



Address by The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia

Public Hearing of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into the *Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024 [Provisions]*

Date: 6 August 2024

Time: 230 pm-315 pm AEST

Location: Committee Room 2S3, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Attending:

- Professor Jennie Shaw, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Academic), The University of Adelaide
- Professor Jessica Gallagher, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (External Engagement), The University of Adelaide (online)
- Ms Gabrielle Rolan, Pro Vice-Chancellor (International), University of South Australia (online)

International education is South Australia's largest export sector, worth over \$3 billion to the economy in 2023. In our universities, international students join us on exchange and through our pathway providers; they study short-term English language programs; they study onshore with us for the latter years of their transnational education programs; and they complete coursework and research degree programs over 2 or more years. The 20% who remain with us after graduation make full use of work rights and contribute in key skills shortage areas. As our Premier has stated, the economy in South Australia would not function without our international graduates.

The new Adelaide University has the potential to generate \$500m per year in additional revenue to South Australia's economy through increased international education exports. Our graduates fill existing and emerging skills gaps. Skilled international graduates are essential for the success of our growing and varied industry needs, ranging from AUKUS to renewable energy, digital and creative industries and the health sector.

While we appreciate the political rationale for no increase in net overall migration, this is not the right set of levers. We would ask that the Committee consider the following:

(1). The national skills and population situation. There is not one solution to fit all. Many areas of Australia are actively pursuing population growth to support workforce needs and have capacity to increase international student numbers. We are also attempting to increase domestic student numbers; but until we have STEM subjects taught more broadly to year 12 students in regional areas, those gaps in our skills profile must be filled by educated international graduates.

(2). We would support existing strategies and measures other than caps to manage population flow. The new Adelaide University seeks to attract an additional 6000 international students per annum to fill state workforce needs. Imposition of caps endangers the future prosperity of South Australia. Caps on city-based university courses will not drive international students to regional areas: they will, however, drive them to apply to countries other than Australia.

(3). Timing of legislative change. The proposed changes go too far, too quickly. It would be beneficial to Australia's long term economic health to consider the impact of these changes before enacting them. Taking a wider lens, not only is the higher education sector going through massive reform, but migration is already starting to slow as the changes to work rights and visas take effect. Any further changes should be grandfathered to consider the impact on currently-enrolled students and the 18-month timeline from application to enrolment for most. Giving us under 6 months to communicate and make these changes in terms of our current applicants and our current university workforce is both unconscionable and unnecessarily disruptive.

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(4). These changes will have a significant, negative economic impact. Within many universities, that impact is already being felt. Externally, international students, their dependents and visiting family members are major contributors to our economy. If we make these changes without assessing the wider economic impacts to such a substantial industry, we risk tipping Australia into recession.

(5). Finally, the proposed changes risk reducing our impact in the region. Our international graduates are valuable ambassadors and advocates for Australia's businesses and culture, but our reputation has already been damaged by the government's claw back of post-study work rights. The increased and non-refundable visa fee, combined with the impact of Ministerial Direction 107, hits students hardest from those nations that are our nearest neighbours and where the government believes we need to increase soft power.

Additionally:

(6) These changes are not a solution to the housing crisis. While restricting net overall migration is proposed as a response to the current housing affordability and availability crisis, in South Australia our students are not primarily competing in the open rental market.¹ The housing crisis, while real, is not a crisis felt equally across the nation and not one where decreasing the international student population will have a significant impact in open rental/purchase markets.²

(7) Nuance must be applied to certain integrity measures. We are broadly supportive of the proposed changes to Parts 1-6 of the legislation.³ However, there are other measures available under TEQSA, CRICOS and presumably under the new ATEC, that should be considered as better alternatives to the far-reaching Ministerial powers proposed.

¹ In 2023 the University of Adelaide enrolled a total cohort of 9115 international students and housed every student who approached us; we placed over 1550 of them (just over 17% of the cohort) in student housing owned/leased by or affiliated with the university. Domestic regional and interstate students who approached us were also housed in owned, leased or affiliated accommodation. The current vacancy rate for student accommodation in the Adelaide CBD is ca.9%.

² With future state in mind, we are in discussion with parties who are interested in building more student accommodation for Adelaide University.

³ Our submission outlines some of these concerns, especially around the definition of 'agent'.