



UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT

Submission to Senate Inquiry

Into

the Welfare of International Students

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Recommendations from the University of Ballarat (UB)

UB recommends the introduction of public transport concessions for international students.

UB recommends that safety programs for international students include information and training about bushfire, total fire ban days and fire safety generally.

UB recommends that the Federal Government enable provision in existing capital funding grants to universities for the construction of additional international student accommodation.

UB recommends that visa costs for international students be reviewed by the Federal Government.

UB recommends the creation of an international student traineeship program which combines 20 hours of paid work in an industry related to the student's degree.

Introduction

The University of Ballarat (UB), as a dual sector University¹, welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee to make a submission to its Inquiry into the welfare of international students studying in Australia.

The first recorded admission of international students to a tertiary education institution in Australia occurred in 1873 when international students were admitted to the School of Mines in Ballarat (a predecessor institution to UB). In 1906, the first international student agreement in Australia was struck between the City of Shenzhen and the School of Mines in Ballarat. UB still continues this relationship with the City of Shenzhen and especially Shenzhen Polytechnic.

The *University of Ballarat Act 1993* identifies “The conduct of teaching, research, consultancy and development activities within and outside Australia” as one of UB’s objectives. UB has from its earliest days been aware of the importance and centrality of internationalisation. In late 1995, UB established an International Office to facilitate the recruitment, education, support and graduation of its international students. Further, UB has long held that internationalisation is more than a preoccupation with student numbers and levels of student satisfaction. Rather UB has interpreted internationalisation as a process encompassing “matters relating to culture, curriculum, staff and student exchanges, and community engagement”.

International Students at UB

UB’s commitment to diversity and its objective to provide educational opportunities for international students is reflected in its international student profile. UB currently has more than 7500 international students from approximately 40 countries as shown in Table 1. International students are able to access UB programs and courses through three modes of delivery:

¹ The University of Ballarat offers both TAFE and Higher Education courses.

- On-campus in Ballarat at Mt Helen, Camp Street and SMB campuses
- Off-campus (on-shore) through Education Agreements with Partner Providers located in Melbourne, Sydney, Geelong and Adelaide
- Off-campus (off-shore) through Education Agreements in Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, and Singapore

Table 1: International students, University of Ballarat, 2003-07

Country of Origin	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% change 2003-07
India	463	1848	2424	2857	3857	933.0
Pakistan	24	43	47	120	236	883.3
Nepal	65	92	63	116	624	860.0
China*	218	331	334	335	352	261.5
Other	513	383	378	376	390	-23.9
* Excludes SARs and Taiwan Source: University of Ballarat, International Activities, 2009.						

UB is proving attractive both on-shore and off-shore to students wishing to undertake post-graduate course work (Table 2). In 2007, for example, 72 per cent of UB on-shore international students were pursuing post-graduate qualifications by coursework, and 69 per cent of off-shore students were doing likewise. UB internationalisation programs are therefore appealing predominantly to students pursuing second degrees.

Table 2 Overseas students, Program Type, University of Ballarat, 2003-07

On-shore	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Undergraduate	786	934	949	1109	1459
Post-graduate (coursework)	850	2170	2834	2860	4041
Other	18	47	50	32	60
Research	15	16	28	33	28
Off-shore					
Undergraduate	323	341	261	230	270
Post-graduate (coursework)	277	464	657	734	594
Other	4	1	1	2	0
Research	0	0	0	0	0

International students have access to a range of support services throughout the student life cycle, including airport meeting and transfer, orientation, accommodation, academic support, counselling, health, employment, social activities, career advice, information technology and library services. Although responsibility and arrangements for the provision of some services are location-specific, UB monitors the quality of services for both on-campus and off-campus international students.

UB provides services to on-campus international students, and Partner Providers are required to provide counselling, academic support, computers, and lecture/tutorial and library facilities in accordance with Education Agreements. Annual compliance and ESOS audits include a review of student support services with areas for improvement identified.

On-campus students are provided with orientation information regarding: living in Ballarat; accommodation; and UB support services including counselling, health and library services. Off-campus international students receive orientation programs from the Partner Providers relative to their location. Orientation to UB, including information about academic matters, UB policies and processes, and library support is provided by the Schools and Library Services at all teaching locations.

The English for Academic Purposes [EAP] Program is available for on-campus international students who require an IELTS (or equivalent) overall band score of 6.0 for entry into UB HE programs. EAP also has an adjunct program, the English Corner, where volunteer staff and students assist international students with conversational English at weekly sessions. The program provides students with social and educational interaction not usually accessible before entry into HE programs.

Partner Providers are required to deliver English-language support to students studying at off-campus locations. Adequate provision of support is monitored by Schools and reviewed by the University as part of the ESOS review cycle.

On-campus international students are supported through a farewell process, including celebratory activities, transition to employment, and reorientation advice for post-university life through Student Support. Partner Providers assist students with various transition activities; for example, some Providers have access to employment services. Graduates from Partner Providers are encouraged to attend University of Ballarat graduation ceremonies at Mt Helen. In 2009, Graduation ceremonies will be held for international students who are studying at interstate Partner Providers. Graduation ceremonies have been successfully conducted overseas for a number of years.

There are matters relating to the terms of reference of the current Inquiry about which the University comments as follows.

Public Transport Concessions

The ongoing issue of the lack of a transport concession being available for international students is having a significant impact on international student attitudes to study in Australia and therefore ***UB recommends the introduction of public transport concessions for international students.*** This has been reported in the local and overseas media and raised in recent forums where issues affecting the drop in numbers of Indian students applying to study in Australia have been discussed. A recent meeting in Melbourne convened by the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria on 31 July 2009 is one such example.

The inequity of the provision of student concessions across Australia has been raised over a number of years. The option of providing these concessions has repeatedly been declined by the State Governments in Victoria and New South Wales with cost reportedly being the major factor. These two States have the highest numbers of international students and therefore receive the greatest share of the economic benefit from the income generated by these students. It has been commented in the Victorian Government Overseas Student Experience Taskforce (December 2008) that this inequity has a significant impact on the feeling of

welcome for international students when they arrive, and an ongoing sense of unfairness as they continue to pay more for their travel. International students are high users of public transport, which exacerbates the financial pressure they experience when they arrive to study in Australia.

Public Safety Concerns

International students are not always aware of the safety issues in Australia. Surveys conducted by UB indicate that many international students are reluctant to contact police or security staff because in their home country such action could have negative consequences for them. In addition, there is concern among the students that their visa status may be affected if they report anything to the police, or come under police scrutiny.

Programs in universities which focus on raising public safety and give students the opportunity to meet with police officers in an informal way, certainly assist students to feel more comfortable about the role of police in their locality. These programs put a strain on police resources and it may be prudent to provide additional consideration for funding for community policing sections to ensure that liaison with education providers can be facilitated.

UB recommends that safety programs for international students include information and training about bushfire, total fire ban days and fire safety generally. The information and understanding about the legal and regulatory frameworks related to safety in Australia is critical for international students, particularly those who arrive at the start of the year in the bushfire season. Many international students like to travel and enjoy the sights prior to their study commencing, and therefore this information needs to be part of the pre-departure information. For those who are accessing national parks, dangers relating to wildlife and care of the bush need to be understood.

Accommodation

Provision of low cost, acceptable student housing for international students is an important component of their success in achieving their study goals. If students end up in overcrowded, unsuitable housing, the impacts on their attitude to Australia as a place to study can be affected markedly. This often results in negative word-of-mouth feedback to their home country.

In Ballarat, there is very limited availability of rental accommodation. The added burden of providing referee reports and other documentation for international students makes this market very difficult for international students given that many are looking for cheaper accommodation. This sector of the market is very heavily sought after by other students and members of the community.

UB recommends that the Federal Government enable provision in existing capital funding grants to universities for the construction of additional international student accommodation. This would allow the students to establish themselves in the country, to develop friendships and become familiar with the rental system in Australia, and provide them with a referee report from the university accommodation service to support them into the private rental market.

Cost of Obtaining a Student Visa

The cost of a student visa and the associated costs of the compulsory medical test make the process of applying for a student visa significantly higher for international students when compared with Australia's major competitor countries. Australian visa costs are approximately \$540 which is four times more expensive than the average cost for most other countries. This is a disincentive for the students when compared with major competitors such as the UK, USA and Canada. ***UB recommends that visa costs for international students be reviewed by the Federal Government.***

In addition, the changes in some assessment levels, coupled with delays in processing visa applications and the Federal Government's changes to skilled migration policy, have made it increasingly more difficult for prospective students. This is in contrast to other countries which have moved to make the visa process easier for international students.

Employment Services for Students

Many international students need to find work to support themselves and must juggle the requirements of study and financial pressure in balancing the hours they work. In addition, many international students express a desire to gain permanent residency and try to get profession /study related part time work, so that they can have relevant experience and referees to offer a potential graduate employer. This type of work experience increases their chances of gaining a graduate position.

UB recommends the creation of an international student traineeship program which combines 20 hours of paid work in an industry related to the student's degree. This initiative would have benefits to the student in accessing relevant professional experience and also recognise the limitations on the 20 hours of paid work an international student is able to undertake under the conditions of their student visa.