

Re: Review of Australia's Higher Education System

The United Workers Union represents workers in; Hospitality, Cleaning, Aged and Disability care, Early Childhood Educations and Care, Food Production and Farm Labour. These sectors are all highly dependent on the employment of International Students.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, international students were facing challenges outside campus life such as isolation, affordable accommodation, workplace exploitation and mental health struggles.

International Students are highly susceptible to exploitation due to a lack of knowledge of their employment rights in Australia, unscrupulous behavior of employers and a fear of losing their visa if they speak up. International Students are in a unique employment and visa relationship and are often overlooked in discussions about migrant workers, yet they consistently rank highly in groups exposed to exploitation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, international students received no support from the Federal Government despite international education being the nation's second largest national export.

It is also worth noting that although all States provide International Students support services and Universities under the National Code are already required to provide access to an age and culturally appropriate orientation program, International Students were in the main, unable to access the necessary support services as needed.

In March 2020, an Alliance of civil society organizations (of which UWU is one) initiated a grassroots engagement and support process with international students in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Through the collective efforts and endorsements of over 40 civil society organizations across NSW, the Alliance were able to secure grant funding to create a pilot for an International Student Community Hub – the Oz International Student Hub (OISH).

Over this period the OISH engaged over 2400 international students and provided services such as; Mental Health and Mutual Support, Conversational English classes, Training and Information to empower students with the knowledge and skills to address commonly faced issues and challenges I.e., Employment, Housing, Visas, Justice and Social opportunities.

An Intake, Assessment and Support Service was also set up as a part of this project to support and connect international students to the most appropriate support service to assist them in critical times of need.

The United Workers Union recommends the Federal Government invest in a nationwide project to set up student hubs based on this model to support international students and bolster our global reputation as a safe and supporting place of learning for international students.

Yours

Anthony Byrne

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