

Universities Australia Submission to the New South Wales Ministerial Taskforce on International Education

Universities Australia (UA) represents 38 of Australia's universities in the public interest, both nationally and internationally. Universities Australia strives to support Australian universities in the performance of their roles including through the provision of information for and about universities.

Australian universities are committed to enhancing the student experience of all students, whether local or international. We commend the New South Wales government in seeking to ensure international students enjoy their experience while in NSW and offer the following submission addressing the four identified criteria.

1. Marketing and recruitment
2. Social inclusion, integration, welfare and safety
3. Quality of education and training
4. Accommodation and employment

Key Issues/Opportunities	Strategies	Recommendations to Ministerial Taskforce
<p>Marketing and recruitment is conducted both in Australia and offshore. The industry is vulnerable due to the inability of Australian governments to regulate offshore recruitment (as it occurs outside Australian jurisdiction) beyond the imposition of agent training programs or registration for e-visa access in key countries.</p>	<p>The reputation of international education is fragile and can be damaged by the actions of a single recruitment agent. It is important that the regulatory regime is sufficiently strong to protect the whole industry from damage by unethical agents.</p>	<p>1. The NSW government work with both the Australian federal agencies and authorities in student source countries to ensure that recruitment agents accurately represent all aspects of the international student experience, including safety aspects and the cost of living.</p>
<p>Universities are aware of the importance of integrating students into the university and wider community. Universities run peer mentoring programs to enable students to best experience the whole range of experiences university life offers.</p> <p>Beyond the campus walls, students are encouraged to become part of their communities while in Australia. Universities run a number of programs to facilitate this in partnership with community organisations and local governments.</p>	<p>A number of city councils run events designed to celebrate international students as part of the city (Newcastle, Melbourne). These events and programs are designed to enable community members to meet international students and better understand them and their aspirations as well as to enable students to fully experience life in Australia.</p>	<p>2. The NSW government work with local councils and city administrations by funding pilot programs to build partnerships between education providers (from all sectors) in hosting events and running programs to bring students into the community.</p> <p>3. Recognise and share good practice in this area, through awarding and promoting exemplar programs.</p>

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<p>The quality of the student experience is the paramount consideration to guide action regarding the welfare of students studying at Australian universities. An absolute foundation for the student experience is the provision of a safe environment for study and learning and living.</p> <p>Universities Australia has prepared the attached Position Paper on enhancing the student experience and student safety (Attachment A).</p>	<p>On-campus safety is the responsibility of universities who shall draw on good practice experience in providing for the required safety outcomes.</p> <p>Off-campus safety is also a concern of universities in conjunction with other authorities and stakeholders so as to serve student welfare in this way with equal priority to on-campus safety.</p>	<p>4. The NSW government support proactive, preventive approaches to assuring student safety; to increase levels of security including through improved cultural awareness and via increased visibility of police and security officers in locations where international students study, work, travel and live, and with suitable complaints bodies being in place to respond to concerns over inaction.</p> <p>5. Immediately make available travel concessions for all students to help enhance their safety and security when moving between campuses, accommodation and workplaces, and improve public transport safety for all.</p>
<p>Quality Assurance at Australian universities is an ongoing concern and addressed through multiple and regular internal and external processes.</p> <p>The ESOS Act (2000) is a key part of the quality framework in Australia and will shortly be reviewed by the Federal Government. State governments have regulatory responsibilities within the ESOS framework that work to ensure the quality of the education system.</p>	<p>The reputation of international education is fragile and can easily be damaged by the actions of a single institution. It is important that the regulatory regime is sufficiently strong to protect the whole industry from damage by rogue providers.</p>	<p>6. The NSW government allocate necessary funding to ensure the regulatory arm of the education department is sufficiently trained and resourced to meet its regulatory responsibilities.</p>
<p>In Australia the vast majority of local and international students undertake employment while studying. Amongst other things, anecdotally there is evidence that international students' employment choices and necessities can potentially place them at risk given late night or irregular hours in travel.</p> <p>How far can government assist universities in supporting safe and regulated employment related to studies such as through internships and work experience programs? Universities Australia has proposed a National Internship Scheme to government which could help significantly here (Attachment B).</p>	<p>The Universities Australia National Internship Scheme involves partnerships with between universities, employers and governments. The intention is to integrate study and work experience in a systematic way. This would enhance employability skills, increase student motivation and provide improved opportunities for well-regulated paid work while studying.</p>	<p>7. The NSW government engage with universities on the development of internship schemes for both international and local students to increase paid work opportunities in areas of relevance to studies.</p>

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<p>Most universities provide some on-campus accommodation. However there is not sufficient accommodation on or near campus to accommodate all students. This raises questions for how to ensure students have safe and affordable accommodation.</p> <p>How far should there be a priority for new arrivals (both international students and students from other parts of the country) to access on-campus accommodation? Can more on or near campus accommodation be provided, including through public-private partnerships? Can working with real-estate associations assist in enhancing provision arrangements? Should student accommodation become a matter for social housing policy?</p>	<p>Many universities are partnering with local governments and private organisations to provide on and near campus accommodation options. These public/private partnerships expand the availability of university accommodation.</p> <p>Some universities have been able to use these partnerships to offer accommodation guarantees to first year undergraduates travelling from outside of the university's immediate region.</p>	<p>8. Work with universities, other education providers, local authorities and housing industry representatives to ensure the availability of sufficient affordable and secure accommodation for all students including international students upon arrival.</p> <p>9. Investigate and fund public/private partnerships for increasing safe and affordable accommodation options close to campuses.</p> <p>10. Guide planning and approval authorities so as to enhance expeditious agreement to student accommodation initiatives.</p>

Universities Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to further discussions, should this be desired. If you have any questions or comments regarding the attached material please feel free to contact Dr Glenn Withers, Chief Executive on (02) 6285 8104.