



26 September 2024

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## Inquiry into the Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024

### Overview

Torrens University Australia (Torrens) is a member of Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA), the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA), and the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), and generally shares the concerns raised by these organisations about this draft legislation in their submissions to and appearances before this Committee.

Torrens University would also like to raise three specific points for the Committee's consideration:

- 1) Torrens University should be treated equally and consistently with Australia's public universities;
- 2) the 2019 & 2023 new overseas student commencements (NOSC) data for Torrens released by the Government and used to calculate Torrens' 2025 NOSC limit is incongruous with our own data, resulting in a lower cap than our data suggests; and
- 3) greater consideration needs to be given to specialist and critical skills areas, such as nursing, in the setting of overseas student limits, and we request that nursing and other priority courses be added to the list of exemptions from overseas student caps.

### Background

Founded in 2013, Torrens University offers undergraduate, graduate, higher degree by research, and specialised degree courses primarily in five fields of study: business, design and creative technology, health, hospitality, and education. Torrens university is one of only 43 universities registered with TEQSA and is authorised to self-accredit its courses.

Over our first ten years of teaching, Torrens University has become Australia's fastest growing university, with around 17,000 current students, including approximately 9,000 domestic students, and 8,000 overseas students from 120+ different countries, studying at campuses in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. We also have a campus in Auckland, as part of our Media Design School. Torrens University is proud to have graduated more than 40,000 students in Australia over the last ten years, and currently employs around 1,800 staff across the country. We are proud of our students' contribution, both domestic and international, to meeting the needs of Australia.

[torrens.edu.au](https://torrens.edu.au)

1300 575 803

#### Adelaide Campuses

88 Wakefield Street

Adelaide SA 5000

22 Pulteney Street

Adelaide SA 5000

#### Brisbane Campuses

90 Bowen Terrace

Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

123 Gotha Street

Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006

#### Melbourne Campuses

196 Flinders Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

25 Victoria Street

Fitzroy VIC 3065

#### Sydney Campuses

46-52 Mountain Street

Ultimo NSW 2007

17-51 Foveaux Street

Surry Hills NSW 2010

#### Leura Campus

1 Chambers Road

Leura NSW 2780

#### Torrens University Australia

##### Head Office

17-51 Foveaux Street

Surry Hills NSW 2010

#### New Zealand Campus

92 Albert Street

Auckland NZ

The caps methodology utilised fails to take account of Torrens University's unique national model with campuses across four states and including both city and regional locations. Importantly, Torrens University was founded in South Australia and proudly maintains a campus in Adelaide with approximately 2,000 students. As one of only four universities in South Australia (and one of only three after the merger of University of Adelaide and University of South Australia in 2026), Torrens University will be instrumental in building the skilled workforce necessary to deliver on the ambitious targets envisaged by AUKUS. Torrens' technology courses and degrees provide both the foundation and advanced capability in specialist areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, information technology and software engineering.

Likely partly in recognition of the goals and skills needs of AUKUS, we understand from media commentary that South Australian public universities are not facing any significant reduction in their overseas student commencements, and further that the Minister for Education's office advised the Australian Financial Review that "two of the state's three universities had been given generous caps to compensate for costs associated with their upcoming merger." We ask that similar consideration is extended to all South Australian universities with similar plans for growth, whether public or private.

Torrens University also operates the number one ranked hotel school in Oceania (QS World University Rankings 2022-2023) - Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (BMIHMS) in Leura in the Blue Mountains, NSW. As part of the undergraduate program, all students are required to reside on campus with accommodation, meal and recreational requirements provided by BMIHMS. As an integral part of the Leura/Katoomba community and micro-economy, BMIHMS employs more than 100 staff of which approximately 90% live in the Blue Mountains. The majority of suppliers for BMIHMS are sourced from the local region and at any given time around 40% - 60% of our students are employed by local businesses. We believe that BMIHMS's importance to the Blue Mountains regional economy and tourism sector warrants particular consideration in the same way that other regional public universities have reportedly been given considerable room for growth under their indicative NOSC limits.

The Universities Accord recently set ambitious access and equity targets, and private universities such as Torrens University will be crucial in helping to meet these targets and reduce the significant cost to the Government these targets entail. Department of Education data for 2022 shows that one in four of Torrens University's domestic students (25%) were from a lower socio-economic status, relative to 17% nationally and 12% among the Group of Eight institutions. Regional and remote students comprised 19% of Torrens University's domestic enrolments, in line with the national average and more than double the 9% among the Group of Eight. First Nations students accounted for 3% of Torrens University's domestic enrolments, relative to 2% nationally and 1% among the Group of Eight. Women in non-traditional courses (including STEM and architecture) comprised 26% of Torrens University's enrolments, compared to the 16% national average. Even within metropolitan areas, Torrens University strongly serves underrepresented communities, with more than 1,000 current students drawn from western Sydney for example.

Our focus on quality education and student experience is reflected in Torrens University being currently ranked 7th overall for Quality of Entire Educational Experience, ranked in the top 10 for Student Support and Teaching Quality, and ranked 11 out of 41 universities for Quality of Entire Educational Experience for International Students in the 2022 QILT Student Experience Survey for Undergraduate Students.

Torrens is owned by Strategic Education Inc, an American company listed on the NASDAQ. Strategic Education purchased Torrens University in 2020, based on Torrens' strong track record, the opportunity for growth in one of the world's most respected countries for quality education, and because Torrens' work aligned with Strategic Education's mission of enabling economic mobility with education.

Through our educational and employability outcomes, economic impact, over-indexing on equity access, and net contribution to government revenue via taxation, Torrens University is a positive example of private investment delivering public good for Australia.

## **1) Equal treatment**

We submit that Torrens University should be treated equally with Australia's public universities, irrespective of ownership or funding model.

### ***Equal recognition under law***

'University' is a regulated term in Australia. Torrens University, recognised by an Act of State Parliament (Torrens University Australia Act 2013 SA), is recognised as an 'Australian university' under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth), in the same category as publicly funded universities. Torrens is one of 43 universities registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and is also eligible for FEE-HELP and research funding as are publicly funded universities.

### ***Equal educational and research requirements***

Torrens, like other universities, is required to conduct both teaching and research across at least three fields of broad education. The requirement to produce new knowledge through original work entails significant investment by universities – a cost not borne by higher education providers. Torrens maintains a robust and active research agenda, investing millions into our five research centres.

Like publicly funded universities, Torrens is authorised by TEQSA to self-accredit and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate courses of study, including doctoral degrees (research).

### ***Government practice is to treat Table A and Table B universities equally***

Commonwealth legislation imposes consistent legal standards on Table A (publicly funded) universities and Table B (non-publicly funded) universities with respect to research and academic quality, grants, and academic freedoms. Consistent treatment of Table A and Table B universities has established market equity, removed barriers to student choice, and reinforced that the university classification sets the standards, responsibilities and contribution expected of all universities, regardless of funding source or ownership models. This policy was reflected, for example, in 2018 when the government removed the additional 25% FEE-HELP administrative loan fee for undergraduate courses at Table B universities.

### ***Unequal treatment under overseas student cap methodology***

Despite Torrens' legal status as a university, and its requirement to meet the same standards as the 38 publicly funded Table A universities, it has not been categorised as a university for the purposes of the Government's new overseas student quota methodology. Torrens has instead been grouped with 'higher education providers' and given a significantly lower overseas student limit (estimated to be around 2,000 fewer) than if the public university methodology had been applied.

### ***Competition implications***

Torrens competes with other Australian universities for both domestic and international students. Treating Torrens differently to other Australian universities reduces genuine student choice and competition in the sector.

## **2) Source data**

The lack of consistent and concise data upon which NOSC limits are being calculated, and which has been provided to providers, indicates the lack of preparedness to properly implement this policy in time for the proposed 1 January 2025 implementation.

The data tables released late last week by the Government via the Senate Order show NOSC limits for Torrens in 2019 and 2023 that are incongruous with our own internal data, and which generate a lower 2025 NOSC limit than our own data would using the Government's methodology.

As prior year NOSC limits are being used to calculate 2025 NOSC limits, it is essential that the data be as accurate and as transparent as possible.

### **3) Impact on critical skills areas such as nursing**

Torrens University shares the concern expressed by others that this policy approach risks biasing providers to optimise the number of students they enroll and could therefore lead to a significant reduction in courses related to skills areas which generally require higher investment in specialist facilities and equipment (e.g. nursing) in favor of less costly classroom-based courses.

Our courses aim to meet the specific skills demands of Australia. For example, after assessing the vast shortage of nurses in Australia we introduced nursing programs which in the period 2022-2023 alone, facilitated thousands of nursing placements across Australian public and private hospitals, aged care, medical clinics and justice health facilities.

Torrens requests that greater consideration be given to specialist and critical skills areas in setting of overseas student caps and recommend that the list of exemptions to the overseas student caps be extended to include nursing and other priority fields of study.

#### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Torrens University representatives would be pleased to appear before the Committee to speak to these issues further.

If you require any further information, please contact Clayton Ford, Director of Communications and Public Affairs

Your sincerely,

Linda Brown  
President  
Torrens University Australia