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NEW VISA APPLICATION CHARGE TO HIT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION and TOURISM

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) will slug temporary visitors to Australia with an additional \$700 Subsequent Temporary Application Charge for those wishing to stay onshore as a short term tourist post completion of study or to extend their study opportunities.

The charge was announced as a suite of visa application charges to increase from 1 July 2013 and is one that will have a significant impact on Australia's international education sector and tourism spend.

ATEC's Deputy Chair, Peter Ovenden, and English Australia's Executive Director, Sue Blundell, call on the government to revisit this charge.

"The application charge may dissuade these visitors from coming to Australia in the first place, and will definitely impact on their desire to stay on and enjoy what the country has to offer as a tourism destination", says Mr Ovenden,

"This in turn will have a flow on affect to other areas of tourism including the lucrative Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) sector."

"Tourism operators in regional areas and those in the backpacker and youth sector relying on the international education visitor to disperse following their study will be hardest hit and these tend to be the ones already struggling with the high Aussie dollar".

Ms Blundell reiterates Ovenden's comments and calls on DIAC to share their rationale behind the fee hike and remove the fee from the student and tourist visa subclasses.

"If these charges remain, they will do incalculable damage to international education which is only now starting to recover, and to local tourism. As well as the monetary impact, they present Australia as less welcoming, at a time when government policy should be about supporting services exports", says Ms Blundell.

"It is unclear whether any thought has gone into an analysis of whether the new visa fees and charges will raise more revenue than the revenue lost by a downturn in the number of visas taken up."

"Importantly, the fee contributes to making our overall visa costs significantly higher than our main rival countries including UK, Canada and the USA, at a time when the market is more competitive than ever".

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