Report card for education agents

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A register of reputable education recruitment agents will be launched later this month as the private education and training industry moves to weed out dodgy advisers here and overseas.

Students will be able to search a free database featuring hundreds of agents who have gained a federal government-endorsed qualification, as well as rate the performance of agents.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training will launch the prototype of the register at an international conference in Sydney today.

"For the first time ever, students will be able to search for qualified agents in their area, wherever they are in the world," council chief executive Andrew Smith said.

"It will make a big difference if students are able to easily find trusted information sources."

Hundreds of delegates are attending the three-day Australian International Education Conference this week. Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard is scheduled to speak tomorrow.

The results of a market survey by recruitment company IDP Education will be presented. The survey of 5000 international students found Sydney and Melbourne are seen as the most dangerous and unfriendly places to live, ahead of Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide.

There has been a sharp focus on safeguarding the $15.5 billion education export industry and boosting Australia’s reputation as a study destination after worldwide publicity about attacks on Indian students earlier this year.

The federal government has moved to tighten regulations for education providers, and a Senate inquiry into proposed amendments to legislation protecting international students will deliver its findings on Friday.

The proposed changes would force all providers to re-register by December 31 next year and to publish a list of the agents representing them.

Students have accused agents and colleges of misleading them with promises of high-quality accommodation and jobs. There are also claims that some agents routinely misrepresent the true cost of living in Australia.

The online register will feature agents who have completed a course endorsed by the federal departments of Education and Immigration.

Of the 1093 private colleges the council represents, more than 60 per cent cater to international students.

Mr Smith said the register would use Google maps to allow students to search for agents by locality.

"The capacity to rate agents’ performance and links to membership of respected professional bodies will feature in the next phase of the roll-out," he said.