BILLS

Education Services for Overseas Students (Registration Charges) Amendment (Tuition Protection Service) Bill 2011

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 3 November 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (10:31): As we consider the vote on this bill, I want to add some comments on the very strong commitment that the government has made to a sector that has experienced significant growth and change in recent years. I draw the House's attention to the package's centrepiece, the Tuition Protection Service or TPS. That is a universal system offering a single point of placement or refund as a last resort which involves all possible placement options, placement incentives for providers and greater choice in the process. It will recognise the reputational benefits of a robust and sustainable tuition protection arrangement by ensuring that all providers participate in the service.

The Tuition Protection Service will be supported by a suite of complementary initiatives aimed at encouraging providers to meet their refund obligations in the first instance and facilitating effective placement of students caught up in a closure. Providers operating in more than one state or territory will benefit from the introduction of national registration, which will see a reduction in the duplication of regulatory effort and support risk management. It will also play a large part in ensuring that the sector is positioned for a smooth transfer to the vocational education and training and higher education national regulators.

As recommended by Mr Baird, the former member for Cook, a number of amendments will make ESOS stronger, simpler and smarter—for example, clarifying definitions, and stronger penalties for noncompliance around reporting and the misuse of prepaid fees. The House Standing Committee on Education and Employment has made five recommendations in relation to the ESOS bills currently before the House. The government intends to consider recommendations 1 and 2—which relate to the period of notification for a default—in conjunction with any further recommendations made by the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee, which is also inquiring into the bills. The government supports House committee recommendations 3 and 4, and we will ensure broad representation of industry stakeholders on the TPS Advisory Board and comprehensive and ongoing communications with the providers throughout the implementation of the new TPS arrangements. Finally, the government supports recommendation 5, that the bills be passed.

As I said previously, this package is part of a larger set of reforms, including re-registration of all providers, strengthening and better targeting of the student visa program and the establishment of national regulation of the tertiary sector. All of these are working towards the same goal: to ensure that international education offered in Australia is of the very highest quality. Consequently, I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.