

# POLICY BRIEF

**LOWY INSTITUTE**  
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## AUSTRALIA'S POISONED ALUMNI: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE COSTS TO AUSTRALIA

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

*International education is Australia's third-largest export market, earning over \$15 billion in export income annually. But as tertiary institutions face incentives to maximise income from foreign students, some have lowered language standards and cut costs on student welfare and service provision.*

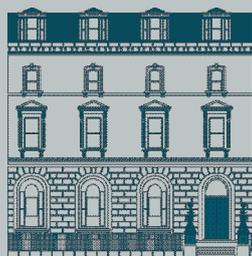
*The result is that many foreign students in Australia face problems of social isolation, labour exploitation, and criminal violence. Attacks on foreign students and the poor standards of some education providers have created diplomatic problems for Australia in important bilateral relationships.<sup>1</sup>*

*Students who return to their countries with negative experiences could become a poisoned alumni, conveying critical attitudes in other countries about Australian society and poor impressions about Australia's reputation as an education provider. They could ultimately destroy a strong export product.*

### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

*The roots of this problem need to be addressed or it will worsen. Public funding for tertiary education should be reviewed to remove the incentive for institutions to maximise earnings from international education.*

*Education institutions need to be subjected to much greater oversight of quality, affordability, value for money, and provision of student welfare. Measures to address the inequality of treatment and entitlements between domestic and international students should be addressed. Ombudsmen should be established and provided with real power to investigate and make recommendations. Stricter oversight of overseas student recruitment, working conditions, and foreign student integration measures is needed.*



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The views expressed in this paper are entirely the author’s own and not those of the Lowy Institute for International Policy.

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**Introduction**

Australia has been educating foreign students since 1904.<sup>2</sup> International education was at the forefront of this country's first international aid initiative, the Colombo Plan, a program that between 1950 and 1967 trained thousands of students from the developing world and has since translated into a vast network of positive alumni in positions of influence in many of the countries most important to Australia. Because most Colombo Plan students lived with host families, the program had the additional benefit of helping shift Australian public attitudes about cultural and racial difference.<sup>3</sup>

But as the profits from international education become steadily more central to the financial viability of our higher education sector, the incentives to maximise income and minimise costs have begun to translate into negative experiences for many foreign students.<sup>4</sup> Although foreign students are studying here in record numbers and surveys still reveal a majority of international students return with positive views of Australia and the education they received here,<sup>5</sup> there is mounting evidence that significant numbers of foreign students face difficult, exploitive and isolating conditions while studying here.<sup>6</sup> And with the number of foreign students growing annually,<sup>7</sup> even a disillusioned minority translates into large numbers.

**The costs to Australia**

If the issue of international education in Australia is not properly addressed, it will most likely worsen, with serious negative consequences for this country. As the recent

attacks on Indian students demonstrate, media attention to such incidents can inform broader perceptions overseas about Australian society.<sup>8</sup> Australia can't afford to forget that the end of the White Australia Policy occurred just over a generation ago – and that people in several Asian countries believe that racial prejudice is still prevalent in Australian society. As the rise of Hansonism a decade ago shows, the way in which Australian society treats immigrant minorities has the potential to resonate strongly in our region.

The Australian government spends millions of dollars each year on public diplomacy, trying to foster a positive image of this country abroad.<sup>9</sup> Any gains made by these programs can be reversed quickly by incidents such as attacks on foreign students. Already Canberra has had to spend extra money on trying to minimise the impact of these events.<sup>10</sup> And as recent experience with India shows, incidents such as the attacks on Indian students have the potential to crowd out all other creative diplomacy from a bilateral relationship.<sup>11</sup>

The damage has the potential to contaminate some of Australia's most important diplomatic relationships. The two largest foreign student cohorts in Australia are Chinese, comprising 22 per cent of the international student population, and Indians, who constitute 17 per cent.<sup>12</sup> These proportions, and the absolute numbers of Chinese and Indian students in Australia, will almost certainly grow over time. Both Beijing and New Delhi are increasingly assertive in advocating the welfare of ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities overseas when they are under attack.<sup>13</sup> The plight of Chinese or Indian students in Australia could translate

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into an enduring diplomatic irritant if not resolved quickly.

International education is Australia's third-largest export market, bringing in over \$15 billion in export income annually.<sup>14</sup> Governments, universities and colleges have now incorporated assumptions of continuing growth in international student numbers into their medium-term projections.

But education is a service which is evaluated and marketed predominantly according to reputation. The growth of perceptions overseas that Australian education seeks to maximise profits and minimise costs, paying declining attention to quality control, threatens to damage its brand name and eventually its dynamism as an export industry.<sup>15</sup> Although there are many high-quality tertiary education providers in Australia, education attracts a national branding;<sup>16</sup> perceptions about low-quality Australian providers can stick to the entire Australian education sector.

A negative cycle could develop. Declining reputation causes the better international students to go elsewhere, leading to greater reliance on poorer quality students, who return home to inevitably be compared against the good students who went to other countries. Australia needs to invest to attract the best overseas students as a way of ensuring the ongoing prestige of its brand name.

**The dynamics of the problem**

The recent attacks on Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney lie at the end of a long, cumulative list of policy failures in

international education. Unless governments and education providers act to address the entire chain of causation, the problems in international education in Australia will persist.

The roots of the problems lie in the steady marketisation of higher education in Australia since the mid-1980s.<sup>17</sup> In 1986, the federal government introduced extensive reforms and deregulation of the Australian tertiary education sector, including the re-introduction of university fees for domestic students and the authorisation for universities to charge international students full fees.<sup>18</sup> For the ensuing decade, international student fees provided a growing fund of supplementary income to tertiary institutions.<sup>19</sup>

From the mid-1990s, however, income from international education began to become a substitute income for declining public funding of the tertiary sector.<sup>20</sup> The decade from 1996 saw public funding for higher education fall by 4 per cent despite a 31 per cent increase in student numbers.<sup>21</sup> Currently, universities rely on international students for on average 15 per cent of their funding.<sup>22</sup> Governments have proved willing partners in helping tertiary institutions attract international students, sitting dedicated education officers in Australian diplomatic missions.

At the same time the deregulation of the tertiary sector has seen the proliferation of private providers of vocational education and training (VET).<sup>23</sup> The model developed in this sector — shop-front facilities, intensive teaching, no research focus — has also been adopted by some universities in Australia. Currently the VET sector has the highest rate of

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international student commencements across the tertiary education industry.<sup>24</sup>

The result of letting the market rip has been the steady diversification of tertiary education in Australia – including in relation to quality.<sup>25</sup> The Australian media have published a disturbing array of accounts of poor-quality education services provided to students.<sup>26</sup> Existing regulatory structures, such as the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) framework,<sup>27</sup> have been inadequate in dealing with either shoddy operators or the declining interest in the welfare of foreign students across the sector.<sup>28</sup>

That the international education sector in Australia continues to grow despite such problems reflects the massive demand for education in the West in developing Asia. This demand also creates opportunities for unscrupulous education agents in many developing countries. International students report agents misrepresenting the education product on offer, its price, and the support services available to prospective students; and in turn helping prospective students defraud the English-language tests on which their acceptance depends.<sup>29</sup>

The result is that some foreign students arrive in Australia without the necessary language ability to study effectively,<sup>30</sup> to be surprised by the actual costs of the product and the associated living expenses, and to be disappointed by the standards of the education and services on offer.<sup>31</sup> They face significant barriers to becoming involved in campus life, and face either isolation or gravitation towards other students of the same nationality.<sup>32</sup> Higher costs drive them to seek cheaper

accommodation further from campus, and to work longer than the 20 hours per week allowed by their visa.<sup>33</sup> Some students are unaware that their signature is legally binding, a status that is not acquired until marriage in some cultures.<sup>34</sup>

Students in these circumstances are ripe for exploitation. The need to work illegally puts them at the mercy of employers offering below-minimum wages and sub-standard conditions. The large numbers of international students seeking illegal employment only further drives down wages and conditions.<sup>35</sup> Confinement to their own ethnic group exposes them to the demands of organised crime networks.<sup>36</sup> The cost of accommodation forces them into crowded living conditions and the need to commute – often on foot – through dangerous areas at dangerous times.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps most disturbing, these conditions and responses have the potential to mobilise negative stereotypes and victimisation by some segments of Australian society.

**Policy responses**

Australian governments have been moving to reform the international education sector even before the attacks on Indian students. The 2008 Bradley Review of Higher Education in Australia recommended greater regulation of international education, greater tuition support for foreign students, and a review of regulatory frameworks.<sup>38</sup> State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers called for providing greater information to prospective foreign students, auditing of international education providers, mandating greater information for foreign students, focusing more

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on cultural understanding and language skills, and outlining clearer standards for education providers.<sup>39</sup>

After the attacks, the Senate convened an Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students. The Victorian and New South Wales governments have established Taskforces to investigate the circumstances facing foreign students.<sup>40</sup> Tertiary education and migration industry bodies have issued several statements and publications relating to international education.<sup>41</sup>

These responses are encouraging signs that governments and the education sector are taking this issue seriously. But unless these problems are addressed in their entirety, these problems will worsen. Seven basic reforms are needed.

1. Tertiary institutions need to be relieved from the pressure of needing to rely on international education for larger and larger proportions of their core funding. The government has announced its intention to inject \$5.7 billion into the sector, with a commitment to continue funding on an indexed basis.<sup>42</sup> This is a sorely needed correction to years of declining public funding of tertiary institutions. But governments should further commit to providing a fixed proportion of university and college funding, and be clear about where these institutions should be trying to raise the remainder.

2. Australia needs to be attentive to its national reputation as an education provider. Too often our attractions as an education destination are marketed according to non-academic criteria: the safety and stability of Australian society,

the relatively lower costs of living here, our proximity to Asia, the ability for students' family members to accompany them under the terms of Australian student visas.<sup>43</sup> This has the unfortunate effect of playing down the academic credibility of our tertiary institutions. It means that Australia remains behind Europe and North America on perceptions of quality; and feeds perceptions that those international students who study in Australia are those who couldn't make the cut in Europe or North America.

The long-term health of Australia's tertiary education sector must be based on perceptions of excellence. To invest in this perception, the government should create a new class of scholarships for international students, and use these to attract the best and brightest from overseas to study in Australian universities. For a relatively modest price, Australia could boost the quality of its own student body, while relying on returning high-achievers to spread the message of Australian academic excellence.

3. Australia must dramatically upgrade its oversight of the tertiary sector, setting clear standards and auditing universities and colleges for the quality, affordability and value for money of the education products they offer. Institutions not meeting these standards should face deregistration and closure.

Tertiary institutions must be required to pay more attention to the welfare and experience of international students. Part of the process of registering to teach foreign students must be an undertaking to provide serious, worthwhile orientation programs, ongoing pastoral care, and processes for integrating international students into campus life.

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4. Given the level of public funding for our universities, it is only right that Australian citizens are provided with benefits not available to foreign students. But there are some entitlements that should be shared by both domestic and international students, especially where they relate to both safety and basic welfare.

A unique structural characteristic of the Australian education sector is that students are less willing to travel far from home for their undergraduate education than they are in comparable countries. This has created universities in the country with less on-campus accommodation, fewer campus services, and a less embracing campus life than in other countries. The result is a much higher proportion of commuters to campus.

In this situation, for domestic students to be offered travel concessions and accommodation assistance, but not international students, is an anomaly with serious consequences. International students who already are under financial strain and working long hours are forced to travel long distance, often on foot through dangerous neighbourhoods. They are thereby placed in danger of attack,<sup>44</sup> and face an uneven playing field academically. Policy should be changed to address this anomaly; all international students should be given access to travel concessions and accommodation assistance.

5. Student welfare officers in the pay of tertiary institutions have an incentive to downplay the complaints made by students against the institution. A more independent oversight mechanism is necessary. Governments should establish an office of ombudsmen for

international education that is accessible to all international students, and which is independent and has real power to investigate complaints and recommend action against serious problems.

6. The role of unscrupulous education agents in other countries needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Such actors play a major role in delivering students with sub-standard language skills to the Australian tertiary sector, and deceiving international students about the costs and conditions of studying in Australia.

Government should consider instituting a system of registration of international education agents. Registration should be free, but subject to strict compliance with standards relating to the information they provide prospective students. To enforce this, government could mandate that only students who either apply in person, or through registered education agents, and who are accepted by an Australian tertiary institution, can obtain a student visa.

7. A problem underlying many of these other problems – from quality of education to student welfare and isolation – is the high variation in English language proficiency among international students.<sup>45</sup> Competition for international students tends to undermine mandatory language proficiency standards, and the costs associated with providing language training to students concurrently with their study means that many of these programs are inadequate. Students from countries where English is not widely spoken, who are studying technical subjects such as engineering or commerce, can have very low English language proficiency. This deepens their isolation and

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reliance on students of the same nationality, opening them up further to exploitation and victimisation. Furthermore, low standards of English language ability dramatically reduce the quality of the education provided, and erode further perceptions about the quality of education in Australia. Parents who send their children to be educated in Australia must react with dismay when they return with barely improved levels of English language proficiency.<sup>46</sup>

Australian tertiary institutions should be required to ensure that all students have an adequate English language ability throughout their period of study, perhaps through making a mandatory English language test a condition of graduation for all international students from non-English speaking backgrounds.<sup>47</sup> Some may choose to insist on high proficiency standards as a condition of enrolment. Those institutions that decide to accept international students with lower English proficiency standards should be required to provide these students with a combination of language training immediately prior to and during the academic program, plus mandated English language standards within the program itself. This would require tertiary institutions to provide English language teaching routinely as part of the program, which increases cost of provision but lifts the quality of the product and repositions Australia at the quality end of the global market.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example in the wake of the recent violence and media attention regarding international students, the Indian tourism minister Kumari Selja cancelled a planned trip to Australia, stating that '[t]he prevailing atmosphere is not conducive for such promotional events and the ministry will work out a new schedule after the situation improve'. It was also widely reported at this time that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh raised the issue at the highest level, with Kevin Rudd. See BBC News. *India calls off Australia events*, 11 June 2009: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8094682.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8094682.stm).

<sup>2</sup> Fraser, Stewart E. *Overseas students in Australia: governmental policies and institutional programs*. Comparative Education Review 28 (2), Foreign Students in Comparative Perspective (May, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> The Colombo Plan incorporated foreign aid, social development programs and diplomacy initiatives between the developed Commonwealth nations and developing nations across South East Asia. The education scholarships were the most conspicuous, positive and enduring aspect of the Plan and fostered largely positive relations on both inter-governmental and grassroots levels at a time when the White Australia Policy still loomed large. As scholarship demand outstripped supply, Australian universities began to subsidise private students (in some instances by up to 80%). The success of the program has in recent months seen calls for revival of the economic scholarships. See for example Oakman, Daniel. The seed of freedom: regional security and the Colombo Plan, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 46 (1) 2000 and Young Asians in our homes: Colombo Plan students and White Australia: [http://www.api-network.com/main/pdf/scholars/jas72\\_oakman.pdf](http://www.api-network.com/main/pdf/scholars/jas72_oakman.pdf). Auletta, Alex. *A retrospective view of the Colombo Plan: government policy, departmental administration and overseas students*. Journal of

Higher Education Policy and Management, 22 (1) 2000; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*. Canberra, Australian Government, 2005; Healy, Guy. Call for revived Colombo Plan. *The Australian*, 8 July 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Forbes-Mewett, Helen and Chris Nyland. Cultural diversity, relocation and the security of international students at an internationalised university. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12 (2) 2008, pp 181-203.

<sup>5</sup> Australia Education International. *2007 follow-up international student survey*. AEI Research Report, May 2008.

<sup>6</sup> See Nyland, Chris and Helen Forbes-Mewett. *The international student safety debate: moving beyond denial*. Department of Management Working Paper Series. Working Paper 15/08, Economics and Business, Monash University 2008; Turtic, Sandra. *Needs assessment of international students in the City of Sydney*. Project Report, City of Sydney, August 2008.

<sup>7</sup> In 2007-2008, there was a 17.6% increase in international students studying in Australia. See Australia Education International. Research Snapshot - *International student numbers by sector* (March 2009):

[http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/44SS09\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/44SS09_pdf.pdf) and in Annexure.

<sup>8</sup> For example, initial research conducted in both India and Australia in the wake of the recent violence against international students suggested that general perceptions about Australian society and the desirability of Australia and an education destination have diminished; see UMR Research and Blackbox Research. *Attacks on Indian students in Australia: attitudes in India and Australia*. Public Opinion Report, UMR Omnibus Survey July 2009.

<sup>9</sup> AEI released a revived plan, 'Study in Australia 2010'. The plan will see a dedicated \$3.5million

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directed to China, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Key features of the plan include: (i) Student Experience (2) Showcasing Excellence (3) Positioning Australia and (4) Sector Engagement. See Australia Education International. *Government drive to raise Australia's international education profile*. Australian Government 2009: <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/SIA2010.htm>; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Economic Analytical Unit. *Education without borders: international trade in education*. Canberra, Australian Government, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Government 'damage control' efforts and expenditures in the wake of the violence and media coverage included sending officials to India, hosting Indian journalists in Australia and forming a specific taskforce. Further on 7 August 13, 2009 it was announced that Julia Gillard, Steven Smith and Kevin Rudd all have trips to India forthcoming. Banham, Cynthia and Heath Gilmore. Rudd forms Indian violence taskforce. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 June 2009, p 5.

<sup>11</sup> In ongoing recognition of the diplomatic implications of the international student issue, it was announced that Julia Gillard, Steven Smith and Kevin Rudd all have trips to India forthcoming. Kevin Rudd noted, 'It's an important relationship for Australia and like most of our relationships around the world has some bumps in the road from time to time ... but we can work our way through them.' See Australia Assures Safety of Indian Students, Rudd to visit India, *Australian Associated Press online*, 7 August 2009: <http://livenews.com.au/news/student-violence-prompts-rudd-to-visit-india/2009/8/7/215406>.

<sup>12</sup> Australia Education International. Research Snapshot - *International student numbers by nationality*: [http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/44SS09\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/44SS09_pdf.pdf) and Annexure; Australia Education International. *Market data snapshot People's Republic of China* (July 2009):

[http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/MarketDataSnapshots/MDS\\_No32\\_China\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/MarketDataSnapshots/MDS_No32_China_pdf.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Gilmore, Heath. China speaks out on student attacks. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2009; Healey, Guy and Andrew Trounson. Moves to safeguard Indian students. *The Australian*, 10 June 2009, p 35.

<sup>14</sup> Australia Education International. *Research Snapshot - Export income to Australia from education services in 2008*. 2009: [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/50SS09\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/50SS09_pdf.pdf) and Annexure.

<sup>15</sup> Marginson, Simon. *In the global context: national policy on international education*. Higher education and the 2007 federal election: global markets and local policy, Symposium: University of Melbourne Centre for Public Policy and Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 5 June 2007.

<sup>16</sup> See for example AEI's official guide to studying in Australia entitled *Live. Learn. Grow*. The document is a direct reflection of the concerted government policy regarding international education and its national branding; Australia Education International. *Live. Learn. Grow*. 2009: [http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/Sia/en/StudyGuide\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/Sia/en/StudyGuide_pdf.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Marginson, Simon. *The global positioning of Australian education: Where to from here?* Dean's Lecture Series, The University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education, 16 October 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Hartman, Grant. *The Dawkins reconstruction of Australian higher education*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Marginson. *The global positioning of Australian education: Where to from here?*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> In this period, Australia was the only OECD country in which public expenditure on tertiary

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education decreased; The Report states Australia's public expenditure on total education was 4.3% of GDP compared to the OECD average of 5.0%. Australia's figure is behind United States at 5.1% of GDP and UK at 5.0% of GDP. At the same time, funding from private sources increased from 21.1% in 1995 to 27% in 2004 whereas the OECD average was 13%. See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Education at a Glance 2007 Report*.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/4/40701218.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> 'Universities made \$2.3 billion from international student fees in 2006, which accounted for 14.9 per cent of all income for tertiary institutions. However, foreign student income as a proportion of total income is much higher for some universities.' Rout, Milanda. *Unis rely on 'risky' income*, The Australian 13 February 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See for all sectors Australian Education International. *International Student Enrolment Data 2009 Table 1: Monthly time series of stock, flow and year to date of student enrolments – All sectors*: [https://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2009/2009\\_1to6.pdf](https://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2009/2009_1to6.pdf) and Annexure; For VET sector see AEI data extracted in Tables 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7 in Access Economics. *The Australian education sector and the economic contribution of international students*. Report for Australian Council for Private Education and Training, April 2009.

<sup>24</sup> In 2008, enrolments and commencements in VET sector both increased 46% to 175 461 and 106 180 respectively. The majority of VET enrolments were with the 437 non-government providers. The non-government provider share increased from 73% in 2002 to 84% in 2008. Australia Education International. *International student Enrolments in Vocational Education and Training in 2000* (April 2009);

[http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/46SS09\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/46SS09_pdf.pdf).

The figures collected by AEI are based on 'enrolment' and 'commencement' numbers as opposed to total international student numbers. AEI explains the method is to mitigate 'double counting' of students who progress through the education sectors in a given year. Where 'double counting' is permitted for students who enrol in more than one course a year, it was 543 898 in 2008. There is a limitation in the AEI data generally however in that it is confined to international students studying in Australia on student visas. This is not representative of the total number of international students as students study in Australian education institutions situated offshore and other students study in Australia while on other visas such as visitor, working holiday and other categories. Commentary on the IDP Education website estimates that there are approximately 100,000 international students in the first category and a further 56,000 in the second category. See IDP Education *International student numbers – Research – Statistics*: [http://www.idp.com/research/statistics/international\\_student\\_numbers.aspx](http://www.idp.com/research/statistics/international_student_numbers.aspx). Further anecdotal evidence suggests there are further students of international origin who are undertaking courses which are non-award i.e. do not lead to qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework and/or not CRICOS registered, as such they are not captured by the AEI data.

Three structural factors underpinned the expansion of the VET sector during this period: 1) the decision in 2001 to allow international students to apply for permanent residency while in Australia, with extra migration points incurred for having studying in Australia; 2) the release of a list of skills/occupations in demand in 2005 and agility of the private college industry in responding to the demand (for example, hairdressing and cooking); 3) the accreditation of

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students with Certificate III qualifications for one year courses without the usual requirement of industry experience. The ELICOS sector grew in tandem with the expansion of the VET sector indicative of the language requirements of 'PR pathway' as discussed on 'International students and the PR expectation gap' on The National Interest on Radio National by Bob Birrell, Sushi Das and Tony Pollock on 31 July, 2009. See also Australian Education International. *Research Snapshots - International Student Enrolments in ELICOS in 2008* (April 2009):

[http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/47SS09\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/47SS09_pdf.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Birrell, Das and Pollock. International students and the PR expectation gap.

<sup>26</sup> Armitage, Catherine. Chinese students 'deserve better'. *The Australian*, 1 October 2008; McDonald, Sarah. Indian student enrolment enquiries drop 80%, Australian says. *Bloomberg*, 30 July 2009.

<sup>27</sup> The ESOS framework includes the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (as amended in 2007), Education Services for Overseas Students Regulations 2001, Education Services for Overseas Students (Registration Charges) Act 1997 (as amended in 2007) and the Education Services for Overseas Students (Assurance Fund Contributions) Act 2000. There is also an ESOS National Code, revised in 2007, by which each registered education provider is bound. The framework complements quality assurance frameworks in education and training such as the Australian Quality Training Framework (for registered vocational education and training providers offering these courses) and the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (for institutions offering higher education qualifications).

<sup>28</sup> The ESOS framework does not impose any pastoral care standards on education providers and fails to appreciate and/or afford international

students' rights other than consumers/economic rights. These rights are however currently compromised by \$5.4 million in outstanding payments and by the inability of the ESOS Assurance Fund to secure further insurance following the demise of AIG, its former insurer during the Global Financial Crisis. See: Healy, Guy and Andrew Trounson. Cash crisis as back-up fund hits the skids. *The Australian*, 22 July 2009.

<sup>29</sup> As related by international students in interviews for *Holy cash cows*. Four Corners Report. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, aired on 27 July 2009:

<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2637800.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Birrell, Bob. The implications of low English standards among overseas students at Australian universities. *People and Place* 14 (4) 2006.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Turtic. Needs assessment of international students in the city of Sydney; Forbes-Mewett, Helen, Mona Chung, Simon Marginson, Chris Nyland, Gaby Ramia and Erlenawati Sawir. *Income security of international students in Australia*. ISANA, December 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Sawir, Erlenawati, Simon Marginson, Ana Deumart, Chris Nyland and Gaby Ramia. Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 20 (10) 2007, pp 1-33; Grayson, J. Paul. The experiences and outcomes of domestic and international students at four Canadian universities. *Higher Education Research and Development* 27 (3) 2008, pp 215-230.

<sup>33</sup> Nyland, Chris, Helen Forbes-Mewett, Simon Marginson, Gaby Ramia, Erlenawati Sawir and Sharon Smith. International student-workers in Australia: a new vulnerable workforce. *Journal of Education and Work* 22 (1) 2009, pp 1-14.

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<sup>36</sup> Curtis, Glen, Seth Elan, Rexford Hudson and Nina Kollars. *Transnational activities of Chinese crime organizations*. Report prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, April 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Linacre, Susan. *International students in Australia*. Australian Social Trends 2007. Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007; Australian Bureau of Statistics. *4510.0 - Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia, 2008*. ABS Report 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Highlighted in the Executive Summary, Recommendations and Findings of the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley Review): <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Documents/PDF/Higher%20Education%20Review/Executive%20summary%20Recommendations%20and%20findings.pdf>, with the international student issues addressed at Chapter 3.6.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Universities Australia's Media Release regarding COAG International Student Strategy *Universities reaffirm principles for enhancing the student experience and student safety, welcome COAG initiatives* 2 July 2009:

[http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=news/media\\_releases/2009/uniaus\\_media\\_10\\_09.htm](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=news/media_releases/2009/uniaus_media_10_09.htm); International Student Round Table Media Statement from Official Website of Australian Labor Party- 28 July 2009:

<http://www.alp.org.au/media/0709/msed280.php>.  
<sup>40</sup> For example – Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation. *Government Receives Overseas Student Taskforce Report*, 22 December 2008: <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/minister-for-skills-workforce-participation/government-receives-overseas-student-taskforce-report.html>; Media Statement, The Hon Verity Firth MP, NSW Minister

for Education and Training, Minister for Women. *Ministerial taskforce examines \$5.3 billion NSW international education industry*, 22 April 2009:

[https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/ministerial/yr2009/apr/mr220409\\_iei.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/ministerial/yr2009/apr/mr220409_iei.pdf). A review of the ESOS regulatory framework has been announced. The Hon Bruce Baird will oversee submissions and consultation: [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_090810\\_073524.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090810_073524.aspx).

<sup>41</sup> See for example Universities Australia's Position Paper *Enhancing the student experience and student safety*, June 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Swan, Wayne. *2009-10 budget - supporting jobs now by investing in our future*. Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia 2009: <http://www.treasurer.gov.au/DisplayDocs.aspx?doc=pressreleases/2009/068.htm&pageID=&min=wms&Year=&DocType=0>.

<sup>43</sup> Australian Education International. *Live. Learn. Grow*.

<sup>44</sup> ABS statistics indicate that footpaths and streets are most common place for attack. See Australian Bureau of Statistics. *4510.0 - Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia, 2008*. ABS Report 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Birrell. The implications of low English standards among overseas students at Australian universities.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Some education institutions require international postgraduate students undertake an Academic English unit as part of their course. For example University of Sydney's Faculty of Arts program at [http://edutech.arts.usyd.edu.au/Artsonline/v2\\_1\\_UO/ST/dsp\\_UoST3.cfm?uid=181184&AY=2009&SID=0&DID=0](http://edutech.arts.usyd.edu.au/Artsonline/v2_1_UO/ST/dsp_UoST3.cfm?uid=181184&AY=2009&SID=0&DID=0).

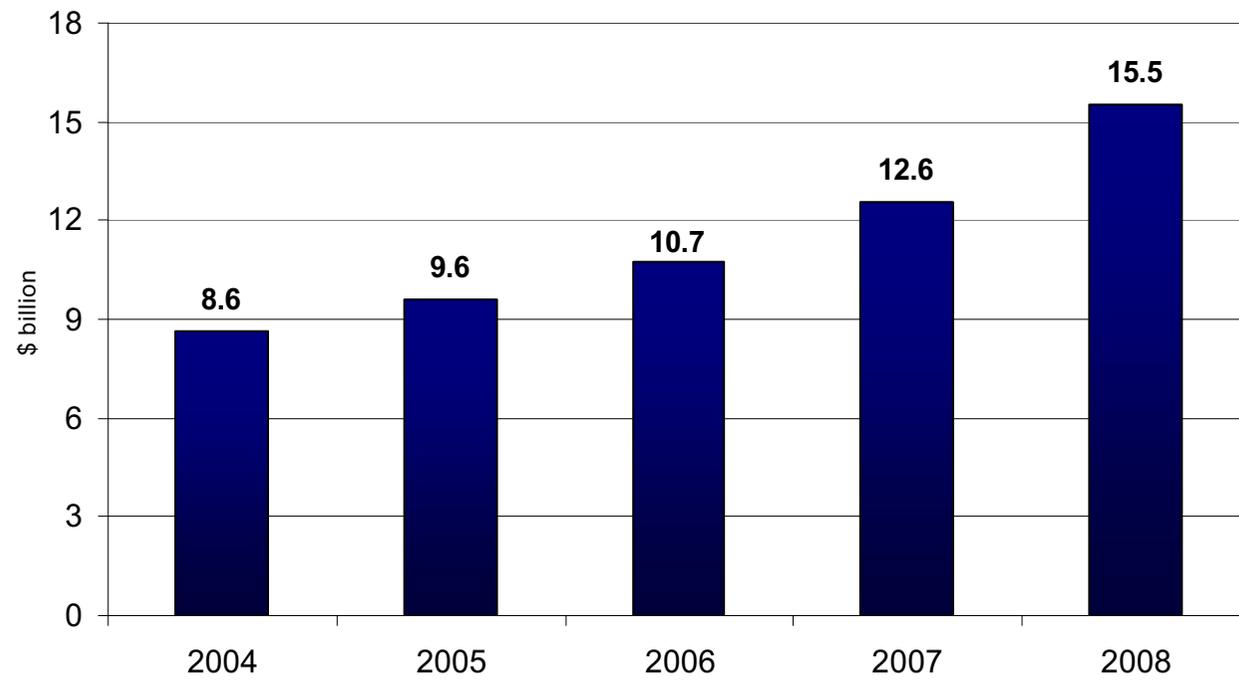
## ANNEXURE: TABLES AND GRAPHS

1. Australian Education International. *International Student Numbers by Sector*
2. Australian Education International. *International Student Numbers: Nationality – Distribution by Age Group and Sectors*
3. Australian Education International. *Export Income from Education Services, 2004 to 2008*
4. Australian Education International. *International Student Enrolment Data 2009. Monthly Time Series of Stock, Flow and Year to Date of Student Enrolments – All Sectors*

<b>International student numbers by sector</b>				<b>International Student Enrolments 2008</b>
<b>Sector</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Annual growth on 2007</b>	
Higher Education	168,052	176,161	4.8%	182,770
VET	107,066	151,258	41.3%	175,461
ELICOS	92,890	115,128	23.9%	125,727
Schools	26,602	28,515	7.2%	28,798
Other <sup>a</sup>	27,256	31,035	13.9%	31,142
<b>Total</b>	<b>370,238<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>435,263<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>543,898</b>
<p><sup>a</sup> The 'Other' sector includes study abroad, foundation, enabling and other non-award courses that do not lead to a qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework.</p> <p><sup>b</sup> The total is less than the sum of its components as individual students can undertake study in more than one sector during the year.</p>				

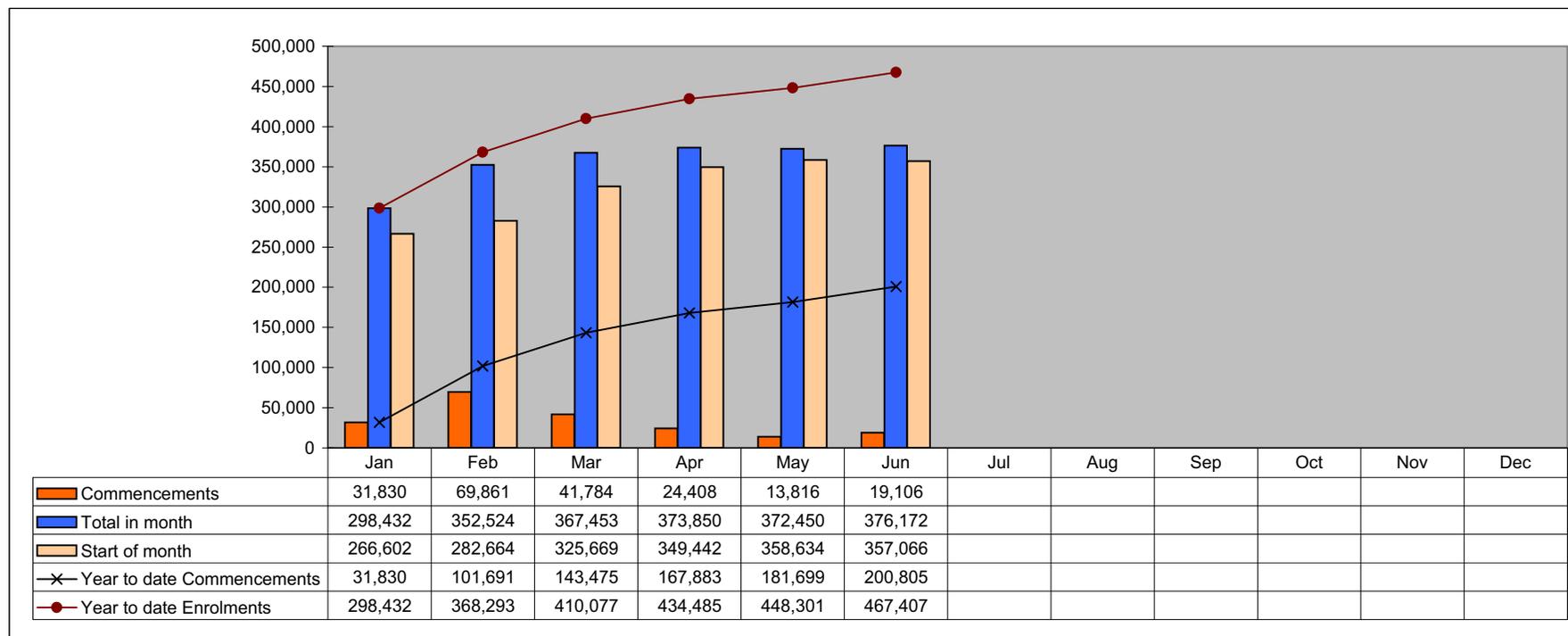
Nationality	International student numbers by age group (years)					Total Students	Percentage distribution of international students by sector				
	≤ 19	20 – 24	25 – 29	≥ 30	Average		Higher Education	VET	ELICOS	Schools	Other
China	22,142	52,640	19,302	2,669	22.2	96,753	40.9%	18.7%	24.8%	11.3%	4.3%
India	5,063	41,135	24,049	5,143	24.0	75,390	30.1%	51.1%	17.7%	0.1%	0.9%
Republic of Korea	6,619	8,289	8,227	5,161	24.3	28,296	19.2%	25.5%	36.2%	15.6%	3.5%
Malaysia	2,970	12,761	2,316	1,573	22.9	19,620	75.4%	14.2%	2.5%	3.4%	4.4%
Thailand	1,221	4,298	6,838	4,097	26.7	16,454	20.9%	36.5%	38.4%	2.9%	1.2%
Hong Kong	3,972	8,515	1,500	710	21.7	14,697	49.4%	24.0%	9.6%	7.7%	9.2%
Nepal	725	7,772	3,847	1,155	24.0	13,499	20.0%	67.2%	12.1%	0.1%	0.5%
Indonesia	3,226	6,597	2,152	1,260	22.8	13,235	47.9%	31.2%	13.7%	2.5%	4.7%
Vietnam	4,085	5,261	2,140	827	22.0	12,313	25.2%	21.1%	37.5%	13.1%	3.1%
Brazil	817	4,278	4,779	2,001	25.7	11,875	4.1%	34.2%	58.9%	1.7%	1.2%
Other nationalities	13,139	59,873	37,223	22,896	25.1	133,131	35.7%	26.4%	21.1%	3.2%	13.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>63,979</b>	<b>211,419</b>	<b>112,373</b>	<b>47,492</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>435,263</b>	<b>35.1%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>

**Export income from education services, 2004 to 2008**



## AEI International Student Enrolment Data 2009

### Monthly time series of Stock, Flow and Year to Date of Student Enrolments - All Sectors



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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His most recent books are *Energy Security in Asia* (Routledge, 2007); *The Howard Paradox: Australian Diplomacy in Asia 1996-2006* (ABC Books, 2007); and (with Allan Gyngell) *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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