



UNIVERSITIES
AUSTRALIA

DISCOVER LEARN LEAD

Enhancing the Student Experience & Student Safety

A Position Paper

June 2009

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Executive Summary

The student experience is central to the educational purpose and responsibility of Australia's universities. This paper affirms that student welfare and student safety are preconditions for that experience to be a positive and beneficial one for all.

The paper presents principles that must underpin success in guaranteeing student safety and outlines good practices and positive initiatives that will help ensure that the principles laid down can be fully realised in both the immediate and longer-term future.

The principles and recommended actions in this paper reflect the views of Australia's universities and their determination to sustain and enhance the student experience, and to keep building a strong and resilient international education sector.

The paper presents material on good practice in the universities on campuses, the area most self-evidently within the responsibility of universities. But just as importantly, it fully acknowledges the necessity for reaching beyond campuses and working in partnership with different education providers, governments, employers and others in the community.

Only then can we ensure that all students have a safe and suitable learning environment during the whole of their period of studies. Only then can international education broaden and deepen and realise its full potential for the future for Australia.

Incidents involving international students, particularly from India, gave focus to these issues in May/June 2009. Universities Australia provided a ten point action plan for responding to these problems which drew on the information being developed for this position paper. The plan was closely considered at, and helped inform, a meeting of all Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers held in Hobart on 12 June 2009.

Introduction

Universities Australia represents 38 of Australia's universities in the public interest, both nationally and internationally. Universities Australia strives to support Australian universities in the performance of their roles including through the provision of information for and about universities.

The purpose of this position paper is to document and promote good practice across Australian universities in relation to enhancing student safety on and beyond campuses within a framework of enhancing the student experience and working in close partnership with the wider community. The ideas, activities and processes in this position paper may also be of relevance and use elsewhere in the international education sector and for other stakeholders.

This paper looks directly at the issue of student safety as a first and foundation component of the student experience. The intention is to document the good practice available across Australia's universities as a basis for sharing experience so as to enhance outcomes. At the same time the intention is also to put this objective in the context of practice internationally, as another source of learning, and in the context of the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders so that the benefits of informed partnership can be achieved, particularly in moving beyond immediate campus life obligations.

Part A: Principles and Practice

Universities Australia affirms the following basic principles that must guide good practice in student safety:

1. The quality of the student experience is the paramount consideration to guide action regarding the welfare of students studying at Australian universities.
2. An absolute foundation for the student experience is the provision of a safe environment for study and learning and living.
3. On-campus safety is the responsibility of universities, drawing on the best available practice.
4. Off-campus safety is also a key concern of universities, and it must be pursued in conjunction with relevant external authorities and stakeholders.
5. In all cases universities will seek student and staff involvement in ensuring personal safety and seek to consult with all other stakeholders who can assist in achieving the necessary outcomes.

The precise ways in which these principles may best operate in practice, with due regard for individual university autonomy, varying local circumstances and protection of privacy, is to be the intended purpose and content of ongoing development of guidelines through Universities Australia, in conjunction with key partners sharing a common commitment.

Universities commit to the above basic principles and will continue to develop practical good practice safety guidelines for informing students and providing properly safe facilities for local and international students drawing on the pooling of good university experience internationally and in Australia.

Universities Australia Action Plan

To implement these commitments and obligations, Universities Australia, for its part, has taken the further advice of the Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellors from all Universities Australia members who met in Canberra on 4-5 June 2009 to consider the student experience and student safety issues. On the basis of their discussion and recommendations, the following action plan has been adopted by Universities Australia:

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.
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.
3. Cooperate with governments, local authorities and housing industry representatives 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.
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, and improve public transport safety for all, and encourage employer and union support for assuring safe travel conditions for student workers.

5. Sustain and expand the current provision of information by all education providers on student security and safety from pre-departure programs, arrival and orientation through to graduation; and encourage students themselves to act on this information by taking safety precautions whenever possible.
6. Reinforce strategies for the integration of students of all nationalities and backgrounds on our campuses and in our communities, and promote a greater understanding of international cultures and languages in Australia through collaboration between the Australian Government, overseas governments and international agencies.
7. Cooperate with authorities in student source countries 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 visa issue by Australian authorities is focussed on genuine and suitable educational objectives.
8. Enhance campus-based student support programs in health, child care, counselling, and employment services and expand specific safety programs including through ongoing input from local authorities, such as police commands, road and traffic authorities, real estate institutes and employers. Passage of the Student Services and Amenities Bill by the current parliament would assist this process immeasurably.
9. Encourage campus and national 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.
10. Engage strongly in the forthcoming review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (as amended in 2007) and establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to ensure that appropriate accreditation and quality assurance of all international education providers in Australia is guaranteed, including via strong and effective enforcement mechanisms.

Universities Australia emphasises that these reforms and initiatives, now and into the future, should be based securely on better evidence and research, which is conspicuously under-provided in this area. This includes issues of basic official data on student safety (subject to considerations of privacy and non-discrimination). As a minimum there must be regular authoritative and independent assembly of official data plus survey work to gather student opinion, both local and international, on the student experience including safety and welfare matters, both during and after completion of studies. Universities Australia therefore also recommends an enhancement of funding by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for research and analysis of these issues.

With this foundation secured, Universities Australia looks to enhancement of the international education process itself. In its submission to the Bradley Review of Higher Education, Universities Australia saw a new mature phase for international education as a key objective for the future.

This would seek to widen and enhance the international education experience to include more Australian scholarships for international students, more overseas scholarships for Australian students, more postgraduate enrolments and staff exchange schemes and more inter-university partnerships for teaching and research across borders. This means deepening and broadening the nature of international education beyond its current phase of development.

Around this, ongoing improvement of teaching and learning for all students would enhance the student experience for local and international students alike.

Part B: The Student Experience and Student Safety

Australian universities seek to place the student at the centre of the university experience. To guide this in recent years tools for assessing good teaching practice have been strengthened and been widely adopted in Australian universities. This includes numerous course experience evaluations, course-related student representation arrangements, student adviser services and much more within academic arrangements; and it is backed by new government policy initiatives such as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (and its successor funding) and the establishment of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

But the student experience is not limited to the classroom. The participation of students in the wider life of the university community and the broader Australian community is also important to a fulfilling university experience. Within universities, student services, student union activities and student sports facilities help to create a wider life outside the classroom.

Further enhancement of experience also occurs in a range of ways beyond the campus from internships and work experience, to volunteering opportunities and more, as well as the experience of general living in the wider community. While there is value in allowing reflection and contemplation without immediate distraction, the modern university is also closely integrated into the community. Increasingly universities refer to a triple mission: teaching, research and community engagement.

None of this can succeed however if basic personal safety is not guaranteed. And in recent times a number of threats to an expectation of such safety have come to prominence. It is appropriate for universities therefore to ground a review of good practice for enhancing the student experience with a thorough examination of the provision of a safe environment for study. In particular, concerns that have arisen about harassment, intimidation, robbery and assault need to be forcefully addressed by universities along with other stakeholders.

This paper looks directly at the issue of student safety as a first and foundation component of the student experience. The intention is to document the good practice available across Australia's universities as a basis for sharing experience so as to enhance outcomes. At the same time the intention is also to put this objective in the context of practice internationally, as another source of learning, and in the context of the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders so that the benefits of informed partnership can be achieved, particularly in moving beyond immediate campus life obligations.

It bears repeating that Australia is, by global standards, a most democratic, understanding and safe society. Twenty-five percent of the population is overseas-born, from many countries of origin. The country ranks third in the United Nation's Human Development Index and has three of its cities in the 2009 Top Ten World's Most Liveable Cities list. The country ranks high for honesty in Transparency International's Corruption Index. The Australian university system as a whole was recently ranked as the world's best by the Lisbon Council. So the foundation for a rewarding student experience is there, as is affirmed by the overwhelmingly positive evaluation given by the international students in post-graduation surveys. Nevertheless, any compromise to safety is to be condemned, and all efforts must be made on a continuing basis to guarantee the right learning and living environment for all.

World Values Survey 2007

Australia fares well on tolerance and trust, and international comparative data (% of respondents):

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>All Countries</i>
Importance of tolerance and respect for other people	92.2%	72.2%
Absence of trust for other nationalities	3.5%	14.3%
Dislike of other nationalities as neighbours	5.9%	24.8%

In March 2009 the Deputy Prime Minister announced a *Study in Australia 2010* initiative that provides a useful focus for advancing assessment of the student experience. It is aimed at sustaining a high quality education and learning experience for international students in the face of a difficult economic climate. Naturally, basic safety and a rewarding student experience apply to all students, but the recent concerns have particularly looked at international students. This makes a further initial examination of arrangements that apply for international students appropriate, without for a moment forgetting the like responsibilities that apply for local students.

When the Deputy Prime Minister launched the *Study in Australia 2010* initiative, the enhancement of the student experience was listed as the first of four key themes which were to underpin the *Study in Australia 2010* campaign. It was used as a broad term encompassing engagement with individual students before they arrive in Australia through to ongoing alumni relations after graduation. A key aspect of the student experience however, was recognised as student safety.

Universities Australia aims to partner with the Australian Government and other stakeholders in the further development of good practice guidelines and a complementary set of good practice examples for enhancing the student experience of international students in Australia. In this first instance, through this position paper, student safety is addressed, fully recognising that it is an issue that affects all students but where international students may be especially vulnerable by being away from their own home support networks in a new country.

Australia's universities are located in demographically and geographically diverse areas in Australia. These differences translate to varied safety and security concerns across university campuses. The guidelines being developed will serve to highlight what is good practice in the circumstances facing a particular university campus. They are not necessarily appropriate for all campuses and as such, cannot be mandatory for all Australian universities.

According to DEEWR there are approximately 250,000 international students studying at Australian universities in 2009. There are also several hundred thousand further international students enrolled in other forms of tertiary education beyond the universities. While in many ways these students are similar to the Australian domestic student cohort in the desire to thrive and succeed in their studies, international students face additional hurdles in adapting to a new culture.

International students can face higher safety and security hazards than their domestic student peers due to different knowledge sets, particular living and travel arrangements and some community attitudes.

The documentation of good practice experience and the putting forward of an action plan for appropriate policy initiatives specifically seek to enhance the student experience and student safety of international students in Australian universities. But this also demonstrates good practice for ensuring the safety for all students both domestic and international, and whether studying at a university or at a vocational education and/or training institution.

Part C: International Lessons

A number of countries heavily involved in the international education industry have addressed or attempted to address the issue of safety within the overall student experience of international students. Australia is well placed to learn from the experiences of others in this area as well as its own experience, and so better respond directly and unequivocally to issues of student safety.

Below are some examples of how various countries have addressed the student safety issue drawn from some limited published research and a review of national education websites. It is worth noting that all competitor countries other than the United States of America have to a greater or lesser degree initiated some form of national response to questions around international student safety.

The United Kingdom

The [*Prime Minister's Initiative on International Education*](#) has defined the recent framework for UK government involvement in international education and the student experience. The initiative focuses on sustaining the international education industry and as such recognises the importance of the student experience and student welfare to the industry.

In March 2006, the UK Government funded a conference with the UK National Union of Students and the Office for London on a safe student environment. Participants were asked, 'to consider ways in which partners with an interest in international students in London could work together to improve their safety and freedom from property crime'.

Also in that year the British Council developed a reputation management strategy and published, [*Safety First: A Personal Safety Guide for International Students*](#). This document is readily accessible on the British Council website and goes into considerable detail on safety matters. It is reassuring, stating that overall Britain is safe for the vast majority of international students, but that students can also take action to better assure their own safety.

In 2007 the British Council published [*Creating Confidence*](#), a research project into student safety in the UK. This is to some degree a marketing document as much as a research report. This document outlines the analysis of the international student survey responses on matters of safety. The British Council also surveyed students as to the usefulness of the *Safety First* document with an 80% overall satisfaction rating.

The British Council sponsors an [*annual award for International Student Support*](#) which recognises best practice in supporting international students. This serves to highlight good practice, reward good practice and includes a grant (approximately £5000) to enable continued improvement.

Canada

In Canada one major exemplar initiative is that by the City of Vancouver, which established the [*International Student Safety Project*](#) in 2005. The project aims to make Vancouver the safest international student destination in the world. This followed widespread reporting of safety issues for Asian students in Vancouver. There are plans to expand the project across Canada.

The project was developed by a steering committee including education representatives, police, community groups and city officials. The project aims to: increase awareness of the importance of supporting international student safety; raise awareness of personal safety precautions among international students; disseminate a consistent safety message; and develop high quality safety presentations and materials.

The project resources include:

- a video (18 minutes) that covers the top ten security issues as identified by students;
- a safety card (wallet-sized, with national emergency numbers and space to write numbers specific to the student);
- a student safety passport with information on the ten issues; and
- a facilitator's guide for education institution orientation sessions on safety.

The website of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada includes information for international students. This includes a page on [safety](#).

New Zealand

A paper by Nyland Forbes-Mewett concludes that the New Zealand education industry was convinced that openly discussing the issue of student safety would create fear in the market and dissuade students from travelling to New Zealand for education purposes. This is why, following a Chinese Embassy warning about slipping standards, it is claimed that the New Zealanders chose to affirm the existing *Code of Conduct for Pastoral Care of International Students*, rather than publicly acknowledge the concerns of the Chinese Government.

In 2003, following the absence of new initiatives, Chinese officials effectively closed the Chinese market by stating that New Zealand did not have the accommodation nor infrastructure to support the international student market.

Senior New Zealand government officials played a role in then responding to the problem areas. The then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Dr Michael Cullen began a program of reform which included strengthening the [Code of Practice for Pastoral Care](#) and a new reputation management scheme designed to increase student safety. The New Zealand Government and the education industry worked with the International Education Association Inc. (ISANA), the representative body for professionals in Australia and New Zealand who work in international student services, advocacy, teaching and policy development in international education, and established a National Safety Advisory Group including police, immigration, insurance, and university representation. They have continued to take matters of student safety very seriously, and international student numbers have rebounded.

Russia

In 2005, the safety of international students came into question in Russia (Nyland Forbes-Mewett 2008). Senior politicians led the government response which included:

- establishing of a list of universities the government recommends to students;
- boosting security on and off campuses; and
- establishing security councils on campus.

Australia: current situation

On 26 September 2008, His Excellency Zhang Junsai, Ambassador of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Australia, delivered a speech to the China Education Forum at the University of Sydney entitled *Australia and China: New Direction in Learning Connections*. In this speech the Ambassador highlighted several issues including the need to introduce measures to guarantee students' interests with particular reference to safe accommodation arrangements in Australia. Universities Australia responded to this address by proposing to Ambassador Zhang a China-Australia Higher Education Summit, now planned for late 2009.

Universities Australia had also much earlier, in 1990,, issued its own [code and comprehensive set of guidelines](#) to inform university practice in international education, last updated in 2005. Likewise, in its submissions to the incoming federal Labor Government in late 2007 and 2008, it sought a greater depth and breadth in a new direction for international education. It also made submissions emphasising the need for greater State and Territory engagement to underpin international education.

For this same reason Universities Australia welcomes new attention to international education presaged by the Deputy Prime Minister on 26 May 2009.

Anecdotally it can also be mentioned that officials in higher education agencies in source countries have been stressing the importance of guarantees of student safety if they are to continue to support overseas studies by their nationals, including in Australia.

It was these expressions of concern, plus some from student groups in Australia that led to the formation of a working party from the Deputy and Pro-Vice-Chancellors (International) Committee of Universities Australia to look at good practice in the safety area, one result of which is this position paper.

These initiatives proved all too prescient, as concern over international student safety in Australia escalated in May 2009, including being reported in news bulletins in key source countries for international students. The situation reached a critical point in the week beginning 25 May 2009 following a number of violent attacks on Indian students in Melbourne. The Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna said he was "appalled" by the attacks, and insisted authorities ensure the safety of Indian students:

"We will also impress upon the Australian authorities that such attacks should not be permitted and that it is their responsibility to ensure the well-being and security of our students studying in Australia."

Overall

The common lesson of all the examples listed above is the willingness to publicly acknowledge the concerns of students regarding their safety, the active involvement of senior politicians in coordinating action amongst stakeholders, and the development of practical applications to enhance the safety of international and local students.

Part D: Recent Federal and State Government Initiatives to Address the Student Experience

The **Australian education industry** has a strong framework by global standards designed to protect the rights of international students, protect the reputation of Australian education and safeguard the migration program. The [Education Services for Overseas Students \(ESOS\) ACT 2000](#) (the ESOS Act) and its accompanying National Code goes into precise detail on the activities required of education providers and the consequences for failure to comply. While the ESOS framework primarily protects a student's consumer rights, it also details the student support services education providers are expected to make available to international students. The framework is robust and comprehensive and well-regarded elsewhere - but issues of needing to be updated and better enforced have arisen as a result of recent attention to safety problems. The **Commonwealth Government** has recently committed to such a review.

The **Victorian State Government** established the [Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce](#) which reported in December 2008, making a number of recommendations on accommodation, safety, employment, social inclusion and information provision. The Victorian Government had not yet responded to the recommendations in May 2009, but has now committed itself to finalise its responses promptly.

The **New South Wales State Government** has also established a [taskforce to address the international student experience](#). Its prime objective is to review the international student experience in New South Wales and make recommendations to the NSW Minister for Education and Training on the agreed objectives. It is expected to report by August 2009.

The **South Australian State Government** established a *Taskforce on Enhancing the Overseas Student Experience in Adelaide* in May 2009. The Taskforce aims to investigate and address key issues affecting the experience that overseas students (other than those studying at primary and secondary schools) have while studying in Adelaide. The issues to be addressed are:

- accommodation and accommodation services;
- student welfare and safety;
- employment and employment opportunities;
- cultural and social engagement, including tourism experiences;
- the quality and coordination of information provision;
- the interface between the services currently offered; and
- what is distinctive about the Adelaide international experience.

Taskforce membership includes representatives from each South Australian university; Education Adelaide; Adelaide City Council; the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship; Australian Council for Private Education and Training; TAFE SA; the South Australian Department of Education; Multicultural SA; the Training Advocate; and two international students, one each from the university sector and the VET sector.

Queensland Education and Training International (QETI) was established in 2001 to focus on the development of a sustainable international education and training industry and enhanced student experience in Queensland. A key initiative has included a proactive strategy to work in partnership with industry to provide a positive and fulfilling international student experience, so as to build and develop Queensland's reputation as a safe destination for quality education.

QETI is currently facilitating the formation of an International Student Experience Reference Group chaired by the Hon. Paul Braddy (a former Queensland Education, Training and Police Minister and Chair of the QETI Advisory Board). The Reference Group will formally address a broad range of matters relating to the experiences of international students in Queensland including issues dealing with crime and personal safety.

At the same time, the student experience (including student safety) was already a key theme for this year's **Joint Committee on International Education (JCIE)** work program. This is the specialist committee of senior officials from all jurisdictions that reports to Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for post-school education, the latter recently renamed as the **Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE)**.

The Ministerial Council met in Hobart on 12 June 2009 specifically to discuss international education. The meeting acknowledged the need for a coordinated approach between all jurisdictions to provide the best possible experiences and outcomes for international students. Ministers agreed that comprehensive information about studying and living and working in Australia is essential to improve international student experiences, including their safety and life in their community. Addressing these information needs will be a priority. Better information will minimise risks to students' safety and ensure if their safety is threatened or infringed, students get the help they need. It will also ensure that international students are fully aware of their employment rights and Australia's workplace laws, and where to go for assistance with employment matters.

Australian Education International within the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has launched the *Study in Australia 2010* initiative that is essentially designed to help sustain international recruitment during times of economic downturn, but includes reference to the 'student experience' and the need to ensure this remains fully satisfactory.

AEI also funded an ISANA International Education Association initiative, [the Rainbow Guide](#), which is a template of good practice options for the support of international students intending to study in Australia. The document is comprehensive on information and support initiatives for international students and includes information on student safety.

The Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP made an [announcement to the Federal Parliament](#) in May 2009 on international education and its benefits to Australia. The Minister stated the importance of the student experience including student safety:

"I am aware of and am concerned about the reports in the media of international students' safety being compromised and of their having unsatisfactory experiences while in Australia. I am personally particularly disturbed by a recent violent incident which occurred in my own electorate.

...

Most international students report that they do feel satisfied with their social experience while in Australia. However reports of any violence or discrimination directed at international students can do much damage to our international reputation as a welcoming country.

Today I am announcing that the Government will invite international student representatives to participate in a round table to discuss issues affecting their study experience such as accommodation, welfare and safety. I will also be asking the round table to consider how the Government can best hear and respond to their views on these and other issues of vital concern to international students, on a continuing basis.

...

The outcome of this round table, along with other international education issues, will inform discussions with State and Territory education ministers at the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education later this year and we will agree on what more needs to be done to promote and protect Australia's reputation as a safe destination for top quality study and research."

The Roundtable will be an opportunity for international students to voice their concerns to government and make suggestions for improvement on any aspect of the student experience including student safety.

The Foreign Minister the Hon. Stephen Smith MP similarly announced on 2 June 2009 a Task Force of officials to coordinate the Government's security response to the attacks on international students.

At the same time the **Australian Greens** have instigated a [Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students](#). On 1 June 2009, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young stated in a media release that:

"Student safety is just one issue that must be addressed, as well as student welfare, access to adequate accommodation, exploitation and discrimination within employment, the conduct of migration agents, and visa requirements.

"For the sake of not only international students' rights and wellbeing, but also Australia's reputation internationally, we need to establish effective benchmarks and quality control mechanisms within the international education sector, and make sure that it is regulated properly.

"A Senate Inquiry will be an effective way of dealing with this whole range of issues, through a transparent process in which state governments, education providers, students and the public can participate."

Part E: Australian University Initiatives to Enhance Safety

Australian universities address the safety of their students in two ways: firstly, by creating a safe environment on campus and creating awareness among their students of good safety practice; secondly, by working with authorities, employers and the wider community to assist in creating a safer environment outside the campus for students.

Creating a Safe Campus Environment

Universities are responsible for ensuring a safe learning environment for all their students. As such, a great many of the safety initiatives described below are for the benefit of all staff and students, not solely the international student cohort.

Because each university campus is different, the means used to ensure the safety of those on campus will be different. However there are a number of approaches that most, if not all, universities take in creating a safe environment. These include:

- **24 hour campus security.** Universities each have their own security to protect both property and persons on campus. Security is twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Students and staff can contact security at any time to request assistance.
- **Security monitoring.** Many campuses are further protected by security monitoring technologies. This includes the use of closed circuit television cameras and restricted swipe-card only access to university buildings for students and staff.
- **Security escort service.** Many campuses either make their security staff available or employ and train students working in pairs to escort staff and students across campus if requested. This can include requesting an escort from the library to student residences, to the car park or to bus or train stations.
- **Shuttle buses.** These are provided between and across campuses where appropriate. Of course, some universities have only one campus, and some campuses may be too small to warrant a bus service.

- **Emergency telephones.** Many campuses have installed emergency telephones outside buildings or near transport hubs that connect to their security office. These telephones are numbered or are automatically identified by the system, enabling security staff to know the exact location of a student requiring assistance.
- **Well lit campuses.** Universities and their security and facilities staff ensure that areas of the campus used by students and staff after dark are well lit. This includes lighting in car parks and across campus.
- **Safety Committees.** Many universities have established campus-based safety committees comprising students and staff. These committees review and monitor safety issues on each campus, making recommendations for on-campus improvements or targeted awareness-raising initiatives as appropriate.
- **Reporting Crime.** Students are encouraged to report all instances of crime to university security or police to ensure an accurate understanding of the areas of risk to staff and students and to enable more targeted resourcing to address problems as they arise.
- **Critical Event Response Plans.** A number of universities have established critical incident response plans for managing a critical incident including those involving any international students. These plans typically include risk reduction measures, assigned responsibilities, critical incident management and reporting procedures and emergency contact details.

Macquarie University Help Points

Macquarie University has established strategically placed "help points" across the campus with the intention of making the university a safer campus for all staff and students.

A Help Point is a custom made device, designed to meet Macquarie University specifications. It is comprised of a Direct Dial telephone line to the Security Control Room (simply press the red button), a speaker, blue light on top and a camera in the vicinity that is activated when the button is pressed. Students activate the Help Point by pressing the red button, it dials the Security Control Centre emergency line and lights up a special help point line, letting Control know which help point is calling.

Simultaneously, an alarm is sent to the Security Control Centre Alarm Monitoring System detailing which Help Point has been activated. This in turn initiates a camera lock on to the Help Point and the beginning of CCTV recording.



Enhancing Student Awareness of Safety

An important aspect of assuring student safety rests with the individual student. Students are able to take measures to better assure their own safety – but in order to do so they need to be well informed of the risks and appropriate measures to take to reduce that risk. To this end universities engage in a wide variety of initiatives to increase student awareness of risk and corresponding safety initiatives, as well as increase their skills in assuring their own safety while in Australia.

Pre-departure information briefings

International students begin their engagement with Australia well before their arrival in the country. Pre-departure briefings, and the provision of factual and up-to-date information before departure, are both opportunities for universities to start ensuring students are aware of their own safety and the potential risks to it prior to arrival in Australia.

Universities engage in pre-departure briefings for their students. Depending on the size of the student cohort this will either involve university representatives travelling to the students' home cities and conducting the briefings themselves; in-country agent briefings; video conferences; or the provision of detailed information.

All universities distribute information to intending students either at pre-departure briefings or at another point prior to departure. This information is intended to cover everything a student needs (or may need) to know before arriving in Australia about their prospective stay. The information provided is tailored to each university and the city in which they are located.

Student Life @ The University of New South Wales

An example of this is the UNSW publication, [Student Life @ UNSW](#). The Guidebook is designed to facilitate a smooth transition to life at UNSW including: how to prepare, what to bring, where to stay, airport reception, and what to do upon arrival.

The topics covered in the Guidebook include:

- [Preparing to Leave](#) - guide on preparations and practical matters before departing
- [Arriving in Sydney](#) - describes things to do upon arrival and services to welcome and support newly-arrived students
- [Living in Sydney](#) - outlines various aspects of living in Sydney and student life
- [About UNSW](#) - contains important information about UNSW
- [Pre-Departure Checklist](#) – lists essential documents for entry to Australia; important items to include in hand luggage; things to advise UNSW International Student Support pre-departure for Australia; customs and quarantine requirements
- Other Important Quarantine Matters

The section on *Living in Sydney* includes comprehensive information on safety including general safety tips, security in the home, securing personal belongings, personal safety and security and road and transport safety information.

Victoria University Pre-departure Briefings in India

Victoria University enrolls a significant cohort of students from South Asia every year. The University is aware of the increase in theft and violence in Melbourne's western suburbs affecting students from South Asia. In an effort to protect their students, Victoria University has been working with the Police Multicultural Taskforce based in Footscray and international students on a program to maximise student safety.

A key aspect of this is the realisation that there are cultural issues that need to be addressed. Many of the University's international students come from countries where police routinely fail to respond to reports of violence or expect a bribe before they will act. Further, many students fear that their visas or applications for residency will be revoked if they are considered to be trouble-makers or in any way involved with the police.

To combat this, Victoria University has been working with the police through a safety week program where police are invited onto the campus, distribute resources, give presentations and reaffirm the message that the police have no interest in a student's visa status but are there to ensure their safety while in Australia. The police and Indian students have even organised a social cricket match to further break down barriers and establish relationships.

The Victoria Police will now be participating in pre-departure briefings in India so that at the very beginning of a student's experience the police are able to inform students and their parents of the safety risks, the means for students to address those risks, and of the role of the police in seeking to support and protect students while in Australia.

On arrival into Australia

Considerable information is provided to students on their arrival into Australia. Much of this occurs during orientation week activities. Orientation week (or 'O week') is the week prior to the formal commencement of studies for university students. This is an opportunity to learn about the university environment and that of their new city, particularly for first year students.

O week activities can be broadly divided into those programs designed to inform students on academic life including choosing classes, using the library, plagiarism rules, student services and student support and those designed to enable students to settle in more generally including making friends and finding people on campus with similar interests to themselves such as student clubs, barbecues, lunchtime concerts and the like.

An important aspect of orientation week is the provision of information. Many universities are now taking the opportunity to have police and fire brigade officials on campus during this time to present sessions on student safety, provide information to students, and better assure students of their key role in supporting and protecting students while in Australia.

Universities work in partnership with state police and fire services to ensure students are provided with information about the safety risks they may face in Australia as well as providing them with information and skills to enhance their own safety. Excellent examples of partnerships between a university and the police in this area are that of the University of Wollongong and the University of Ballarat.

University of Wollongong Safety Awareness for International Students

The University of Wollongong and the NSW Police have collaborated to produce a [University of Wollongong Safety Guide for International Students](#). This document provides a comprehensive guide on student safety including information on the police and their role in the community; university security; tips to improve personal safety; and what to do if you become a victim of crime. Importantly this brochure is provided to all international students and is available in both English and Mandarin.

The University of Ballarat

The University of Ballarat has collaborated with the City of Ballarat and the Victoria Police to produce a safety brochure in the form of fridge magnet designed for easy reference when required. It includes emergency contact numbers specifically for the university (and advice for students to program these numbers into their mobiles) and local community services. Importantly the information is repeated in both Mandarin and Hindi on the reverse side of the brochure.

General information provision

Students can often seem swamped with information in the first weeks of their arrival in Australia. While it is vitally important that they receive information on their safety as soon as possible, it is also important that they remain aware of their personal safety throughout their stay.

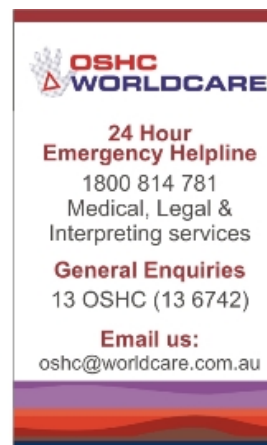
Universities approach this in a number of ways. The information is provided in hard copy during and/or prior to O week, enabling students to refer to this information as and when they require it. This information is also included on university websites in the area devoted to student information. Using the web in addition to providing hard copy material to provide information to students acknowledges that each student accesses information differently. It also enables the information to be constantly updated as new services become available or as specific issues arise.

A number of universities also use their on-campus safety committees to publish periodic newsletters on safety issues. These include reminders on safety risks; tips for ensuring personal safety on and off campus, information on services available to students; as well as updates on emerging safety issues or initiatives. These newsletters can be distributed electronically or made available in residences, in libraries or in areas of the universities frequently accessed by students (such as cafes, student unions and computer labs). Universities can also ensure ongoing attention to personal safety by periodically emailing international students with relevant safety advice. This can include sun safety tips approaching summer, advice on home security and road safety prior to vacations, and information on drink spiking and how to prevent it throughout the year.

Griffith University

Students may need to access information on their safety in a hurry following an incident or should they fear for their personal safety at any time. Noting that students may not remember key numbers or what they need to do in these situations, Griffith University has produced a wallet-sized safety information card.

The card provides an easy reference for emergency and security numbers on and off campus, interpreter services if needed, as well as numbers for health insurance contacts.



On-campus safety initiatives and skills development

As well as general information provision, universities also provide specific on-campus activities designed to increase student safety. These initiatives can include Safety Week activities such as those referred to at Victoria University, appointing safety ambassadors from among the student body (including in university residences) to ensure ongoing awareness, and activities that invite the police on campus such as social cricket matches.

The University of Melbourne

Each semester the Victoria Police and the Melbourne Fire Brigade are invited on campus to participate in a safety awareness campaign. The campaign's focus is on personal and property safety. The Police provide safety advice and security mark all transportable valuable items for staff and students e.g. laptops, mobile phones, bicycles etc. These personalised campaigns help to present Emergency Services personnel to international students in a positive and helpful manner.

Universities are also aware of the considerable knowledge resting with their local students. Local students have their own safety skills, knowledge of the city, and how to manage the university experience. Many universities run mentoring programs for first year students, both international and local. The programs serve two purposes, in that they facilitate friendships between local and international students as well as allow for the transfer of knowledge.

The University of Adelaide

The award-winning Peer Mentor program at the University of Adelaide is a successful program designed to ease international students into university life. Informal dialogue with a peer can often be an effective support and guidance mechanism for students. The program includes an orientation section including tours, workshops, social events and information sessions. Mentors (Australian students in their second year and beyond) are able to talk to international students in a relaxed environment, share their experiences of living and studying in Adelaide, and respond to questions from new international students. The program has been so successful it is being rolled out across faculties to cope with demand from Australian students wishing to be involved as mentors and from international students seeking to expand their friendship groups and better adjust to life in their new city.

Considering Safety Beyond the Campus

Naturally a significant part of student living takes place outside formal campus conditions. This is even more so for non-university providers who are also important for international student education. But most students travel, live and often work beyond the immediate conditions of a campus.

Some contribution to the off-campus enhancement of safety can be made by organised university activity and information provision. For example, universities also run specific training for enhancing safety. These include beach visits for international students from cities or countries where ocean safety is either not an issue or not discussed. These beach visits involve introducing students to life guards, presentations on beach safety, understanding the flags, sun safety and appropriate behaviour on the beach. In some universities this can extend to swimming lessons for international students without those skills or who lack confidence in their swimming ability.

Many universities also run self defence lessons for all students. These are frequently offered by the Student Sports Union (or a similar body on campus), via referral to a community service, or can be a specific program in O week activities. The International Office of UNSW runs a program, *Fight like a Girl* aimed at improving the self defence responses of female students.

But wider issues arise and now most universities seek partnerships with local authorities and community groups to consider student safety concerns off campus. These typically involve police, fire and other emergency authorities as well as health authorities.

Victoria International Directors' Committee (VIDC) and Victoria Police Initiative

The VIDC with representatives from all Victorian Universities and the Victoria Police have established an International Student Safety working group to develop strategies to raise awareness of personal and property safety amongst international students. The other emergency services have joined the working group - Life Saving Victoria, Crime Stoppers and Melbourne Fire and Emergency Services Board - with a united aim of developing a range of communication strategies to raise personal safety issues amongst international students.

The development of a safety DVD is the proposed keystone in the safety communication strategy. The DVD will be a "real life" scenario based production, consisting of a number of chapters including personal, road, water and fire safety issues. The DVD would be available to all education providers to broadcast during orientation and any other relevant opportunities.

It is hoped that this realistic approach will:

- help raise safety awareness amongst international students; and
- encourage students to seek help and report crime and incidents to the police.

At the present time, it appears some international students may be reluctant to report incidents to the police because of misinformation that their visas will be cancelled or that the police will not respond, or from fear of further attacks from a perpetrator. It is hoped that the DVD will address these concerns.

RMIT University

An innovative approach to engaging international students with the local community is the GLoBALL Program.

A joint initiative of the Essendon Football Club, the City of Melbourne, the Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS) and RMIT University, the program aims to assist international students to connect with the community and other students while immersing themselves in the Australian culture and way of life. Students participating in the program attend Essendon games, sit with the Essendon Cheer Squad, are allocated a buddy from the Essendon membership, and attend skills days as they choose.

The program enables international students to understand Australian Rules Football, become a part of their community and join in conversations with local students about football.

A blended approach that mixes on and off-campus conditions is the new knowledge community concept where university-related accommodation sits alongside knowledge-precinct businesses and services and university facilities. This produces a student-friendly and all-hours supportive environment. A good example is the Kelvin Grove campus of the Queensland University of Technology which has created an “urban village” environment for staff, students and related businesses and activities ranging from university teaching and research activities to coffee shops, restaurants, theatres and galleries.

In addition, wider state/territory - university policy issues need consideration at a government level. This includes pathways between universities and VET, transport concession arrangements, state planning provisions including soft and hard infrastructure coordination, international student access to community and children’s education services. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes have been reluctant to include this overlap between what is often seen as Commonwealth responsibility (universities) and the many State/Territory services that are needed for all students, including international students, to be successfully supported.

Survey evidence shows that international students feel that the absence of travel concessions on par with local students implies they are not viewed as “welcome guests” but are rather seen only as “cash cows”. However the recent safety incidents have brought forward some valuable new State initiatives.

Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA)

The ECCWA has been concerned at potential under-reporting of student safety issues because of fears that this may affect a student’s visa status. It therefore has launched a website of its own to get around this issue through a trusted independent auspice: <http://overseasstudentsmatter.multiculturalwa.org.au>

The site includes both advice and reporting elements, including an incident report form that can be submitted anonymously.

Other issues also arise beyond the confines of the campus, because here universities must work in partnership with other stakeholders. Among the key problems where greater priority attention is needed are each of transport, work and accommodation. Here there is a variety of approaches and little systematic codification. As a result, good practice is yet to be well-defined and much more urgent work is needed to change this. Discussion of some of the key considerations follows.

Employment

There is a paucity of information on what the practices and responsibilities are for employers of international students. In Australia the vast majority of local and international students undertake employment while studying, even as full-time students. Amongst other things, anecdotally there is evidence that international students' employment choices can potentially place them at risk given late night or irregular hours in travel.

What here are the responsibilities of employers to their workers? How far must they assist in supporting employees travel to and from work safely and provide safety while working, e.g. taxi driving, pizza delivery? How can universities assist in providing information on employment?

Universities Australia also believes that employer bodies should be included in consultations regarding suitable employment arrangements for students, including the development of best practice guidelines for their members especially in regard to the conditions applying to those employees working in vulnerable circumstances as regards their personal safety both at work and in work-related travel.

How far can government assist universities in supporting safe and regulated employment related to studies such as through internships and work experience programs? Universities Australia has proposed a National Internship Scheme to government which could help significantly here. Universities Australia believes that governments should work with employers and universities to increase paid work experience options that will enhance the student experience and safe work.

Universities Australia National Internship Scheme – Major Features

In May 2008, Universities Australia proposed the development of a [National Internship Scheme](#). This would involve partnerships with between universities, employers and governments. The intention was to integrate study and work experience in a systematic way. This would enhance employability skills, increase student motivation and provide improved opportunities for well-regulated paid work while studying. Universities Australia strongly advocated the inclusion of international students in this scheme.

In terms of international education this would help keep Australian education at the frontier of innovation. Surveys show disappointment by international students over access to, and quality of, work experience. For safety, the more well-regulated paid work available, the less the need for employment in out-of-hours, insecure and risky jobs.

Government has yet to act in a major way on these proposals.

Likewise, Universities Australia supported proposals for a volunteer community service corps considered by the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit in April 2008. Universities Australia emphasised the importance of including international student volunteers in any such scheme so as to enhance the students' understanding and experience of Australia, and Australia's acquaintance with them and their knowledge and perspectives.

There is a major need for employers to learn to better tap cultural diversity as a strength in business development. An Internship scheme or Volunteer program would provide a strong platform for this improvement.

Transport

Regarding transport, could safe travelling programs that currently exist for local students (especially school-age) and which also encompass the general public, particularly the elderly, be utilised or modified to benefit the international students, who have not had the exposure of many locals to these matters? What are the responsibilities of transport providers to not only seek to ensure safe travel but to provide information related to this and in what ways? How well do transport route planning and timetables take into account student safety obligations?

As a concrete, specific proposal, Universities Australia believes that giving transport concessions to international students would be a significant goodwill gesture to show them and their families that they are valued by the state of residence. At present, NSW and Victoria do not accord such concessions. There is strong survey evidence from international student graduates that the denial of concessions on an equitable basis with local students is the other feature of their education experience that is most criticised, alongside access to work experience, within the generally positive evaluations provided.

In the case of international students, where issues such as denial of student transport concessions rankle deeply, it is important for state/territory authorities to recognise not only the importance of basic civil society obligations but that through GST payments by international students and their visiting families and income tax paid while working, these students certainly pay their way. Students feel denial of concessions shows they are not viewed as welcome guests but more as 'cash cows'. This contributes to an attitude of resentment that can flare up and damage the whole sector.

Extending transport concessions to international students would not only contribute to enhancing student safety and a sense of belonging, it could be revenue neutral for public transport operators. Lower fares would be offset by increased patronage, as the elasticity of demand by low-income students is likely to be quite high. A careful and independent economic analysis of transport concessions would help resolve the factual issue and is likely to demonstrate that resistance is actually counter-productive for the two state governments that continue to deny access to concessions for international students.

A related issue is that of improving access to public schools for the children of international students. This is included in recommendation 15 of the [Review of Australian Higher Education Report, December 2008 \(the Bradley Report\)](#):

That the Australian Government liaise with states and territories to ensure consistent policies for school-fee waivers for the dependants of international research students in government-subsidised places and examine its visa arrangements to improve conditions for spouse work visas.

Accommodation

Most universities provide some on-campus accommodation. How far should there be a priority for new arrivals to access such accommodation, at least initially? Can more on or near campus accommodation be provided, including through public-private partnerships or other knowledge finance activities e.g. market debt raising by universities? Can working with real-estate associations assist in enhancing provision arrangements? What must students know about the roles and responsibilities of landlords, including in relation to safety of premises and beyond? How can local government engage on this process?

Universities Australia believes that government departments could work with other stakeholders to educate students and private accommodation providers about their responsibilities in relation to international students. Universities would be very interested to cooperate with any relevant government department to develop material for students and accommodation providers. Relevant industry associations in the areas of property and real estate should also be invited to develop material for their members on these matters, including guides to good practice and education programs for their members.

***The Australian National University and UniLodge:
Accommodation Provision through a Public-Private Partnership***

The ANU has developed a partnership with UniLodge to provide additional student accommodation within the university precinct. This public-private partnership has expanded the availability of university accommodation and enables the ANU to offer an accommodation guarantee to all first year undergraduates from outside of Canberra.

First year undergraduate students from outside the Australian Capital Territory region (either an Australian or an international student) are guaranteed an offer of university accommodation - either a place in a University Hall, Affiliated College or other approved University accommodation. This enables students to focus on the broad student experience rather than the stresses of finding suitable safe accommodation upon arrival.

Should student accommodation become a matter for social housing policy? Can specific new funding arrangements be extended to the student housing area? Will enhanced student services and amenities charge provisions be allowed so as permit better provision of housing advice and services, as well as employment, transport, health and a whole range of other under-funded underpinnings of the student experience?

Since the adoption of “voluntary student unionism” policies in Australia the capacity of universities to properly fund these services under the funding provided by government has been problematic. The recent drop in investment revenues has also compromised that source of funding for such purposes. A new start on student service charges would help mightily; and Universities Australia looks to expeditious parliamentary support on this matter.

Impact of “Voluntary Student Unionism” and Employment on Campus

A number of universities have a ‘students first’ employment policy for on-campus jobs in which employers are asked to consider employing students before advertising more widely for jobs on campus. There are many and varied reasons for this, but students who are employed on campus reduce their safety risks through less travel, better hours and a regulated environment where visa restrictions are understood, and students are less open to unscrupulous treatment by employers.

The Australasian Campus Union Managers’ Association (ACUMA) and Australian University Sport (AUS) produced a report on the [impact of Voluntary Student Unionism](#). A key finding of the study was that there has been a loss of employment across the student services sector, with more than 1,000 jobs lost in the student services area, alongside loss of important services for students that do have implications for safety, e.g., employment advice, counselling, childcare, health.

Conclusion

The May/June 2009 incidents of attacks on international students from India who are studying in Australia have focussed attention on student safety as a crucial foundation for the student experience. This position paper provides detail on Universities Australia's proposed policies to improve that experience and associated safety practices in a number of other countries and as conducted within Australia's universities.

The paper is the beginning of further review and of improvement strategies planned in this area. The outcome will be a thorough updating and revision of Universities Australia's own earlier [code and guidelines](#) on the provision of education to international students for Australian universities.

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