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City of Monash
293 Springvale Road
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14 August 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBMISSION BY MONASH CITY COUNCIL TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO
THE WELFARE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Introduction

Monash City Council welcomes the Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students and is pleased to submit to the Inquiry.

This submission has been developed in consultation with the Monash Multicultural Advisory Committee, Councillors and Council staff.

City of Monash

Monash is located 20 km southeast of the CBD and is one of Melbourne's most culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse community with 39.7% of its population born overseas; 33.9% of the total population born in non-English speaking countries, 38.6% speak a language other than English at home, 12.5% speak English not well or not at all and 71.3% follow 30 different religions.

Monash has also a significant number of international students who live in the Monash municipality and study at Monash University and local TAFEs. Statistics provided by Monash University indicate that international students make up 31.7% of their entire student population and whilst data on 2009 figures of international students living in Monash or enrolled at Monash University and local TAFEs could not be obtained this group could represent around 10,000 people living within Monash.

Background

Research into the experiences of international students conducted in 2008 by the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements at Monash University identified the following:

- 67 per cent of female and 62 per cent of male international students experience ‘periods of loneliness and isolation’ while studying in this country
- more than two-thirds work or have worked here, with 35 per cent reporting financial difficulties
- financial hardship, mental illness, unlawful activities and visa breaches are particular areas of concern
- half the international students interviewed as part of the research suffered from discrimination or bad treatment
- 57 per cent of female students reported discrimination and
- one in 10 said they felt unsafe in Australia

In addition research undertaken by Monash City Council in 2009 as part of Council’s Clayton Community Strengthening Project has identified a number of issues and concerns relating to international students. These specifically focus on public transport issues, affordable housing and inappropriate living situations.

The following is a summary of issues, comments and recommendations in relation to the Inquiry and in reference to the Terms of Reference:

Central Point of Contact

Monash Council believes that enrolling institutions should provide a mentor/pastoral care contact as a first point of contact for international students. This will enable students to discuss issues they may have as these arise. This type of service should also be used as a point of dissemination of information on issues such as employment rights and tenancy laws.

In addition enrolling institution should actively advocate for the students’ rights and survey students on a regular basis i.e. six monthly or midway through their stay and at the end of their course to ascertain any ‘hidden’ problems or issues that could be addressed earlier rather than later.

Transport

It is also Council’s view that international students should be able to receive travel discounts, as costs for travelling on public transport on a full fare could be a significant expense for international students and as a consequence could limit opportunities for socialisation with other fellow students or friends or attendance at activities and events outside university hours. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is an issue and contributes to international students becoming very isolated and not connecting and engaging with the broader community, which will allow them to establish stronger friendships.

Tertiary Support

It is also being suggested that the success of international students at tertiary courses can depend on the pre-tertiary course offered by various institutions. Specifically

qualified teachers should staff pre-tertiary English training institutions. Furthermore the government should apply stricter regulations with respect to the granting of accreditation to the various institutions.

In addition it is important that as student numbers grow so should the levels of teaching staff and facilities. It is unacceptable for institutions not to be providing students with the right resources and tools to complete the course for which they have enrolled and paid for.

Welfare Support

Council believes that educational institutions need to be providing support to international students through appropriate services to meet the needs and issues faced by students, especially those who have been identified 'at risk'. Appropriate welfare and counselling services should be offered to students, as well as a central point of contact that has been well publicised amongst the student population, educational institutions and service providers. This central point of contact could be a 'life line' type service that could be operating on a 24-hour basis and staffed by qualified councillors and/or welfare officers.

Orientation & Information Provision

Monash City Council also suggests that all educational institutions, public and private be required to provide extensive orientation programs for international students as soon as these arrive in Australia including the organisation of events and activities that introduce students to the educational institution community but also to the broader community they will be living in.

In addition Council recommends the development of an information kit that provides students with appropriate and relevant information of life in Australia including their rights and responsibilities with respect to renting accommodation, applying for a job, consumer and tenancy rights.

It is also recommended that a mentoring program be established where students are linked to an individual or a family who could provide them with support especially with their settlement in Australia.

In addition Council strongly recommends that settlement services funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship should be made available to international students.

Advocacy

Furthermore Council recommends the establishment of an independent (not run by the education providers) support service that can investigate complaints, support students and advocate on their behalf.

Council also believes that there is a need to regulate colleges and agents, as the aim should be to educate international students and not profit from these.

Another important issue, which Monash City Council believes should be addressed, is the 'hidden' racism that exists in the community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that international students experience covert racism and discrimination and this creates an environment where students do not feel safe.

Council believes that it is important that educational institutions address this issue by establishing programs that educate local students through their own orientation program to the university and provide them with opportunities to become better aware and more understanding of difference and dispel myths such as ‘overseas students are taking local places at tertiary institutions’ and ‘the only reason they enrol in an institution is to obtain a permanent visa’.

Conclusion

Council believes that it is important that educational institutions, public and private, should work at ways to foster relationships between groups to overcome divisions and prejudices and to make students understand what it means to be living in a global community.

If you require further information regarding issues and recommendations provided in this submission please contact Eugenia Grammatikakis, Community Development Officer on (03) 95189 3625.

Yours faithfully

CAROLYN McCLEAN
Director Community Services