

Case Study 6

International students in Australia

Introduction

Coverage of international students in the pages of *The Australian* newspaper over the period of a year, between the beginning of November 2004 and end of October 2005 revealed a number of key themes. As *The Australian* is a national publication, most of the 58 stories published during the year were general, rather than local, in nature. Most stories focused either on issues affecting international students or their study, or on the international student market in Australia. Of those stories which focused on specific cultural groups, Chinese students were the most frequently mentioned, as either the victims or perpetrators of crime. In some instances, the reference was widened to include Asian students more broadly – for example, in the headline “Asian student gambling plague exposed”. Other areas of focus included outcomes for international students, visas, and racism, in particular, racist comments by Macquarie University academic Andrew Fraser. Stories covering the international student market examined issues such as voluntary student unionism, its likely impact on international students and potential inequities in the levying of student fees. Most of the rest of the articles in this area focused on the international student market more broadly. Asian countries were a central theme of this coverage, although this may reflect the importance of Asia as a market for Australian education. Also mentioned were concerns about the number of university places being offered to international students and the possible effect of this on places for local students.

The Australian (reporting period November 1, 2004 – October 31, 2005)

- ◆ Searched Newsbank on December 20, 2005; January 6, 2006; January 10, 2006
- ◆ Search terms “international students”; “foreign students”; “overseas students”
- ◆ 58 articles
- ◆ Excluded were a series of articles reporting on IDP Education Australia (the main recruiter of international students, owned by Australia’s 38 universities)

The articles divided into two distinct groups. The first group concerned international students generally, covering issues regarding their experiences, pastoral care on campuses, student visas, post-study outcomes and similar matters. The second group focused on the international student market, and was largely concerned with fees, generating income and marketing Australian education.

International students

Pastoral care

One strand of articles which emerged concerned the level and quality of the pastoral care international students received from their institutions. The first article, published in December 2004, was a report on a study being conducted by Monash University, which criticised the lack of pastoral care and security international students received. This was emphasised in a long report in March 2005 covering the murder of an international student, whose disappearance went unnoticed by her university. One letter to the editor also commented on this case, criticising the lack of pastoral care and concern for student security displayed by Australian universities (March 2005). Two articles in August 2005 focused on the university's responsibility to maintain communication with international students, reporting that the university in question had breached legal obligations by failing to report the student's absence to DIMIA. The importance of pastoral care was also touched upon in an opinion piece published in May 2005, and a report on underage gambling by international students published in December 2004.

Crime

Another subset of articles concerned international students as victims or perpetrators of crime. The murder of the Canberra University international student was covered in a series of five articles in March, June and August 2005. Two articles, in December 2004 and September 2005, reported on the incidence of underage gambling among international students from Asia attending both secondary and tertiary institutions in Adelaide. An article in May 2005 reported on an international student arrested in an Adelaide heroin bust. The article was entitled "TAFE student a 'heroin kingpin'", and opened with the sentence "A Chinese TAFE student is accused of being the mastermind behind one of Australia's largest single shipments of heroin ...". All of the articles reporting on crime among international students identified the perpetrators (and the single victim) as Chinese.

Outcomes

Four articles touched on the post-study outcomes for international students: two positive and two negative. The first, published in February 2005, reported on a new collaborative teaching agreement between the Malaysian Government and two Australian universities, in which Malaysian ESL teaching students will spend part of their degree studying in Australia. The second was an opinion piece about the benefits of international student education for both Australia and the students' home countries, with a particular focus on Malaysia (May 4, 2005). This article was a version of a presentation given at an international education conference in Malaysia. This piece was written by the CEO of IDP Education Australia. The third article reported on the poor employment prospects for Asian-born accounting students who remain in Australia as permanent residents after completing their studies (July 6, 2005). This article was entitled "Language lets down Chinese accountants" and noted that NESB accounting students were "predominantly Chinese". The final article was a report on

the decreasing interest of Chinese students in seeking tertiary education in Australia, as it no longer automatically garnered a higher salary (September 14, 2005).

Student visas

A substantial number of articles focused on student visa issues. The first was an opinion piece, published in April 2005, calling for permanent residency to be offered to international students. It focused on the economic and social benefits that could be derived from retaining international students after graduation. This piece was written by the Vice-Chancellor of Swinburne University of Technology. The second article reported on the substantial number of international students who fail to maintain the health cover required under their student visas (June 29, 2005). The third article was a report on the detention of international students who breached their visa conditions (August 3, 2005). It noted that the Federal Court had criticised DIMIA for its “heavy-handed enforcement”, stating it could harm Australia’s reputation as an international education provider. The fourth article concerned a ruling against DIMIA which could see thousands of cancelled student visas reinstated (September 16, 2005). The fifth article reported on changes to student visa conditions which allow students to undertake workplace training after graduation. It also reported on a new visa category for student apprenticeships.

Racism

Three articles reported on the controversy generated by an academic from Macquarie University who was accused of espousing racist views in his position as a university teacher and representative of the institution. The first article, published on July 27, 2005, reported Associate Professor Andrew Fraser’s claims that he would be sacked if he did not resign, as his views would deter enrolment by international students, affecting the university’s income. Associate Professor Fraser revealed that he had used his university address and email when registering with the Patriotic Youth League (see Case Study 1), which was linked to racist activities at Newcastle University. It also reported that he supported the PYL campaign to stop African refugees from settling in Australia, based on his belief that Africans have lower IQs and so form a higher crime risk. The second article, published on July 29, reported that African students were calling for a boycott of Macquarie University for its failure to “discipline” Associate Professor Fraser. The final article reported that the National Tertiary Education Union intended to represent Associate Professor Fraser in any action taken by the university, despite being “outraged” by his comments. This was a long article which reported in detail on Associate Professor Fraser’s assertions regarding African and Asian migrants, including his focus on the Sudanese community in Australia. The articles did not mention that Associate Professor Fraser had migrated to Australia from Canada.

The remaining three articles covered a range of issues. One reported on the Foreign Minister’s pledge that Muslim headscarves would not be banned in Australian schools (September 8, 2005). One was an advisory piece aimed at international students, published in a Post Grad Special Report in the *Weekend Australian* (September 10, 2005). The final article was a report about universities organising scholarships and fee

relief for international students affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami (January 5, 2005).

International student market

VSU

The impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on the international student market featured in a series of seven articles published in March, April, August and September 2005. The first three articles were opinion pieces asserting that the diminished services available to students under VSU would make Australia a less desirable education destination for international students. Two articles were published on the same page of the HES on March 23. One was a piece written by the National Union of Students president, damning the Government's VSU proposal. The claim that international students would be deterred was one of numerous negative outcomes of VSU discussed in the piece. The second opinion piece was written by the Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowan University. It described the negative impact of VSU on the university, after it was introduced by the WA State Government in 1994, and noted the importance of student services to its international students. The third opinion piece was published on April 6, written by the convener of the National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia (NLC). This piece focused in detail on the impact VSU would have on international students already in Australia, and the likelihood that the decreased services offered by universities would deter future students from choosing Australia. An August 17 article also reported on the negative impact of VSU on international students, quoting from a letter written to the Education Minister by the NLC, and reports to the Senate inquiry into VSU.

The second group of articles, published in September, reported on changes to the Education Services for Overseas Student Act which would allow universities to charge compulsory student services fees to international students at the same time that the VSU legislation made charging domestic students these fees illegal. The first article focused on the negative impact charging a compulsory fee only to international students would have (September 23, 2005). The second article reported that Melbourne University did not intend to charge its international students a services and amenities fee which it could not charge to domestic students (September 26, 2005). The third article described the rift that could be created between international and domestic students if the fees charged and services available to them varied widely (September 28, 2005). All three articles touched on the discriminatory nature of charging international students compulsory fees while making fees voluntary for domestic students. Two articles published on January 5, 2005, reported that the rising cost of international student fees generally was reducing the demand for Australian university degrees among Asian students. The first article was on page 3, and the second in the HES feature.

Market

Most of the articles were concerned with the international student market. Nine articles noted the Australian education sector's reliance on the income generated by international students. An article published on November 23, 2004, reported on the increasing numbers of overseas students being charged substantial fees for primary and secondary education in Australia. A January 19 article reported a University of Western Australia plan to open a foundation college, intended to channel year 11 and 12 international students into the university. The remaining articles were concerned with the tertiary education sector.

Five articles reported on new programs or collaborative arrangements aimed at recruiting a new sector or bigger share of the international student market. An article published on December 1, 2004, reported on an international marketing campaign being jointly developed by the WA State Government and its tertiary education sector. The UWA plan was reported seven weeks later. A report on a joint venture between ANU and Sydney University, targeting international students and researchers, was published on February 23, 2005. A May 4 article reported on a new screen performance program being developed at Griffith University which would target international students from Asia, alongside domestic students. A report on scholarships being offered to British students by Australian universities was published on August 31.

The demand for Australian university places among international students was the focus of seven articles, and mentioned in numerous others. Decreasing demand for Australian university places and increasing competition with other education providers were reported in two articles, published on February 16 and July 6. The remaining articles gave a positive spin to the changing demand for places. An article published on May 11 reported on the growing number of Indian students coming to Australia, while a June 1 article reported on the recovery of Malaysian international student numbers after an unexpected decrease in 2003-2004. A report on September 14 revealed that Australia had the highest percentage of international students in the OECD, but warned about increasing competition from other countries. Two articles published on October 12 reported that Asian students were choosing Australia over the US for safety reasons, and chose to study here rather than in their home countries. Both articles reported that Australia was still perceived as offering a lower quality of international education than the UK and US.

A July 6 report refuted allegations that increasing international student numbers were displacing potential domestic students from Australian universities, and that universities were lowering standards to accommodate international students. An article published on June 1 carefully avoided linking increasing international student numbers with decreasing domestic students. This article quoted the Opposition education spokeswoman as criticising decreased federal funding of tertiary education, asserting that it forced universities to increase international student enrolments to compensate. However, an October 12 article stated that the drop in federal funding forcing universities to rely on international students was decreasing the number of domestic students who could gain a university place.