

*** Attention Education Journalists: **Monday August 31, 2009** ***

Postgrads and international students take to streets on concession fares

Rallies are being held in Sydney and Melbourne this week to demand equity when it comes to public transport. "International and postgraduate students are joining together in New South Wales and Victoria to tell their State Government they have had enough of the ridiculous inequities that persist when it comes to access to concession travel on public transport" CAPA President, Nigel Palmer said.

New South Wales and Victoria are the only Australian states to deny international students concession fares on public transport. Victoria has the nations worst transport options for students, in also preventing postgraduate students from travelling on concession fares.

Wednesday September 2nd students in New South Wales will meet outside the UTS Tower building on Broadway at 1pm, and in Victoria meet outside the State Library in Swanston Street at 2pm.

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young will be among the speakers at the Sydney rally.

The demonstrations coincide with the commencement of Senate Committee hearings for the Inquiry into International Student Welfare.

"**Thirty eight** of the submissions to the Senate Inquiry raised the issue of concession travel on public transport for international students. None of these said discriminating against international students was a good idea" CAPA President, Nigel Palmer said.

"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. 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 in Australia, clearly this is one of the things that has to change" CAPA International Officer Anwar Shah concluded.

National rankings for student concession entitlements are available at:

www.capa.edu.au/transportconcessions

Selected comments and recommendations made on transport concessions in submissions to the Senate Inquiry into International Student Welfare are included on the following pages. Full details are available at:

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/international_students/submissions.htm

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Comments and recommendations made on transport concessions in submissions to the Inquiry by universities, schools and industry associations include the following:

Whilst Deakin is satisfied that it is doing as much as it reasonably can do to protect students' safety, it believes strongly that unresolved issues surrounding public transport have a significant impact on the safety of all students and international students in particular. The failure of the State Governments of Victoria and New South Wales to provide transport concessions for international students – in fact for all but full-time domestic undergraduate students – has implications for student safety as international students especially feel forced by cost considerations to choose less safe means to travel to and from university....The absence of transport concessions not only imposes a financial cost on overseas students –many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet – but also creates a perception amongst these students that, despite the government rhetoric, they are not really welcome.

Submission #99, Deakin University

In addition to affordable student housing in safe communities, students need access to affordable transport. The current distinction made between domestic and international students in the provision of concession cards is a symptom of treating international students as commodities rather than, well, as students.

Submission #103, Prof Michael Spence, Vice Chancellor, Sydney University

The lack of concessional fares on public transport is an issue of vital importance to international students. This current highly visible discrimination (in some states) between local and international students is often perceived as a racist money-grabbing exercise by state governments and certainly does not engender a sense of welcome and inclusiveness across the entire student cohort.

Submission #63, Victoria University

There is currently an inconsistency across the States in the availability of international student concessions for travel on public transport. The ATN supports the call for universal student concessions for public transport as a means of removing any barrier to opportunities for employment and study during standard hours.

Submission #11, The Australian Technology Network group of Universities

In order to improve safety and expand work and accommodation options for international students, the NSW and Victorian governments should offer public transport concessions to international students.

Submission #95, IDP Education

Public transport concessions should be granted to all full-time students, regardless of their international or domestic status. Not only would this signal to international students that they are a valued part of the Australian community, but those students who choose to work after hours will have access to an affordable mode of transport which is safer than walking or cycling home alone.

Submission #38, Group of Eight Universities

CAPA is the national peak body representing Australia's 270,000+ postgraduate students. Level 3, Trades Hall, 2 Lygon St, Carlton South, VIC, 3053. www.capa.edu.au

One matter that requires Federal attention is the perception among some international students that they are simply cash cows. A particular example is international student exclusion from access to student transport concessions in NSW and Victoria. This highly visible discrimination between local and international students is often perceived as a racist, moneyhungry exercise by these governments. It does not engender a sense of welcome or acknowledge the contribution of international students to Australia. Given that many international students pay GST, work and pay income tax, the inability for NSW and Victoria to make this concession reinforces the negative belief. It is clear that after repeated appeals to these State Governments they will not adjust their stance without strong Federal Government intervention...

Universities Australia considers it very important that travel concessions be immediately available to all international students in all states and territories. This will contribute to a sense of belonging and enhance their safety and security when moving between campuses, accommodation and workplaces, and improve public transport safety for all.

Submission #70, Universities Australia

Extend travel concessions from domestic to international students across all States and Territories

Submission #71, TAFE Directors Australia

Ensure that international students across all sectors have access to appropriately priced public facilities such as transport, primary and secondary education for dependent children.

Submission #79, The University of Queensland

[International students] cited lack of transport concessions as a huge concern. This is viewed as both unfair and discriminatory. It contributes to students' ability to manage financially, and in many cases to travel safely... All international students should have access to travel concessions.

Submission #30, University of New South Wales

Transport concession cards should include all international students regardless of visa type.

Submission #17, Southern Cross University

RMIT recommends that...Public transport concession is made universally available to international students to promote social inclusion and reduce financial burden.

Submission #89, RMIT University

Navitas calls on the Senate, for safety reasons and equity reasons, to urge the NSW and Victorian Governments to grant international student travel concessions commensurate with those received by Australian students.

Submission #39, Navitas

The issue of travel concessions for overseas students and the fact they are not uniformly available across states and territories is an issue that is often brought up and one in which a common approach would be welcome. Overseas students contribute a great deal to state and territory economies and the withholding of these concessions is viewed as discriminatory given that the concessions are freely available to domestic students.

Submission #72, Independent Schools Council of Australia

The basis of international students not paying taxes appears to be a false premise, given the percentage who do actually work. In fact it is very often this travel from work at very late hours that is causing international students to be placing themselves in risky situations.

Submission #13, Central Queensland University

International students purchase goods and services while in Australia and contribute to the GST revenue of the States. Many international students also work and pay taxes in the same way as domestic students. Withholding of travel concessions is discriminatory in this sense.

The lack of travel concessions in NSW and Victoria is a major negative against the industry in those States. It causes unnecessary resentment towards Australian authorities and the Australian community by the students affected. It is perceived as unfair and discriminatory by most international students.

Granting of travel concessions in NSW and Victoria would have an immediate impact as an indication of goodwill towards students who perceive they are under pressure. In public relations terms it would be a much needed plus at a time of seriously adverse perceptions about the industry here and overseas.

IEAA recommends the NSW and Victorian governments provide international student travel concessions commensurate with those received by Australian students.

Submission #18, International Education Association of Australia (IEAA)

Inconsistent policies across the State and Federal territories of Australia in areas of public transport concessions, the cost of accessing government schooling by the dependants of international students all contribute to dissatisfaction of international students.

Submission #82, The University of Melbourne International Centre

[T]he New South Wales and Victoria Governments should immediately allow international students to have access to student travel concessions, as is the case in other States. International students being denied travel concessions is discriminatory and reduces the ability of students to fully contribute to the community and experience what Australia has to offer.

Submission #100, Canberra Multicultural Community Forum

We recommend that public transport concessions for international students be introduced immediately.

Submission #76, International Student Legal Advice Clinic

Many of Australia's competitor nations in the international education industry provide student concession fare entitlements on public transport to international students. In Australia, some states have chosen to provide international students with this entitlement but others have not.

As the vast majority of international students gain part-time employment while studying in Australia, they are required to pay income and other taxes but have a strong belief they are discriminated against with current full fare public transport requirements.

[T]hey are also not aware, when they arrive in Australia, that they will be required to pay the highest fare sector or multiple fare sectors because of the distance of their accommodation from their education provider.

NEPT member colleges often receive very negative feedback from international students about the public transport concession issue. Feedback includes that, when international students befriend Australian domestic students and travel with them, they have genuine feelings of financial discrimination compared to their peers.

[NEPT recommends that] The Federal Government liaises with relevant State Governments to ensure uniform provision of public transport student concession fare eligibility to all international students across Australia.

Submission #94, National Education Providers Taskforce (NEPT)

[T]he LIV understands that there is significant variation between states and territories in relation to the provision of public transport concessions for international students. Victoria and New South Wales currently exclude international students from public transport concession entitlements but all other state and territory bodies treat international students on the same basis as local students. This variation makes it both confusing and difficult for international students to know when they are entitled to concessions. It also results in an unfair situation for international students studying in Victoria and New South Wales who are required to pay significantly more than both their fellow local students and their overseas counterparts in other states.

Discrimination between international and local students with respect to public transport concessions is not justified. Encouraging public transport usage is environmentally beneficial. It also acknowledges the importance of international students to our economy.

Submission #97, Law Institute of Victoria

*The inequity of the provision of student concessions across Australia has been raised over a number of years. The option of providing these concessions has repeatedly been declined by the State Governments in Victoria and New South Wales with cost reportedly being the major factor. These two States have the highest numbers of international students and therefore receive the greatest share of the economic benefit from the income generated by these students. It has been commented in the Victorian Government Overseas Student Experience Taskforce (December 2008) that this inequity has a significant impact on the feeling of welcome for international students when they arrive, and an ongoing sense of unfairness as they continue to pay more for their travel. International students are high users of public transport, which exacerbates the financial pressure they experience when they arrive to study in Australia... The ongoing issue of the lack of a transport concession being available for international students is having a significant impact on international student attitudes to study in Australia and therefore **UB recommends the introduction of public transport concessions for international students.***

Submission #64, University of Ballarat