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Peak bodies slam latest *Four Corners* attack

Two of Australia's peak international education bodies have slammed the ABC's latest Four Corners program, saying it flies in the face of the ABC's charter to provide balanced coverage and fails to highlight the positive impact of international students to Australia's social, cultural and economic prosperity.

"Each time the *Four Corners* producers focus on Australia's international education sector they seem intent on finding as many negative angles as possible. Any media outlet can string together a group of disaffected academics, students and even education agents. The fact that the program's producers and reporters continually choose to ignore the incredibly positive outcomes that Australia is achieving with our 450,000 overseas students is cause for real concern," said the CEO of the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), Phil Honeywood.

"The English language academic entry requirements were the focus of a particular attack from *Four Corners* on this occasion. However, no mention was made that only 18 months ago Australia significantly toughened up its English language entry standards. This included direct entry pathway agreements which are now subject to stricter controls by the national regulator. These regulations are now regarded as some of the most stringent in the world," said CEO of English Australia, Brett Blacker.

"Quite apart from stricter macro regulatory settings, most education providers have proactively raised their own English entry requirements. Many have initiated programs, from informal social events to formal support to provide concurrent language proficiency with the main course of study," argued Mr Blacker.

"Rather than our education system's quality declining because of international students, Australia has continued to improve, comparative to our main study destination competitors, in international ranking systems. Whether it be the percentage of our universities in the top 500, increasingly high rates of student satisfaction or course completion rates, both our domestic and international students have benefited from these system wide improvements," Mr Honeywood maintained.

"On every occasion that *Four Corners* launches another attack on our sector – which now employs more than 240,000 people and brings in \$34.9 billion per annum in export earnings for the benefit of all Australians – they restrict any positive commentary to just one spokesperson. With this latest program, the Chair of Universities Australia, Prof. Margaret Gardner, willingly provided an extensive interview which the producers chose to make significant and detrimental cuts to in the editing room. Given that no reporter from the program has ever bothered to reach out for any background information or balanced commentary from our two representative national associations, we can only wonder about the motivations behind this ongoing negative campaign," concluded Mr Honeywood and Mr Blacker.

On a related note, IEAA launches today a new project showcasing the benefits of international education to the broader Australia community. For more information, visit www.broadenourhorizons.com.au

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