

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA – WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

**ISQ Non-Government Schools International Education Conference 2006:
Experience counts
1-2 June 2006**

PowerPoint presentation by Caroline Miller, ISCA Policy Analyst

Introduction

The independent schools sector

- 1,069 independent schools
- 479,903 students (14% of all school enrolments)
- Growth at an average of 4% over the last decade.



The Independent Schools Council of Australia is the national peak body representing Australia's 1078 independent schools and nearly half a million students.

ISCA is an association comprising the eight State and Territory Associations of Independent Schools as its members. The members of the AISs are of course the many independent schools across the country encompassing a wide range of philosophies, religious affiliations, schools of differing type and size.

As a Policy Analyst with ISCA I have been dealing with international education issues for the last seven years. I attend meetings, participate on working groups and committees and also prepare responses and submissions on particular issues when necessary. For example I have to date now written four submissions on the draft National Code in the last six months.

Overseas students in the independent sector

Overseas students in the schools sector - 2005

- 365 independent schools
- 25,542 students (total schools sector)
- 15,667 students (non-government schools sector)
- 8.8% decrease in 2005



According to the 2005 Non-Government Schools census approximately 365 independent schools – or roughly one third of the sector – had at least one overseas student.

According to AEI PRISMS data for the year 2005 there were 25,542 overseas students enrolled in the schools sector, and nearly 16,000 or just over 60 per cent were in the non-government schools sector. Queensland had 17% of all school level enrolments, 4349 students, which is the third largest of the states and territories. Of that number nearly 70% are in non-government schools.

As you are no doubt aware, nationally in 2005 school enrolments declined by nearly 9%. If you look at the government and non-government sectors of schooling, both sectors have fallen by about 9% but in real numbers the non-government sector has had a larger drop in numbers because it has the larger number of students.

The most recently released monthly data for March shows the downturn continuing with a 7% decrease in total Year to Date enrolments over the same period last year.

ISCA representation of the independent schools sector

ISCA representation of the independent schools sector

- Australian Government Departments
eg Department of Education Science & Training
- MCEETYA Taskforces
eg Performance Measurement and Reporting
- Other Sector Bodies

ISCA represents the interests of the independent school sector on a national basis on issues such as Commonwealth funding and other representation on national policy making bodies such as MCEETYA taskforces, working groups and so on. Currently ISCA represents the independent sector on over 100 taskforces, working parties, advisory bodies etc. ISCA also widely consults within the sector, meeting regularly with other sector bodies.

ISCA representation of the independent schools sector on overseas students

- Australian Government Departments
 - Department of Education Science & Training, AEI
 - Department of Immigration
 - Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade
 - Austrade
- IDP
- Other Peak Bodies
 - ACIVC, ACPET, AVCC, EA, SIGG, TDA

ISCA's representation on international education issues mainly involves dealing with the Department of Education Science and Training and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs on broad policy issues such as the student visa program and the ESOS Act. We also deal from time to time with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on things like Free Trade Agreements, as well as Austrade.

We have some limited interaction with other bodies like IDP and also other peak bodies representing government schools, private vocational colleges, English language centres, TAFEs and universities.

ISCA areas of involvement

ISCA Areas of Involvement

- ESOS Review
- Offshore Quality Assurance
- Foundation Programs
- AEI School Sector strategy
- Student Visa Program
- Education Agents Training Course
- Promotions Advisory Committee



I'll just outline for you the main areas in which ISCA is involved in international education.

ESOS Act Review

As you are no doubt aware, on 1 May the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) released the public exposure draft of the National Code.

There are a number of standards in the draft code which are of interest to the schools sector including attendance and satisfactory academic performance and the care of students under 18 years of age.

ISCA is currently finalising our submission on the Industry Consultation Draft of the National Code. It is important to remember the draft was not the final document and there are further consultations to follow. As well a number of representations have been made to the Department regarding timelines by a number of peak bodies.

ISCA will also be receiving funds from DEST under the National Code Transition Support Programme to produce a handbook for independent schools to help them comply with the new national code. We will be developing this handbook in close co-operation with AISs and the involvement of schools in this process will be vital. We envisage that the handbook will be a step by step guide to compliance with the Code and will be widely available both in hard copy and on the web.

Offshore Quality Assurance

ISCA is a member of the AESOC Transnational Quality Strategy Working Group which has been set up to continue the work of the Offshore Quality Reference Group which met last year in response to the DEST discussion paper – 'A National Strategy for Australian Transnational Education and Training'. The aim of the proposed strategy is for Australia to maintain its international reputation as a provider of quality education.

Currently the Working Group is looking at a strategy with a few different parts – a communications strategy which will include a website, fact sheets and showcasing, a good practice component, and finally data collection and quality assessment.

The end result will be some kind of list of Australian providers who offer programs offshore and who have signed up to the TQS.

Foundation Working Group

ISCA is also involved in the foundation working group set up by DEST to try and set criteria and standards for foundation courses. Most of these courses are non-award courses and do not fall under the AQTF and as such this is an area that has been largely undefined and unregulated.

There has been significant work done on this issue with the completion of a draft set of standards for standard foundation courses. There is on-going work being done on the criteria for extended and accelerated foundation courses.

AEI School Sector Strategy

Because of concern about the downturn in enrolments in the schools sector, late last year AEI engaged consultants to look at the schools sector and to produce a schools sector strategy. The consultants met with ISCA, other peak bodies, AISs and schools as well doing research overseas.

On 13 March there was a school sector roundtable which was attended by a number of independent sector representatives including myself and AIS representatives. There was a wide ranging discussion covering not only the downturn in student numbers but also the nature of internationalisation in schools, research possibilities and possible future directions for schools.

The consultants report, *Meeting the World Half Way: Towards an Australian School Sector Strategy* has been finished and AEI will be using it to develop a School Sector Strategy for release in next the next few months. Hopefully the report will be made available to schools following the release of the strategy.

The section of the consultants' report pertaining to competitor country analysis is available for free download from the AEI website. This analysis is divided into two main sections, the first contains our four main competitors – the UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand, and the second provides information on new education hubs.

Student Visa Program – IELTS Waiver for the Schools Sector

ISCA also meets regularly with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) in an on-going consultative process with other sectors of education to discuss the Student Visa Program. In March this year there was an English language workshop where there was extensive discussion of the IELTS waiver, how this has affected student numbers from China and the future of the waiver. The uncertainty associated with the waiver is of particular concern.

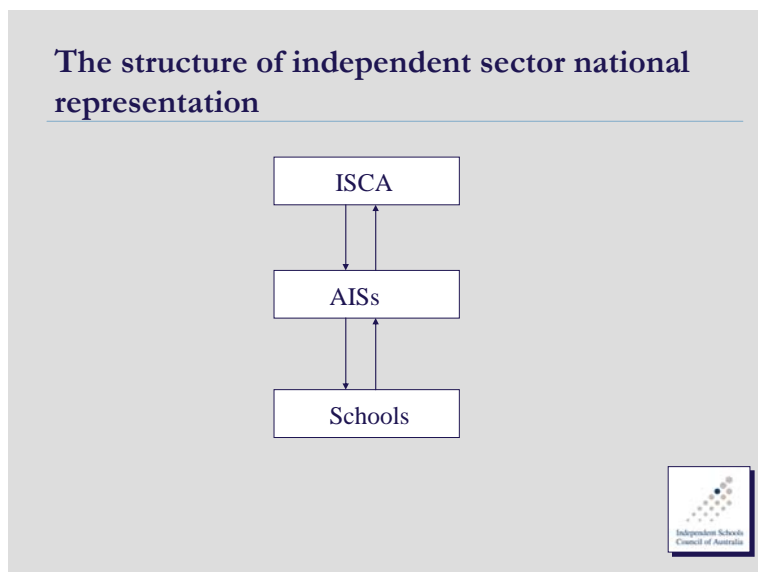
DIMA have undertaken to look at the waiver and see if there are ways to retain the benefits of the waiver, reduced fraud and improved compliance rates, while doing away with the uncertainty of the waiver but not imposing an inappropriate language test on the sector.

Other Consultations

ISCA also meets regularly with both DEST and DIMA twice a year at the Government Industry Stakeholder Consultations (GISC) and a further twice a year with DIMA only at the DIMA Industry Stakeholder Consultations (DISC).

We were also involved in the Education Agent Training Project Consultative Group. Mariana Lane represents ISCA on the AEI Promotions Advisory Committee, which advises AEI on how to best spend their money.

How ISCA consultations work

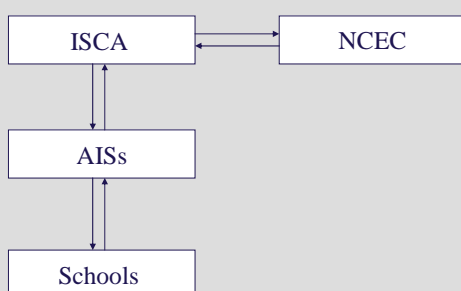


As I've just explained, as the peak body for independent schools, ISCA represents the sector in a number of fora. So how do we communicate what is going on and how do we get feedback on issues which are important to schools?

As you can see from the slide, communications don't go directly to schools – they go via Associations of Independent Schools in each state and territory. Each Association has means by which it sends information out to schools and asks for responses if required. Those responses are then fed back to ISCA either via the AIS or directly to us.

In the case of international education issues, we also send out our information circulars to the National Catholic Education Commission as we also represent them at the national level in this area.

The structure of independent sector national representation for international education



The involvement of schools in this feedback process is vital. Unless we know what your concerns are we can't help address them, and unless we know what the problems are we can't find solutions.

I know that sometimes the sheer size of some of the documents we send out is daunting and that often we are given very short timelines by departments, but the fact is that we rely on you, the practitioners, to let us know when you can see that there will be an issue. Often in some of these areas, such as the Student Visa Program, they are such complicated systems that it can be hard to judge what the effects of certain things will be, or there are unintended side effects of certain decisions. Any way we can lessen those effects is beneficial.

In all our representation ISCA's goal is to maximise the opportunities for independent schools and minimise the administrative burden. The latter goal in particular seems to be getting harder and harder to achieve. But it is only with your help and involvement that we can achieve these aims.