Government wakes up on international students

The Gillard government is finally waking up from its slumber in regards to Australia’s fourth largest export earner and our most important services export industry, according to Senator Brett Mason, Shadow Minister for Universities and Research.

Senator Mason was commenting on today’s decision by the government to set up a review of the student visa program.

“International education is a very important industry for Australia, generating almost $18 billion in exports in 2008-09,” said Senator Mason.

“However, over the past two years our position as an international leader in education services has been hit by a perfect storm of adversities. There has been softening of demand due to the Global Financial Crisis, the improving quality of domestic education providers in our traditional overseas markets, and the stiffer competition from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom.

“A strong Australian dollar certainly hasn’t been helping either, and last but not least, a string of private provider collapses and incidents of violence directed at overseas students sadly and unfairly affected some perceptions of Australia as a safe and welcoming quality education destination.

“There is no doubt that the industry is hurting. Yet the government has been slow to act on industry’s concerns and has seemed strangely disinterested in this issue.

“The Coalition welcomes the much needed debate on this vitally important issue, and the opportunity for stakeholders to be heard and put forward constructive proposals and ideas to make our education services more attractive for overseas students.

“We want to teach the world’s best and brightest and for them to choose Australia as their study destination.

“The student visa program is one part of the equation. It is clear that our visa process should be clear, timely and transparent, and any anomalies eliminated.

“Wherever possible, we need to ensure that our immigration rules do not make it more difficult for potential students to come and gain their education here in Australia than visa systems of our major competitors in the international education market.”