



Service Skills Victoria

## **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE WELFARE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Service Skills Victoria (SSV) is pleased to provide the Senate this submission regarding the welfare of international students.

SSV is the Victorian Industry Training Advisory Board for the service industries, representing approximately a third of the state's workforce and working in close collaboration with major industry stakeholders. Its primary role is the provision of advice to government agencies, industry and the learning community on skills, education and training for the service industries. SSV has played a significant role in identifying the training priorities of our industry sectors, including the acute skills shortages faced in the hairdressing and hospitality sectors.

Our comments for this submission have been developed from the feedback we receive from our significant interaction with industry, business, both small and large and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Our feedback indicates that both industry and RTOs are concerned with the effect of poor quality programs on the employment opportunities of international students. SSV has reported these concerns to government in recent years with no perceptible improvement<sup>1</sup>.

There has been a proliferation of RTOs delivering hairdressing and commercial cookery training for overseas students resulting from the fact that these courses are popular targets for people amassing points for permanent residency. Many private providers in these industries provide excellent outcomes, but those that have focused on throughput rather than quality have not held the interests of their students nor industry at heart, yet appear to have been able to operate with impunity.

We believe that our current regulatory regime has had mixed success in assuring quality outcomes for international students for a number of reasons which will no doubt be outlined in many other submissions.

Both the hairdressing and hospitality industries regard qualifications gained via traditional apprenticeship training as the benchmark for employment. These industries strongly endorse the formative development of skills in a workplace context. In recent times, changes in the training market have allowed for rapid growth in provision outside traditional apprenticeship arrangements, via institution only program pathways also

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<sup>1</sup> Service Skills Victoria (2007, 2008). Industry Change Drivers Report (Service Industry Qualitative Data)

made available to the international market. It is for this reason that Service Skills Australia, the industry skills council responsible for the development and maintenance of the training packages for these industries, included work integration units for these qualifications.

Quality providers recognise that effective work integration strategies and substantial allocation of hours for learning and assessment against work integration units are required to achieve equitable qualification outcomes and employable graduates. Others produce poor quality outcomes and unemployable graduates who are not even able to complete the 12 months work experience requirement to access Migration Occupation in Demand List (MODL) bonus points. This is adding to the much publicised exploitation of the system by disreputable migration agencies.

The flexibility to deliver hairdressing and hospitality qualifications outside of the traditional apprenticeship pathway has resulted in a unique set of issues that industry is keen to urgently address with the policy makers and regulators of the VET sector. At the core of these issues is significant inconsistency and lack of quality in the implementation, and particularly the assessment of institutionally delivered programs, that is consequently affecting quality outcomes for international students and parents who have paid substantial fees and can't achieve successful employment outcomes.

The systems to register and monitor international education are in place but need to be properly enforced. It appears that 'light touch' regulation has not been the answer.

The international training industry has presented an additional strategy for our country to solve industry skill shortages, an opportunity to support better prospects for migrants and the development of a very significant export industry, based on our skills in education and training. Its reputation is, however, in serious danger and there appears to be little urgency to address the root causes.