

## Briefs...

### Residency change

In the Monash journal *People and Place*, social researcher Dr Bob Birrell said the education export industry, whose phenomenal growth had been helped by foreign students seeking permanent residency as skilled migrants, had reached a crossroads.

He said a change to the skilled migration rules in December last year, coupled with other reforms, would put permanent residency beyond the reach of many former overseas students with poor English, little work experience and low-value qualifications in hospitality and cooking.

"Those providers who have built their business around marketing a credential that will lead to permanent residence must refocus their business," he said. "They need to sell credentials that overseas students believe they can take back to their country of origin with profit."

### Work for nothing

Recent media reports have highlighted the fact that thousands of overseas students are being made to work for nothing or even pay

to work by businesses exploiting loopholes in immigration and education laws in what experts describe as a system of economic slavery.

The vast pool of unpaid labour was created in 2005 when vocational students were required to do 900 hours work experience. There was no requirement that they be paid.

Overseas students remained bound to the system as completion of such courses became a near-guaranteed pathway to permanent residency in Australia.

Since then the number of foreign students enrolled in the sector has leapt from 65,120 to 173,432 last year about half of all overseas students.

### Visa fees rise

International students will pay 20 per cent more for visas from next year under changes in the budget.

The application fee for student visas will rise from \$450 to \$540 from January 2010 in one of several visa fee increases that will bring in more than \$400 million in extra revenue over four years.

## Winners and losers in allowance change

*"With a finite amount it is vital we target those most in need"*

The federal budget's announcements in May of wide-ranging changes to the youth allowance represent the most significant reforms to the system in 15 years, restoring fairness to a system that had strayed from its original purpose, according to the Group of Eight major universities.

Analysis of the 2009 Budget reveals that the changes to parental income tests and the treatment of equity scholarships will increase the number of low income students eligible for Youth Allowance and financial support from universities and private philanthropy.

"With a finite amount of public funding it is vital we target those students most in need," Go8 chairman, Professor Alan Robson said.

"The Government has significantly increased the parental income test threshold for access to Youth Allowance. This measure will apply from January 2010 and will increase the number of eligible

students by 17 per cent.

"For example, a family in which two students are living away from home will be able to earn up to \$139,388 before those students lose their Youth Allowance payments. This represents almost double the allowable income under current arrangements.

Significant as the changes are, they are being financed essentially through the abolition of a substantial aspect of the allowance's independent category, triggering substantial student protest.

National Union of Students president David Barrow said the new system has major flaws including that the payments have not actually increased.

"The 2008 gap year students have had the rug pulled out from under their feet and there will be problems for rural and regional students whose parents earn above the threshold," he said.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard defended a tightening of the so-called independent category often used by students from affluent families as necessary to fund increased payments for thousands of other students.



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