

Knight Review of the Student Visa Program

Summary of Government Response



29 September 2011

In December 2010, the Government appointed the Hon. Michael Knight AO to review the student visa program. This review was completed on 30 June 2011 and contained 41 recommendations. On 22 September 2011 the Education Minister [Minister] announced the Government's response to the Review.

The Government has accepted all 41 recommendations in principle although some will be implemented with modifications. It accepts that there are concerns with the speed with which student visas can be processed under the current system in comparison to other countries competing with Australia for international students. The Government is also looking to make changes to allow it to distinguish high and low risk education providers and will undertake a review of the risk framework in 2012.

Of most interest to the hotel industry are the Government's intentions relating to students and the labour force through the ability of international students to work while studying in Australia and to stay on and work in Australia after completing their studies.

On post-study work, the government will **allow university graduates access to the proposed Genuine Temporary Entrant (GTE) visa which will allow them to work in Australia for up to four years** after graduation. This visa will not require the graduate to be working in the field of their study, and will be available from early 2013. Non-university graduates would not have access to this visa and would need to continue to utilise the Temporary Skilled Graduate (485) visa which allows up to 18 months of post graduate work in Australia.

One of the sources of contention has been the restriction on international students working hours during study. The current system limits international students to 20 hours of paid employment per week. In response to demands from employer groups for more flexibility, the Government has announced that **the work restriction will change from 20 hours per week to 40 hours per fortnight** (with unlimited hours outside of the study term/semester). These working rights apply to the student and any dependent family members. This is scheduled to take effect in the first half of 2012.

As part of streamlining visa processing, the Government will **grant student visas up to four months before the start of the course**, giving students more time in Australia.

The package will be implemented in two major stages. Some changes will be introduced before the end of 2011, but the majority of changes will take effect in time for the second semester of 2012 (except for the GTE visa which is slated for 2013).



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