



Student Guild | University of Western Australia

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations

Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students

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Prepared by

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Members of the Senate Inquiry,

I would like to submit this short document in support of the research and recommendations of the National Union of Students Submission to this Inquiry. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to take part in such a forum, which the UWA Student Guild believes is long overdue.

Due to funding cuts to Higher Education over the past decade and previous to the recent Federal Budget, International Students have become an important source of income to Universities. Many of them are paying tens of thousands of dollars annually to study in Australian Universities and Private Colleges.

Despite being such an important source of income for Universities, many institutions have neglected the specific needs of these students while studying. Thankfully, the issue of support for International Students has become a focus in the Sector recently, most notably in the auditing process by the Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Even though Western Australia has not seen the same level of attacks on students as other states, the issues facing International Students in this state are no different. In many cases they are the target of racism and violence off campus.

With rents in Western Australia some of the highest in the country, International Students, even more so than domestic students, have been the subject of exploitation through overcrowded residences and overpriced rents.

While Universities such as UWA have done their best to support International Student's accommodation, the demand outweighs the supply and many institutions have appeared to simply 'give up' on the issue.

Due to the inordinate expense associated with studying in Australia and the restrictive nature of their visa conditions, everyday International Students are working illegally, trying to make ends meet.

These jobs, due to their clandestine nature, are often at lower pay rates and with fewer safeguards, meaning International Students are treated as second class workers. These students are unwilling and unable to speak out; afraid that they will be deported and lose the time and money they and their families have invested in their education.

Any improvement to the treatment of International Students in Australia can be easily justified on the basis of equality. There is no justification that there should be a two tiered system at our universities or in society.

The fact that International Students are unable to access public transport travel

concessions in Victoria and New South Wales is a perfect example. There should be no distinction drawn between international and domestic students since both are facing the same financial constraints. In Western Australia, all tertiary students are eligible to receive travel concessions.

The same issue of equality comes to the fore when comparing the treatment of International Students at Universities and Private Colleges.

International Students at Universities have (at least) some safeguards regarding their treatment. There are external groups such as Student Unions and Guilds which advocate for International Students and their interests, as well as internal processes through Faculties, Complaints Management Units and International Departments, etc for students to resolve their issues.

Universities are also subject to frequent auditing by AUQA and review by DEEWR. These provide a safety net for the treatment of International Students and ensure that a regulatory framework is in place.

For students studying in Private Colleges, the same can not be said. There is not the same level of auditing and review of their operations or treatment of International Students. There is little to no requirement for support services to be made available to students studying at the colleges, and there is no evidence that independent representative structures exist.

It is completely inequitable that such colleges are not open and accountable to the same kinds of regulation and auditing that other Higher Education providers are.

I would like to strongly encourage the Senate Committee to follow the recommendations of the National Union of Students Submission on this matter. It is a positive first step that this inquiry is taking place, but it must be accompanied by real reform to the treatment and welfare of International Students in Australia.

Regards,

Dominic Rose