

*** Attention Education Journalists: **Friday June 12, 2009** ***

Quality, equity and safety for international postgraduates a priority

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) has welcomed the 10-point action plan adopted by Australia's University Vice-Chancellors.

"These measures are very much in line with issues on which we have been advocating for many years" CAPA President, Nigel Palmer said. "The concerns of international postgraduates have for the most part have remained the same since the onset of the boom in international education".

The announcement of the 10-point Action Plan by Universities Australia coincides with other positive developments, including announcements by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard that a review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act will be brought forward in light of recent concerns, and of a national roundtable to discuss international students' experience. CAPA has also welcomed The Greens' call for a Senate Inquiry into international student issues.

"I believe that international postgraduates will find it encouraging that these issues are getting the attention they deserve" CAPA International Officer Sally Dongping Huang said.

"Affordable accommodation and concession travel are essential in helping those struggling with the costs of studying in Australia. What international postgraduates really want is a safe, secure and comfortable environment where they can pursue their studies. Improvements will help attract more international students to study in Australia".

The announcements come on the heels of a spate of reported attacks on international students, and the massive popular outcry of condemnation in response. Focus groups of Indian students hosted by the LaTrobe University Postgraduate Association found that safety was a major concern for students both on and off campus, and students believe there are important steps that government, universities and the police should be taking to help improve the international student experience.¹

"In New South Wales and Victoria, many international students feel being denied concession travel on public transport is the biggest form of discrimination they face" CAPA International Officer Anwar Shah said. "We are told we are different from domestic students twice a day, every day: once when we get on public transport in the morning, and again each time we travel home. If people are looking for ways to improve the international student experience, clearly this is one of the things that has to change".

Students and community groups in Victoria are looking to form a coalition of interested organisations and individuals in support of concession travel for postgraduate and international students. Likely to be called the "Concession Card Coalition", the initiative is modelled on the success of the Cross-Campus Concessions Coalition in raising the profile of this issue in New South Wales.

CAPA is also encouraging international postgraduates to attend the international students' forum it will be co-hosting with the National Union of Students, supported by the University of Melbourne, 28-30 June, 2009.

¹ A summary of findings from the report (in press) is appended.

“International students are more than just a source of fee revenue, they are an important part of the student community – we are keen to ensure they are no longer taken for granted” CAPA President, Nigel Palmer, concluded.

Summary of responses from focus groups of Indian postgraduate students

Focus groups of international students studying from India hosted by the La Trobe University Postgraduate Association found that Indian postgraduates:

- Believed that police did not take effective measures to stop further crime after they received initial reports.
- Strongly believed that police were responsible for the safety of everyone in Australia, that international students were no exception, and that police have a responsibility to ensure people’s safety whether attacks are racially motivated or not.
- Felt that efforts to recruit international students should be matched by efforts to ensure their safety.
- While some believe that all international students face similar threats to their safety, others felt the threat was greater for Indian students.
- Indicated that feeling unsafe made them resentful of the high costs of studying in Australia.
- Strongly believed that more should be done by governments, police and universities to help ensure their safety.
- Felt that although the university environment was safer than other areas, that universities had a strong obligation to ensure international students felt secure on campus.
- Stressed the need for 24 hour security on campus, that security patrols should be able to respond quickly to incidents, and that a 5-minute response time to incidents was not unreasonable.
- Stressed the importance of the university library as a safe environment for students, and recommended extending library hours, especially during peak assessment times.
- Identified railway stations as particularly dangerous areas at night, and recommended that regular night-bus services linking local railway stations with the university campus form part of regular security patrols.
- Stressed the need for social functions and cultural events to help ensure a harmonious environment for both domestic and international students on campus.

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