International student numbers continue to spiral down

International student data for the September quarter confirms the downward spiral of student numbers in the VET sector.

This time last year, there were 113,843 international students studying a VET qualification in Australia; today there are 87,022 students representing a drop of 23.6%. This compares with an overall decline of 11.2% for all sectors.

While the September quarter showed a slight increase in the number of visas lodged - almost 4,000 more than for the same period last year - offshore lodgements accounted for only 1,000 of this increase.

The number of visas granted offshore during the September quarter remained static compared to last year; just over 3,650. It is worth noting that while the number of visas granted to students from India almost doubled for the September quarter, the grant rate was 45%.

Analysing the data on a year to date basis, there has been an increase in lodgements this year of approximately 10,000 and an increase in visa grants of approximately 6,000. Of particular concern for the VET sector is the very low offshore visa approval, or grant rate which is 69.8% for VET compared to 88.6% for schools, 87.5% for ELICOS and 85.7% for higher education.

Another set of statistics released last week by AEI provide further evidence of the decline in the VET sector. Enrolments are down by 17.6% compared to the same time last year and commencements are down by 7.6%.

TDA is aware there can be much confusion around the interpretation of DIAC and AEI statistics.

From TDA’s perspective, the key indicators of growth or decline are the actual numbers of students currently studying in Australia and the number of student visas granted by DIAC offshore.

Enrolment data can be misleading because it can include multiple enrolments by the same student within the data collection period; commencements can also include students who have already been studying in Australia but have enrolled in a new course.

At the moment there are a lot of international students currently studying in Australia enrolling in, or commencing, new courses. But there is no significant improvement in the number of students being granted study visas in their home countries.

For further explanation of AEI data please refer to these explanatory notes. AEI statistics for September can be read here. DIAC’s explanation of their terms is on page 2 of this report.