



Australian Federation of International Students

**Inquiry into the Education Services for Overseas Students Legislation
Amendment Bill 2010**

Submission to the Senate Inquiry



Australian Federation of International Students

About Australian Federation of International Students

The Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS) is a national non-profit, community-oriented and community-run organisation aimed at assisting international students maximise the scope and potential of their experience living and studying in Australia. AFIS intends to work with the government bodies, institutions, student clubs and community organisations to enhance and enrich the experience of international students by addressing their interests and needs, and enhanced by the provision accurate and timely information and services.

AFIS' vision is to involve international students in Australia's multicultural community through events and programs designed to assist our members interact and engage with confidence and security in Australia's culture and community.

Our direction for the future is to become the "one stop shop" for all international student issues and concerns, and to be recognised as a leader in the international students issues debate – a credible voice to government, community services and student groups.

AFIS currently provides a number of services including:

- One-to-one support for international students
- Delivery of culturally appropriate orientation programs to international students at TAFEs and private colleges
- Education programs to international students
- Social engagement programs
- Seminars and forums appropriate to international students

Response to the second readings in the Senate:

- AFIS welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the inquiry looking into ESOS Act.
- AFIS agrees that "providers will have to demonstrate access to the financial resources to meet the objectives of the act; that they have a sustainable business model and that they have the capability, governance structures and management to deliver education of a satisfactory standard." However, it is also recommended that the risk level of colleges should be accessible by potential students, in order to make informed choices.
- AFIS agrees that "cap on enrolments, annual financial statements or restrictions on the fees in advance that can be collected", but further recommends that there should be more protection to students in regards to 'other service fees' to be collected by colleges. 'Other service fees' may include fees to assist students seek housing and accommodation. In one particular case, a student pre-paid thousands of

dollars to the college to secure housing, and when the college collapsed, the fees could not be refunded. Although, it is not recommended that the service be AFIS banned, due to the fact that in the best case scenario, it can assist students in securing accommodation. However, students need to be protected from a worst case scenario by the Act.

- AFIS welcomes the extension of the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to include students of private registered providers. This will provide an independent body to handle student complaints. It is also recommended that private colleges should have a mandate to provide students with complaints mechanisms, including the option to go to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. During the implementation stage, it is recommended some awareness sessions to introduce such complaint mechanism to students.
- Currently, students are only permitted to change courses after 6 months of commencement of their 'principal course'. Principal course by definition is the highest level of the course enrolled. For example, if a student is enrolled in an Advance Diploma, they must complete a Diploma first, and the principal course is the Advance Diploma. The Diploma may take 1 year to complete, in effect, if in the first few months, students find that the college is of low quality and wish to change colleges, they must wait 1 year + 6 months. Many students are unaware of the definition of 'principal course', and hence misled by education agents (who receive commission from education providers) for students to enrol in a higher level course in order to 'save money'. AFIS understands the importance to also protect education providers and the sector by preventing students from moving from one provider to another frequently. However, the current Act places students in highly disadvantaged situations. AFIS therefore recommends that the Bill should provide provision for students change courses 6 months of commencement of their **first course**.