

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL STUDENTS' FAMILY WORK RESTRICTIONS POLICY

A significant number of medical students from various countries travel to Australia each year to complete their medical studies on an up-front full-fee paying basis. These students can expect to pay over \$210,000 in university fees over the duration of their course¹, plus a one-time payment of at least \$1,400 for overseas student health cover and around \$18,000 per annum in living expenses^{2,3,4}. These are substantial costs for these individuals and their families.

FAMILY WORK RESTRICTIONS

International medical students currently study in Australia under a higher education sector: temporary visa (subclass 573)⁵. Under the terms of this visa, the spouse and dependents of these students are restricted to working no more than 20 hours per week. As of 2009, all Australian medical schools were either purely undergraduate or graduate-entry undergraduate courses, which meant that family members of all international medical students were subject to this restriction. Considering the enormous costs associated with travelling and completing a full-fee paying medical degree in Australia, this limitation on family income causes significant hardship on medical students and their families and limits opportunities for career development for their spouses.

Not all families of international students are subject to this restriction. While the Department of Immigration and Citizenship does not differentiate between undergraduate and graduate-entry undergraduate courses, family members of international students enrolled in postgraduate degrees are able to work unrestricted due to their perceived lower immigration risk⁶. The University of Melbourne's Doctor of Medicine (MD) program will be the first postgraduate medical course in Australia, which means that family members of international medical students enrolled in this course will not be limited to working 20 hours per week^{5,7}.

AMSA BELIEVES THAT:

1. The cost of a full-fee paying medical degree places a significant financial burden on many international medical students and their families.
2. International medical students with families should be supported, not restricted, by their visa conditions to study medicine in Australia.
3. The restrictions on the temporary visa (subclass 573) places unreasonable work restrictions on spouses and dependents of international medical students.
4. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship should recognise the distinction between undergraduate and graduate-entry undergraduate courses. Accordingly, the Department should waive work restrictions for the families of international students enrolled in graduate-entry undergraduate courses due to their lower immigration risk, as is done for international students in postgraduate courses.

REFERENCES

1. AMSA (2009). Average cost of a medical degree for international students enrolled in Australian medical schools in 2010.
2. OSHC Worldcare online quote, based on cover for 1 adult with 0 dependent children for a minimum of 48 months. Accessed 9/09/09. Available at <https://www.oshcworldcare.com.au/Default.aspx>.
3. The University of Sydney (2008). International Student Guide: Your Road to Success. Available at [http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/documents/issu/IO Road to Success_online.pdf](http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/documents/issu/IO_Road_to_Success_online.pdf).
4. The University of New South Wales (2009). Living Expenses. Accessed 9/09/09. Available at <http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/future/fees/feesexpenses.html>.
5. Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Higher education sector: temporary visa (subclass 573) – Assessment Level 1. Accessed 9/09/09. Available at <http://www.immi.gov.au/students/students/573-1/>.
6. Vardos, P. & Alexander, J. (2009). Letter: International student visas response (16/08/09).
7. The University of Melbourne (2009). Doctor of Medicine. Accessed 9/09/09. Available at <http://www.medicine.unimelb.edu.au/future/md.html>.