

International Students Strategy for Australia

Questions and Answers

1. What is the International Students Strategy for Australia?

The International Students Strategy for Australia aims to support a high-quality experience for international students, in order to ensure a sustainable future for quality international education in Australia.

The Strategy focuses on four action areas – student wellbeing, quality of education, consumer protection and better information – and twelve initiatives that governments have agreed to implement.

These actions will help to ensure that international students:

- are able to make informed choices about studying and living in Australia;
- have a positive study and life experience in Australia; and
- acquire skills that equip them for a successful future.

The Strategy will also help to ensure that Australia has an international education sector positioned for a sustainable future; a reputation for high-quality education; and a regulatory framework that assures quality education.

2. Who developed the International Students Strategy for Australia?

The Strategy has been developed collaboratively by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) <www.coag.gov.au> recognising that all governments are responsible for aspects of the international student experience.

The sector and international students were consulted during the Strategy's development.

3. Why do we need an International Students Strategy for Australia?

Australia needs this Strategy to ensure that international students continue to have high-quality experiences in Australia.

All Australian governments recognise the importance of Australia's international education sector. After years of success, our international education sector now faces major challenges, arising from rapid change in the size and composition of the international education sector. As a key area of competitive advantage for Australia, supporting a high quality student experience is therefore crucial to maintaining the success of Australia's international education sector.

Governments decided that an International Students Strategy for Australia was required to ensure the sector could continue to develop in a sustainable way, providing high quality education to students who come here to live and study.

The Strategy has been developed alongside a number of other complementary measures at a State, Territory and national level (some of which are highlighted in the Strategy), including targeted law enforcement strategies to support student safety and a Review of the *Education Services for Overseas Students ESOS Act 2000* (ESOS Act).

4. What other changes to international education have governments introduced recently?

International education services are governed by the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000*¹. The Act has been amended several times to provide an integrated regulatory framework including consumer protection, education quality and student support services. ESOS is widely recognised as among the best frameworks for international education regulation in the world, especially for protecting tuition fees. More information can be found at: www.aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS.

Improvements continue to be made. Amendments to the ESOS Act made in 2010 require all international education providers to re-register under tighter new regulatory criteria by December 2010, and to publish a list of education agents operating on their behalf, to ensure greater transparency and accountability of education agents on- and off-shore.

In 2009, the Commonwealth Government also brought forward a review of the ESOS legislative framework. On 9 March 2010 the Commonwealth Government released the ESOS Act Review report titled *Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students* and agreed to begin work to implement some of the recommendations immediately. More information is available at: www.aei.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/InternationalStudentsTaskforce/ReviewESOSAct

The report made a number of recommendations along two central themes:

- ensuring students are better supported through improved information, management of education agents, stronger consumer protection mechanisms and enhanced support to study and live in Australia, including having somewhere to go when problems arise; and
- improving regulation of Australia's international education sector and ways to streamline ESOS to ensure Australia maintains its reputation as a high quality study destination.

In response to the Review, the Commonwealth Government introduced legislation to amend the ESOS Act to strengthen the quality and integrity of the international education sector. This first phase response to the review has a focus on raising the bar to entry to the sector, risk management, effective regulation and improving complaints and appeals processes.

¹ Also by the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students ('the National Code') under the Act, the Act's Regulations and two associated Acts.

The Commonwealth will also consult widely with the international education sector and States and Territories on other recommendations in the ESOS Review intended to provide better support, information and tuition protection for international students.

In addition Australian governments are working to develop new standards for the English Language sector that build on Australia's world-leading industry accreditation scheme.

5. *What other changes to migration policy has the Government introduced recently?*

Australia's Skilled Migration Program has strongly influenced how the international education sector has developed by offering migration options to qualified international students. While this arrangement has the potential to assist in meeting Australia's skills needs, it is important that a quality education experience for students is maintained.

As economic conditions vary over time, so too do the skills and qualifications Australia seeks in skilled migrants. Migration policy will always change to best meet Australia's contemporary needs. In 2010, the Commonwealth Government announced changes to the skilled migration program to ensure the program operates as a demand- rather than supply-driven system that delivers the skills most needed in the economy.

Further information on recent migration policy changes can be found at:
www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/whats-new.htm.

Australia continues to welcome international students and offers them a quality education with qualifications which equip them for productive and satisfying careers wherever they pursue them.

6. *I am an international student – what does the International Students Strategy for Australia mean for me?*

Through the initiatives under the Strategy, international students will:

- have access to a student personal safety guide;
- be required to provide evidence of health cover for the duration of their visa;
- through a community engagement strategy, be able to become more involved in local community life and activities;
- have a national forum to put forward their views on issues affecting their study and living experiences in Australia;
- be able to access an independent and expert complaints handling mechanism;
- have access to comprehensive and accurate information in a variety of languages about studying, living and working in Australia, including comparative information on government services in different study destinations.

7. *How will we know that things have changed for international students?*

As part of the Strategy, an international student survey is taking place in 2010 and 2012 to better understand international students' experience of living and studying in Australia. The

survey will examine why they chose to study in Australia, level of satisfaction with their education, support services, engagement with the local community, and the general experience of living in Australia.

It will also examine international students' future plans and aspirations.

The findings of each survey will help inform reporting and future policy making for international students.

8. *What happens now?*

Under the Strategy, a number of initiatives are already underway, including the Study in Australia information portal, which provides a comprehensive and accurate information source for international students at www.studyinaustralia.gov.au.

Other initiatives will be rolled out soon, including a national community engagement strategy to facilitate connections between international students and the broader community.

All governments will oversee the implementation of the Strategy through the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE), which will report to COAG annually.