



**Submission to the Inquiry into the Provisions of the Education Services for
Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024**

Addendum

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Foreword

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) is the representative organisation for postgraduate students at the University of Sydney. Established in 1970, SUPRA's constituency has grown to include 28,431 enrolled postgraduate students in 2023, of which 56% were international students. The 2023 total enrolment of international students at the University of Sydney was 31,429, or 45% of the total student enrolment at our oldest university (University of Sydney Annual Report 2023). SUPRA has for over 50 years represented postgraduate student interests, and has provided professional casework and legal services to international postgraduate students, gaining valuable experience and insight into the aspirations and issues international students face.

Summary

SUPRA has previously submitted a submission to the inquiry into the provisions of the Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024 and we thank you for this additional opportunity to provide further information on SUPRA's concerns around changes to the ESOS Bill 2024, specifically around international student caps.

For many reasons, as outlined in our first submission, SUPRA does not support the introduction of an international student cap. Additional reasons that SUPRA does not support a cap is the negative impact on our organisation's ability to represent the interests of postgraduate students, due to the cap's impact on our funding stream. This reduction in funding will also negatively impact the support and community building activities SUPRA can run. We also do not support the cap as we do not believe it will address the issues it purports to address around housing, or domestic student enrolments. Rather, the result of this rhetoric has merely been to increase the discrimination international students face, which is unfair and unjust.

Discussion

SUPRA is entirely funded by the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), which is a small fee charged to all enrolled students, used to fund student support activities at the University of Sydney. With SSAF, SUPRA funds a free professional and independent casework service and legal service from a team of employed staff members. These two services support thousands of students every year with university, welfare and legal matters. SUPRA also runs extensive student-led social and community activities, including for students affected by specific forms of marginalisation such as First Nations students, queer students, disabled students, students who are women, international students, and students studying on satellite campuses, including in regional and rural areas. SUPRA also represents the interests of postgraduate students, within and outside of the university. This includes advocating for improved teaching and learning conditions, reviewing university policy and procedures from a student-centred perspective, and pushing for additional supports and improvements to university systems for marginalised groups. We also represent student needs outside of the university, through formal submissions such as this, and directly with elected government officials at the state and national level. These extensive and vital activities are all possible because of the SSAF we receive.

With an introduction of international student caps, and a reduction in student enrolments, we will see a reduction in SSAF available to student organisations and other student support services at the university. This will result in a reduction in activities our organisation can undertake, and will result in a reduction in support services, student-led activities and internal and external-facing student representation. This will be a significant blow to the work of our service and, when including other student organisations across Australia, this reduction will result in a reduction in student-led independent representation. Students know what is best for students and this will be a silencing of the voices of students who are, and should always be, at the centre of the higher education system.

The second issue we want to raise in this submission is the real-world effect of the anti-international student rhetoric used to push through these changes. This rhetoric places international students in opposition to domestic students' access to university and to Australians' housing affordability. This rhetoric diverts attention away from the real issues facing Australia: a lack of interest in higher education by domestic school leavers arising for myriad reasons, including the inability to afford to study due to incredibly low levels of financial support for students, and the lack of access to affordable housing in part due to low housing stocks, high demand, and government support for investment properties. The result of this unfair and unfounded blaming of international students has been an increase in discrimination targeting international students. At SUPRA we have seen a significant rise in anti-international student commentary, particularly online, directed at our members and our organisation. This is unacceptable and a direct impact of the rhetoric used by the government to push through these changes. International students should never face discrimination, but to do so because of the words of the government is particularly painful for students who are in Australia to learn, share and belong.