

Submission

No 57

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Government
☐ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Name: Mr Robert Griew

Position: Associate Secretary

Date Received: 17/10/2011



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Associate Secretary
Robert Griew

Your Ref: LAC11/179

Mr Bruce Notley-Smith MP
Chair
The Social Policy Committee of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Notley-Smith

RE: Inquiry into international student accommodation in NSW

Thank you for your letter of 19 September 2011 to Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary of the Department, regarding the Social Policy Committee inquiry into international student accommodation in NSW.

DEEWR is highly committed to the wellbeing of international students studying in Australia and we appreciate the opportunity to make a submission.

This is attached for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Robert Griew

17 October 2011

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Submission to the Inquiry into International Student Accommodation in New South Wales

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has responsibility for a whole of government approach to Australia's international education engagement. This includes responsibility for administering the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework, part of which is the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007. The National Code of Practice outlines the requirements of providers delivering education to international students.

Responsibility for student accommodation is largely devolved to education providers and the regulation of accommodation is a responsibility of state and territory governments. International student accommodation concerns have been raised in national discussions on matters impacting the student experience.

In June 2010 accommodation issues were discussed as part of the development of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) International Student Strategy for Australia (ISSA). The ISSA focuses on four action areas; student wellbeing; quality of education; consumer protection and better information. Strategy 5.2 – Improving the accessibility and quality of information – from the 'Better Information' section of the ISSA highlights the need for a central, online source of accurate information for prospective and current international students. Better information not only assists students but is also a useful resource to assist education providers, accommodation providers and public agencies understand and respond to the needs of international students.

A key initiative of the strategy has been the 'Study in Australia' information portal. Translated into 12 languages, the portal provides a comprehensive and accurate source of information, including information about accommodation and living in Australia, for international students. The portal can be accessed at: www.studyinaustralia.gov.au

The issue of accommodation was identified as a major concern at the International Student Roundtables in 2009 and 2011. The 2009 roundtable Communiqué recommended that *"Education providers should collaborate with state and federal governments to develop a model for the provision of affordable accommodation to international students. This may include creative ways of utilising unused or undiscovered resources, such as an organised home-stay program."*

The 2011 International Student Roundtable noted that affordable student accommodation is not an easy problem to solve and urgent initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing were strongly supported. The 2011 International Student Roundtable Communiqué, recommended *"consideration of new models such as public-private partnerships, more active promotion of home-stay or home-share arrangements to local residents and increased allocation of reasonable priced on-campus accommodation with newly arrived international students."*

Matters of international student accommodation have also been discussed by the Joint Committee on International Education (JCIE), a Commonwealth and state/territory forum reporting to education ministers on international education issues. In 2009 JCIE members

engaged with state and local authorities responsible for laws and regulation governing the use of private accommodation in each jurisdiction to raise the priority given to preventing exploitation of international student tenants and unsafe housing being made available to such students.

International and domestic students living away from home have a number of housing options, including private rental, on-campus halls and colleges and student apartments. According to the results of the *2008 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement*, university students who live on campus are more engaged, feel more supported and have better general development.

In his final report "Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students - Review of Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000" released in February 2010, the Hon Bruce Baird AM noted "*there is an urgent need to develop, implement and enforce relevant and robust solutions to address those issues outside of ESOS, including student safety, accommodation, employment, transport and health matters*".

Standard 2 of the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (the National Code 2007) requires that registered providers must, prior to accepting a student provide relevant information on living in Australia, including indicative costs of living and accommodation options. Standard 5 (younger students) and Standard 6 (student support services) of National Code 2007 require that before a visa can be granted to a student under 18 years of age, the Australian Government must be satisfied that there are appropriate accommodation, support and general welfare in place for the period that the student will be under 18 in Australia.

Registered providers must support students to adjust to study and life in Australia, to achieve their learning goals and to achieve satisfactory progress towards meeting the learning outcomes of the course. This includes providing an age and culturally appropriate orientation program that includes information about, amongst other things, accommodation options and issues.

The *cost of accommodation* was identified as an issue to respondents of the International Student Survey 2010 where satisfaction levels of 60% for Higher Education students, 72% for VET students and 52% for ELICOS students were recorded. It is noteworthy that in respect to *accommodation access*, all three sectors recorded satisfaction levels of around 85% in the 2010 survey, representing a significant improvement on the ratings recorded in a similar survey conducted in 2006 (64% for Higher Education students, 63% for VET students and 59% for ELICOS students).

DEEWR, principally in collaboration with states and territories, has recently conducted approximately 40 focus group sessions with international and domestic students and education providers to explore more fully accommodation and other issues arising from the International Student Survey.

DEEWR grant programs that support higher education infrastructure projects (**Attachment A**) do not specifically target the prioritisation of infrastructure as this is a matter for institutions. However, a number of projects to support the development of student accommodation have been funded by DEEWR since 2000 (**Attachment B**).

In recent years, most on or near campus student accommodation developments have been financed through Public/Private Partnerships with widespread private sector involvement in the development and/or provision of university student accommodation.

The Committee may wish to note that support for the development of student accommodation has been available under the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), administered by the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Details of the Scheme, including the tertiary education providers who have accessed the NRAS incentive can be found at:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/housing/nras/index.html>

DEEWR will continue to conduct regular international student satisfaction surveys to enable ongoing monitoring of student's perceptions about the quality of their study and living experience in Australia. This will include a 2012 International Student Survey, already agreed under the International Student Strategy for Australia (ISSA) 2011 – 2014.

ATTACHMENT A

Sources of Australian Government Capital Funding for Student Accommodation

PROGRAM	ABOUT	ALIGNMENT WITH STUDENT ACCOMMODATION
Education Investment Fund (EIF)	The EIF funds projects that create or develop significant infrastructure in higher education institutions, research institutions and VET providers.	The EIF prioritises funding for teaching and research infrastructure. Student accommodation developments have only been supported where it has been demonstrated that the accommodation is integral to projects fully delivering the intended outcomes.
Better Universities Renewal Fund (BURF)	The one-off BURF and the TLC are designed to renew ageing university infrastructure and provide an educational experience appropriate for the 21 century.	While some universities directed a small portion of their allocations towards student accommodation projects, BURF and TLC funds have largely been used to support teaching and research infrastructure, ICT developments and infrastructure associated with student amenities.
Teaching and Learning Capital Fund (TLC)		
Capital Development Pool (CDP)	The CDP provides special funding assistance to higher education providers for capital infrastructure needs over and above those that could be expected to be funded from their other sources of funding.	Although funding for student accommodation is potentially available under the CDP, the vast majority of CDP funds have been applied directly to teaching and learning infrastructure including ICT.

ATTACHMENT B

Student accommodation projects funded through direct grants from DEEWR programs since 2000

INSTITUTION	PROJECT/DESCRIPTION	FUNDING
TEACHING AND LEARNING CAPITAL FUND (HIGHER EDUCATION)		
The University of Melbourne Victoria	Refurbishment and extension of Medley Hall student accommodation facility to enhance student learning through improved student rooms, additional tutor accommodation, and improved learning and social facilities.	\$3m
The University of Western Australia	Construction of a 30 bed student accommodation module, recreational spaces in the existing kitchen, a new kitchen and accommodation and work spaces for two tutors at St George's College.	\$3.1m
The University of Ballarat Victoria	Construction of student accommodation at the University of Ballarat's Environmental sustainability and biodiversity research station and living laboratory at 'Nanya'.	\$0.368m
BETTER UNIVERSITIES RENEWAL FUND (BURF)		
Edith Cowan University Western Australia	Development of a site that is suitable for the construction of student accommodation by a private sector partner.	\$4.03m
University of New England New South Wales	Redevelopment of Mary White College (this project also received funding from the Capital Development Pool).	\$2m
Australian National University Australian Capital Territory	Development of modular student accommodation on campus linked to Ursula Hall.	\$4m
University of Queensland	New accommodation at the Heron Island Research Station.	\$2.2m
CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT POOL (CDP)		
Monash University Victoria	Student residences redevelopment - Gippsland campus	\$3m
University of Wollongong New South Wales	Residential places for medical students from rural and regional areas	\$1m
The University of New England New South Wales	Redevelopment of Mary White College (this project also received funding from Better universities Renewal Fund).	\$2.5m
University of Tasmania	Modernising student accommodation at the Australian Maritime College	\$1m
EDUCATION INVESTMENT FUND (EIF)		
La Trobe University Victoria	La Trobe University Rural Health School	\$59.6m (of which \$11.6m will be spent on student accommodation).
Charles Darwin University Northern Territory	The Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education	\$30.65m (of which \$3.3m will be spent on student accommodation).