

August 19th 2024

**Committee Secretary**

Senate Education and Employment Committees

Delivered by email to [eec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eec.sen@aph.gov.au)

**RE: Inquiry into the Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024**

Dear Committee Secretariat,

I write today to provide an answer to a question I took on notice at a public hearing of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee on Tuesday, August 6th 2024, as well as to provide some further clarifying comments to supplement the evidence provided by myself and Janageeth Logeswaran.

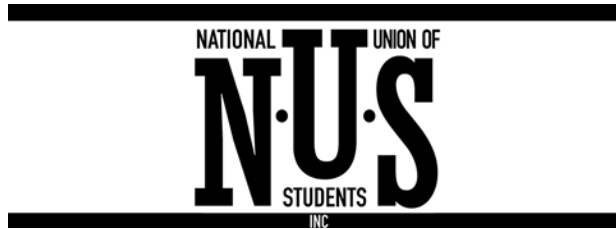
**Question on Notice**

In response to a question asked by Senator Sheldon, I would like to highlight a couple of the “hard stories” of student accommodation that we’ve heard from our membership.

These examples were kindly provided by Jordy Duffy, Vice President of Student Rights at the University of Queensland Union. They have been deidentified and are part of a broader survey into the cost of living crisis as experienced by University of Queensland students being prepared by Jordy and their co-VP, Jeryn.

*“As an international student, housing has been a big struggle. I obviously don’t have family here (most of us don’t) so it’s not an option. Student accommodations would be our next choice however the prices have increased way too much, almost 30% in just a year (Scape, UniLodge, Iglu, basically all of them). This pushes international students to compete in the rental market with Australian Citizens/PR, many of whom are working adults and will obviously be preferred by landlords due to the income stability. We have to face so many rejections, the pressure and stress of actually being homeless while studying. Unlike locals who still have family here, at least they still have a safety net if they don’t have a home, for us, it’s a plane ticket back home... Many international students have to take up a part time job to help with the rise in cost of living but again, we’re not preferred by most managers... So how else are we supposed to deal with the raise [in price of] housing and food?”*

*“I have cut down on buying food, and cannot buy clothing or entertainment more than a few times a year. I also had to leave my off campus student accommodation and move in with housemates further away from campus because rent increases so drastically.”*



While these are just a few examples of some specifics, stories of exploitation, sexual assault and harassment, toxic cultures and problematic behaviour at both privately owned and university owned student accommodation are all too common. I would draw the Committee's attention to pre-existing reports, such as the Living Precariously Report,<sup>1</sup> Red Zone Report<sup>2</sup> and the National Student Safety Survey<sup>3</sup>, for further insights into the realities of student accommodation and student safety on campus.

### **Supplementary Comments on Given Evidence**

Since appearing before the Committee, I have had time to reflect further on the notion raised by Senator Darmanin that, should universities fail in their obligation to provide students with safe and affordable housing, they should face further caps on the number of international students they can host. As I testified at the time, it is absolutely vital that higher education institutions and education agents that fail to provide students with access to quality student accommodation should face penalties - but this should not be done by closing the door on international students.

If a higher education provider or education agent is, for example, connecting a student with student accommodation that doesn't actually exist, then it is the higher education institution or the education agent in question who is at fault and must be held accountable, not the student who was seeking accommodation. To suggest that international student caps are or should be a form of punishment for higher education institutions is not only about as logical as telling a tenant in the private rental market that they'll be kicked out of their apartment because their landlord failed to fix a leak in the roof, it's also a concerning furthering of the narrative that international students are nothing more than revenue raisers for higher education institutions.

It's a poorly kept secret that higher education institutions are financially reliant on international students, with the average university revenue raised from an overseas student nearly twice that of a comparable domestic student.<sup>4</sup> International students are expected to pay their tuition fees upfront, which can cost them anywhere from \$27,000 to \$162,000 over the lifetime of their degree,<sup>5</sup> in addition to visa costs, which have been recently doubled, and living expenses once in the country, which are at an historic high, with little to no access to support upon their arrival. It's no wonder, then, why international students feel like nothing more than cash cows for the

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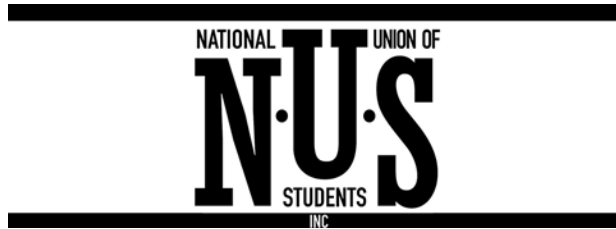
<sup>1</sup> Migrant Justice Institute (2019), <https://www.migrantjustice.org/livingprecariously>

<sup>2</sup> End Rape on Campus Australia (2018), <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018-02/apo-nid134766.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Social Research Centre (2022), <https://www.nsss.edu.au/results>

<sup>4</sup> The Guardian (2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/aug/02/australian-universities-international-student-fees>

<sup>5</sup> SI Australia (2024), <https://www.studyin-australia.com/study-guide/cost-of-studying-in-australia-for-international-students/>



Australian higher education sector. Senator Darmanin's framing as presented at the Committee's August 6th hearing only reinforces this perception.

International students should not be denied an opportunity to study in Australia simply because higher education institutions are unable or unwilling to ensure their students have access to safe, affordable student accommodation. To do so would be to the detriment of not only our campus diversity and community multiculturalism, but also to the Australian higher education sector and economy more broadly.

I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak to them on August 6th to present evidence on behalf of the 1.4 million students we represent. I look forward to reading the Committee's final report.

Kind regards,

Ngairé Bogemann

**NUS President**

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