MEDIA RELEASE
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Student Visa Changes Will Strengthen International Education Sector

Federal Government’s changes to Australia’s international student visa system will mean fairer treatment of all international education providers and better management of risks in the sector, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) said today.

ACPET CEO, Claire Field, welcomed the Federal Government’s response to the Knight Review of student visas, but noted her profound disappointment that the Knight Review report focussed so overwhelmingly on the university sector and Knight's assertion that the future of international education in the VET sector is 'offshore'. While many VET and higher education providers are delivering offshore and the additional government support recommended by Knight is welcomed, Ms Field was clear that “International students do not and should not only be able to choose university studies when coming to Australia”.

In reviewing the government's response to the Review, Ms Field said that changes must now be implemented urgently to bring Australia back into line with key competitors around the world, ease the pressure on high quality providers and restore the nation’s status as a world leader in delivering international education.

Ms Field said the Government's commitment to introduce a new risk management framework for providers of international education, was a particularly important change that would strengthen the integrity of the sector and boost its international competitiveness.

“ACPET has long argued for better and more targeted risk management in Australia’s international education sector, so we wholeheartedly welcome the introduction by government of an institutional risk based system that will ensure different educational providers are treated fairly” Ms Field said.

"We are particularly pleased that the government has signalled that the new streamlined arrangements for universities and those private providers they package courses with, will also apply to all high quality non-university providers. Reducing the requirements on students wanting to study with educational providers with a proven track record, is a major step forward for the sector."

“ACPET also welcomes the immediate changes from the government to the requirements for students from Assessment Level Three and Four countries. These will ease some of the onerous requirements placed upon prospective international students.

“For too long high costs, long wait times and other burdensome requirements have put Australia’s student visa system out of step with competitors in the UK, USA, Canada and
New Zealand. The Government has made the right decision to ease some of these requirements,” Ms Field said.

Ms Field said other measures announced today, including changes to English skills requirements; establishing an Education Visa Advisory Group and repealing the automatic cancellation and mandatory cancellation provisions for student visas were all welcome developments, but she raised concerns that the introduction of post-study work visas especially for university students would create divisions between the treatment of university and non-university students.

“The government is not being consistent when it claims that ‘other work visa options, such as Temporary Skilled 457 visa and the Skilled Graduate Visa, continue to be available to graduates and to employers looking to meet genuine skills needs’. Our concern is that if these current arrangements are working so well, why do university bound students need different arrangements?”

“ACPET reiterates its support for Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh’s, proposal for three-year working visas for international graduates in areas of skills shortage, which better meets the needs of both the Australian economy and international students, without creating a two horse race in our education and training sector.”

“Overall, though, ACPET welcomes the changes the government has announced in response to the Knight Review and we look forward to working closely with the Federal Government on the fast implementation so that we can get Australia’s international education sector back on track,” she said.

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