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Australian Council for Private Education and Training
English Australia
International Education Association of Australia
Independent Schools Council of Australia
National Tertiary Education Union
Australian Tourism Export Council
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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International Education Taskforce Welcomes Government Commitment to Cooperation

Australia’s education, business and tourism peak bodies have welcomed a commitment by the Australian Government to collaborate with industry in order to stabilise the nation’s international education sector.

At a meeting in Canberra yesterday, leaders from across Australian industry came together to push for Government action they regard as essential to restoring the nation’s reputation as an international education leader, and rebuilding the market in our third largest export industry.

Today, the peak bodies said they are pleased the Australian Government has agreed to review and consider a course of action proposed unanimously by the peak bodies.

The peak bodies said they expect to work closely with Government in the short term to address critical challenges surrounding student visa processing and skilled migration requirements, while also establishing an ongoing consultative mechanism to represent Australia’s international education sector into the future.

"Today, we came together because the international education sector is hurting, and high quality institutions are looking to the Australian Government to instil confidence that it will support this critical sector and the contribution it makes to Australia’s economic, social and diplomatic prosperity," said Claire Field, A/g CEO of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET).

"We have agreed to work with the Australian Government to address urgently those issues that could lead to college closures, department contraction and job losses in the short term, while also developing new ways of working with Government in the long term to sustain international education in Australia," Ms Field said.

Peter Anderson, Chief Executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said: “At a time when our export industries are under pressure, it is vital that the government highly values the economic and social contribution of the international student market. The potential decline in this export industry as a consequence of domestic policy is deeply disturbing.”

"International students also fill gaps in areas of our labour market which are important to national productivity," Mr Anderson said.

John King, Chairman of the Australian Tourism Export Council, urged the Federal Government to "take education out of its silo."

"Education issues impact upon the tourism industry and the entire Australian business community. This sector is critical to our trading and diplomatic relationships, our labour market strategies and our economic prosperity. If we continue to administer international education in a silo, the entire Australian economy will suffer," Mr King said.
In the short term, the peak bodies said they would work with the Australian Government to recommend refinements to the student visa and skilled migration requirements, particularly relating to the onerous financial requirements placed upon potential students, and the need for greater objectivity, transparency and consistency in student visa assessments.

“Student visa processing in Australia is out of step with our competitor countries,” said Sue Blundell, Executive Director of English Australia.

“We need immediate action to bring student visa processing in Australia more into line with countries like the USA, UK, Canada and New Zealand if we are to avoid further decline in our sector,” Ms Blundell said.

“If the policy settings are corrected, then other issues such as the high value of the Australian dollar ought not be an obstacle to students choosing to study in Australia,” she said.

To serve the interests of Australia’s international education sector in the long term, the group said it expected to establish ongoing consultative mechanisms with the Australian Government so that future policy changes and improvements properly considered potential impacts on the sector.

“What we’re looking for is a ‘Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Industry’ approach to international education in Australia, which takes into account the responsibilities of institutions, students, governments and business alike to ensure the sector serves the needs of the entire nation,” said Helen Cook, Vice President of the International Education Association of Australia.

“We are encouraged by yesterday’s forum, and welcome the Australian Government’s willingness to work with us to resolve many of our sector’s challenges, but we must act quickly,” Ms Cook said.

“The education sector and broader business community are keenly looking forward to announcements by the Australian Government in the short term that will restore confidence in Australia’s international education sector, and stability to the lives of the 120,000 people it employs, and the 600,000 international students in Australia.”

Interviews and further information available on request.
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