

**Submission to the
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties – 31 July 2015**

**Free Trade Agreement between the Government of Australia and the
Government of the People’s Republic of China**

The China Australia Free Trade Agreement provides a long sought breakthrough for higher education providers in Australia.

The Agreement will extend the number of Australia’s private higher education institutions featured on the Chinese government’s JSJ (Jiaoyu Shewai Jianguan XinXi Wang) or “white list” of recognised institutions where currently only public universities, TAFEs and one private provider are listed. If ones degree is not recognised, the two main consequences are that one cannot study for a master's or work for a state-owned institution at the correct pay scale.

China has agreed to list on its ‘Study Abroad’ (JSJ) website an additional 77 Australian private higher education institutions registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) within a year of ChAFTA’s entry into force

The JSJ, established in 2003, contains information on approved education agents for self-funded Chinese students studying abroad and overseas education providers as well as updates on law, regulations and policies around international education. The JSJ website provides an important and trusted source of information to potential Chinese students who today make up 25.9 per cent of our international student market, injecting \$4 billion to the Australian economy.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) estimated in 2013 that 88% of incoming Chinese students selected institutions appearing on the white list.

Under ChAFTA, the Australian and Chinese Governments have agreed to work together to increase the marketing and recruitment opportunities for Australian education institutions in China.

Higher Education in Australia

Higher education providers in Australia are all registered through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which was established as the single national regulator for higher education in 2012. In 2013 there were 173, 39 considered public universities and 134 other higher education providers. Courses range from diplomas and bachelor degrees through to PhD’s.

Total enrolments in public universities in 2013 were 1,215,620 (90.4%) and in other higher education providers 117,067 (9.6%).

Of total higher education enrolments, 25% or 333,000 were international.

About 40% of enrolments in private higher education are international students.

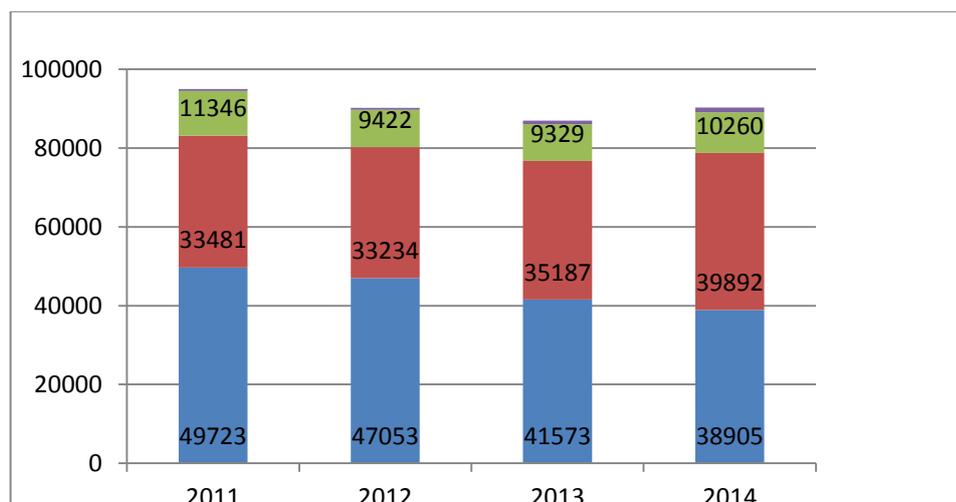
Key Features of Higher Education in Australia and New Major Initiatives

Participation of international students in Australian higher education (#3 in the world) is a remarkable success story and there are some key characteristics that need to be recognised as part of that success. There are also a number of Government Policy initiatives that will further enhance opportunities.

In summary

- With the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in place, the rigorous regulation and standards environment in Australian higher education is highly respected and considered best practice across the world.
- The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is also highly respected and establishes a national system for recognising the key characteristics of all courses in Australia.
- Australia has a Tuition Protection Service as a national scheme to ensure international students can be confident that they will receive the education for which they have paid.
- The Education Services for Overseas Students Act (ESOS) provides a sound structure for protecting international students and our reputation for excellence. It is currently undergoing further revision to reduce the regulatory burden and improve processes. The associated National Code specifies the detail needed for effective implementation of the Act and in particular, the treatment of students.
- Streamlined Visa Processing (SVP), introduced for our Members in the past year together with the availability of better data has put more responsibility on providers but has also improved the quality of students recruited and increased numbers. The SVP will be superseded by the Simplified Student Visa Framework (SSVP) in mid-2016 which will further improve processes.
- The Draft National Strategy for International Education which follows the Chaney review is the first ever strategy for international education, and is currently being developed by the Minister for Education in broad consultation with the many stakeholders involved. It will be comprehensive, cover all levels of education and importantly bring a whole-of- government approach that can take Australia forward. It is important to recognize that international education is a two way engagement and is trade that can be measured in valuable relationships as well as revenue.
- We have now seen the establishment of the Coordinating Council for International Education, chaired by the Minister for Education, that brings together senior Ministers with an interest in international education which includes the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Industry and Science, the Assistant Minister for Immigration and the Assistant Minister for Education and Training plus senior sector representatives. This high level body promises improved inter departmental cooperation in policy development and implementation. We are already witnessing the sensible outcome of extensive consultation with the sector.

Higher Education Enrolments from China 2011 - 2014



These figures indicate the potential for growth, particularly for the private sector, from China following ChAFTA. We note for comparison that the growth in private higher education enrolments from India over the same period more than doubled, albeit from a smaller base.

All in all, in the context of the policy focus on the importance of international education and from our perspective, the Free Trade Agreement with the PRC reflects perfect timing for higher education. As with many overnight successes there has been at least a decade of hard work behind it.

About the Council of Private Higher Education

COPHE is a peak body representing higher education institutions that are independent of Australian public universities. The membership is diverse and includes private universities and institutions operating from more than 80 campus locations across Australia. Members vary in student enrolments from under a hundred to a few thousand and include not-for profit and for-profit operations. Courses offered range from pathway diplomas through to bachelor and master's degrees, often linked to professions and employment. Some members also offer research degrees, including PhDs.

The private sector in higher education is recognized for the quality of student outcomes from a diverse range of smaller institutions that focus on the quality of teaching.

The diversity is also evident in the provision of international education. For COPHE, seeking policy that encourages all students to be global citizens is a priority.

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