

# Australia reviews student visa programme

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Australia's minister for immigration and citizenship, Chris Bowen, and minister for tertiary education, skills, jobs and workplace relations, senator Chris Evans, recently announced a review of the student visa programme, along with many measures for the country's international education sector.

The student visa changes focus largely on the financial requirements of obtaining student visas. Indian students, who plan to pursue bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, graduate certificates, graduate diplomas or masters by coursework in Australia, would now find it easier to meet the financial requirements, said a spokesperson of Oceanic Consultant.

These new changes would mean that the students now need to demonstrate less funds to obtain a student visa for higher education. For all the student visa applications made on or after April 12011, the students will need to show funds for only two years of their studies instead of three years, which is the current requirement. Moreover, such funds are required to be only three



months old as against the current requirement of it being six months old. The new law that comes into effect in April 2011 will allow trier students to be sponsored by any individual as against the current legal requirement that limits the sponsorship to applicant's spouse, parents, siblings, grandparents and uncle or aunt meeting certain criterion.

The changes, in effect from December 16, 2010, also lower the financial requirements for students who pre-pay their boarding through educational institutions in Australia as the amount equivalent to the prepaid

amount would be reduced from the required funds.

Naresh Gulati, CEO of Oceanic Consultants, said,

"The changes announced today would help Australia regain its position as a more favourable destination amongst Indian students than its current levels. A large number of students, who wanted to study in Australia, considered other destinations just because they found the financial requirements for Australian student visa far more stringent than those of other countries. This would change and we would see traffic to Australia increasing."

The measures announced include:

- \* Reducing the student visa assessment levels from April 2011 as indicated in the recent assessment level review conducted by their Department of Immigration and Citizenship. As part of this decision, the higher education visa assessment levels for applicants from China and India will also be reduced
- \* Refining the rules to further enable pre-paid boarding fees to be counted toward students' cost of living requirements in their visa application
- \* Enabling assessment level

4 vocational education and training (VET) students to undertake a package of certificate level courses to meet visa requirements.

"The Australian international education sector has come under increasing pressure as a result of the rising value of the Australian dollar, the ongoing impact of the global financial crisis in some countries, and growing competition from the United States, New Zealand and Canada for international students," senator Evans said.

"The size and nature of the international education sector has also changed dramatically over the past decade, and it is crucial that we take a whole-of-government approach in responding to these changes."

"The review is tasked with enhancing the continued competitiveness of the international education sector, as well as strengthening the integrity of the student visa programme." The government has appointed Michael Knight to undertake the review, and to report to Bowen and senator Evans by mid2011.

"The review will examine and make recommendations on a more effective partnership framework between key stakeholders and requirements for student visa applicants," Bowen said. "The review will look at ways to better manage immigration risk in the student visa caseload and deter breaches and misuse of the programme, as well as consider visas for different education sectors."

The government is also introducing a package of measures to streamline the visa application process for lower risk cohorts while continuing to uphold the integrity of the programme.

More information on DIAC's website  
www.immi.gov.au.