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Go8 warns of unintended consequences for Higher Education from Abolition of 457 visas

The Group of Eight (Go8), comprising Australia's eight leading research intensive universities, is concerned by the potential unintended consequences for Australia's international Higher Education sector as a result of the abolition and replacement of the 457 visa announced yesterday.

Professor Peter Høj, Chair of the Go8, said that the Go8 is "supportive" of safeguarding Australian jobs through a targeted approach to issuing and processing visas that allow foreign citizens to work in Australia.

"However, the Go8 sees there is potential for a perverse outcome that may put at risk many of the estimated 130,000 jobs supported by Australia's \$21.8 billion international education industry," he said.

"Our universities operate in a truly international marketplace where we must compete against the best universities in the world for international students and academic talent. Establishing our reputation in this marketplace depends on attracting the best minds from around the globe to come to Australia to work with and foster local talent.

"And we have been successful. The performance of the Australian Higher Education sector – and in particular the Go8 institutions; six of whom rank in the top 100 universities in the world – is a major reason behind Australia's \$21.8 billion international education industry and in 2014 had produced research estimated by Deloitte Access Economics to be worth \$160 billion.

"At face value the new technical arrangements for the *Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS)* visas and *Employer Sponsored Permanent Skilled (ESPS)* visas may make maintaining Australia's international advantage more difficult.

"More broadly, the mere suggestion of the Government clamping down on academic mobility into Australia could deter potential academic recruits to Australia. This is particularly a concern at a time when there are opportunities for recruitment from the US and the UK and initiatives under way such as the recently announced Go8 – India taskforce tasked with developing PhD and researcher mobility between Australia and India.

"Many outstanding Australians such as Professor Ian Frazer, Professor Fiona Wood – both Australians of the year – and Professor Brian Schmidt – Nobel Prize winner and Vice Chancellor of the ANU - who came to Australia as foreign researchers, were educated overseas at no cost to Australian taxpayers and have become great contributors to Australia and great Australians.

"The Go8 is committed to working with the Government to ensure that this tradition continues and to maintain the international competitiveness of Australia's academic workforce."

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