



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY & EDUCATION

RTO Code 21495 / CRICOS Code 02592K

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE WELFARE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

Australian Institute of Technology and Education in Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate's inquiry into international student welfare.

Australian Institute of Technology and Education (AITE) is a registered training organisation that has a strong commitment to excellence in vocational education and training. Our community is made up of students from all over the world, attracted by our quality courses, professional service, supportive environment and great central city location.

At AITE, our courses offer training in key industry areas that are targeted for growth and will provide a wide range of employment and further study options. Experienced industry professionals assist in the development and review of our courses, ensuring our qualifications are industry-relevant and current.

Our students are central to everything we do and our aim is to ensure that every student enjoys a positive experience and support to pursue their goals. Our staff are industry professionals who arm our students with the skills and knowledge they require to enter and succeed in today's challenging global workforce.

SENATE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

- Student safety;
- Adequate and affordable accommodation;
- Social inclusion;
- Student visa requirements;
- Adequate international students supports and advocacy;
- Employment rights and protection from exploitation;
- Appropriate pathways to permanency

This submission addresses the following terms of reference:

1. Social inclusion
2. International student support and advocacy
3. Student visa requirements

AITE'S POSITION

1. Social inclusion
2. International student support and advocacy

With students from many different language, heritage and cultural backgrounds, we foster a community-focused atmosphere bringing diverse global perspectives and experiences together.

AITE's position refers to the trainers' role in the support and social inclusion of international students in vocational education.

While providing quality education services to international students begins with the provider's management systems and processes backed by Government regulations and standards, it is ultimately the trainers, educators and instructors to facilitate it.

International students spend most of the time at school and most of the school hours with their trainer/assessors, so those play an essential part in their student life. Trainers' role is not only to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and technical and employability skills, but also to help the students understand and adapt to the life in Australia and have an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

In our experience and of our colleagues' in the industry we've discussed with, it has become a clear fact that the trainers teaching international students have minimum or, in most cases, no cultural awareness or the necessary skills to manage culturally diverse student groups.

We see this as a major challenge, with teaching staff, otherwise excellent and highly experienced professionals in their vocational fields, starting their roles with great enthusiasm, soon to be replaced by frustration and disillusion. As such, trainers see themselves unable to "get through" to their students, question their methods and abilities, and their self-worth. Often times their confidence as professionals and their self-esteem suffer.

We do put all our efforts in supporting our teaching staff facing such issues with information and open discussions but we feel that this is not enough.

We strongly believe that trainers and educators of vocational international students should be properly equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills on managing a multicultural group in a classroom or workplace-based teaching environment, not at the level of pamphlet information, but by means of competency.

We are confident that equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills in this area, educators will make a significant contribution to the welfare and social inclusion of international students, whilst enhancing their overall teaching and learning experience.

As competency in Training and Assessment is necessary for all trainers/assessors (under the AQTF Standards), and as workplace trainers/assessors involved with apprenticeships /traineeships often face the same problems within a multicultural workforce environment, we even more so consider these measures of critical importance for both the local and international vocational education sectors.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Government considers a matter of urgency and supports the development and introduction in the Training and Assessment training package (TAA04) of core units of competency dedicated to aspects of cultural awareness, training / assessing in a culturally diverse environment, how learning happens in different societies and other relevant topics, or even the introduction of a dedicated International Students stream in the Certificate IV of Training and Assessment.

3. Student visa requirements

In recruiting international students, we are putting a lot of effort into acting in the fairest and most honest manner, by providing them with accurate and comprehensive pre-enrolment information about our school and courses. Also, as often as we can, we participate directly in the marketing of our programs by meeting face to face with prospective students and their parents in their home countries. By this approach, our aim is to assure the students and their parents that we are real, our intentions as education providers are genuine, and to avoid false images and expectations and ultimately to gain their full trust and confidence.

As such, our expectation is that these students make a fully informed decision when they enrol in our courses and we are looking forward to welcome them and assist them in gaining their qualification and having an enjoyable and enriching experience while studying at our college in Australia.

We are doing the utmost best to keep our promises to the students and to their parents.

It is therefore extremely worrying to us when our students, sometimes after just a short couple of months, inform us that they are transferring to another college, in all cases to a completely different type of course.

This is happening for a number of reasons identified by us, such as poaching and a way too easy process of students moving between providers.

All day long, the streets of Melbourne CBD, where most of the colleges are, are awash with unlawful elements targeting international students and distributing flyers offering discount courses that run for just two days a week, guaranteed employment and permanent residency. These people wait in the street at the colleges' doors and also at the train stations.

This phenomenon is perpetual and out of control and we see it as a major risk to students' safety and wellbeing, as well as a threat to good operators from the business point of view.

The risk resides in the fact that while students have made a fully informed decision when they've enrolled in their course, in such instances they are lured on a very dangerous path by a quicker and easier gain, usually ending up with dodgy operators and putting themselves at unnecessary risk of exploitation and grief.

At the same time, good providers, whose already calculated business risk is exceeded in such circumstances, find themselves with half-empty classrooms, letting go of staff, financial loss and no business protection of any sort, as opposed to the students who have been granted protection under the Consumer Law.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Government considers a matter of urgency and supports the review of the student visa conditions, which should limit the transferring of students between providers only to the exactly same course. If transferring to a different provider to a completely different course than originally enrolled, compassionate and compelling circumstances should be demonstrated, and they should not include issues such as students realising the course is not for them. If students want to change providers and courses, they should not be allowed to re-enrol under the original student visa, but that visa should be cancelled and the students having to return home and start the process of enrolling over again, based again on proper pre-enrolment information.

We see this measure not as imposing tougher conditions on students, but ensuring they stay with their provider and achieve the qualifications they've opted for, this also contributing to their welfare and safety, as risks such as explained above are greatly reduced. Prospective students will also realise that choosing a course of study and ultimately a profession is a life impacting decision that should be taken very seriously. Not less importantly, this measure can constitute an efficient business risk treatment for good colleges, who will be able to dedicate more resources to continuously improving the quality of their services and to make an overall better contribution to their clients and to the Australian economy.