

**Submission
No 36**

INQUIRY INTO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Organisation: Australian International College of Language (AICOL)

Date Received: 6 August 2020

Although I live in Queensland, I believe that the problems facing the education sector are not limited to NSW, and indeed a nation-wide approach is required. Given that the universities have for decades been able to ring-fence themselves from the realities which the rest of us must face, and have presented a united front opposing the winds of change, perhaps a State by State approach is the only way. Please accept my comments as a concerned citizen of Australia.

I know from my experience as the owner of a small private ELICOS provider that for decades international education in Australia has been sold (yes, sold) not as a first choice based on quality but as a second choice. An education agent in Hong Kong once told me that this is the way Australian education was marketed in China - don't worry if you are not accepted into your university of choice, come to Australia where you can do a Foundation Year in TAFE or at a private college and then proceed straight to Year 2 at university, graduating in 3 years. Or do a "pathway" English course at a college will get you straight into university regardless of whether you can speak English.

Some universities offer discounts to students from some countries under the guise of "scholarships". International education unfortunately has very little to do with quality, and everything to do with numbers. Education agents control the markets and the commission rates, in some cases allocating student weeks based upon rates of commission. International students are a commodity. This of course extends to English language colleges which have "pathways" to universities, which are simply a means to recruit students.

Of course this is all general knowledge to people in the industry, and has been for at least 20 years. So why has nothing been done about it? Because money is placed above standards. So what can be done.

We could wait for the Chinese market to collapse and allow events to take their course, but universities are already seeking out alternative markets (South Asia, Africa etc.). I suggest the following:

- ALL international students MUST sit an INDEPENDENT language test before they enter university, and the score must be AT LEAST equivalent to IELTS 6.0.
- ALL pathway programs from English colleges to universities should be abandoned. There should be no "easy way". Incidentally, there are also some pathways from English schools to high schools, which result in underprepared students finding themselves in Australian schools.
- The focus of ASQA and TEQSA should be totally changed. There should be no higher education input into/ownership of these bodies. Their simple focus should be on the delivery of quality courses by quality providers who meet the requisite standards. The standards should include financial stability. Preferably universities and colleges should be able to demonstrate that they can operate on the sound business model of operating trust accounts for student fees, so that fees are drawn down as the student completes the course. We do this at our college.
- Major savings in audits can be made by instituting a SPOT AUDIT SYSTEM. The regulatory body should be able to visit any university or college at any time and be able to examine their operations.

We are doing nobody any favours by continuing to maintain institutions which deliver second rate qualifications.

Kind regards,

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