



**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING AND REGULATORY
LEGISLATION**

SUBMISSION FROM AHAUCHI

AHAUCHI is the peak body representing heads of colleges and halls of residence at Australian universities. With 140 members and over 40,000 students, it has almost complete coverage of the sector within Australia.

We follow up our submission to the Crossroads Review by seeking the Senate Committee's consideration of two matters within its brief: namely the financial impact on students and that on universities.

In recent years there has been a re-appreciation of the role which halls and colleges play in helping to achieve educational goals in the tertiary sector – both for individuals and more broadly. There is sufficient convergence of strategic goals for them to be viewed as real partners with Australia's universities and their not-for-profit commitment to the university sector is outstanding.

Through the provision of secure accommodation, on or near campus, with support structures (pastoral, academic, IT) and appropriate facilities such as high-speed IT access, individuals find that such accommodation positively impacts upon their sense of well-being and thus on their studies, networks and aspirations. Collectively, this promotes student retention rates, academic grades and the building of strong relationships with parents and sponsoring bodies within and outside Australia, enhancing the educational reputation of this country.

The provision of suitable, reasonably priced accommodation is a primary concern for tertiary students, parents and sponsoring bodies, both domestic and international. This provision becomes even more critical with the dramatically increasing numbers of 'mobile' tertiary students, including from overseas. Annual DEST figures from 1986 chart this admirably, though even these are conservative in that they do not track *intrastate* mobiles who also need a place to live, eg students moving from home at Bendigo to Melbourne, or from Armidale to Sydney. Students who move intra state, interstate or from overseas ipso facto need somewhere to live.

Given broad all-party acceptance for universities differentiating their degree offerings and for marketing Australian universities internationally, the provision of appropriate accommodation thus becomes a real factor in servicing the mobiles and achieving and sustaining long-term educational goals. Being successfully accommodated significantly affects a student's tertiary studies. Having poor digs or none at all undermines everything. There are no winners if a student gives up studies and goes back home because there is nowhere to live.

AHAUCHI believes this is more than a local problem of supply and demand. Just as the policies and structures that create, facilitate and encourage such mobility are national with legislative and regulatory frameworks, so there should be a national dimension once again for accommodation befitting national educational objectives. 'Once again', because such existed previously, notably in the accommodation funding arrangements of the Australian Universities Commission.

1. Financial Assistance to Students

AHAUCHI acknowledges the positive impact which the government's proposed Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships and Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships will have. The assistance thus available to students with lower SES and from rural and regional areas will be welcomed by students and parents. The accommodation scholarships will also provide a measure of stimulation to those colleges and halls which end up accommodating such students.

We consider, however, that more should be done to assist students at large to cope with the increasing costs of tertiary study. Our members are daily aware of the financial impact on students and families. And it is to be wondered morally whether the largest debt of career-embarking students should be what they owe their government for their tertiary studies or, conversely, that one of the larger assets on a government's balance sheet should be the money owed to it by its university students and future leaders.

In particular we invite the Senate to consider widening the scholarship net beyond what has been proposed. Consideration might be given, in this regard, to how the tax and regulatory environment as applicable to higher education can be fine-tuned to facilitate higher levels of private sector philanthropic contribution in the form of scholarships and the like (eg bursaries) for worthy students who would otherwise not be able to afford university or college fees.

2. Financial Impact on Universities – Access to Capital for Halls and Colleges

We invite the Senate to assist in gaining access to suitable capital to develop and renew tertiary halls and colleges. The measures before the Senate do not adequately provide funding mechanisms for capital projects, given the need for more, suitable accommodation to cope with the anticipated increase in the numbers of university students needing accommodation, and for costly upgrades to existing buildings. **We**

therefore urge the Senate to push for infrastructural support for capital development and for recapitalizing the tertiary residential accommodation sector.

Many university residences that were constructed in the late 60s are now reaching the end of their days. Many of these were financed up to 75% by a joint federal and state government formula under the Australian Universities Commission. No similar sources now exist to underwrite their major redevelopment or replacement and security of title is unavailable to many. In addition, university college and halls are not-for-profit institutions operating on budgets whose shoestring proportions would amaze commerce and business! There are few pots of gold on which to draw, especially given that most of our halls and colleges are not university-owned.

Lack of access to suitable funding arrangements results in strings of unacceptable outcomes: exorbitant fees, students (and parents) undertaking even more part-time work to pay their way; unrealistically low fees and seriously under-maintained programs or aged buildings; or lost-leader or cut-price operations springing up that have no long-term commitment or primary regard for the students.

It would be a welcome move, therefore, if the Senate could highlight this need and enable funds such as the Systemic Infrastructure Initiative to be extended on suitable terms to residences whose educational goals converge with those of their respective universities.

CONCLUSION

AHAUCHI welcomes the Senate's review of the tertiary proposals and this opportunity to put our views and proposals. We would appreciate an opportunity to speak in person to the Committee.

Background information follows about AHAUCHI and the nature of our members' activities in and knowledge of, the tertiary sector in relation to the Senate's Terms of Reference.

Dr Lewis Rushbrook
Hon President, AHAUCHI, 2003

BACKGROUND

ABOUT AHAUCHI

AHAUCHI is the peak body representing heads of colleges and halls of residence at Australian universities. With 140 members and over 40,000 students, it has almost complete coverage of the sector within Australia. Approximately 40% of these residences are university-owned, 40% have some church affiliation and 20% are educational trusts. AHAUCHI has a formal constitutional objective of promoting university college residence as a means to a broad education incorporating academic, social, cultural, and moral development. One of the defining characteristics of member colleges is that they provide pastoral care and educational assistance to our resident students.

Members play a valuable, often under-recognized, role in enriching the university experience for students, adding significantly to the value of the university years for the individuals concerned and potentially also for Australia and those countries from which international students come.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Our members form a close partnership in higher education with the universities on, or near, whose land they are regularly located. Whether this is through centralized admissions, shared academic assistance, joint marketing, coordinated programs for international students, attention to security, pastoral care, alcohol and grievance policies, health and welfare, there is an almost seamless relationship of goodwill between universities and residences in our association. Within many Australian universities, the 'halls and colleges' make up a community of communities, well-regarded and relied upon for the commitment shown to their residents and to the university. Over 40,000 Australian university students are so embraced within this network of communities.

Increased numbers of 'mobile' students means that more accommodation will be needed in the short to medium term. DEST figures from 1986 indicate the growing numbers of 'mobiles', especially from overseas. As Australian universities differentiate themselves to establish their own markets, this trend will increase, because there will be fewer universities offering the same course mixes. More students will need to move interstate to take up their choices. The extra push for offshore students will accentuate this. All these new students will need accommodation somewhere, whether with family members interstate, on or near campus, or wherever they can find a bed.

There is currently a major resurgence of capital development in the tertiary accommodation sector, valued around \$500m including both public and private development, and providing up to 5000 new 'beds'. Not all development, however, has the students' interests at heart. Not all development will prima facie contribute to meeting the high educational goals desired by Parliament. Given the capacity of tertiary residences to reinforce, complement and enrich the core objectives of their

host universities, we argue that recognition should be accorded the work of those tertiary residences which look beyond mere provision of bed and board or returning a dividend to shareholders. There is little merit in being a university of the highest rank academically if the quality of key ancillary services is below par. It does not take too many days of coming to lectures, and leaving your suitcase outside because there is no accommodation, before the message gets out that this university, at least, whatever its intellectual calibre, is not 'the place to be'.

This is not to ask the Senate to prescribe that form, or forms, of tertiary accommodation that would assist students to meet its high expectations, but to acknowledge that a Committee pursuing quality outcomes in the higher education sector should value highly accommodation that goes beyond simply meeting minimum standards of construction, health and hygiene. With their convergent strategic goals, halls and colleges share a special relationship with their host universities. They care about the students and configure their communities to reflect this.

Factors relevant to the Senate's Terms of Reference which arise from the goals of AHAUCHI members

- *Academic support.* With many university classes growing in size and many tutorials being phased out, colleges and halls offer a level of personal academic support which complements and supplements that provided by the host university. Most residences within AHAUCHI offer some sort of academic assistance, often through resident tutors, in one-to-one, or group situations. It may take the form of discussing essay structure and content, reviewing exam questions, exploring how to use the library, prepare a tutorial presentation, cope with procrastination or undertake an honours thesis. As well as dealing with such issues, many residences additionally provide technical assistance with IT skills and software applications. High-fliers and plodders alike can benefit.
- *Academic ambience.* Life in an academic residence offers exceptional opportunities to enhance one's academic studies and overall academic experience, for example, through attending dinners with staff and distinguished guests, or informal discussions with peers. There is usually always someone in college who took your subjects ahead of you. And one must not forget the myriad small ways in which colleges and halls configure their lifestyle in order to create an atmosphere conducive to study, such as duty staff at night and mechanisms for replacing the computer cartridge at 3am so that the 9am deadline can be met. Many conventions are founded on the rhythms of the academic year, such as 'no mowing the lawns during exam time'. Not for college residents the experience of the student who moved into a student house in an adjacent suburb only to find after a few weeks that the house was now full of bikies. College admission policies recognize this. A web search of member's colleges and halls (www.ahauchi.edu.au) will show that for many residences, renowned or otherwise, promoting a lively academic environment is part of their core business.

- *Multi-disciplinary exposure.* The current review of higher education recognizes the increasingly complex nature of the world; it is arguable that its future will be more reliably placed in the hands of those with breadth of vision and experience than those with a narrower focus. A fifth year engineering student who had no time in his first year at college for anyone not doing engineering and IT could not, in his fifth year, trumpet the value of college enough, confessing how its foremost benefit now appeared to him as the daily opportunity to rub shoulders with those undertaking different courses than himself. College and halls assist universities to keep learning personal and broad.
- *Personal support or 'pastoral care'.* This is a sine qua non of AHAUCHI members and is offered through skilled peers or older staff or students. It frequently addresses the personal stress encountered in such transitions as leaving home, arriving from overseas, or coming to terms with city and tertiary life after leaving remote or regional Australia. College pastoral carers are usually trained in first aid, basic counseling skills and how to deal with issues of harassment or discrimination. In addition to such formal support, webs of student-based activities abound providing personal support through social, cultural and recreational activities.
- *Enhanced multi-culturalism.* College and halls play a significant role in enhancing multi-culturalism within Australia. Whilst the fruit naturally takes a few years to mature, the supportive residential environment provides outstanding opportunities for students who are the future leaders of Australia and overseas communities to share experiences through a variety of informal and structured activities. For a nation that seeks to model multiculturalism and to attract overseas students, tertiary communities that go out of their way to promote multi-culturalism should be encouraged.

It is for this reason that most colleges and halls try to balance, as they see fit, ratios of international to domestic students, so as to facilitate multi-cultural learning. Some resist pressure to give over all their places to international students and even the worldwide International House network has as a primary tenet that no more than 50% of places be given to international students, and that these will be spread throughout the house rather than co-located. Sports, social and academic activities tend to ameliorate the natural gathering of like with like and the bonds of studying at honours or postgraduate level frequently promote greater cross-cultural interactions.

- *Network creation.* It is a truism of many university college residents, not just that 'the best years of my life were at college', but also that 'my best life-time friends were made at college'. Those experiences lay friendship foundations that are renewable years afterwards and, in a global setting, strengthen national and international networks. Australia needs mechanisms that have such outcomes.
- *Valuing non-commercial, service-based lifestyles.* The first term of reference for the Senate Inquiry refers to principles for a higher education system. Public

accountability and social responsibility are two relevant principles demonstrated daily in our residences. Much work is done voluntarily, or through highly committed individuals who model a different approach – of service, cooperation and going many extra miles. Students, too, through residents' associations, model an inclusive and participative approach to community. Over a period, living in such an environment can prove inspirational and affect lifestyle choices, adding to the pool of persons, Australians and others, who wish to contribute to society more than to take from it.

- *Proximity to campus.* Almost all academic communities represented in AHAUCHI's membership are on, or very near to, campus. For many students 'location, location, location' is a premium well worth any extra upfront cost. But given the low vacancy rates and limited supply of rental accommodation in many areas, it is not uncommon for students who are unable to secure on-campus accommodation, to abandon or defer their studies due to the accommodation hurdle.