

Australia to offer agent qualification

AUSTRALIAN Education International (AEI), part of Australia's Department of Education, Science and Training, has developed an accredited vocational education and training course for education agents that will be delivered online from April. The course was developed in partnership with International Education Services, a registered training organisation, under the Australian Qualifications Training Framework.

The objectives of the new qualification are to provide education agents in Australia and overseas with knowledge of the Australian education system, education quality assurance issues and the Australian visa regulation system, as well as ensuring that they have a good understanding of Australia as a study destination. AEI said that the course would also "keep agents abreast of changes and developments in the international education service industry and encourage and support excellence in business service delivery, study and career pathways and professional development".

Participation in the education agents training course, which is made up of two units called "Working effectively in the international education environment" and "Review compliance with relevant legislation and regulations for international education provision", will be free, although those wishing to gain a statement of attainment will have to complete an assessment mode costing AUS\$400 (US\$299). Agents wishing to attain a full Certificate III in International Education Services will need to undertake a further 10 units of study and pay an additional fee.

Australia comes out on top in student poll

Australia is now the first choice destination for the majority of Asian students looking to study abroad, according to the findings of a report by JWT Education for the British Council in the UK.

The report was presented at IDP's international education conference in October last year and reveals that out of 332 interviews with undergraduates from 10 of the leading Asian student markets, 81 per cent reported Australia as their first choice destination over the USA and UK. JWT Education has been surveying changing trends among foreign students since 1997 and completed a similar survey in 2000, when fewer than half of interviewees chose Australia over the UK and USA.

The survey results are bad news for the USA's stagnating education export industry, which saw international enrolments decrease for the first time in the 2003/2004 academic year. Allison Doorbar, JWT partner, who presented the findings, said that there "is a widespread

perception that the United States is simply not as welcoming as it once was". She added that previously there had been an assumption that the USA was a destination where every student wanted to go "but the evidence suggests that this just can't be assumed any longer".

In the UK too, where recent visa fee increases have caused consternation regarding the message the country is sending to international students (see *Education Travel Magazine*, September 2005, page 42), the report findings are not particularly welcome. However, Doorbar said that new visa fees – still lower than Australia – and the London bombings did not seem to have affected student attitudes so far.

The number of international students studying in Australia increased by 18 per cent to 322,776 in 2004 compared with 2002, despite the fact that in recent years the Australian dollar has appreciated strongly against the US dollar. Australia's education exports increased by 17.8 per cent last year and were

valued at more than AUS\$5 billion (US\$3.8 billion) for the first nine months of 2004. The study also showed that Asian students still see US higher education institutions as being world leaders in terms of quality. Australia was rated in third place in terms of quality, behind the USA and UK

and ahead of Canada, Germany and New Zealand.

Another interesting finding revealed that 81 per cent of students questioned did not consider taking a foreign degree in their own country, despite the increase in off-shore education provision in recent years.

New study abroad requirement

GOUCHER COLLEGE in Baltimore, MD, has become the first college in the USA to require its undergraduate students to take part in at least a three-week intensive course abroad in order to graduate. Each student will also be given a voucher for US\$1,200 to offset the cost of studying in a foreign country.

Sanford Ungar, President of Goucher College, said, "You don't have to look any further

than the front page of the nearest newspaper to see that global events have a direct and immediate influence on all of our lives. We in the business of higher education are simply not living up to our responsibility if we don't find ways to educate our students not only to understand what's happening on the international scene, but also to bring their learning to bear in addressing the global challenges of our time."



Full name: IDP Education Australia
Year established: 1969
Organisation's main role: IDP is owned by 38 Australian universities and its main role is to recruit international students for the Australian education system at all levels. It has a network of 66 offices in 27 countries.
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What activities has IDP been involved in to further the interests of Australian education providers?

In October, IDP organised the Australian International Education Conference in Queensland which attracted over 1,000 participants from around the world. This annual conference will celebrate its 20th anniversary in Perth in 2006.

How have international enrolments fared over the

last 12 months at Australian universities?

In spite of the historically high value of the Australian dollar, which is a major factor affecting international enrolments at universities, student numbers have held up. In 2005, they were one per cent higher than in 2004.

Do students face any particular difficulties when applying to study in Australia?

Australia's student visa processes have continued to work smoothly following the terrorist attacks of 2001, which is one of the reasons why student numbers continued to grow after September 11. IDP and Australian education providers have lobbied the government to keep visa requirements as open as possible. In October, the government made several visa changes which made it easier to study in Australia.

What are your future plans?

We will continue to push the message that Australia offers quality education at a very competitive cost. On top of that students enjoy a low cost of living in a safe environment with an enviable lifestyle.

UK colleges complain of bias

VISA STAFF in some countries are only granting UK visas to students who want to study degrees at universities, according to a confidential briefing note compiled by the Association of Colleges (AoC) for principals, seen by the UK newspaper, *The Guardian*. The association claims that entry clearance officers do not understand the further education system.

Jim Crewdson, Principal of Wigan and Leigh College in Wigan, UK, told *The Guardian* that he sent a colleague in China to investigate after applications from Chinese students dried up a year ago. "He went to the visa office in China and found a woeful lack of understanding

among officials about British further education," said Crewdson. "They didn't know what a BTEC was and they didn't seem to understand what an HND and an HNC were."

While official data for international enrolments at colleges in the UK is unavailable, Jo Clough, International Policy Officer at the AoC, said that many colleges reported a downturn in international enrolments last year.

Visa issuance problems may also be affecting other education sectors in the UK as the University and College Admissions Service (Ucas) reported in October that Chinese students enrolments for the 2006 academic year had declined by 22.5 per cent to date.

ETS revamps Toefl test

THE EDUCATIONAL Testing Service (ETS) has introduced a new version of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (Toefl) in an attempt to make it more accurate as an assessment of language and academic ability.

Changes made to the test include making it into an Internet-based product and also introducing a new speaking section that emphasises integrated communication skills. Students will now have to read, listen and then speak a response to a question, listen and then speak in response to a question and read, listen and then write a response to a question. Previously, the Toefl test was based around multiple

choice style questions that isolated individual listening, reading and writing skills.

Mari Pearlman, Senior Vice President of Higher Education at ETS, said, "With the new Toefl iBT, test takers are presented with questions that truly reflect how language is used in an academic setting. Admissions officials, in turn, gain a better idea of how well prospective students will interact at their universities."

The new Toefl iBT was available to students in the USA from September last year, and in Canada, France, Germany and Italy from October. It is scheduled to be available in most parts of the world by summer 2006.

Koreans spend more

The Bank of Korea has announced that spending by Korean students studying overseas amounted to US\$2.25 billion from January to August 2005, an increase of 41 per cent on the previous year. This figure is expected to reach US\$3.5 billion by the end of 2005.

When including the money spent on living expenses by accompanying family members the calculated overseas spend increases to US\$7.1 billion.

DAAD information service for students

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has set up a new online information service for students, graduates and postgraduates, which provides information on where to find funding for studying in Germany. The website www.funding-guide.de is available in German and English.

Malaysia-Poland links

According to a report in Malaysian newspaper, *The Star*, Malaysia and Poland are planning to sign a memorandum of understanding on education that will enable Malaysian students to study in Polish universities.

An agreement was reached whereby Malaysian delegates would visit Polish universities with a view to sending students to study

science and medicine. The Malaysian government has expressed an interest in universities that offer English as the medium of instruction, particularly in the fields of science and medicine.

Students choose Japan

International enrolments at Japanese universities have grown by 54 per cent since 1998, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The report identifies Korea as the biggest student market for Japanese universities but other important markets include Australia, the USA and Europe.

Funding for Queensland

Queensland government chief, Peter Beattie, has announced plans to increase funding for projects to encourage the growth of Queensland's international education sector. Government grants have been approved worth AUS\$272,400 (US\$203,587) for 11 international education and training organisations based in the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Hervey Bay, Ipswich, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Alberta office in Mexico

An Alberta international education office opened in Mexico at the end of last year, offering Mexican students access to comprehen-

sive information regarding opportunities for post-secondary study in this province of Canada. The office, which is situated in Guadalajara, was opened in September at the same time as an agreement renewing educational partnerships between the two regions was signed.

China authenticates qualifications

Employers in China can now verify the academic credentials of job applicants by checking their foreign qualifications through the Chinese Ministry of Education. The service authenticates foreign degrees and diplomas from institutions as long as they are included on an approved list of overseas educational establishments.

Malta has potential to expand private education

The director of a private higher education institute in Malta has announced that the country has the potential to develop a healthy private education tertiary tuition sector for overseas students, which in the UK equates to a multi-million pound business.

Charles Theuma, Director of St Martin's Institute, which teaches courses leading to University of London degrees, said that the Mediterranean climate, English language and lower cost of tuition are all attractive to international students.