

**Senator Bridget McKenzie**

**on behalf of the Hon Christopher Pyne MP**

**Minister for Education**

**Australian International Education Conference**

***The Government's plan for sustainable growth in  
international education***

***\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\****

**Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre**

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## Introduction

Thank you, Helen (Helen Zimmerman, President, International Education Association of Australia).

It is a pleasure to join you for this important conference that brings together the international education community. And thank you, Minister Pyne, for that compelling video introduction.

I would like to acknowledge:

- Councillor Graham Quirk, Lord Mayor of Brisbane
- The Hon Phillip Honeywood, Executive Director of the International Education Association of Australia
- Representatives of IDP Education, education providers and the international education community.

As Minister Pyne foreshadowed in his opening remarks, tonight I will be speaking to you about the Government's commitment to grow international education to secure Australia's place as a world leader in education, with a robust and sustainable reputation for quality.

Tonight, on behalf of the Minister, I would like to outline the Government's response to the report prepared by the International Education Advisory Council, chaired by one of our most distinguished and respected business leaders, Michael Chaney AO. The report, *Australia – Educating Globally*, provides considered advice on the challenges and opportunities facing international education in Australia.

A formal response to this report will be part of a soon to be released draft National Strategy for International Education, which will subsequently be put out for consultation to the broader sector.

I would also like to discuss how the Government is working methodically to create the right conditions for quality higher education to thrive, grow and prosper in Australia. The Government's higher education reform package, currently in the Parliament, is essential to this. The reforms cannot be separated from Australia's international reputation as a world leader in education services.

### **Government commitment to international education**

The Government wants to ensure Australia's education system keeps up with growing international competition. It wants all students who study at an Australian institution to be able to compete and win the jobs of the future in the workplaces of the world. The Government wants to empower institutions to be the best they can, delivering their best to Australian and international students alike. Ultimately, it wants students to achieve their full potential.

This commitment resonates strongly with the theme of this year's conference – *Inventing the future.*

The Government's higher education reforms are precisely about inventing the future. They aim to free education institutions to focus on the only future that works – a future of quality, combined with access and equity.

The reforms are carefully designed to improve Australia's higher education system and ensure it is not a victim of increasing competition. They aim to make marketing to students easier – by enabling

universities and other providers to make the most of their individual strengths, to specialise and offer courses that meet students' needs.

The reforms will ensure that Australia does not get left behind in increasing competition.

The Shanghai Jiao Tong index – the Academic Ranking of World Universities - lists eight Australian universities in the world's elite 200. Universities in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore are rising strongly through the rankings. Five years ago, there were no Chinese universities in the top 200, now there are six.

The “Times Higher Education” World University rankings were released last week. The rankings showed that while last year there were 20 Asian universities in the top 200, now there are 24.

The reforms will safeguard our position as a leader, strengthen our universities, offer more to students, and – as part of the package – protect Australia's strong, competitive research system.

They will position our institutions to attract the best and brightest students and staff from around the world. There is much at stake, as you know, if we don't do this. That is why the Government is working tirelessly to see this vital package pass.

### **Government response to the Chaney report**

While a formal response to the Chaney report will be part of the upcoming draft National Strategy for International Education, on behalf

of the Minister, I can outline tonight a broad response to the Chaney report.

The International Education Advisory Council included representatives from the education and business sectors. It was established to provide advice and recommendations on the challenges and opportunities facing international education in Australia.

The Coalition welcomed the Chaney report in Opposition. Since coming to office, the Government has taken time to consider the report, and to ensure its response reflects its commitment to getting international education right.

The Chaney report was developed in close consultation with leaders across the international education community. Many are in the audience this evening. It set out recommendations against seven key issues identified as critical to the future of Australia's international education efforts.

### Coordination

The first key issue identified by the Advisory Council was coordination.

The Government agrees with the recommendations of the Chaney report about the need for better coordination of government policy and programmes in international education. It also agrees that there is a need for improved consultation with stakeholders, without creating additional red tape and reporting requirements.

The soon to be released draft National Strategy on International Education will guide a coordinated effort and vision for Australia to grow as a world leader in international education into the future.

To help drive the national strategy and provide the coordination needed for effective national action, Minister Pyne will release a consultation draft in the near future. He will want to hear from you all, and others with views, on how we should go forward.

To that end, he will be convening two Round Tables on International Education each year. The Round Tables will include representatives from the international education community, including IEAA, Universities Australia and other peak bodies, business leaders, community leaders and, of course, governments.

Minister Pyne will be saying more in the coming weeks about the Round Tables and the Government's consultation processes.

But I can say that in working with you to develop the strategy the Government will be taking a broad view of international education. It will provide a strategy for sustainable growth in the long term. It will recognise international education as a key economic driver for Australia into the future. It will not lose sight of the unbreakable link between our domestic and our international aspirations, nor domestic and international education policy.

The divide between Australian students and students overseas seeking an education in Australia is not as wide as people think. All students want the same things - a high quality education and an enriching educational experience that leads to good employment prospects.

We will work together across institutions, governments and with business to support their aspirations and goals.

## Quality

The second issue identified by the Advisory Council is further enhancing the quality of the education provided to our international students.

As a recent analysis suggests:

*perception of quality is the most important factor in student choice. Cost, safety, post-graduation work rights and student visa policies are all considered but the majority of students say quality is what matters most.*

We are on the same page there. Australia's position as one of the world's top three English-speaking study destinations has been squarely built on, and rests upon, our reputation for quality. It is vital that quality be at the heart of Australia's approach.

The Advisory Council highlighted that Australia should be positioned as a provider of the highest quality education, while reducing over-regulation, duplication and overlap.

The Government's higher education reforms have been designed to promote opportunity and quality in Australia's higher education and research system. They also reduce regulation, reporting and red tape. The Government wants to free education institutions from unnecessary burdens so they can get on with doing what they do best.

The review of the Education Services for Overseas Students arrangements is underway. You may have been involved in this process already.

Last week, the Government released a discussion paper on *Reforms to the ESOS framework*. The discussion paper sets out proposals for improving ESOS in key areas identified by stakeholders through consultations. The Government will work through all changes with the international education community, to ensure ESOS is contemporary and to ensure that it meets the needs and expectations of institutions and students.

I encourage you to read the paper and think seriously about what the Government needs to achieve in this context. Your input to the review will be important and will help determine the final shape of the reforms.

#### A positive student experience

The Advisory Council also made a number of recommendations to ensure that international students have a positive experience while they are our guests. They stressed we must maintain and build on Australia's reputation as an open and friendly learning environment, where international students are valued members of the community and are supported to achieve their goals.

There were also recommendations about accommodation for international students, and their access to public services and to work experiences.

The Government is acutely aware of how *not* having the right accommodation available for students could dissuade them from coming to Australia. It is looking at ways to improve the availability, affordability and quality of international student accommodation.



The Government will also continue to work with state, territory and local governments to ensure that students from overseas continue to have a welcoming study and living experience, in addition to a world-class education.

This is something that Brisbane has really taken on board with the establishment of the Brisbane Student Ambassador programme. This city should be commended for supporting international students to take the lead in engaging with the community.

Part of that engagement relies on the business community providing more opportunities for international students to have meaningful work experience. The Government has put the visa settings in place. It is now up to institutions and businesses to work together to realise these opportunities for students.

### Partnerships

Another key issue identified by the Advisory Council was the need to encourage Australian institutions and governments to develop strong and diverse international and multinational partnerships.

These partnerships encourage student, researcher and teacher exchanges and draw strengths from across the international education community and across the world. We will not lose sight of the potential for developing new partnerships with regions such as Latin America. This is why the Government has established an education and science counsellor in Brasilia to build closer research and science linkages to promote Australia as a high-quality study destination.

At the same time as we diversify, Australia's partnerships with the Asia-Pacific region will, of course, continue to be absolutely critical to our future prosperity in the region.

The New Colombo Plan is building on these successful relationships. I was very privileged to visit Kyoto and Hiroshima in Japan in April, where I saw for myself the opportunities for new partnerships that will arise from the New Colombo Plan.

The 2014 pilot phase of the New Colombo Plan has supported around 1,300 Australian undergraduate students and 40 scholarship holders to study and work as interns in the four pilot locations. These locations are Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Students have come from a range of disciplines including business, law, health, education, language, culture, science and engineering.

In 2015 we will expand the programme so Australian students continue to develop skills and knowledge through study, mentoring and professional development experiences in over 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

### Student visa programme

Ensuring the integrity of Australia's student visa programme is another key issue identified by the Advisory Council.

Minister Pyne agrees that Australia's student visa settings must be competitive and attractive in all education sectors and he is working closely on this with Senator Michaelia Cash, Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection.

Streamlined visa processing arrangements and post-study work visas are creating opportunities for students to develop the work skills they need to compete in the global employment market.

### Data analysis and research in international education

The Advisory Council identified the need for better information, through improved data analysis and research, to support effective Australian international education policy.

The Government will work with peak bodies and education leaders to determine research priorities for international education in the medium to longer term, including working with IEAA on ways to expand the International Education Research Network.

### Competition, promotion and marketing

Finally, the Chaney report underlined the importance of Australia being competitive and innovative as global competition for international students intensifies.

For instance, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand have all released international education strategies in the past 18 months. And China and Japan are setting ambitious targets for foreign students to study at their institutions.

The Government will continue to draw on Australia's competitive advantages and actively promote Australian education, including through the Study in Australia website and the Future Unlimited brand.

## **Conclusion**

The future of Australian education and international education is a bright one. There is huge potential for sustainable growth - and the key to going forward is quality.

We have a responsibility to all students studying in Australia to ensure that they have a high quality education experience.

The Government's higher education reforms, coupled with direct actions to drive quality in international education through the Government's response to the Chaney report and the development of the National Strategy, will ensure Australia continues to be a leading destination for international students.

By continuing to work together, we can fully realise the potential of Australia's international education.

I wish you all the best for this important conference.

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