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## Media Release

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### **Mixed blessings from joint Ministerial statement on student visas**

#### ***STUDENT VISA REVIEW***

The announcement on Thursday 16 December by Ministers Bowen and Evans of a review into the student visa program was a welcome if long overdue acknowledgement of the pressures facing the international education sector.

Other measures announced on Thursday will be seen as mixed blessings:

#### ***LOWER ASSESSMENT LEVELS***

The reduction in student visa assessment levels offers limited benefits for TAFE institutes. In some cases it will have a significant negative impact on our ability to attract international students.

Of the eight countries with a lower VET assessment level, only one (Taiwan) is in the Top 20 source countries for VET. Based on 09/10 visa grant data, these eight countries provided a total of 841 international students for VET out of a total of 72,000 visa grants.

Conversely, the higher education sector has had assessment levels reduced for 26 countries. These include China and India, which together provided over 50,000 visa grants in higher ed for the 09/10 period.

Of even greater concern is the fact China and India are the VET sector's top two markets. Diploma level applicants from these two countries will now be even more confused about the relative value and status of Australian diploma level qualifications.

Students applying for industry endorsed diplomas delivered by Registered Training Organisations, which may also be higher education providers, will attract a higher level of assessment than diplomas delivered by the same organisation but under higher education protocols.

There is an obvious danger that industry endorsed qualifications which focus on trade and para professional occupations will be less attractive. This will have a significant impact on Australia's ability to meet skill shortages through independent skilled migration, particularly from two of our most important source countries, China and India.

TDA certainly appreciates any reduction of assessment levels but continues to argue for a proper risk based assessment. At the moment our TAFE institutes are suffering major collateral damage from the actions of a minority of private providers. Current VET sector assessment levels do not accurately reflect the low risk from our members.

#### **OTHER ANNOUNCED MEASURES**

Improved information exchange with the sector and statistical reports from DIAC are very welcome; the packaging of Certificates for Level 4 VET students will have limited benefit; and enabling pre-paid boarding fees to be counted as part of a student's cost of living requirements specifically excludes homestay and pre-paid rental agreements.

#### **CALL FOR ACTION**

TDA calls on the Government to put in place a risk management process for student visas which recognises the low risk of TAFE institutes.

Failure to do so will seriously threaten Australia's ability to attract high quality VET students from overseas, lead to job losses at TAFE institutes and reduce an important source of funds which go directly to improving the facilities and course offerings for domestic students.

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