

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## SVP impact 'could be muted'

JOHN ROSS THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEMBER 25, 2013 12:00AM

**STREAMLINED visa processing could make little difference to Australian private higher education, because very few students may be in a position to access the scheme.**

SVP makes it quicker and easier to get visas to study in Australia. While it is currently only available to students enrolling at public universities, the federal government has invited 22 unnamed private colleges and TAFEs to apply to join the scheme.

However, the HES understands some of the best known and most respected private institutions and TAFEs have been left off this confidential list, with mostly small, new and niche providers getting the nod.

Patricia Stewart, Sydney campus director of MIT – which has been excluded from the list – said the small size of many of the favoured providers could reduce the impact on other institutions. “There may not be a great deal of difference between having SVP and not having SVP,” she said.

“It depends how the market perceives us, and that is very difficult to tell at present. We’ll have to go out and see how they perceive us.”

Dr Stewart said private institutions’ reputations had suffered because of the favourable treatment of universities, and the same thing could happen again.

“If (markets) perceive us as sub-standard because we haven’t got SVP, it will affect us,” she said.

“In some countries they didn’t realise only public universities were originally (allowed) into the system. There is a perception, particularly in Bangladesh, that if you don’t have SVP you’re not a good provider. And whether you get students depends on how people perceive you.”

Dr Stewart said MIT’s failure to obtain an invitation to join the SVP had come as a shock.

“We’re still reeling. We had come through so many audits so well, and (had) always been recognised as a quality private provider. We interviewed every student; we looked at every financial document. The risk factor just wasn’t there. That’s why we were so surprised – we thought we had done very well.”

The HES understands providers were knocked back because of significant enrolments from the subcontinent, even though countries such as India and Pakistan rank among the top sources of international students.

Immigration officials consider India, Pakistan and Nepal to be immigration “risks”, with their citizens thought to have a higher propensity to breach visa conditions or seek ways of remaining in Australia.

Two theology colleges, unlikely to attract many students from Hindu and Moslem countries, are understood to be among five Victorian institutions invited to join the scheme.

Other invitees include specialised business, hospitality and management colleges.

Ken Hawkins, CEO of Sydney-based Kent Institute of Business and Technology – which is on the list – said some of the 22 colleges would probably not proceed with SVP.

Dr Hawkins said opting into the scheme was “onerous and resource-intensive”, requiring preparation of a project plan that the government could still reject. “It’s not an easy task,” he said.