

Submission from The University of Queensland

to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students

Background - The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland (UQ) has a mission dedicated to achieving national and international levels of excellence in teaching, research and scholarship. Founded in 1910, it is the oldest university in the State of Queensland, with approximately 38,100 students, including 6,100 international students from over 120 countries. UQ is a founding member of the *Group of Eight (GO8)* coalition of Australia's research-strong universities and one of only three Australian foundation members of the global *Universitas 21 (U21)* alliance.

With 5814 staff (2407 academic staff), the university has teaching and research sites throughout Queensland with its major campuses located at St Lucia (Brisbane), Gatton and Ipswich. UQ offers a wide variety of support services for international students including the following:

- Student Centres at each campus which provide face to face one stop shop services
- dedicated Office for International Student Admissions
- on-campus health service
- 24 hour, 365 days per year security service
- wide range of quality sporting facilities
- on-campus food including Halal and Kosher
- free airport reception for new enrolled students and fee-for-service for English language students
- on campus multi faith chaplaincy service
- a dedicated accommodation service providing free assistance with locating temporary and longer-term accommodation
- use of University owned housing and on campus residential colleges
- free academic, communication and English language preparation programs available prior to commencement and throughout program. A free IELTS test is available upon graduation
- one week Orientation program with international student specific sessions. Support programs for commencing research students are held throughout the year

- a Student Services unit, with dedicated international student advisors (ISAs), which provides counselling, careers, learning support, and information and advice regarding successfully studying and living in Australia
- opportunity to join more than 130 student clubs and societies involved in sports, travel, religion, international, food and leisure
- opportunities to study overseas through exchange programs
- international alumni chapters around the world
- access to scholarships, fellowships and bursaries.

Like other Go8 universities, The University of Queensland is committed to internationalising all aspects of its activities in order to remain globally competitive and provide an enriching experience for students. UQ fully appreciates that a high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate education must prepare students to think and act with global awareness and cross-cultural understanding (global learning). Indeed, UQ is committed to preparing students to be citizens of the world and seeks to enhance the international, global and intercultural dimensions of the university at both the level of the curriculum and extra-curriculum as a quality higher education provider. These themes of internationalising the curriculum and ensuring our campus culture reflects the rich backgrounds of our students represent the major focus of UQ's Internationalisation Plan 2010-2014. Growth in the University's international student population is another element of this internationalisation, along with enhancing international research collaborations and the development of partnerships with overseas institutions that nurture and facilitate the bilateral flow of staff and students within the global community. Building on this platform, it is essential that there be a continued focus on the quality of the educational experience for all students and that this be underpinned by closer partnerships between the higher education sector and Commonwealth, state and local levels of government.

Response to Terms of Reference

This submission seeks to illustrate how the higher education sector can work in partnership with the three levels of government in order to improve the quality of the experience for international students. Some of the successful initiatives undertaken at the university are used to illustrate areas where across-industry best practice could be shared and standards established.

There has been substantial growth over the past two decades in the number of students studying in Australia. Institutions in the UK and USA have been undertaking this activity in a coordinated and managed way for a much longer period. Neither the UK nor USA has experienced the rapid growth off a low base, when compared with Australia. Therefore, institutions in these countries have had time to develop appropriate infrastructure and systems to support international students particularly in relation to welfare and support in non-academic areas. It is timely for the Australian higher education sector to work in a coordinated way with key government and industry stakeholders to validate the appropriateness of Australian infrastructure to ensure quality of experience for our international students.

In developing its response The University of Queensland makes the following comments and recommendations:

1. Whilst the ESOS ACT/National Code provides an excellent framework for protection of international students as consumers of education in Australia, compliance oversight by government agencies appears to fall short of expectations both by private and public providers.
2. Support the development of a framework that is sufficiently well resourced to ensure compliance and regulatory audit processes across the entire sector regardless of location, private or public funding and level of education. This framework should include measures that can be enforced to ensure that education providers which are not behaving appropriately do not undermine the integrity of the entire industry.
3. The university strongly supports the implementation of The Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement.
4. The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, National Code of Practice or other legislative mechanism to provide a core set of student welfare key performance indicators for all public and private providers of education. This legislation should specifically address the needs of students who are under the age of eighteen years.
5. The rights of international students as consumers in the broader community and outside the coverage of the ESOS Act need to be protected.
6. Typically, benchmarking and success has been measured in Australia relative to the increasing number of students enrolling in Australian institutions, together with the income generated by this success. Australian institutions would benefit from working in partnership with government to measure good practices for student support services, which can be benchmarked internationally, particularly against institutions in the UK and USA.
7. Ensure that international students across all sectors have access to appropriately priced public facilities such as transport, primary and secondary education for dependent children.
8. Given the importance of international education in Australia's education, immigration, aid and foreign policies, the Departments of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC); Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR); Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT); Austrade and AusAID should establish a more integrated regulatory environment.
9. The agencies within the three tiers of government that are responsible for marketing international education offshore provide more definitive information to prospective students, parents and sponsors regarding the differences between higher education and vocational education sectors; and that providers in all sectors, public and private, meet a minimum standard of service.

10. Revise federal government student funding arrangements (for example, for the Endeavour program including International Postgraduate Research Scholarships [IPRS], AusAID including Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research [ACIAR] and others) to ensure all recipients receive adequate stipends to live in Australia or ensure that the recipients can access other funding sources.
11. Support the implementation of a framework and compulsory accreditation for the regulation of international agents.
12. Federal government to provide funding to various industry organisations to comply with the raft of legislative changes that are foreshadowed.
13. Continuing the dialogue from the “International Student Round Table” and implementing a framework that facilitates ongoing discussion and implementation of agreed recommendations.

The University of Queensland’s comments on the specific issues of interest are provided below:

Student Safety

The experience of The University of Queensland has been that there has been limited crime occurring on-campus and that international student safety issues are more likely to occur within the broader community. Given this, it is critical that prospective students be provided with information appropriate to the communities in which they intend to live and that there be a stronger partnership between higher education providers and the various levels of government in order to facilitate this.

The Australian, State and local government education export facilitation agencies that are responsible for marketing Australian education offshore place great emphasis on the fact that Australia is a safe destination and, in many instances, do not delve further into explanations of how to minimise risks that may be encountered – traffic rules, water safety, local knowledge regarding crime, natural environment etc. Students should be informed, rather than alarmed, of the potential risks encountered by any person residing in Australia.

Currently there is no legislative requirement to impel institutions and their agents to provide international students with information regarding potential unsafe situations when living in Australia. While the National Code of Practice¹ stipulates industry standards, these are not enforceable. It would be advantageous to all international students and Australian institutions if the National Code or other legislative mechanism is amended to ensure that institutions and government agencies are jointly responsible for providing safety information to prospective and commencing students. A clearly mandated role for institutions to provide such information to international students upon enrolment and arrival in Australia needs to be implemented.

¹ Copy available at http://aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/NationalCodeOfPractice2007/National_Code_2007_pdf.pdf

In 2005, QETI (Queensland Government Education and Training) suggested establishing a framework in conjunction with the Police Service and education providers to further prevent crime against international students.² More recently QETI announced the establishment of a Student Experience Reference Group³, assigned to identify methods of improving student safety. It would be beneficial if education sector leaders could draw from the various state level activities (such as the QETI initiative) and the work that is being undertaken by the Victorian government and institutions, in order to undertake more comprehensive benchmarking and sharing of best practice.

Adequate and Affordable Accommodation

Accommodation is usually the second largest expense for students, after tuition fees. There is anecdotal evidence that a proportion of international students do not have sufficient funds for accommodation needs.

The government education export facilitation agencies that are responsible for marketing Australian education offshore as well as the education institutions and their agents often emphasise the “cheaper” cost of living in Australia, but do not note that Australian university students (unlike many other countries) do not reside on campus in university accommodation. Often there is a lack of understanding by enrolling students that it is not the education institution’s responsibility to provide accommodation for students. Nonetheless, UQ has a dedicated team who are responsible for providing appropriate accommodation information to international students. Information provided includes a range of accommodation alternatives, guide to accommodation costs, safety and access information, tenant/lessor rights and responsibilities etc.

Closely mirroring the observations of Consumer Affairs Victoria⁴, the University notes that, in relation to rental accommodation, international students are a particularly vulnerable consumer group because:

- it can be difficult to arrange accommodation prior to arrival
- there can be a lack of understanding between different offerings including home-stay, home share or “au pair”, boarding or rooming, share houses including co-tenants and sub-tenants, halls of residence, and service agreement or residential tenancy agreement in student accommodation
- there can be little knowledge of local geography including public transport, travel time, safety issues etc.
- there can be limited social networks and access to available properties

² Article regarding initiative available at <http://esvc000804.wic018u.server-web.com/NewsArticle.aspx?NewsId=64&ParentPageId=46>

³ Press release available at <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?u=24461&id=520917>

⁴ P15-17. Consumer Affairs Victoria (2007) Residential Accommodation Issues Paper – Stakeholders Consultation, Consumer Affairs Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Report available at [http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/CAV_Publications_Consultations_Reviews_2/\\$file/rent_issuesspaper_residential_accommodation.pdf](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/CAV_Publications_Consultations_Reviews_2/$file/rent_issuesspaper_residential_accommodation.pdf)

- most students are new to renting accommodation and they have little knowledge of the processes, procedures and pitfalls, without a rental history that can be accessed by prospective agents and landlords
- students may be unduly influenced by operators from the same cultural background and be unwilling to pursue tenancy rights
- students can tend to seek accommodation aligned to the academic year e.g. 9-10 months rather than 6 or 12 month leases
- the transient nature of students' stay limits enforcement processes and progression of complaints
- cultural and linguistic barriers that lead to lack of knowledge of rights, responsibilities, avenues of recourse including fire safety, barring telephone hotlines, pets etc.

Over the past few years in Queensland, various government entities have worked together to set standards around good practice for the provision of home-stay services and educational materials such as the QETI / RTA home-stay resource manual⁵. The introduction of the Blue Card⁶ in Queensland has also assisted to provide protection for students under the age of eighteen. Like these initiatives, there are a number of areas where local and state governments could work together to improve services for international students including local government introducing stricter regulation regimes around boarding/rooming/au pair arrangements, providing quicker and easier pathways of recourse for disputes, and provision of more information about the different types of accommodation available and the legal rights of students.

A second issue relates to living stipends. Some Australian government and international scholarship authorities fail to provide adequate living stipends for students and their dependents forcing them into unsatisfactory accommodation. A review of living stipends associated with Australian scholarships is required. In addition, some form of government to government dialogue with key source countries would assist in addressing this issue.

Social Inclusion

International students are not a homogenous group and their needs and concerns differ by ethnicity, age, level of affluence, knowledge of technology and level of study. The issue of inclusion is exacerbated by the fact that domestic students are on campus less frequently than past generations due to work, other non-university related extra-curricular activities and access to technology that allows home-based study. The introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) has also had an impact on the number of activities run on campus by the Student Union, for both domestic and international students, which previously would have promoted social inclusion. While The University of Queensland has maintained its support for social inclusion activities through its UQ-

⁵ Available at http://esvc000804.wic018u.server-web.com/Upload/Files/2006815102547_HomestayManual%5B1%5D.pdf

⁶ For more information see "Blue Card System" <http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/employment/whats-new.html>

Mates program, there is more scope for support to be provided to and by student-based associations via an appropriate funding mechanism.

The university would welcome the opportunity to enter into dialogue with stakeholders (local authorities, community groups, students) to discuss how best the university might integrate students in the local community.

Student Visa Requirements

Whilst noting that DIAC has been responsive to the needs of the education sector over recent years, there are still some areas for improvement. As noted by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) in its report “Federal and State Government Responsibilities in Support of International Students” (August 2009), foreign students pay more for their visas to Australia than any other OECD country. This is inclusive of additional costs that some nations have in place e.g. US \$250 SEVIS 1-901 fee to the US Department of Homeland Security. In addition to visa application fees, students incur costs for medical examinations and vaccinations for themselves and their dependents each time they apply to renew their visa (whether or not they have travelled internationally during their stay). The university does not support the lessening of DIAC visa holder due diligence; it would prefer that there was increased scrutiny of student’s financial and health situations. However, it would be beneficial to all if fees and charges could be aligned with those of other countries, without compromising the integrity of the immigration system.

There are also some areas of the student visa regime that require clarification:

- care and welfare issues/responsibilities that arise with students under the age of eighteen who, having completed year 12 in Australia, remain in country with a valid student visa (expiring March the year following completion of secondary studies), yet they have no current CoE with a higher education institution. Who holds responsibility for ensuring that students only remain in country holding a valid visa and CoE? Institutions are often placed under considerable pressure to sign off on care and welfare arrangements because students have commenced studies on the expectation that they will be permitted to continue. Often students may be completely unaware of the legislation surrounding care and welfare arrangements
- provide guidance in relation to what steps should be taken by an institution to ensure they can be confident of meeting and achieving the intent of Standard 5 *Younger Students* when signing off welfare arrangements.

It has been mooted that education agents may have to be accredited. As long as the current contractual arrangements with the university’s network of agents are enhanced by accreditation, not disputed or disrupted, this university would welcome the accreditation of agents through formal arrangements, including official sanctions. It would be imperative that the proposed system would allow for the accreditation of agents offshore and onshore, as well as their subagents.

Adequate International Student Support

The following points remain critical for the university in ensuring the quality of experience for its international student cohort.

- The university acknowledges that the implementation of socially inclusive student recruitment policies has led to an increase in first-generation domestic and international students on campus. These cohorts can be high demand users of support services both on campus and in the broader community. Consequently, there is a need for all students to have comprehensive and accurate information regarding Australia, the institution at which they will study, and the community in which they will be living. This information should be made available to students prior to arrival at their educational institution.
- Institutions need to work more closely with the Commonwealth Government to ensure stipends paid to students studying on scholarship are adequate.
- Appropriate programs (pre-departure, orientation etc) are provided for all students and educational representatives. Geographically specific information regarding employment opportunities should be provided to education and immigration agents offshore, and information regarding cost of living. It is important for higher education providers to have closer engagement with industry and government, enabling additional internship (paid and unpaid) opportunities to be provided to students.

Appropriate Pathways to Permanency

The university is of a view that achievement of academic outcomes and an excellent educational experience are a strategic priority for students whilst undertaking a degree at this institution. Academic achievement, though often integral to the success of a residency application, is viewed as independent to the permanent residency process.

Whilst the university understands the reasons why the MODL model for immigration was developed, and that this has encouraged students to undertake relevant courses that support Australia's immigration program, some institutions have been motivated by income generation and not ensuring a student's academic experience or graduate outcomes. It is the strong view of The University of Queensland that if the integrity of 'Brand Australia' is to be protected, the fundamental principles of excellence in education must be paramount in all aspects of international education and that industry needs to work with Government to resolve this issue.

Portability of Qualifications

The University of Queensland is an early participant in the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement. It welcomes the government's efforts in supporting this initiative. However, further work needs to be undertaken by government and institutions to ensure Australian qualifications are

recognised worldwide, especially as nations begin regulating and expanding their own post-secondary education sectors.

The identification of quality benchmarks and controls for service, advice and support for international students studying at an Australian education institution

Fiona Pakoa⁷ in a paper to the AIEC Conference 2005 noted “Currently there is no definitive list of the support services that institutions should make available to international students: Edmond (1995) suggests that core services should include: counselling, healthcare, advisory/advocacy, financial assistance, accommodation, student community development, social activities, newsletter to students, support for families, peer support programs, career counselling, learning skills assistance, staff development, library and alumni programs. The Bateman report (Bateman & Badgood, 2005) acknowledges the diversity of support services currently delivered by educational providers and includes the list mentioned above: airport pickup, food packs on arrival, advice on religious facilities, 24 hour contact service, returning home programs and interpreter services.”

In addition to stipulating the minimum service levels across a defined list of services required to be provided to international students, any new quality framework should have the following attributes:

- clarity regarding demarcation of responsible federal and state government agencies for reporting regulatory infringements, undertaking audits etc
- a combination of short and long term indicators with related performance standards that allow institutions as key stakeholders to respond to issues as they are raised
- acknowledgment of the risk of over-surveying international students e.g. ISB, CEQ, University Student Experience Survey, AusAID and other funding body surveys and focus groups for a range of institutional purposes if the outcomes are not implemented
- data collected to be disseminated to various stakeholders within the university community in simple English
- awareness that students at a single institution could be located across metropolitan and regional campuses and a variety of research sites including hospitals, barrier reef, mines, farms.

Any other related matters

The forthcoming review of Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act and the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is an opportunity to ensure appropriate accreditation and quality assurance of education institution and their representatives both here and abroad. To ensure compliance with the proposed forthcoming changes it will be necessary for more government resources to be allocated to monitoring and enforcing the code. This may be easier given the centralisation of CRICOS registration process with

⁷ [Providing best practice in student services – identifying and facilitating opportunities for the future](http://www.aiec.idp.com/pdf/Pakoa,%20Fiona.pdf)
<http://www.aiec.idp.com/pdf/Pakoa,%20Fiona.pdf>

the Federal Government. A priority role for TEQSA will be to terminate the licences of unsatisfactory providers through more thorough and transparent accreditation processes and more monitoring. Potentially a publically available system of ratings could be implemented leading to less frequent audits for institutions that are performing and more frequent audits and punitive measures for non-performing institutions. It is also imperative that an appropriate resource, similar to that of the ATO's tax rulings, be established to assist institutions interpret and apply the Act in circumstances not envisaged in the Code. These interpretations could then form the basis of future precedence.

The University commends ISANA (International Education Association Inc) for the development of resources such as the *Rainbow Guide*⁸ which have been integrated by many institutions into the vast array of materials provided to international students prior to departure from their home countries and at various stages throughout their enrolment. As legislative changes occur over the coming years, it is important that ISANA and other key industry groups such as IEAA, UA and GO8 are provided with support by the Federal Government to update their resources, thereby ensuring continued institutional compliance.

The University supports the recent Federal Government initiative "International Student Round Table" and would like to see the consultation process with international students extended over the coming years as the various changes to the legislative, regulatory and financial frameworks are rolled out.

Finally, if Australia is to truly benefit from attracting international students to study here, there must be a greater focus on quality. This means Australia has to compete with the Americans and top European universities in being able to attract the best and brightest. While UQ has performed at a high level in attracting international students from over 125 countries, like most institutions, it is struggling to align the internationalisation of the university with its desire to be part of a knowledge led-economy. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider some recent data emanating from the US where their approach has generally been to attract the best and brightest through providing significant scholarship support for international students. In envisioning the US, it is important to realise that while they have the largest number of international students (623,805), they only account for less than 3.4% of total tertiary enrolments, whereas in Australia (202,448 international students) this figure is 21%, and in the UK (376,190) and Canada 18% and 11% respectively. In a big system like the US it is fair to say that their approach has been more directed to quality than to generating income. Like Australia they are also having the same discussion about balancing domestic capacity while at the same time attracting the best and brightest from abroad. In this regard, a recent report by Bhandari and Blumenthal (Bhandari, R and Blumenthal, P. Global student mobility: Moving towards brain exchange. In: Higher education on the move: New developments in global mobility, pp 1–15. Edited by R. Bhandari and S. Laughlin, Institute for International Education, 2009.) made the following observations:

"keeping the doors open to international students and scholars, many who go onto become immigrants, also has multiplier effects: the children of immigrants show a very high interest in science and technology. According to the National Foundation of American Policy, 60% percent of top science and technology students and

⁸ Report available from http://www.isana.org.au/files/cppfiles2/Full_template_document%20FINAL.pdf

60% of top math students in U.S. high schools are children of immigrants. A detailed study of engineering and technology companies started in the U.S. between 1995 and 2005 found that over a quarter were founded by immigrants (primarily Indians, followed by those from the UK, China, Taiwan, and Japan), employing 450,000 workers nationwide, and accounting for \$52 billion in total sales.”

Bill Gates recently highlighted these same findings to the Science & Technology Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the international arena a lot of Australia’s focus is simply on volume and short term gains; fees from international students to underpin the financial viability of universities. The continued financial pressure on institutions is unlikely to change in the near future. At the present time Australian institutions have no proactive schemes to attract high flying students from, for example, the Indian Institutes of Technology whose graduates have powered approximately 40% of Silicon Valley. Further, the very competitive nature of our international student recruitment between institutions in places like India may be our ultimate downfall. In this regard, the British Council has a much more coordinated approach where the talents of different institutions are harnessed to enhance performance in such a challenging market. Further, the modus operandi of Australian Education International to treat all universities the same in such a complicated global international student market is working against our ability to succeed. There is also a disconnect between Australia’s foreign policy and the role of universities in the international sphere when one considers how US foreign policy operates. US universities are used extensively to capacity build abroad and are underpinned by government support. The real challenge for all Australian universities is how to move from a transaction model to a transformative model where benefits flow both ways. There are good examples where this has been achieved by Australian universities, but such an approach could be significantly enhanced if the Federal Government was to be creative in this space. This is a crucial piece of the jigsaw that is missing to underpin the long-term financial viability of Australia’s international education industry.

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