

**Submission**

**No 25**

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Attention Vicki Buchbach  
Social Policy Committee

## **Submission to the Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into International Student Accommodation in New South Wales**

All students including international students experience difficulties in securing affordable and safe accommodation during their time at University. There are many contributing factors that make it difficult for students seeking accommodation. A summary of considerations are provided.

1. Support proactive, preventive approaches to assuring student safety; and collaborate with local law enforcement authorities to increase levels of security including through improved cultural awareness and via increased visibility of police and security officers in locations where International students study, work, travel and live, and with suitable complaints bodies being in place to respond to concerns over inaction. Students are reluctant to complain or seek assistance in many cases. They require a greater understanding of, and access to, their rights and responsibilities. In regional areas support mechanisms are not always as accessible as they may be in metropolitan areas.
2. Work with diplomatic missions and the Australian government to streamline and enhance existing reporting processes for missions regarding student safety. At the same time work in partnership with Australia's own diplomatic posts as required, developing fully integrated communication processes to advise and support students on living and studying in Australia upon receipt of their student visas. In regional locations diplomatic missions/embassies etc, can be difficult to contact and negotiate with as there is still a need for face to face contact. Technology has assisted with greater access and communication, however service and support could be improved. Information on contacts within representative embassies and their role in support/administration of overseas students should be made readily available
3. Governments, local authorities and housing industry representatives should be encouraged/incentivised to work with Universities to ensure the availability of sufficient affordable and secure accommodation for all students including international students upon arrival. Consider innovative finance mechanisms to assist both the students and the construction arrangements, e.g. a fund akin to the Education Investment Fund to support this at appropriately sustainable levels and/or Defence Housing Scheme model. Students face challenges in securing affordable accommodation due to lease agreements (6 – 12 months). Typically a student maybe on campus for up to nine months per year with

limited or no previous rental history. Competition within rental market is another significant challenge, especially in regional areas.

4. Advocate that all state and territory authorities immediately make available travel concessions for all students to help enhance their safety and security when moving between campuses, accommodation and workplaces; improve public transport safety for all; and encourage employer and union support for assuring safe travel conditions for student workers. Travel for students attending regional Universities is an issue that impacts not only on accommodation options but also safety, affordability and impacts a student's daily life. Travel issues include getting to the regional centre and travel during their study.
5. Visa conditions which restrict the number of hours a student may spend in paid employment can create hardship and stress and contribute to attrition rates. There is a balance required to ensure that priorities are managed between work and study. Improved support networks to ensure that students are coping with this balance would also be appropriate.
6. There is a need for general cultural awareness, sensitivity and expectations for students and community. Strategies and education need to be reinforced to ensure that the integration of students of all nationalities and backgrounds on our campuses and in our communities, promoting a greater understanding of international cultures and languages in Australia through collaboration between the Australian Government, overseas governments and international agencies.
7. Liaison with authorities in student source countries is needed to ensure that university recruitment agents accurately represent all aspects of the international student experience, including safety aspects and the cost of living, and ensure that the visa issued by Australian authorities is focussed on genuine and suitable educational objectives.
8. Encourage campus student leadership to take a proactive role in representing and supporting international students to enable them to raise important issues regarding the quality of the student experience and provide direct opportunities for students to contribute to the debate and support.
9. As is the case with all international education providers in Australia there should be some form of strong and effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure that appropriate accreditation and quality assurance of accommodation providers is guaranteed.



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