

Submission to

## **Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students**

**Prepared by Chee Lai (President) on behalf of  
Curtin University Student Guild and the International Students  
Committee**

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### **Background**

Curtin University has over 40,000 enrolled students, of which almost 10,000 are fee paying onshore international students, and 7,800 who are fee paying offshore students. As the elected student representative body the Curtin Student Guild represents the rights and interests of all Curtin students. The International Students Committee (ISC) is the Guild department directly responsible for the welfare and advocacy of all international students. This submission will focus on steps that can be made to improve the international student experience in Australia and Australia's reputation as a world class provider of tertiary education. It specifically addresses terms of reference A(i), (ii), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii) and C.

### **Recommendations**

- 1)** That information on all assaults and security incidents on campuses be made available to students and staff, with information and advice provided especially to international students.
- 2)** That university housing services be required to keep a regularly updated list of recommended landlords and agents for international students.
- 3)** That a set number of on-campus housing places be allocated to a pre-determined ratio depending on the number of international students enrolled at a university, to ensure as many students may stay in or around campus as possible.
- 4)** That allowances be made in certain circumstances for students to gain visas without the need for holding a lump sum of money.
- 5)** That all universities ensure that international students have representation through a student-elected body or representative to raise issues and concerns to the university directly.
- 6)** That the number of hours international students are allowed to work be lifted so that they are treated no differently from local students who also need to work and study.
- 7)** That the Government be seen to take action on university funding so that international students are treated the same all other students, rather than as a way to subsidise education costs.

## **Terms of Reference Addressed**

### **A(i). Student safety:**

Curtin University has experienced violence against international students in and around its Bentley campus. The Guild does not believe that these attacks are racially motivated, but are based on opportunism that has largely arisen due to a lack of awareness about security issues from relatively new arrivals to Australia. While Curtin provides a very good security service, it is vital that the concept of campus security encompasses not only patrols, but better designs for buildings and walkways, lighting and on-campus housing.

Compelling designers to take security issues into account in all new buildings will help to address these concerns in the future. Mandatory recording of assaults and incidents involving all students should be made public, so that students understand the level of risk to their personal safety, and security services will be held more accountable for their roles.

### **A(ii). Adequate and affordable accommodation:**

On the whole, Curtin University provides excellent accommodation services to all students, including internationals. But it is not uncommon for students to be living in overpriced and overcrowded conditions provided by unscrupulous landlords. The ISC believes that this occurs because the accommodation promised to students before their arrival in Australia is not monitored closely enough. An expansion of lists of recommended accommodation providers would help solve this problem.

The ISC has found that international students prefer to live on campus where possible. This helps reduce issues of transport, security and adjusting to a new city. Curtin University's on-campus housing is always at capacity with many hundreds of students being turned away each semester. Universities should have to have a set number of accommodation places in line with the number of international students enrolled, and be made to increase this number in line with international enrolments increases.

### **A(iv). Student visa requirements:**

The requirement for international students to have a large amount of money in order to acquire a visa is a large problem for many international students. It also does not prove that students are able to support themselves, as many students simply borrow the money from friends or relatives for the very short term, or use false statements. There should be allowances made for students who themselves or whose families may have constant income and be able to support themselves, but do not have the luxury of having access to a large sum of money.

The practice of grouping countries of origin into categories with different application requirements for different categories is also unfair. Applications and countries of origin should be treated equally and not discriminated for any reason, except in the most extreme political circumstances.

### **A(v). Adequate international student supports and advocacy:**

Any university with a significant international student population should have an independently student-elected international student representative or

organisation. The ISC is an autonomous arm of the Guild that sits on a number of university boards and committees and raises legitimate international student issues with Curtin. A similar model should be compulsory at all universities, leading to increased awareness of international student rights and a greater feeling of power given to international students.

**A(vi).** Employment rights and protections from exploitation:

The current laws restricting international students from working more than 20 hours a week are extremely unfair. They limit the capacity for international students to live at the same level as local students, and create the opportunity for exploitation for those students who are forced to do extra work illegally in order to get by. By limiting the amount of hours worked, international students are forced to work underpaid 'cash' jobs in poor working conditions and with a lack of representation when issues arise.

**A(vii).** Appropriate pathways to permanency:

There should be a larger range of courses that international students can complete in order to gain permanent residency. Although limits on numbers can still be imposed, the current arrangement creates overcrowding of international students in certain areas, such as Curtin Business School, while other faculties and courses have very few international students. This creates an imbalance at the university and forces international students into completing courses despite having no intention of working in a related industry.

**C.** Any other related matters:

The Guild and the ISC feel that the most important issue facing international students are the very high fees that they pay for their tuition. Having international students heavily subsidise local students, research and other costs creates a sense of resentment and causes hardship on international students, and has the effect of creating two distinct tiers of students. This situation has arisen because the chronic underfunding of tertiary education has forced universities to look to international students to make up for budgetary shortfalls. This is an unfair situation and should be remedied as quickly as possible.