

IHEA Calls for Sustainable International Education Policies to Protect Australia's Economic Future

Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) is urging the next Australian Government to ensure the long-term sustainability of Australia's international education sector.

As outlined in IHEA's Federal Election Platform, international education is a cornerstone of Australia's economy, contributing \$51 billion in 2023-24 and accounting for almost 1 per cent of GDP growth, more than half of the country's total economic growth that year. Any move to weaken this sector would have devastating economic consequences for all Australians.

The *Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024* (ESOS Bill) sought to impose damaging enrolment caps on international students at independent higher education providers. This unjust and discriminatory move would have stifled student choice, restricted sector growth, and undermined Australia's global reputation in higher education.

Ministerial Direction 111 (MD 111) represents a better approach than the failed ESOS Bill, ensuring visa processing is prioritised based on application receipt rather than arbitrary restrictions targeting independent providers.

Yet, future policies must go further to guarantee a level playing field. IHEA calls for international student numbers at independent providers must not drop below 2023 levels, with 2019 figures acting as a baseline safeguard.

IHEA CEO, the Hon Dr Peter Hendy emphasised the critical role international education plays in Australia's prosperity:

"International education is one of Australia's most significant economic drivers, providing skilled talent and fostering global partnerships. Any policy that discriminates against independent providers undermines this success and risks Australia's global competitiveness."

Dr Hendy further stressed the need for equitable policy settings:

"Independent providers play a critical role in delivering world-class education and training. It is unacceptable for government policies to sideline them. We are calling for fairness, equity, and economic sustainability by ensuring all providers can compete on equal terms."

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