Government sending mixed messages on restoring Australia’s international education sector

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) has welcomed the Government’s decision to simplify the student visa Assessment Level (AL) Framework but is disappointed by the announcement that just 22 providers will be invited to participate in extended streamlined visa processing arrangements.

“The proposal to reduce the AL Framework from five levels to three levels and to ease the financial requirements placed on prospective international students is welcomed. These proposals, when implemented will help drive Australia’s competitiveness and attractiveness as a destination for international students.” Said Ben Vivekanandan Acting Chief Executive Officer.

“However while we welcome the Government’s decision to simplify the AL Framework we are deeply disappointed that just 22 providers will be invited to participate in extended streamlined visa processing arrangements. This decision will negatively impact much of the sector.” Said Mr Vivekanandan

Mr Vivekanandan has called on the Minister to outline how the decision had been taken to determine that only 22 institutions had the low-risk profile to warrant the offer of SVP arrangements for their students.

“Only limited detail is available on how the Government has come up with a list of just 22 providers. We believe that transparency is paramount so the sector can understand how these 22 providers were judged to be low risk, while some 70 odd other CRICOS registered higher education providers and hundreds of CRICOS registered VET providers did not make the cut.” Said Mr Vivekanandan

“The sector had welcomed the pre-election announcements from the Coalition that they understood the sector and were keen to support it to get back on its feet after a disastrous few years. Given a we have now heard that SVP will be offered to just 22 providers it is critical that we hear what measures the Government will put in place, and when, to extend improved visa arrangements to all high quality, low immigration risk providers” said Mr Vivekanandan.

“Australia has been a global leader in international education for several decades, providing a vital economic contribution and consistently being one of Australia’s largest export earners, peaking at an estimated $17.9 billion in 2009-10. Unfortunately a number of domestic issues, most particularly the changes to student visa requirements, have caused a significant decline in the number of international students coming to Australia and resulting in related export earnings falling to an estimated $15.3 billion.”

“International education in Australia is at a critical turning point and while today’s announcement is of enormous benefit to the providers on the SVP list it will substantially skew the enrolment profile of international students funnelling them into a narrow range of institutions and putting all other high quality providers at a significant disadvantage.”

“The Minister knows that the non-university international education sector is operating well below its potential, and the VET sector’s international education provision is currently at about 40 per cent capacity. Improvements to the AL Framework are welcome but providers need certainty and transparency around how SVP operates.” Concluded Mr Vivekanandan

Ben Vivekanandan is available for comment: 0439 008835 / 03 94125912