

Good Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students in Australia: Government Interventions in Ensuring Quality and Fairness¹

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Outline

1. The growth of international education in Australia
2. The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislation
3. Implementing the ESOS requirements at UniSA
4. The role of government in university management
5. Conclusion

This presentation will

- profile the growth of international education in Australia
- provide information on legislative initiatives to ensure quality and fairness in the provision of education to international students
- describe the implementation of legislative requirements, including some examples of how the requirements have improved administrative practices for all students in some respects
- offer some critical observations about the role of government in university management

1. The growth of international education in Australia

Australia

- International education has grown into one of Australia's largest export earners in the years since fees for international university students were first introduced in the 1980's (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002).
- Today, international education is Australia's third largest export industry, contributing \$14.2 billion to the Australian economy in 2007/08. This is an increase of 23.4% on the previous financial year. Education services continue to be Australia's largest services export industry (AEI November 2008).
- During the 1990s international student numbers in Australia grew at 15% a year (Moignard 2006).
- In 2008 there were 543,898 international students enrolled in Australian education institutions. This represents an increase of 20.7% on the previous year, and incorporates a 4.7% growth in enrolments in universities. 83.6% of higher education enrolments came from Asia, with China and India being the largest markets (AIE December 2008).
- Recent trends include
 - Students from a wider range of source countries enrolling in a wider range of fields of study (*Australian Education International*, n.d.)
 - Better balance between postgraduate (including research students) and undergraduate students (*Australian Education International*, n.d.)
- Australia is maintaining its position as the third most popular education destination in the English-speaking world, after the United States and the United Kingdom (*Innovation Australia* 2008).
- This may be because, according to Marginson (2007, p.7) 'Australia has been more effective than other English speaking countries in recruiting from Southeast Asia and

¹ I would like to acknowledge the work of one of my staff in preparing these notes – Storey Chambers, Policy and Projects Officer.

China (though overshadowed by the USA in Korea & Japan)' Marginson's claim is supported by the latest figures from Australia Education International which indicate a 21.5% increase in student enrolments from Asia during 2008 (Gillard, 2009).

- It is forecast that demand for Australian international higher education will grow from 163,000 in 2005 to 291,000 in 2025, which represents an increase of 78% (*IDP Education* 2008). As an indication of progress in relation to this projection, there were 182,770 enrolments in this sector in 2008 (AEI December 2008).

South Australia

- International education is one of South Australia's major export industries, injecting about \$741 million into the State's economy in 2007-08 and directly supporting more than 3,500 local jobs (*Education Adelaide*, email communication, 4 March 2009)
- In 2008, Adelaide attracted 27,967 international students, which is an increase of 20% over the previous year and follows closely the national average of 20.7% growth for the same period (*Education Adelaide*, email communication, 4 March 2009).
- The Asian region remains South Australia's main source for international students, representing about 88% of the total market. Continuing high growth is occurring from China, India, Vietnam and South Korea (*Education Adelaide* email communication 4 March 2009).
- International students do much to enrich the cultural diversity of the community, provide local students with a world perspective, and return home as unofficial ambassadors for South Australia, thereby sowing the seeds for future business networks (*Education Adelaide* 2008).
- **TOP 3 SOURCE COUNTRIES FOR SA**

	2007	2008	Growth 2007-08
China	8140	9519	16.9%
India	2662	4725	77.5%
Malaysia	2108	2250	8.0%

(*Education Adelaide*, 2008, email communication, 4 March 2009)

UniSA

- UniSA is the largest university in South Australia with five campuses and a diverse population of almost 36,000 students, including approximately 13,000 international students from 94 countries (Planning and Assurance Services UniSA, March 2009).
- Growth in international student numbers has been significant. In the ten years from 1998 to 2008 international students at UniSA increased from 2,500 to approximately 13,000. These statistics refer to the combined total of onshore and offshore international students (Planning and Assurance Services UniSA, March 2009).
- UniSA has won export awards for education and services in 2006, 2004, 2001, 2000 and 1999 (UniSA 2009).

2. The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislation

Australia's legislated suite of protections and other assurances for international students studying in Australia are world's best practice. This includes some of the world's most rigorous consumer protection mechanisms for international students provided through the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) framework (*Innovation Australia* 2008).

Under the ESOS legislation, providers that wish to offer courses to international students studying on a student visa must first meet requirements for registration on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). Registered providers must also meet legislated standards for marketing activities, education delivery, facilities and student support services. The ESOS Act has a strong focus on tuition

and financial assurance and contains provisions for monitoring the compliance of education providers (*Innovation Australia* 2008).

The ESOS Act was originally introduced in 2000. The purpose of the legislation is to protect the international education industry in Australia through the introduction of a set of national standards for the provision of education and training services to international students. The legislation complements existing national quality assurance frameworks for sectors of the education and training industry and enables the Federal government to take action against providers who are found in breach of their obligations (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007).

The legislation is comprised of several components including a National Code of Practice. The National Code is a mechanism for giving practical application to the rules and regulations set out in the broader ESOS framework. This is achieved by:

- setting out specifications and procedures to ensure that registered providers can clearly understand and comply with their obligations
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Australian federal government and state and territory governments (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007)

The stated objectives of the National Code are to:

1. **Establish and safeguard Australia's reputation** as a provider of high quality education and training by:

- ensuring that education and training for international students meets nationally consistent standards, and
- ensuring the integrity of registered providers

The underlying principle of this objective is that the social, cultural and economic benefits of international engagement through education and training depend on the quality and integrity of the services offered to international students, and maintaining public confidence in those services.

2. **Protect the interests of international students** by ensuring that:

- appropriate consumer mechanisms are in place, and
- nationally consistent standards exist for
 - welfare and support services
 - dealing with complaints and appeals

This is important because international students are disadvantaged by not being able to evaluate the quality of a program before they enrol, and may not be able to remain in Australia to pursue consumer protection remedies available through the Australian court system. It is therefore critical that comprehensive and nationally consistent provisions are in place to ensure that international students are provided with optimum support services and effective mechanisms for the expedient resolution of any grievances during their time in Australia.

3. **Maintain the integrity of the student visa programme** through requiring providers to monitor student compliance with student visa conditions, and report any breaches to the Australian government. The underlying principle here is that upholding Australian migration law is central to maintaining public confidence in the international education industry.

4. **Support the effective administration of the legislation** by Federal, state and territory governments.

The original ESOS Act included a requirement for an independent evaluation to be undertaken within three years of the legislation coming into effect. As the result of this evaluation, a range of amendments came into effect from 1 July 2007. The amendments included revisions to the National Code of Practice (2001).

As a result of these amendments, Australian universities have been required to review a range of practices including marketing and promotion, use of agents and associates, complaints and appeal processes, and support services and facilities, including support for students under 18 years.

(Department of Education, Science and Training 2007)

The next section of this presentation will focus on the implementation of these standards, focusing mainly on changes to student and academic administration policy and practice.

3. Implementing the ESOS requirements at UniSA

The revised National Code consists of 15 standards which in many respects represent best practice in the provision of education services. Because of this, the University has extended the provisions to all students by introducing similar arrangements for both domestic and international students wherever possible. Examples are provided in the discussion below.

The implementation of the revised National Code required the collaboration of four central units involved in administration and provision of services to international students. This cross-unit collaboration was coordinated through a Working group which met regularly through 2007 to:

- clarify roles and responsibilities within the University for all aspects of the international student program
- review services provided to international students and identify areas for improvement
- resolve any compliance issue which arose
- monitor the progress of implementation

Changes were required to policy, systems, business processes and documentation. Online resources were also developed or updated to assist students, academics and professional staff to understand and comply with the requirements. There has also been a comprehensive program of activity of induction and re-training of all staff who deal directly with international students.

3.1 Safeguarding Australia's reputation

Standards 1-4 of the revised National Code have required the University to enforce policy and procedures relating to the recruitment and admission of international students.

Standard 1 - Marketing information and practices

- Guidelines for print and electronic publications for international students, which include example statements to be used in publications for international students, have been developed and made available to staff, together with a process for signing off promotional material.
- The web-based information provided to prospective international students has been comprehensively reviewed and enhanced. The site is now much more user-friendly, and includes direct links to ESOS information in English and other languages.

Standard 2 – Student engagement before enrolment

- UniSA's written agreement with a student, comprising a Letter of Offer, Acceptance and Payment Form and Refund Guidelines have been reviewed and updated in accordance with the requirements of the National Code.
- A review of the admission and application process within UniSA International was completed, and resulted in the implementation of an Admission and Application Processing Quality Framework, which includes documented procedures for assessing a student's qualifications, experience and English language proficiency.

Standard 3 – Formalisation of enrolment

- The University is required to clearly indicate any conditions in relation to an offer of admission (for example, admission may be conditional on the student completing a pre-requisite program). The relevant University policy was amended to include this requirement and the letter of offer which is sent to students now clearly specifies any conditions relating to an offer of admission.
- UniSA's written agreement with the student now sets out the circumstances in which the student's personal information may be provided to external authorities, and

advises the student of their obligation to notify the University of a change of address.

- The Refund Guidelines now include a plain English explanation of what happens in the event of a program not being delivered.

Standard 4 - Education agents

- The revised Code requires the University to maintain formal administrative links with associates and agents.
- In response to this requirement the University developed a new Student Recruitment Agreement consistent with the National Code, but also containing revised payment terms and conditions placed on agents. All UniSA contracted claims agents have now entered into the new Student Recruitment Agreement. In the interim period, an addendum was added to all existing contracts to ensure compliance with the code from 1 July 2007.

3.2 Protecting the interests of international students

Standard 5 – Younger students

UniSA is required to demonstrate an appropriate duty of care towards students under the age of 18 who are in Australia without a parent or suitable relative.

This has involved putting in place specific measures to monitor the safety and well being of these students, including:

- a university wide protocol covering admission, accommodation, support, and reporting requirements which is available to staff on the corporate website
- a system report, generated at the start of each study period, which lists all international students under the age of 18. The relevant Program Directors are subsequently advised if any of these students are in their program. Program Directors will then arrange monitoring of academic progress and attendance, and will liaise with The Learning and Teaching Unit as necessary
- parents give permission for the automatic release of the student's personal information where required
- The Learning and Teaching Unit will monitor the welfare of individual students through:
 - home visits
 - liaising with Course Co-ordinators to monitor class attendance, (even though the University is not legally obliged to do this under the Act)
 - students meeting with support staff at regular intervals during the main study periods to discuss their academic progress

Standard 6 – Student support services

UniSA is fully compliant with the National Code through a comprehensive package of support services which are available to international students, including:

- the student being contacted by a UniSA representative, either on their arrival in Australia, or during orientation.
- student orientation program involving activities and information sessions designed to assist international students with settling into life in Adelaide and study at UniSA, including:
 - strategies for successful study
 - services available for international students at UniSA
 - opportunities to meet other students and University staff
 - assistance with finding accommodation
- a team of counsellors, learning advisers and international student officers, available on each campus to assist with academic and personal issues as required
- UniSA critical incident policy, which was amended to be consistent with ESOS definition of a critical incident.

Standard 7 - Transfer between registered providers

UniSA has developed a policy and procedure, including an appeals process, to assess student transfer requests. The provisions were written into existing policy and published on the website, and a procedure was introduced to ensure that records of all requests for a transfer are maintained on the student's file in a central location.

Standard 8 - Complaints and appeals

UniSA already has in place a robust set of procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals.

To be compliant with the National Code we were required to:

- ensure that students are provided with clear and comprehensive information about:
 - internal complaints and appeals processes,
 - their right to appeal, and
 - their right to access external avenues of appeal.
- extend the timeframe for accessing the appeals process from 10 to 20 days. This was achieved by:
 - amending the relevant policies
 - including the information in correspondence with students and web resources for both staff and students

Common to all standards designed to protect the interests of international students is the requirement to maintain a complete record of all academic and administrative decisions concerning a student. This has meant establishing processes to ensure the systematic documentation and recording of internal decision-making, and the maintenance of complete and comprehensive student files in a single central location. This practice has been extended to domestic students as well.

3.3 Maintaining the integrity of the student visa programme

Standard 9 – Completion within the expected duration of study

The revised National code allows more flexibility for international students to vary their enrolment load across study periods instead of having to maintain a full time load throughout their program, as was previously the case. However students are required to complete their program within the 'expected duration', as specified on their Confirmation of Enrolment document (CoE).

The Code also requires that international students must be enrolled in at least one internal course in each study period, and must not undertake more than 25% of their program by distance and/or online learning.

These two requirements are a policy mechanism aimed at achieving a balance between:

- allowing greater flexibility for international students, which in turn enhances the likelihood of them successfully completing their studies and creates greater equity and parity with domestic students in relation to managing study load, and
- limiting the amount of study that international students can do in isolation to ensure that they gain the full benefit of living and studying in Australia, while at the same time domestic students gain the benefit of the contribution of international students in the learning environment

The implementation of these requirements by the University involved:

- amending the relevant policy
- introducing an online 'pop up' message for international students who are attempting to enrol in external courses, which advises them to seek advice from their Program Director before continuing with their enrolment
- creating a system report for each study period which lists all international students who are enrolled in at least one distance and/or online course and a business process which ensures that these students are reminded via email of the requirement and are warned of possible implications

- amending completion letters for international students to indicate whether or not they have exceeded the 25% online/distance education component.
- requiring study plans issued by Program Directors to be consistent with this requirement.

Standard 10 - Monitoring student progress

The University is required to systematically monitor the progress of each international student, notify and counsel students who are at risk, advise students of the implications of unsatisfactory progress, and report to the government those students who have breached progress requirements.

Monitoring academic practice and providing support to students who are not meeting progress requirements is already part of standard administrative practice at the University. However policy and procedures have been refined and clarified in response to the revised National Code. For example, in the interests of both the student and the University, a complete record of all intervention strategies and outcomes must now be held on the student's file in a single central location.

The changes apply to both domestic and international students. This is another example of the principle of best practice in international education being extended to domestic students.

Standard 11 – Monitoring attendance

Universities are exempt from monitoring attendance under the National Code

Standard 12 – Recognising credit

The National Code requires the University to have a procedure for granting credit, such that the student must sign or otherwise accept the credit and be provided with a record.

The University's [Recognition of Prior Learning](#) policy (A.13) and associated procedures have been amended to accommodate this requirement, and to extend its application to both domestic and international students. We have also ensured that, in the case of international students, a revised study plan is documented and the student's CoE is modified if the credit affects the expected program duration.

Standard 13 – Deferring, suspending or cancelling the student's enrolment

The University may only extend a student's study plan (and therefore their CoE) where it is clear that the student will not complete the program within the expected duration as a result of:

- compassionate or compelling circumstances
- the implementation of an intervention strategy to address unsatisfactory progress, or
- leave of absence being granted

Implementation has involved:

- amending policy to incorporate 'extension to program duration' provisions, including examples of 'compassionate or compelling circumstances'
- publishing these provisions as a staff resource on the corporate website
- requiring that a record of any variation to program duration is maintained on the student file, including a revised study plan and anticipated completion date.

4. The role of government in university management

In 2004 the Federal coalition government introduced a package of reforms known as 'Backing Australia's Future' (BAF), which has been described as 'the most significant reshaping of the policy framework for Australian universities' (Duckett 2004:211) since the reforms of the 1980's.

The outcome of the BAF reforms has been a higher education environment characterised by:

- reduced government funding
- expanded regulatory intervention
- funding tied to compliance and reporting requirements

- increased student fees
- the introduction of full fee paying domestic student places
- exposure to a highly competitive international market
- increased competition with both public and private providers in the domestic market for both funding and students
- increased diversity

This section describes the impact of the reforms on Australian universities and draws attention to a fundamental contradiction in the policy between:

- the expectation that universities should compete effectively in an open and deregulated global market, and maintain diversity in their offerings and
- increased regulatory intervention and micro-management designed to elicit a high level of compliance and accountability

Specific examples are provided in relation to:

- the erosion of institutional autonomy
- financial and market constraints
- the cost of implementation of legislative requirements

to demonstrate how the contradictory tension in the policy framework creates a significant impediment to the Australian higher education sector's capacity to operate effectively and efficiently in a competitive environment.

4.1 Erosion of institutional autonomy

The Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS) is the main accountability mechanism built into the BAF reforms. It is designed to ensure that universities offer the programs and courses they have agreed to offer (Burmester 2003, cited in Duckett 2004 p.228).

In order to access additional funding, Universities have also been required to demonstrate compliance with

- the Higher Education Workplace Relations Reforms (HEWRR) whereby staff must be offered individual agreements as an alternative to collective agreements (DEST 2005 cited in Pick 2006, p. 237)
- the National Governance Protocols which detail requirements for the composition and operation of university governing bodies (PhillipsKPA 2006, pp.13 & 41). However it has been pointed out that 'state government support is required to legislate for the new governance protocols', and state and federal interests may not necessarily be aligned, resulting in the potential for regulatory confusion (Duckett 2004, p.229)

These mechanisms put into effect the underlying standpoint of the Coalition government that, since universities receive significant public funding, a greater level of accountability is to be expected. It is difficult to ignore the implicit lack of trust which these requirements convey.

The financial and market constraints outlined below also impose restrictions on university autonomy.

4.2 Financial and market constraints

FEE HELP loans for 2008 were capped at AU\$81,600, or \$102,000 for medicine, veterinary science or dentistry (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007 p.6). The limit on access to funds meant that students must either not enrol in a program which will exceed their entitlement, or pay the balance of their fees up front. (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.36). Moreover, the loans do not cover the full cost of high demand programs (Duckett 2004, p.226). In a competitive market environment where universities are expected to rely increasingly on private sources of revenue, these

factors combine to limit the fees universities can realistically charge, and also to limit potential demand (Pick 2006, p.237).

The Commonwealth Grants Scheme, although offering an increase in funding, also requires universities to plan, report and monitor enrolment at a much greater level of precision than previously required. There is a very narrow margin for error, with financial penalties for over-enrolment imposed at the highest student contribution rate, regardless of the program concerned. The intent of the policy has been to increase transparency by demonstrating a direct link between funding and program delivery. But student preferences, acceptances and re-enrolment patterns can vary significantly from year to year and the rigid reporting requirements constrain universities' capacity to respond effectively to changes in student demand, new opportunities and other market considerations. (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.41, Duckett 2004, p.232)

The need to obtain government approval to withdraw a program, while linked to government concerns to ensure the right skill mix for the national economy, also limits university capacity to respond quickly to changes in the market, manage limited resources, and compete effectively on basis of sound business decisions (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.20, p.41).

Likewise the requirement to publish program & fee information may encourage transparency and strengthen the capacity of students to make an informed choice in a competitive environment, but it has been argued that it also constrains the capacity of universities to adjust their offerings in response to changes in the market or internal resource conditions (PhillipsKPA 2006, pp.23-25).

Finally, the limits imposed on the amount a university can charge domestic students means universities cannot maximise the potential return from high demand programs, (Pick 2006, p.237)

4.3 Cost of implementation

There is a long standing concern amongst universities, not only in Australia but also the UK & USA, about excessive reporting requirements (PhillipsKPA 2006, pp.6-7)

Prior to the introduction of the BAF legislation, reducing unnecessary reporting requirements was cited as an objective of the reforms (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.6). However, a major report commissioned by Australian Vice Chancellors has since concluded that '(t)here is no doubt that reporting requirements on universities have increased as a result of the policy and operational changes flowing from *Backing Australia's Future*' (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.12), with the cost to each university estimated as between \$1.41 and \$1.84 million for initial implementation, and between \$0.55 and \$1.06 million in recurrent costs per annum (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.3).

In this environment questions arise as to whether 'changes to reporting requirements [are] the *minimum* necessary to give effect to ... policy decisions', or whether they are just 'a more complex and onerous way to distribute ... existing funds for an existing purpose' (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.12). For example it has been argued that the new Student Learning Entitlement (SLE) does not bring in additional funds, provide additional benefit to students, or result in any saving to the government. Moreover, an analysis undertaken at the University of Western Australia found only 5 students who might potentially exceed their entitlement (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.35). At the same time, the implementation and reporting costs associated with this requirement have been substantial (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.13).

Reporting requirements are not synchronised across the range of different legislative instruments, resulting in the same information being required in different formats at different times. While this has required significant university resources, the information collected is of limited use because it represents a 'snapshot' taken at a particular point in time. Furthermore, the complexity and fragmentation of reporting requirements has meant that it is difficult to gain an overall perspective of what is required and how the information might be integrated into a comprehensive and useful data set (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.38-40).

The BAF reforms required putting in place extensive changes to university administration within a very short timeframe. This has meant that it has not always been possible to allow sufficient time for clarifying the requirements where necessary, and for planning and trialling implementation (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.11, p.38).

For example in working through the implementation of the ESOS requirement concerning a 25% limit on enrolment in external courses for international students at UniSA, a number of questions arose, for example

- If student has credit, does the 25% apply only to the remainder of the program?
- If student is enrolled in a cross institutionally which institution is responsible for monitoring the 25% limit?
- If student does an internal transfer between programs, does the 25% limit apply to the original program or the program to be completed?
- what are the implications if student exceeds the 25% limit?

The result has been implementation 'on the run', sometimes requiring subsequent legislative amendments being introduced without the implications of those amendments being fully understood. The effect has been to create a continual 'cycle of change, review and modification' for university administrators (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.38).

5. Conclusion

The ESOS legislation has provided a framework for ensuring a consistent approach by Australian universities, which is comforting in a global market place. The national standards relating to the quality of Australian higher education make it a good destination for international students who will be living away from home.

However, Marginson (2007, p.8) has argued that the consumer/provider paradigm within which the legislation is framed creates limitations on the provisions for ensuring the welfare of international students while they are in Australia. For example, the welfare provisions do not extend to protecting students at risk from housing discrimination, exploitation in the workplace, or racism in the community. These limitations would appear to mitigate against the stated intent of the legislation.

Marginson (2007, pp.9-10) has also advocated a revision of current policy to strengthen domestic participation, teaching quality, and research capacity whilst maintaining a strong higher education export industry. He argues that there is a need to restore the balance between the first three elements and the last, and points to the United Kingdom as an example of where this has been achieved.

In terms of the burden of reporting, the Phillips KPA report has pointed out that it is difficult to reduce reporting requirements without changing the policy position, which in turn reflects the underlying nature of the relationship between government and universities (PhillipsKPA 2006, p.4).

In the light of this, it is to be noted that Australia elected a new Federal Labor government in November 2007 creating the possibility of change in both policy and the relationship between government and universities.

Historically there is a tendency for a new government to make superficial changes rather than reversing the key policy positions put in place by the previous government. For example, rather than reversing the Voluntary Student Unionism legislation introduced in 2006, the Rudd government is exploring alternative funding options to restore student services on university campuses (Ross, 2008, pp. 4-5). The Minister has recently announced that legislation is due to go before parliament early in 2009 for implementation in the second half of the year. Under the new legislation, universities will be allowed to charge students a compulsory amenities fee, with accompanying guidelines on how the revenue is to be used. Eligible students will be able to defer payment via a HECS style loan. Universities will also be required to meet national benchmarks for access to student support services and fulfil new protocols for independent representation and advocacy for students. Compliance will be tied to Commonwealth Grants Scheme funding from 2010 (DEEWR 2009).

However, it would appear that there is reason for optimism, with a positive response across the Australian higher education sector to many of the initiatives which have been announced by the Rudd government, particularly where these initiatives demonstrate a commitment to pre-election promises.

Some examples of these initiatives include

- The cancellation in late 2007 of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) proposed by the Coalition government, and the commitment to develop a new approach to ensuring the quality of Australian research which will combine metrics with other quality measures appropriate to the humanities, creative arts and social sciences, such as peer review (Campus Review 2008)
- In early February 2008 the government announced the decision to end conditional university funding arrangements based on compliance with workplace arrangements (HEWRRS) and the National Protocols' (Hare 2008)
- On 13 March 2008 the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard announced a major review of Australia's higher education system. This has been the first major review of higher education to be undertaken since 2002, and was completed by the end of 2008.

The review examined the current state of the Australian higher education system against international best practice, and advised the government on possible key objectives and how these could be achieved through reform of the sector and changes to regulation and funding arrangements. It will inform the preparation of the Government's policy agenda for higher education through 2009 and 2010, and will also help to develop a long-term vision for higher education into the next decade and beyond.
(Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008 & 2008a)

The Review Expert Panel was chaired by **Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley AC**, former Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of South Australia who retired in May 2007. Professor Bradley was a member of the 2002 Higher Education Review Reference Group. In 2005 she was named South Australian of the Year, and on Australia Day 2008 she was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in recognition of her service to higher education. She is currently National President of the Australian College of Educators, and Chair of VERNet.

There is evidence of a renewed optimism in the sector about the Rudd Government and its commitment to education, including higher education.

Key recommendations from the Review include:

- Less direct control by government in university activities, rather, the review recommends a strengthening of the regulatory/accreditation frameworks for the sector, within which universities will then manage their own affairs.
- A student entitlement funding framework where the programs offered will be driven by demand in the market place and the strategic directions of the university in the programs that it offers to respond to that demand rather than the range of disciplines/programs offered being controlled through centralised government profile processes.
- In the case of international students, the review recommends an increase in overall funding to universities removing the current need for international student tuition fees to support core university functions. This will enable universities to use international student fees more directly in the support of international students. It will also shift the emphasis away from international students as being a source of revenue to one of international students as mainstream student cohort within Australian universities.

The budget is in May 2009 so let's see whether the dollars follow the principles and commitments that have been made...

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