# Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students

**Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee**
**from**
**IDP Education Pty Ltd**

**August 2009**

This submission from IDP Education Pty Ltd addresses matters referred by the Senate on 17 June 2009 to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee.

**(a) The roles and responsibilities of education providers, migration and education agents, state and federal governments, and relevant departments and embassies, in ensuring the quality and adequacy in information, advice, service delivery and support, with particular reference to:**

**(i) Student safety**

Student safety is a key issue for the international education industry and also has major implications for Australia's international relations. The focus it is currently receiving from a wide range of industry stakeholders gives confidence that that effective, long-term solutions will be found.

There are many factors to be considered in improving student safety. For example they include: improvements in accommodation; greater social inclusion; ensuring the students are not exploited at work; ensuring that they come to Australia with adequate financial resources; public transport concessions; and offering effective support systems. These measures all contribute to improved international student safety and are addressed below.

**(ii) Adequate and affordable accommodation**

International students need improved access to adequate and affordable accommodation. As a result of the rapid expansion in international student numbers, great strain has been placed on student accommodation. IDP supports calls for education institutions, government and the property/real estate industry to explore ways of increasing supply of affordable accommodation in safe neighbourhoods with reasonable access to educational institutions. **(See Recommendation 1)**

We also urge the NSW and Victorian governments to follow other states and offer public transport concessions to international students. Cheaper transport will increase the accommodation options available to international students by allowing them to consider a wider range of neighbourhoods. Many international students hold night-time jobs and need to use public transport to travel safely between work and home. **(See Recommendation 2)**

**(iii) Social inclusion**

Research indicates that international students would like to form more links with Australian students with a 2006 study by Australian Education International finding that 80% wanted more Australian students as friends.[1] A 2008 study by IDP Education found that, among 1,940 graduates of Australian Technology Network universities, 45% had formed networks with Australians during their course of study.[2] Clearly there is room to create greater linkages between international students and Australians and this is likely to improve the experience of international students in Australia. Educational institutions already work hard at creating conditions to increase the on campus contact between international and domestic students.

1 2006 International Student Survey, Australian Education International 2007
2 Banks, Melissa and Olsen, Alan. Outcomes and Impacts of International Education: From International Student to Australian Graduate, the Journey of a Lifetime. IDP Education 2008

IDP supports a call by the Executive Director of the Lowy Institute, Michael Wesley, to improve the standard of English among international students as a way of reducing social isolation. Among his suggestions are making an English language proficiency test a mandatory condition of graduation for students of non-English speaking background and including English language training as a core part of the curriculum for international students whose proficiency needs improvement.[3] Such initiatives will also improve the outcomes for students after graduation, as proficiency in English is highly sought after in the employment market. **(See Recommendation 3)**

**(iv) Student visa requirements**

IDP recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship should review the financial requirements which applicants for student visas need to fulfil, because they are no longer in line with the cost of living in Australia. For example, DIAC requires a student without dependents from a higher risk country to show they have $12,000 a year available to meet living costs. The figure is unrealistically low and, although DIAC informs students that it does not necessarily represent the cost of living in Australia, it sends students the wrong message and does not serve the purpose of ensuring that students come to Australia with sufficient funds. **(See Recommendation 4)**

**(v) Adequate international student supports and advocacy**

International education providers are required to offer support services to students under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act. These services include assistance in finding accommodation, study skills support, orientation support and assistance for accidents and emergencies.

International students undertake advocacy through a number of student organisations, some representing both domestic and international students and some focussed on international students. It is important for international students to be able to effectively put their views to government and other industry stakeholders.

**(vi) Employment rights and protections from exploitation, and**

International students are likely to need advice about how to proceed in situations they may encounter in Australia, such as commencing employment and securing accommodation rental. They could also need information about support services for dealing with problems that emerge in these situations. Extensive information is included in many orientation programs for international students and we support efforts to make information and support services consistent and as widely available as possible.

**(vii) Appropriate pathways to permanency**

Australia's skilled migration system has contributed to the large increase in international students numbers in the VET sector seen in recent years. The commensurate increase in numbers of private VET colleges taxed the ability of State governments to effectively regulate the sector. While the majority of the VET sector is made up of high quality institutions which deliver excellent outcomes, low quality colleges have been permitted to operate, damaging Australia's international reputation in education. The increase in student numbers has also contributed to

3 Wesley, Michael. Australia's Poisoned Alumni: International Education and the Costs to Australia. Lowy Institute for International Policy 2009

other problems affecting international student welfare, including accommodation and job shortages.

The Federal government has introduced a series of changes to address the issue and we believe further changes will be needed. However skilled migration is a necessary part of Australia's strategy to meet skill shortages in the labour market and we believe international graduates should continue to be able to apply for skilled migration after the completion of their course without having to leave Australia. **(See Recommendation 5)**

**(b) The identification of quality benchmarks and controls for service, advice and support for international students studying at an Australian education institution**

We believe that existing regulations in ESOS legislation and in the state-based regulation of private colleges provide a very good framework for ensuring high quality service, advice and support to international students.

Not withstanding recent problems, Australia's system for protecting international students is fundamentally sound and continues to perform very well for the majority of international students. We can look to the experience of individual Australian educational institutions to see examples of excellent service, advice and support of international students which would serve as benchmarks for the future.

**(c) Any other related matters**

Although we believe existing laws and regulations affecting international education are fundamentally strong there is room for improvement to achieve greater harmony between state-based systems and to meet changing circumstances.

We welcome the Federal government's review of the ESOS Act and the moves, through the Council of Australian Governments, to create a single national regulator for the VET sector. We also welcome the increased auditing of private international education providers in the VET sector which is underway.

As changes are made, we urge government to ensure that changes to the ESOS Act and other laws and regulations affecting international education are efficient to apply, do not lead to unnecessary impositions and are effective in achieving their intended outcome.

We believe that international education is an industry of great national importance to Australia, not only for its contribution to trade but also because of its potential to create lasting and valuable relationships between Australians and people from other countries in our region.

## Recommendations

1. Education institutions, government and the property/real estate industry should explore ways to increase the supply of adequate and affordable accommodation in suitable locations for international students.

2. In order to improve safety and expand work and accommodation options for international students, the NSW and Victorian governments should offer public transport concessions to international students.

3. English language proficiency of international students should be improved as a way to reduce social isolation. Measures to be considered include making an English language proficiency test a condition of graduation for international students of non-English speaking background, and including English language training in the core curriculum, with mandated standards to be achieved during the course, for international students whose English proficiency needs improvement.

4. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship should review the financial requirements for student visas to ensure students come to Australia with sufficient funds to meet living costs.

5. Further changes should be made to skilled migration rules to prevent abuse, to ensure that skilled migration focuses on qualifications and skills which are strategically important for the economy, and to ensure that numbers of skilled migrants are not oversupplied in particular skill areas. Because of their experience in Australia, international students are suitable applicants for skilled migration and should continue to be able to apply after graduation without having to leave Australia.

## About IDP Education

IDP Education Pty Ltd is the largest international student placement service in Australia, placing over 30,000 students into Australian educational institutions in 2008-09. IDP's student placement service operates through over 70 student offices in 25 countries.

IDP also is a one-third owner of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the world's most popular English language proficiency test, which is delivered at over 500 test locations in 120 countries. The other owners of the test are the British Council and University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations.

IDP's other activities include:

- Conducting research in international education
    - We produce the major forecasting study of international student numbers, Global Student Mobility, last published in 2007
    - We support and web host a major research resource, The Database of Research in International Education
- Delivering education development aid projects
- Operating two English language schools
- Co-hosting the annual Australian International Education Conference which was founded by IDP in 1987

IDP is half-owned by 38 Australian universities and half-owned by Australia's largest online employment and training company SEEK Ltd. It was founded in 1969 by Australian universities to extend development assistance to universities in South-East Asia. This year IDP is celebrating its 40th anniversary.