

Community-Campus Summit on International Students

Final Report
20 April 2010



Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)

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24 May 2010

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The Community-Campus Summit on International Students is the first initiative of the Vice-Chancellor's Front Foot Project. The Front Foot Project is aimed at proactively ensuring all Monash international students continue to have a positive, rewarding and high quality education experience while studying at Monash campuses.

For further information visit: <http://www.monash.edu.au/community-summit/>

OVERVIEW

On 20th April, Monash University hosted a *Community-Campus Summit on International Students* at Caulfield Campus. This extremely important summit brought together State government representatives, Victorian industry groups, local community organisations, foreign diplomats and Monash University representatives to address key issues impacting on international students.

The Summit presented an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas on a range of issues important to international students.

It sought to deliver in particular two key outcomes:

- to develop a set of items for implementation aimed at dealing with key issues directly impacting on international students in areas such as accommodation, transport, safety and security, social inclusion and employment rights.

- to formulate practical ways in which international students could be more engaged with local communities.

About 126 attended the Summit, with 45 percent external representatives, while the rest were Monash staff and student representatives.

Next stage:

- working towards establishing the **Community-Monash University Council** chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Council will be an important forum to pursue items for implementation identified at the forum, share information and initiate joint activities;

- working closely with the Research, Education, Advancement and Administration portfolios along with faculties and campuses to **better coordinate** Monash's community engagement; and

- mobilise **research interest** at Monash and in the community on issues relating to international students.

A **Community-Campus Engagement Website** has been established to host videos of presentations given by speakers, links to ongoing Monash-Community initiatives and summary of summit proceedings.

<http://www.monash.edu.au/community-summit/>

WELCOME ADDRESS

***Professor Stephanie Fahey
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement), Monash University***

Distinguished guests, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen, our colleagues who are joining us by video-conference from our Malaysia and South Africa campuses. It is my great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of Monash University, to the Community-Campus Summit on International Students.

In the spirit of reconciliation, Monash University acknowledges and pays respects to the traditional owners and elders, both past and present, of the land on which the Monash University Caulfield campus stands, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation. We acknowledge their living culture and unique role in the life of this region and offer our deep appreciation for their contribution to and support of our academic enterprise.

Monash has an ongoing commitment to enrich the student experience and overall learning outcomes by providing a safe learning environment, and greater opportunities for social inclusion; regardless of whether students are from on or offshore, and studying in Australia, Malaysia, South Africa, or our Centre in Prato.

Social inclusion applies to all students, and is particularly pertinent to students who are studying away from their home and own support networks.

Perhaps I can take a moment to provide some context.

In 2008, Monash University student enrolments comprised 20.3 per cent of Victorian and 5.3 per cent of Australian higher education enrolments. We have the largest international student population among the Group of Eight universities with approximately twelve thousand international students at our six Victorian campuses and almost twenty thousand when our Malaysia and South Africa campuses are included.

Monash recognises the valuable contribution international students make to the cultural diversity of this university. We understand many of our international students seek a better connection with local students and the wider community. The University also recognises the importance of equipping our international students with information about the Australian lifestyle and values so they can better adapt and display greater personal safety awareness, especially as student safety and security is inextricably linked to the student experience.

Monash already offers an extensive range of programs and services to support and enhance the student study experience, the majority of which are delivered centrally (and often in collaboration) through Health Wellbeing and Development, the Security Office, Monash Residential Services, Monash Sport, and Employment and Career Development.

We also realise a collaborative effort is required from Federal and State Governments, education providers, community groups, student associations and local councils to develop a comprehensive national strategy to significantly address the issue.

As the Senate inquiry into the Welfare of International Students by the Education Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee found, there are broader issues which play a significant role in the student experience – lack of personal safety awareness, a tight rental accommodation market, rising living costs, inadequate English language proficiency in social situations, and the reliance international students have on public transport especially when travelling to and from work. In addition, the higher education sector may not have a complete understanding of the depth of the student safety issue because of the reluctance of international students to report criminal activity due to a perception it may adversely impact an existing visa or future visa application.

Today's program has been purposely divided into two sessions. Session one addresses the issues and challenges experienced by international students. Session two is focussed on a way forward and ideas generation for formulating practical ways in which international students could be more engaged with you in our local communities.

Mr Peter Mares will facilitate the two sessions comprising two speakers each delivering a five-minute presentation to set the framework for broader discussion. Peter has been a journalist and broadcaster with the ABC for more than twenty years and currently presents the weekly public policy discussion program The National Interest on ABC Radio National and has a particular interest in migration issues.

We will be filming individual interviews today for the purpose of producing a mini documentary of two to four minutes length. So please feel free to talk openly during the discussion – what you say during today's discussion will not be featured in the documentary.

Before we warmly welcome your active contribution to this important discussion please join me in inviting Monash University Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Ed Byrne to say a few words.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Professor Ed Bryne AO
Vice-Chancellor and President Monash University

Welcome to all guests, students, community leaders and members of the Monash community.

Today's event is a very special one. It is the first time that Monash University and the community around it has come together for this very important topic, this important theme. Monash is one of the world's most internationally engaged universities, and we always seek to be outward looking and to be engaged with the community. But in some ways areas we haven't done it as well as we might, and today's meeting is a major step in terms of remedying this around the whole area of student experience, in particular, international student experience.

Often when we talk about international student enrolment and international students coming to Australia we appropriately emphasise the positive aspect of the engagement. We talk about the tremendous role that higher education has in building our international linkages and allowing new members of the communities to find their place, and ensuring that good ideas can travel across geographical, political and cultural borders. But for the students themselves, as we all know and that is what today is largely about, it is not that easy. Aside from the tremendous experience of travelling abroad, there are many challenges, not just the academic challenge of undertaking study in a language that often is not your native language, but challenges in making new friends, adjusting to a different culture, and being removed from the support networks of your home.

Australia's universities have been challenged to cater to diverse cross sections of students and staff, whose needs are often different from those of the past. Monash University has students from almost 150 different countries studying on Australian campuses

A key challenge in this area is not just to the University, but to members of the general community and the community around our campuses, who share a responsibility with the university to be good host, to welcome international students in such a way that they are able to build long term connections to their neighbourhoods in which they live, work and study. So their time in Australia, regardless of whether they stay here as immigrants in the long terms as permanent residents, or return home to the country in which they have come, their time here in Australia is remembered as one of the happiest and most exciting times of their lives.

It is clear that to achieve the type of student experience we not only want but must have for our international students, we must work together and ensure that we are working in the same direction, and that of course is what today is about.

This extremely important summit brings together State Government representatives, Victorian industry groups, local community organisations including local government, foreign diplomats, and many people from Monash

University itself to address some of the key issues impacting on international students, and work out how we can address those together.

The summit presents an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas on a range of issues important to our international students, and we seek to deliver two key outcomes:

1. Develop a set of items for implementation, that deal with the most important issues directly impacting on our international students, and cover areas such as accommodation, transport, safety and security, social inclusion and employment rights;
2. Formulate practical ways in which international students can become more engaged with our local communities.

By bringing this group together combine knowledge share resources and build a picture of strength and experience to ensure international students have the best possible experience and a high quality experience of their time in Australia.

PROGRAM

PROGRAM FORMAT

ABC Broadcaster, Mr Peter Mares, facilitated the two sessions with two speakers in each delivering a five-minute presentation to set the framework for broader discussion. The first session focused on international student experience with Monash's Professor Chris Nyland outlining the issues and challenges these students face, focusing on security and safety, transport, accommodation, and employment. Ms Anupvir Shergill, and Indian student of a private training college discussed some of the struggles faced by international students at private colleges. The second session focused on community engagement with international students. Mr Andrew Macleod, Chief Executive Officer, Committee for Melbourne led the discussion and spoke about the Committee and the Victorian Government's work on student-community engagement. A recent Monash graduate, Mr Vincent Miao from China, followed by offering his perspective on international student community engagement.

KEY ISSUES

Transport: Universities and other higher education institutions are unanimous in their belief that public transport concessions for international students is an issue that must be addressed. There are currently discussions underway that may see domestic and international students on same footing with the same privileges.

Accommodation: Affordable housing for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, low SES students, students from rural areas and international students is essential. Research has found that affordable on-campus housing enhances the student experience by integrating students into the campus community. This also links in with safety, reducing the student's dependence on public transport late at night travelling between their home and place of study.

Many international students are unaware of their tenant rights, or don't want to cause trouble (for fear of losing accommodation), leaving these students vulnerable to unscrupulous real-estate agents.

Safety: There is a need to monitor off-campus wellbeing. A number of Monash students have been threatened or attacked at their home or around Melbourne, but while these students may have discussed this with peers or their supervisors, they have not reported this to the authorities.

There has been an increase in domestic violence against women. In particular, many Indian women are victims of domestic violence or sexual assaults, and many of these go unreported because the women are unaware of their rights and the laws. Women's refuges cannot accept international students because they don't have permanent residency.

Employment: One of the biggest issues faced by international students is unemployment, this applies not only to those students newly arrived, but also to students who have recently completed their studies. Additionally, in order to prepare these students for work in their chosen career, there needs to be some reform in the private education sector with regard to the quality of field placements.

Restrictions on the number of hours that international students are allowed to work (not more than 20 hours) often leads to students working for cash in hand, which can lead to exploitation. There are many reports of women being paid \$5 cash in hand, eg childminding or other domestic duties.

Student Engagement: ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) study compared international student experience in Australia to that of international students in America. The study found that international students in Australia were less likely to speak up in class than their American counterparts, and there was far less engagement between staff and their students in Australia than America.

Much of the information and engagement of international students is from those studying at university, with students from private college missing out. Many private colleges do not even offer student welfare associations. Programs that involve or are dedicated to international students need to include and engage both international and domestic students.

Many students from India studying at private colleges never really leave India. They are met at the airport, work is arranged, and they live, work and study in their Indian communities. There is little engagement with the wider communities. Students have already made up their mind and have preconceptions about Australia before they even consider studying in Australia. *If you start off expecting racism, you will see it everywhere*, so we really need to address these preconceptions.

'Everyone needs to be told everything at least once'. We need to recognise that guests in the country are told everything at least once, regarding living in Melbourne.

- Orientation needs to be longer and more involved. Orientation should include a focus on what students should realistically expect during their time in Australia, including information on their rights and safety. Not just paint a rosy picture!
- Provide external provider with information on how to get information through to students and staff at the University.

Victoria Police initiatives: A number of student safety initiatives have been implemented by the Victorian Police. These include:

- The North Western International Student reference group and the South East International Student reference group. These groups are made up of representatives from various organisations, including the Consulate General of India, the Indian International Student Advisory Centre, the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria, the Victorian Multicultural Commission, local councils and universities and various Indian media outlets and are to attend and take part in the meetings.

- The International Student Central Governance Committee, comprised of senior level management from Victoria Police, as well as senior managers from strategic stakeholders such as Human Rights Commission, Office of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Planning and Community Development etc. Student Governance Committee. This committee provides direct input into the Chief Commission of police, and considers recommendations from both reference groups.
- Providing advice to employers as well as employees, and are looking at educating Victoria Police members on how to engage with international students.
- Putting across their messages in the most effect and efficient manner for various issues including:
 - Engaging the right stakeholders in these committees, including the Transport Ministry, as they have significant input into some issues with students engaging in activities which are considered to be high risk. These activities can expose the students to becoming victims of crime. For example, the majority of taxi drivers are Indian students, and driving taxis can put the driver at high risk for attacks and robbery.

Challenges faced by international students in community engagement:

Two main factors that contribute to challenges faced by international students in connecting with local community are:

1. *Language barrier* – this is the main reason that international students stay within their own groups rather than interacting with other students, and this affects social interaction and engagement, participation in tutorials and the ability to find work.
2. *Lack of interaction with domestic students.* Domestic students are seen as friendly and kind, but lack awareness of how to engage with international students. Peer Mentoring programs link international students with a mentor to answer questions and provide guidance for living in Australia. However, many of the mentors are international students, rather than domestic students, therefore not providing the international students with interaction with domestic students.

Postgraduate/HDR students often have different needs from those of undergraduates. They start at various times of the year, so may miss orientation. These students are often older, and arrive with spouses and children. The experience and success of these students is often influenced by the happiness of their family.

Resource Networks: International student groups are very resourceful, with students setting up their own resource networks. An example is some Saudi students have set up a website where new Saudi students are put into contact with community support resources, and provided with strategies and advice. This type of service could be done in collaboration or conjunction with the University/ies.

Community Engagement: Not all international students are ready to engage with the local community and culture as soon as they arrive in Australia. Different students and different cultures have different needs, so we need to

think about the way we engage newly arrived international students, for example, put students with similar interests together, eg sport, Arts, work groups and accommodation, rather than everyone together hoping they will have something in common. It is also important to remember that international students will not pay to engage in cultural or social activities when they are struggling to make ends meet, so the cost of social activities aimed at engaging these students must be carefully considered.

A good way for international students to become engaged with the community may be through Rotary, as Rotary represent the community. Rotary are keen to engage with international students, and have the ability and contacts to link international students with other students from their communities and with Rotary members, providing an excellent opportunity for the international students to better their language skills and better assimilate.

RESEARCH IDEAS/INTERESTS

A number of research ideas and research interests came out and were discussed at the summit. The classroom is only one part of the teaching experience. Research is needed to understand what is happening in our international student communities with relation to housing, employment etc.

Research on the impact of the thousands of international students on the wider Australian communities, including those around the Monash Campuses and beyond is needed. Several organisations expressed their interest in collaborating with Monash on research opportunities including:

- *Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition*. This organisation already has connections with different communities, and is keen to work with Monash and these communities.
- Rotary. As discussed above, Rotary may be a good way for international student engagement with local communities, and Rotary Australia have expressed their interest in exploring research opportunities with Monash University.

OUTCOMES FROM THE SUMMIT - ITEMS FOR ACTION

1. **Cultural Awareness training:** In partnership with VECCI (Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry), in May this year, brought in the main employers of international students including 7/11, Hungry Jacks, MacDonald's, taxi drivers, Coles etc, asking employers to provide a short staff induction program that was specific to each place of employment on safety and cultural awareness for their employees. That is, asking the employers to take on the responsibility to ensure employees have the knowledge to get to and from work safely.
2. **Culture Card:** This is being launched with the Victorian Government and the Committee for Melbourne bringing together the main cultural partners

(AFL, Art Gallery, Museum, Vic Market and others). The Cultural Card is about giving international students privileged access to cultural icons (but with a guided tour, welcome cocktail) that many Victorians visited during their schooling.

3. **Practicum:** Committee for Melbourne partnering with Universities. Bring in high performing postgraduate international students and link them with key businesses to provide work experience type engagements.
4. **Internships:** Pilot project through Inner Melbourne Forums and Action Plan (IMAP) <http://www.imap.vic.gov.au/> which brings together the State Government and the inner city councils (Melbourne, Stonington, Yarra and Port Phillip), on an internship program. This internship program is to fit with the Work Integrated Learning Requirements which are part of most undergraduate teaching. The internship program could be on either a paid or non-paid basis.
5. Through the Business Development Program, Glen Eira City Council provides opportunities to bring together students (local and international) and small businesses. Partnerships in the areas of website development and statistics have proven to be particularly successful. http://business.gleneira.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_id=271&h=-1&newsletter=true
6. *Skilled migration placement program-* Glen Eira Council have found that local government has great opportunity to tap into the knowledge of skilled migrants in areas of skills shortage including town planning, engineering and accounting. The program provides \$3400 to take on a skilled migrant for a three month placement, during which time the employee can determine whether the workplace is right for them, and vice versa.
7. Students as staff program: The University provides employment opportunities for students, this is more common in the United States where many universities hire students as staff.
8. International Welcome Desk at the airport.
9. Buddying Program at Monash:
 - a. Social English language programs – domestic students chat, talk about movies etc.
 - b. Information Workshops – your rights at work, what to expect from the landlord, how much you would expect to pay for certain services/goods, financial advice.
10. CEO and Vice Chancellors Program: Bringing together the Vice Chancellors from universities around Victoria and the major CEO's from around Melbourne to identify opportunities where businesses can come together with the academic world.
11. Better orientation programs: these should be longer than a day or a week, and should provide information on how to better engage and assimilate into the local and wider community.

12. Prizes and awards for good employers - recognition for employers who support and care for international students. Have information and incentives for these businesses to be recognized, on the Community for Melbourne website, and the VECCI website. This would allow for recognition, but also provide information to the students on which businesses constitute a safe and supportive work environment.
13. Better engagement of international students with volunteer programs including high profile events such as Clean-up Australia day activities.

CURRENT ACTION/PRACTICAL INITIATIVES

1. **Manifesto**/public statement on views of international students: Manifesto/powerful statement signed off on by staff, students and communities we work with, around the importance we attach to international students and their experience in Melbourne and Victoria.
2. **Monash Community Council** – continuation of topics and discussion from the Community Campus Summit.
3. **Government Contract:** A contract between Australia and the Indian Government has been drawn up to develop and monitor standards and regulations applicable to the wellbeing of Indian students.
4. The **Australian Human Rights Commission** is proposing a contract that provides a guarantee in writing to each student detailing their rights and entitlements, embracing housing, safety, transport etc.
5. **Victoria Police initiatives across the community:**
 - a. Project Guardian launched recently in Dandenong: involving the input of over 90 additional police around transport hubs and the surrounding environs, with Strike Teams entering the area addressing problems looking for weapons etc. Also providing reassurance to students and the rest of the community that Police are aware of and are addressing problems. More *Project Guardians* are planned for the future.
6. **Cultural Awareness training:** Always inadvertently place yourself in case of increased risk when you don't know the culture - Formalise the cultural awareness training given to international students with training to be determined in conjunction with the universities, private providers and the student unions.
 - Tap into the consuls general, to give them mechanism where they can say to their nationality the 4 or 5 main fopauxs that their nationals make in Australia.

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