Canberra: Queensland Premier secures support for international education

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh was today successful in securing support from the States and Territories for three year working visas for international graduates in areas of skills shortages.

Ms Bligh said states and territories have asked the Commonwealth to evaluate this idea to arrest the slide in student numbers.

The Premier placed the issue of international education on the COAG agenda as a result of declining numbers of international students in recent years.

"Australia is on the cusp of a resources boom and we are facing a looming skills crisis," Ms Bligh said.

"We shouldn't be discouraging young, enthusiastic workers who are keen to fill these roles."

Ms Bligh said the international education and training sector was the state's third largest export earner, directly and indirectly employing more than 17,000 Queenslanders.

"But the 2009 changes to arrangements for student visas have been really hurting this market.

"It was imperative that we act and act decisively," she said.

"We have to make ourselves a more attractive and accessible destination in a very competitive global education system.

"I am determined to stand up for Queensland and this $2.8 billion export market in international education is too vital for our future.

"Queensland has a bright future ahead and I want to make sure that is secure.

"Today's agreement means not only growing Queensland's vital industries but ensuring we have the skilled workforce to do this."

Ms Bligh said the resources sector alone would generate 38,000 jobs in the next few years and unprecedented opportunities for Australian graduates in key disciplines such as engineering, environmental science,metallurgy, as well as law, hospitality, accounting and management.

"And we want to ensure that we are maximizing these opportunities for Australian graduates."
Ms Bligh said she also welcomed a commitment from the Commonwealth to release the Knight Review of the student visa program and work with the states and territories to develop a response by October.

"I look forward to seeing the Review and working with the Commonwealth, States and Territories and education providers on a way forward."

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