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DIAC oversight to avoid visa rorts

JOHN ROSS THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEMBER 16, 2011 12:00AM

UNIVERSITIES would be obliged to have their operations approved by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, under proposed arrangements accompanying the fast-track visa processing system to be introduced mid next year.

The 10-point proposal would require each university to give the department a written commitment on operational matters, including international student recruitment, student body composition, dealings with agents, institutional collaborations, and monitoring and management of students' English language skills.

"This written commitment will acknowledge the ongoing nature and the consequences of not meeting these requirements," says the document circulated last month by DIAC secretary Andrew Metcalfe.

"Further, it will acknowledge that the university is aware the commitment will be made publicly available on the DIAC website."

The commitment would include information on the number of international students the university planned to recruit, the source countries and courses it intended to focus on, and remuneration deals with agents.

But a spokesman denied that opt-in arrangements would "subject the universities to unreasonable management by DIAC", and said the department didn't plan to disclose commercial-in-confidence information. "Once universities have established that they have an acceptable plan for the recruitment and management of genuine international students, DIAC's role will be one of monitoring," he said. "Where the students of a particular university have a poor immigration compliance record, DIAC would work with the university to identify remedial measures."

He said exclusion from the system would be a "final sanction", and that universities were under no obligation to opt in.

The spokesman said DIAC had already consulted universities on the proposal.

Universities Australia said it was confident "a program of benefit to all" would emerge.

"Rather than introducing the micromanagement all too common in some government programs in higher education, the (proposals) are a means for universities to demonstrate the virtues of self-regulation," chief executive Glenn Withers said.

He said "unreasonable or overly interventionist demands on universities" needed to be avoided, and issues such as financial requirement verification were still being sorted out.

The proposed commitment would cover strategies to make sure international students didn't run out of money or break their visa conditions.

