

Qs & As:
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING AT TAFE INSTITUTES IN AUSTRALIA

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) would like to set the record straight on the impact and motivations of international students studying at TAFE institutes in Australia.

How many international students study at TAFE?

In 2009, our TAFE institutes had just over 31,000 international students studying vocational courses in Australia. This represents just 5% of the 630,000 international students in Australia last year and less than 2% of the 1.7 million local students who studied at TAFE last year.

Do international students take the place of local students?

Our TAFE institutes are funded by their state or territory government to provide a specific number of training places for local students each year. International students do not take these places. There are a number of state and federal programs where additional funding is available for local student training places but TAFE has to compete with other providers for these additional places. Again, international students do not take these places.

To enrol in a TAFE institute as an international student, you must first demonstrate you have \$18,000 in the bank for each year of intended study in Australia. Then you are required to pay a full fee for your course which can range from \$10,000 to \$25,000 each year depending on the level of qualification and complexity of the course. Local students also have the option of paying full fees if a government funded place is not available.

How is the money from international student fees used?

The income from international student fees is used by our TAFE institutes to improve facilities for all students, provide additional student services, support additional professional development for teachers and update and expand course materials. Over the last few years, Federal government funding for TAFE has not even kept pace with inflation. The income from international student fees has provided many of our institutes with funds to expand opportunities for local students.

Aren't international students just trying to gain permanent residency?

According to a 2009 international survey conducted on our behalf by the UK group, i-Graduate International Insight, 30% of the respondents (from a total of 3,421) chose to study in Australia with immigration as one of the motivations for their choice. However from the same group, only 13% now see permanent residency as their goal.

Contrary to commonly held perceptions, the vast majority of international students studying at TAFE want an educational experience in Australia and then return to their homeland.



What impact is the current controversy having on TAFE institutes?

Not all our TAFE institutes host international students. Those that do are experiencing a slight drop in enrolments but we are expecting the real impact to happen next year. Combined with the high value Australian dollar, the tightening of visa regulations and assessments, and the closure of private colleges, the ability of our TAFE institutes to differentiate themselves and encourage students to choose Australia is being made much harder.

Despite the small percentage of international students currently studying at TAFE, the predicted drop of up to 30% in enrolments next year will result in many part time and casual TAFE teachers being out of work. The loss of income will also affect the forward planning and investment in facilities and services by some of our institutes.

The more damaging long term impact will be on our TAFE institutes' ability to promote and position themselves as providers of education the equal of any in the world. Our institutes are very active in exporting our expertise overseas with major contracts in China, the Middle East and throughout South East Asia. The negative publicity about Australia's attitude towards international students directly impacts on our ability to connect with key decision makers in other countries. International students are often the best advocates for our capabilities.

What should happen next?

Along with other providers of international education, we want all political parties to commit to promoting and supporting international students. This requires a reasonable investment in marketing and promoting our capabilities, just as there is bi-partisan support for promoting tourism.

We want media commentators to stop demonising international students and talk to us about the reality from a TAFE perspective.

We want the general public to learn more about the international student experience and to engage with us as we work hard to promote TAFE as a truly international brand with colleges capable of mixing it with the best in the world.

Finally we want a clear understanding that wanting to live in Australia is not such a bad motivation and investing in an Australian education is a positive step towards being accepted.

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