

Genuine international students for a stronger education system

Matthew Thompson

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION offers incredible benefits to the host country and diverse opportunities to those living, studying and working on a student visa.

As reported by the Department of Education Skills and Employment, in 2019, there were 956,773 enrolments generated by 758,154 full fee-paying international students in Australia on a student visa. All of these international students met the Department of Home Affairs' criteria of a 'Genuine Temporary Entrant' (GTE) to gain a student visa to study in Australia.

Evidence provided by the applicant assists in the identification of GTE applicants – those whose sincere aim is to gain a quality education in Australia, and non-GTE applicants – those who are suspected of using the student visa program for motives other than gaining

a quality education.

A publication issued by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2013 -2017), Managing Immigration Risk - Strategies for education providers, demonstrates the challenges that are faced in ensuring visa integrity:

"The integrity of the student visa programme can be undermined by non-genuine applicants providing fraudulent documents or claims or in circumstances where an applicant does not have a genuine intention to either undertake study, or remain temporarily in Australia."

The integrity of GTE status at the application stage is crucial, to prevent undermining of the international education industry. Maintaining GTE integrity whilst studying in Australia is also crucial and requires an understanding of the overseas student visa conditions and commitment to them,

not only by the student, but all involved including educational organisations, students and their families/ advisors, and agents.

The Department of Home Affairs website clearly states that "the GTE requirement is used to make sure the student visa program is accessed as intended. The student visa program is not a way for international students to maintain ongoing residency in Australia. The GTE requirement helps identify applicants who are using the student visa program for motives other than gaining a quality education."

Most international students are genuine, however there are also instances reported in which the motives of the applicants entering Australia on the pretext of the student visa are questionable. These non-genuine students may seek to exploit the Australian visa regime to their advantage, by providing misleading or false state-

ments in their GTE, for the purpose of entering Australia. Their hidden agenda may include to transfer to a less rigorous and more 'flexible' institution (for which they would never have been issued a student visa) and/or plan to ignore their overseas student visa conditions including a maximum of 40 hours per fortnight paid work once they are safely ensconced inside the Australian migration zone.

Combined with the above, there are reports of unscrupulous agents or others in Australia who seek to profit by targeting and exploiting the vulnerability of students. In the worst cases, the misinformation provided could be considered intentionally misleading and for the sole purpose of financial gain. These practices referred to in Industry as 'Agent Touting and Institution Poaching' and associated 'Provider and Course Hopping' by international students,

whether before or after completing at least six months of their principal course, can seriously destabilise and disrupt student progress and quality of the Australian export education industry.

The Australian Government is aware of visa integrity malpractices with nearly 18,000 student visas cancelled for 'non-genuine' students in 2019. These instances can bring reputational damage to Australian international education and the system that ensures compliance as well as disadvantaging the majority of international students who have genuine intentions of acquiring good quality education in Australia and strictly adhere to the student visa conditions as imposed by the Department of Home Affairs.

International education is crucial to Australia. It is identified as one of the country's top three export industries. According to Acting Immigration

Minister Alan Tudge, the student visa program is "vital to the Australian economy [and] supports our global competitiveness and strengthens cultural, trade and commercial links with other countries."

Although some students actively seek to contravene Australia's immigration regime and their student visa obligations, the majority of international students have genuine intentions of adhering to their overseas student visa conditions for the purpose of acquiring a good quality education in Australia.

It is incumbent on all involved in the industry, and those who assist or offer support to international students to be aware of the importance of maintaining genuine temporary entrant status whilst studying in Australia.

(Matthew Thompson, Business Development and International Engagement of Lawson College Australia)



College Australia

During COVID-19 pandemic over **300** of our students facing hardships benefited from the multiple 'Student Relief Packages' along with our relief contributions to the esteemed organisations, **The Salvation Army and FareShare**, which provided much needed support in the local community.



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