
COUNCIL OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION
INCORPORATED

15 March 2013

Sarah Edson
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sarah

Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013

The Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE) fully supports expanded eligibility for OS-HELP assistance, the AsiaBound Grants Program and additional incentives for higher education students to undertake study in Asia.

All domestic students should have equitable access to engage with the social and academic cultures of other countries and develop their potential as global citizens. Extending support to all students will help achieve the objectives outlined in the Henry white paper *Australia in the Asian Century* and the Chaney paper *Australia – Educating Globally*.

This legislation as drafted however, limits eligibility to those students in Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs - commonly called HECS places) provided under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme.

Students enrolling with our members are not able to access CSPs, with the exception of a small number of students in teacher education and nursing at four institutions.

All Australian graduates make a contribution to Australian society and we see no reason to discriminate against students choosing to undertake their higher education outside public university institutions. We therefore seek amendment to the legislation to provide eligibility for OS-HELP and Access to AsiaBound Grants for *all* domestic higher education students enrolled with providers approved by the Commonwealth under the HESA 2003 legislation.

Since the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in January 2012 as a single national regulator, all Australian higher education providers must meet the same standards for educational provision, course standards and graduate outcomes.

OS HELP assistance should be available to *all* students as recently stated in a media release by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research *Making Study in Asia More Accessible* dated 14 February 2013.

Human Rights

We have noted that the Statement of Compatibility with Human Rights in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill indicates that Schedule 1 of the Bill engages the right to education contained in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It states that the covenant recognises that higher education shall be equally accessible to all. My colleagues question how excluding some Australian higher education students from access to OS-HELP, and other support under the HESA Act and Asian Amendments Bill can be said to be compatible with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights?

About the Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE)

The COPHE constituency operates from about 60 campuses across Australia. They sit unambiguously in the higher education sector, offering courses taught and accredited as the equivalent to those offered in public sector universities.

COPHE members, while diverse in size and educational focus, are committed to the provision of quality higher education, registered under TEQSA as regulator and approved as higher education providers under the HESA 2003 . Institutions are student-centred, often have smaller student-to-staff ratios than their larger public counterparts, and provide opportunities for flexible and accelerated learning. Offering courses in niche discipline areas, members are committed to particular professions and have strong employer links.

International students for some COPHE members form a large proportion of their enrolments and for others the international student numbers are small but reflect a perceived need for cultural diversity and support of their broader community or mission. International education has for too long been a matter of enrolling overseas students in Australia and we need to encourage Australians to take a global view with a particular focus on Asia.

We would be pleased to appear before the committee if there is a public hearing.

Yours sincerely

Adrian McComb

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