

Funding international student support services: tension and power in the university

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Abstract This case study aims to contribute some understanding as to why a research oriented university with many thousands of full-fee paying international students was believed not to provide adequate funds for international student support services. Drawing on Bourdieu’s notions of fields of power and disciplinary hierarchy, we suggest that the University must allocate resources amongst competing claimants. In the associated internal contest for resources, international student support divisions and disciplines with little intellectual capital but great capacity to attract international students have relatively little bargaining power. This study indicates that the need to build and sustain research reputation led to inadequate funding of support services in an Australian institution heavily reliant on international student income. Ironically, this can mean students who choose a highly ranked university may not receive the support services they require.

Keywords International student security · Support services · University budgeting · Tension and power

Introduction

Australian universities rely heavily on revenue accrued from international student fees. As of 2010, there were approximately 470,000 international students in Australia—a number that has since fallen away (Studies in Australia 2010). Critical to the success of the international student experience is the provision of services that support student security. International student security is defined as “maintenance of a stable capacity for self-determining human agency” (Marginson et al. 2010). This understanding accords with the

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view of Clements (1990, p. 2), who believes that without security “social life would be both meaningless and relatively dangerous”. Within this context, the international student support services referred to in this paper may include counseling, housing and finance advice, and academic support, which is usually termed as language and learning support. International student support services are understood to include all university provided services that contribute to student safety and well-being (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland 2008). Despite the importance of this core human requirement, the functional capacity of university support staff is continuously challenged by a need to compete for resources against university divisions that generate outcomes more highly prized by senior managers. In the case of research intensive universities the outcomes most cherished are those that directly enhance the university’s research profile. As a consequence, student support staff may not receive the resources required to adequately contain the risks that challenge international student safety and wellbeing. The consequent difficulties experienced by international students have been documented by Marginson et al. (2010). In this paper we extend the Marginson et al. contribution by drawing on Bourdieu’s notions of fields of power and disciplinary hierarchy and on an Australian case study to explain why international student security may be inadequately funded despite a heavy reliance of universities on international student revenue. Our case institution will be referred to as ‘the University’.

Field, hierarchy and university budgets

The University endeavour to provide for the security of all students is challenged by the size and complexity of its international student cohort. It is further complicated by competition between departments for desired and/or necessary financial resources. In his study of university budgeting, Zona (2005, p. 28) observes that within universities the “thirst for financial resources is endemic” and competing sub-units are consequently compelled to draw on power and positioning. Hence, just as the globe is a “field of power” in which universities and university systems use various forms of capital to capture resources and position their institutions in the global academic hierarchy (Marginson 2008), individual universities are fields of power in which sub-divisions contest for limited resources and prestige. A field of power means a “space that is an ensemble of positions in a relationship of mutual exclusion” (Bourdieu 1996, p. 232). It is a setting in which agents and their social positions are situated, with the location of each being a function of the rules of the field together with their specific habitus (subjective system of expectations and predispositions) and the forms of capital (symbolic, economic and cultural) that individuals and sub-units are able to combine as they contest for prized assets at stake within the field.

Organizationally, universities tend to be committed to specific goals and are characterized by vertical and horizontal coalitions that promote vested interests. Informed by this perspective, Baldrige (1971, p. 107) developed a research framework that assumed universities can be studied as miniature political systems “fractured by conflicts along the lines of disciplines, faculty subgroups, student subcultures, splits between administrators and faculties, and rifts between professional schools” (see also Hickson et al. 1971; Pfeffer and Salancik 1974; Salancik and Pfeffer 1978; Hills and Thomas 1978). The tensions associated with vested interests have an inevitable relationship with power.

It has long been held that “power accrues to those departments that are most instrumental in bringing in or providing resources which are highly valued by the total organization” (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974, p. 470). What constitutes a power source is

dependent on the nature of the university. Thus, while a discipline's capacity to attract large numbers of students might be a significant power source in institutions that prioritise teaching, this is unlikely to be the case with universities that emphasise research. This generalization may be moderated if student income becomes critical to the research organization's financial viability. For Bourdieu (1988), the fundamental resources that determine divisional power within universities are academic and intellectual capital—academic capital equates to one's position in the management hierarchy and intellectual capital to one's place in the institution's cultural hierarchy. A division's intellectual capital is a function of the scientific renown enjoyed by its individual members, research teams and/or the nature of the discipline (Bourdieu 1988, p. 79).

Bourdieu's perspective is largely shared by US analysts who argue that the main sources of decision-making power in universities are a capacity to secure positions on key decision making bodies, win external grants, produce high-status publications, and be an accredited member of a prestigious discipline (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974; Salancik and Pfeffer 1978; Pfeffer and Moore 1980). However, while Bourdieu and US scholars echo each other, there are tonal differences worth noting. Lodahl and Gordon (1972) and Pfeffer and Moore (1980), for example, would agree with Bourdieu that disciplines have divergent capacities to engage in contests of power. However, they do not accept Bourdieu's assertion that disciplinary power primarily reflects the class position of the students and faculty that tend to be recruited to a field. They suggest rather that the disciplines that have the greatest intellectual capital tend to be those with the most 'mature' paradigms—fields in which there is a high level of agreement on what constitutes evidence and knowledge—and that have the capacity to attract levels of funding that is substantial and clearly measurable (Lodahl and Gordon 1972; Salancik et al. 1980). The emphasis accorded funding and quantifiable measures relates to Slaughter and Leslie's (1997) concept of academic capitalism, which provides an understanding for the development within universities of "new managerialism, and calls for accountability, assessment and rankings" (Kauppinen 2012).

The importance of research as a power source can create great difficulties for university divisions with relatively little research capacity but an ability to earn substantial revenue from international student fees. These low-status/high-income divisions may find they are required to transfer much of their income to high prestige research sections of the university. Lodahl and Gordon (1973) note this option is seldom left to chance by disciplines with substantial capital. Rather, the high prestige research sections of the university tend to build coalitions with sub-units of a similar ilk in order to ensure budget allocations favour their collective interests. As captured by Pfeffer and Salancik (1974, p. 470), divisional "power derived from acquiring resources is used to obtain more resources, which in turn can be employed to produce more power—the rich get richer".

Along with disciplinary fields with relatively little academic or intellectual capital, other divisions that are likely to perform poorly in the struggles for university resources are those Hackman (1985) terms 'peripheral units'.

Peripheral units are the non-central parts of the institution. They vary widely in size and mission, both within an individual college or university and from one institution to another. Included in this category are most administrative and support offices.... (Hackman 1985, p. 62)

International student services come within the ambit of support offices that are subject to differing power dynamics compared with core sub-units. Hackman explored six case universities to find core units to be the primary recipients of resources with peripheral units perceived as optional and hence highly vulnerable in times of financial difficulty. Given

these dynamics, Hackman (1985, p. 75) advised that sub-unit strategists should determine whether their programs are primarily core or peripheral and shape budget lobbying in accordance with these estimates. Core unit managers should emphasise the fact that resourcing their divisions will enable them to further the primary goals of the university while peripheral units, (and we would suggest disciplines with relatively little intellectual capital but a substantial capacity to attract student fee revenue) should focus on broader institutional needs and highlight their capacity to reap external resources that can contribute to the institution as a whole.

Ongoing university budgeting debates have provided powerful insights that can help explain the level of funding allocated to international student support services. Despite the increasing significance of international student income to many universities, this debate has not previously been extended to consider the internal tensions and use of power that may be generated by this new source of revenue. It is this lacuna within the literature that we address in the following case study.

Background to the study

International education in Australia is considered a commodity and is the nation's third most important export 'industry'. To develop higher education as an export sector Australian governments enacted facilitating legislation, reduced state funding to higher education, and introduced a corporate culture that encouraged universities to engage in cost cutting and the maximization of the profits made possible by recruiting international students. The new source of revenue also generated tensions within universities as divisions mobilized their power to influence how this wealth was to be distributed. That research oriented divisions commonly profited from this exercise to the detriment of international student support services was highlighted by a University of Melbourne study (Beaton-Wells and Thompson 2011). The study revealed that a large proportion of the revenue generated by the divisions at Melbourne University that host the largest numbers of international students was used to subsidize the research intensive sections of the university. The Melbourne study further alleges this process is occurring across Australia's universities and as a consequence international students "are paying in quite a direct sense for research" to an extent unknown in any other country (Beaton-Wells and Thompson 2011). Within this context, we aim to provide further understanding of the dynamics associated with the tension and power within an Australian university in relation to the allocation of income derived from international student revenue and why international student support services may not have been prioritised above competing claims for funds.

The research design

Situated within the highly commercial Australian model of education, the site of this case-study was a large University with many thousands of international students from diverse backgrounds. The university concentrates on producing high quality graduates and research outputs. In response to the national Government's financial incentives for Australian universities to expand and further integrate with the Asian region, the University expanded its off-shore presence and dramatically increased its full-fee paying international student cohort. The University was recognized across Asia and international students constituted one-third of all enrolments and were generating over 200 million dollars in

revenue per annum. The research site had approximately 10,000 on-campus international students, of which 20 per cent were higher degree by research (HDR) students. This group refers primarily to PhD and Masters Candidates whose study is undertaken primarily through writing a dissertation. The other 80 % were enrolled in either post- or undergraduate course-work programs, which involve undertaking specific units of classroom related study, and in some instances a dissertation on a smaller scale than HDR candidates. Unevenly spread across the University, the greatest concentration was in the business faculty.

A combination of internal documents and in-depth interviews were utilized for this study. Documents obtained from the University or provided by members of staff remain anonymous to provide the confidentiality required by the University Ethics Committee. In-depth interviews of between one and 2 hours were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face with 50 University staff members. Those who participated were selected because their employment positions involved working with international students and/or making decisions relating to international student support services. The participants included student representatives, international student support staff, and middle and senior management at both faculty and wider university levels. All interviewees had responded to an emailed invitation to participate in the study. They were asked questions relating to the needs of international students and the provision and funding of support services. The interviews were taped, transcribed and analyzed manually to identify emerging themes (Bryman and Burgess 1994). A purpose-driven analysis allowed the researchers to charge the research text with meaning (Erben 1998). Interviewees were allocated a participant number, for example P26 or P43, for the purposes of anonymity in published text.

Findings

Providing international student support

The greatest number of international students originated from Malaysia and China (24 and 18 % respectively), while significant proportions also came from Singapore, Hong Kong and Indonesia. The concentration of these students into particular courses meant a very significant increase in income for a small number of faculties. However, it also meant there was a need for increased support services, particularly in English language and learning for the large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds. Despite the discipline focus of the international student cohort, the research participants generally believed the students experienced a diverse range of difficulties:

I think it varies by student, by age, by source country, and I think this is what's fascinating about the area – I think it's difficult to generalise about international students as a single group ... it is actually quite difficult to make general statements about who is having difficulty and why they are having difficulty, without actually doing the research, and I think it is very specific. (P26)

From a Bourdieuan perspective, the University is a field of power and the administrative and academic hierarchy that characterized this field was disrupted by the new source of revenue and the new calls on resources. Initially, the University created a separate entity that was responsible for the international marketing of student places and providing for international student wellbeing. Owned by the University, this entity was legally and financially separate until it was encompassed within the wider University as part of an

‘internationalization’ plan that involved on- and off-shore campuses. How new sources of revenue should be obtained and divided, rather the University’s avowed enthusiasm for the process of ‘internationalization’ per se, was believed by many staff to be the force driving the University to expand the enrolment of international students:

[The University] has gone through various phases with all of this stuff to do with international students and I think that Australia has obviously gone through various phases... the rhetoric of international, just reflects the concerns of the day ... in 1989 and the early 1990s; the place was all about expanding. The aim was to have more campuses and increased student numbers. So you had the amalgamations, which was part of government policy too, of course. In those days, some of the staff used to joke that if a bus stopped too long at the traffic lights [nearby], the University would try to take it over and call it a campus – after all, you can fit forty students into a bus.... It was like ‘the age of empire’ The goal was to be big and well-known. And international’s a tool for doing that. (P39)

The interviewee alleges the University’s international program was designed to take advantage of government incentives offered to universities that were willing grow in size and forge links to Asian institutions and communities. In this regard, however, there was a diversity of views that fell into three categories largely depending on one’s role in the University, or in Bourdieuan terms that reflected different fields of power. One participant suggested the growth was seen from three perspectives – a positive view that the University has benefitted; a second and negative view that suggested the growth was not in the interests of academic credibility; and a third perspective that sat somewhere between the former two. These perspectives were articulated as follows:

[A]n exciting vision that had shaped the university for the better; a predominately commercial pursuit that ran the risk of undermining ... academic credibility; [or] an optional extra that did not always clearly relate to the core activities of research, teaching and community engagement. (Internal document 2006, p. 10)

[I]f you look at the big picture of how staff for example view the whole international aspect of the University, it falls into various categories. One group who might sort of be a third of the place, ... embrace the students ... they think it’s great having the presence of the international students and they also like the opportunities to travel and ... have the opportunities to do things that they might not be able to do ... if the university didn’t have that international or such a large international aspect. I think that there’s a second group of people who again, ... about a third of the place, think that it’s probably not a good thing that this diverts resources away from research and ... more academic pursuits, ... they don’t like the ... ruthless pursuit of the dollar, [it’s]the commercial aspect of it they resent ... And I think there’s another group that is probably about a third of the place also who basically think that it’s irrelevant and it’s just a lot of hot air and it doesn’t do much ... that’s my impression of it.... And I think that a lot of people are understandably weary or cynical about what they think is primarily a money-making, or money-losing in some cases, exercise. (P39)

The perspective advanced by Participant 39 suggests that University’s senior management was unable to convince a great many staff the internationalisation program was anything more than a means to garner the financial benefits made possible by a new source of income.

Distributing university income

The fact that the University Executive was able to use the power it derived from its academic capital to divert resources to further the University's presence overseas and concomitantly grow the onshore international student cohort challenged staff responsible for providing student support services. According to a faculty manager, staff were constantly compelled to put their "finger in the wall of the dam that's bursting with problems with overseas students" (P43). This situation was compounded by the divisions alienated from the internationalisation agenda because it diverted resources from research mobilised intellectual capital. Collectively, these divisions campaigned for a redistribution of resources to themselves and away from faculties that could attract international student revenue but had a relatively poor research record. The beneficiaries appear to have been in accordance with the predictions of US organisational sociology, which suggested that the intellectual capital and hence capacity to lobby of medicine, chemistry, physics and engineering faculties would be further enhanced by the emergence of international ranking instruments that accord great significance to research reputation (Mohrman et al. 2008).

To support the divisions with significant intellectual capital the University increased external borrowings against future revenue flow and invested this income in research infrastructure (Internal University document 2007). This commitment to the high paradigm faculties was accompanied by a need to increase the enrollment of full-fee paying international students in order to offset the debt (P50). It was believed that to sustain the University's capacity to provide for the security of its international student cohort the increase in numbers should have been accompanied by an corresponding increase in the resources provided to support divisions. However, satisfying this requirement was problematic given the competing demands from overseas campuses and research intensive divisions, which was further problematised when the previously separate support service division was "re-absorbed back into the uni[versity]" (P1). The last step was of particular significance for it meant funds previously quarantined to provide for international student support became contestable. The success of other claimants to the funds became evident when international student support services were 'mainstreamed' to provide for all students—local and international—as a homogenous group.

Support divisions and the low research intensive faculties that hosted the vast majority of international students responded to the challenge posed by the University's decision to invest heavily in research infrastructure by arguing that this policy would "kill the goose that laid the golden eggs" (P43). In accordance with Hackman (1985), the senior management of the Business faculty strove to highlight the importance of their capacity to reap external resources that can contribute to the university as a whole and to gain influence by arguing this capacity was being put at risk. In doing so, they were joined by relevant professional associations. Thus, in 2010, a representative of the Institute of Chartered Accountants observed: "There are not sufficient resources within universities flowing to the teaching of accounting education because of the cross subsidization from business students fees to other parts of the university" (Guthrie 2010).

Internal University documents (2008) revealed that the competing claims for resources eventually exhausted the University's capacity for financial borrowing. Nonetheless, the documentation suggests the University remained committed to the agenda advocated by those divisions with substantial intellectual capital. Consequently, a number of alternative strategies were explored including greater engagement with industry, tapping philanthropic agencies, and the adoption of new cost savings. The considered range of options was fitting

with what Mohrman et al. (2008, p. 11) termed the ‘Emerging Global Model’ of the research university:

As governments find it impossible to meet the need, universities must raise money through different strategies including private donors, increased tuition and fees, grants for research and technical innovation, profits from spin-off businesses, contracting with corporate entities, recruiting international students for higher fees, and so on.

The circumstances detailed in the 2008 internal documents reflect the existing tension generated by universities’ “irreconcilable” demand for financial resources and Bourdieu’s awareness that the divisions with the greatest capital will gain a disproportionate share of the available resources (Zona 2005, p. 31). The documents revealed that addressing the University’s debt while sustaining the research effort would require cost cutting and increased divisional cross-subsidization. According to a senior manager (P47), any other option would be “simply unrealistic”. Given this situation, the power accruing from the distribution of administrative and academic capital within the University prevailed and the number of full fee-paying international students was further increased.

The decision to expand the size of the international student cohort, increase cross-divisional transfers, and embrace a program of cost cutting generated increased tension between senior managers and the front-line staff employed in the support provision and the faculties which had limited intellectual capital but a substantial capacity to recruit students. Interview data revealed that in 2007 the Business faculty was instructed to “earn a surplus of 29 million dollars which will go back to the university” (P43). This unwelcome demand was more than doubled by 2011. Two interview participants from the Business faculty expressed strong emotion associated with their belief that excessive resources were distributed to research intensive faculties to the detriment of providing adequate resources to support international students.

I mean if we’ve chosen to take international students then we need to be fair dinkum about what we give them, in some sense match their expectations. (P9)

... it’s not valued highly enough within the university. If it was a university value they would pump a lot more money into it and we do have the money to pump in because we get money from the teaching learning and performance fund where we get five or six million dollars a year but I don’t know if that’s going to be spent as an extra on teaching and learning so you may ask yourself why not and where does that money go ... Where does all this money go? Where does all the money go that’s earned by the overseas students? One point something billion isn’t it? Where does it actually go? It doesn’t seem to me to be going into academic support. (P41)

Within the Business faculty it was believed that at the very least an increased share of the funds earned from international student fees should be reinvested in the provision of language and learning services for these students. Indeed, a senior manager spoke of an unsuccessful proposal suggesting that the Faculty should be allowed to invest some of its funds into providing for the specific needs of business students rather than being transferred to the central administration and the associated central language and learning support unit.

The ... demands on that central unit are big. I’m saying they’re not being met. Something needs to be done. Medicine, as I say, has just gone its own way and got a huge staff of its own in this area. I put up a proposal to say if the university wants me

to do it my own way, can I have an extra \$4 million I think I asked for out of my budget. And this year I am asked to earn an extra \$29 million which will go back to the university. If I had \$4 million of that lent back to me, I would set up my own student services system. I don't think that's sensible but that's what I would need to do. But they said no. So what I need is a central system that handles the needs I think we have with all those students, particularly with language. It's something that any university with a large number of international students in particular should be investing in. It's really simple. And I can't believe how difficult it is to get that message through. (P43)

The prevailing level of interest in providing support services was compared with the approach taken during the post-war Colombo Plan¹:

We don't necessarily treat the incoming international students with the same care as was done in that era and if there's a grab for funds it's because it supports the decline in federal government funding elsewhere. If they're just seen as the teaching area which pulls in the money, which is used for other purposes [there are] major problems. ... The University ... is pouring resources into research. Which is very sensible, it does promote this quality finish that ... is so important and it might attract better students. That's good. [But at the same time] it does take a lot of resources and at the moment they're coming out of international students. It would work if we also gave a bit more attention to what the international students need. (P43)

Regardless of the view that international students were not afforded the required support, it was deemed necessary for the Business faculty to raise international student enrolments and also increase fees by between five and seven per cent depending on the level of study. One student support service interviewee shared the following concern:

I don't think our management these days, being focused as they are on the bottom line and managerial efficiencies sometimes it's easier to deny the problem exists and to change the rhetoric and 'only good students come to [the University] ... I think they're running an enterprise and like any management they'll collect their information and make decisions based on that information. I think even though there was a rash of consultation over the last 2 years, that little has been done with it, and that if it's not convenient...for example, the international student kind of surveying approach where they visited international students on different campuses, that showed quite clearly that more resources were necessary. However, the step that was taken was to actually cut the resources and to change the rhetoric. So I suppose it is almost a philosophy of 'needs must'. The needs are we don't have enough money; therefore we mustn't have this problem. All organisations do this... (P19)

The comment above infers that the University needed to increase spending on quality education and support services, and that a failure to take this step was unwise in the long term given the risk it posed to the institution's reputation. It was believed the University justified the reduction of international student support funding by denying the existence of a problem. It was a view shared by others:

¹ The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific was established as a cooperative venture for the economic and social advancement for the peoples of South and Southeast Asia. Established at Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), in 1950 as a result of discussions by the governments of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, the United States and Japan, it now has members from 26 countries (cited in Forbes-Mewett 2009).

It's business. You're looking after your customers. If we claim as we are recruiting, keeping and looking after international students then we have to provide the support for them. (P27)

Strong sentiments were expressed in regard to how University budgeting was directing the flow of international student income. Indeed, one interviewee from the Business faculty commented:

Nobody cares enough to actually keep saying look at the budgets, look how much we need to invest on this particular cohort of students if they're to continue to hold the University up.... It's outrageous; it's shocking business management.... I think it's almost unethical how universities handle their student fees at the moment. ... We should be saying quality rather than more numbers and in the international area.... We are a hugely important international presence in higher education in Australia and we should just be having a very clear international strategy which pushes the quality up. And then the locals won't mind because they'll speak English anyway and they'll have good things to talk about. But that's the strategy that takes a lot of work and it's not necessarily the one that [we employ]. (P43)

The need to review budget allocations was supported by most interviewees. A manager (P39) believed that the University was ranking poorly in terms of overall student satisfaction and English language skills and for this reason more money needed to be directed to student language and learning support. This was a claim subsequently acknowledged by senior management though only in relation to international research degree students. An exception was made in the case of this cohort both because doctoral candidates were deemed an important contributor to the University's research output and because the University was performing relatively "poorly" in recruiting these students. It was suggested that the University needed to embrace a major cultural shift both academically and administratively so as not to appear "chiefly commercial in nature" (Internal University Document 2008). In a following paper the University indicated it would benefit from providing adequate services to support a greater number of HDR students. This proposed development was described by one of the authors of the document as a 'work in progress'.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's notions of fields of power and disciplinary hierarchy has provided a framework within which to explain why the case university underfunded support services relevant to international student security. It appears that in the contest for resources, student support divisions had relatively little academic or intellectual capital to underpin their bargaining position. This was because they were functioning in a context in which the capacity to generate revenue from international student fees was a source of power secondary to other factors. Initially, student security was subordinate to the University's aspiration to gain both state support and status by internationalizing its geographic presence and subsequently to a perceived need to build research reputation when the state began according heightened attention to research. This attention reinforced research oriented staff beliefs that the emphasis on geographic expansion had placed a heavy burden on research. Given this emergent conviction and the University's weakened measurable research output, the

power of staff with significant intellectual capital and hence capacity to rescue the University's research reputation rose accordingly.

Significant lessons can be derived from this evolving situation that should be accorded due attention both by university staff and by external funding agencies that wish to influence university policies and strategies. The experience of the case university highlights the fact that a level of caution needs to be exercised if expanding internationally, either geographically or through increasing international student numbers. Also underlined is the fact that if the priorities of senior management or external agents with relevant power resources change, the substantive influence that derives from differing forms of capital is likely to change in corresponding ways. In brief, the significance of university power sources is contingent. This last finding suggests that a range of university goals other than a pursuit of status via research can potentially undermine international student security. For instance, students might select a university with high status derived from research or some other source and find that they receive substandard support services because a capacity to provide student welfare is not prioritized or rewarded when revenue and other resources are being allocated. If governments or university senior management decide to reward the enhancement of international student security, the power of international student support divisions is likely to be greater. The last is a lesson that was acted upon by the Australian Government which, in 2012 following the publication of a *Strategic Review of the Student Visa Program*, introduced new regulations that reward universities that make a serious effort to assure student security and impose costs on those institutions that prove lax in so doing.

Support staff and a number of senior faculty managers opposed the University's policy of curtailing the allocation of resources to care for and educate international students while sectors benefiting from this situation tended to support the policy. The notion that staff would mobilise within their disciplines and with those they deem allies in opposition to other sectors of the university is likely to discourage cross-disciplinary staff collegiality. At a time of ongoing retrenchment of state funding to universities this development is likely to undermine scholars' collective capacity to combat government cuts and is likely to undermine the already limited capacity that exists to embrace cross-disciplinary collaboration. Given these costs may prove significant and given universities and their staff have a moral duty to care adequately for those they host there exists at the very least a prima facie case to suggest that universities should quarantine support services from divisional struggles over how the revenue generated by international students should be distributed. This policy would necessarily entail each university determining what share of the revenue generated by international students will be allocated to assuring student security. Ideally, information regarding the provision of international student support services should be made available to students before they decide where to study.

The implications of compromising international student support are short-term gain at the cost of long-term reputational damage. Australian education exporters and regulators decision to embrace a 'no frills' highly commercial approach to international students and their welfare has almost certainly contributed to the major slump in the number of international students studying in Australia in recent years. In concluding, we acknowledge the limitations of case-study research, which is not generalisable. However, we believe that our findings may be pertinent and of interest to other Australian universities and to the increasing number of institutions in other countries that are finding they have little choice other than to become part of the international education 'industry'.

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