



**International Students’
Experience of the Housing System
in Metropolitan Sydney
Student Internship Report**

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Research Overview

This report is based on a research project that looked at the housing experience of international students living and working in Metropolitan Sydney. It was part of my placement with Shelter NSW which has advocated for better housing outcomes since 1975. The organisation is especially concerned with housing insecurity for people on low and very low incomes. Shelter regularly advocates around affordable student accommodation and this project will help to better inform Shelter advocacy work in this space.¹ The purpose of this report is to create a better understanding of the housing experience of International Student in metropolitan Sydney.

¹ Shelter NSW. May 2021 Submission Proposed changes to boarding houses, co-living & student housing.

Methodology

The research project was supported by Shelter NSW, Sydney Alliance, Sydney Community Forum, OZ International Student Hub, and Democracy in Colour.

This event was developed and coordinated by students from the University of Wollongong and Western Sydney University as part of their placements at Shelter NSW and Sydney Alliance on 12th October 2022.

The event was held at the Western Sydney University Parramatta campus. It was an in-person event which created a safe space for students to speak comfortably about their house related issues.

The event had the participation of thirty-five students. Participant were broken into four groups and asked to describe their housing experiences. It sought to understand the housing needs of international students and how they might access support services.

The project methodology was based on an informal yarning circles model. The participants were made up of international students who were enrolled and studying across different universities and schools.

The different organisations participating created their own diffusion campaign to invite international students to the event. The platform Humanitix was used to create the tickets for the students to confirm their assistance.

In the event there was a short break. The space was used to share food provided for the organisations to the students. The food also became an opportunity for the students to do networking during this time.

Participation was based on a Yarning circle model² as this seemed an appropriate model for international students who being different cultural knowledge, they speak different language and have different understandings about their rights in terms of the housing market in NSW.

The aim was to promote connections and engage in a respectfully way. The group format aimed to provide a safe place for participants to be heard and come up with shared solutions.

The following three questions were developed in consultation with Shelter NSW, Sydney Alliance, Sydney Community Forum, OZ International Student Hub, and Democracy in Colour as a way to start the discussion.

² Yarning (<https://www.yarning.com.au/what-is-yarning>)

1. *What is your favourite thing about living in Sydney?*
2. *What are your experiences finding a place to live in Sydney?*
3. *Considering your own experiences with housing, what kinds of support would you like to see for international students living in Sydney?*

After the session, the answer from each group was categorized based on responses from the majority of participants

The project aimed to bring international students together and document their housing experience to create a better understanding of the housing needs of international students. The second aim was to have a better understanding of the experience of international students, who are a part of Sydney's Metropolitan development and economic model

Yarning Circles

There were thirty-five participants divided into four yarning circle groups. Each group had a facilitator that guided the questions and collected the stories. This listening aimed to get accurate and valuable information about the housing experience of international students' and any shortcomings.

Questions and Findings

The first introductory question sought to give confidence to the public and break the ice.

1. *What is your favourite thing about living in Sydney?*

A pattern was found in the answers to this question with the majority of participants indicating the following: Climate, beaches, and natural landscapes; Variety of food; Security; Diversity and Multiculturalism.

The second question focused on the students' challenges when finding a place to live.

2. *What are your experiences finding a place to live in Sydney?*

The following significant findings were noted:

They found it difficult to access affordable housing.

Due to the housing costs, they often had little choice but to line up in overcrowded shared accommodation. The participant indicated this situation made it difficult to focus on their studies due to the lack of privacy and adequate spaces in their overcrowded accommodation.

Obtaining a suitable place to live requires you to arrive in Australia with financial resources and many did not have this. They were working in Australia to pay for their studies. The high cost of living and accommodation linked with multiple work restrictions made it hard for students, to generate enough income to survive.

Many landlords took advantage of student visa restriction, they had fewer rights than citizens. Therefore, they changed the conditions of the contracts. In several situations students were given accommodation instead of wages. This created circumstances for exploitation and led to even greater vulnerability.

Some students who had severe financial difficulties during Covid living in a car. Some had been evicted from a house without prior notice.

During the pandemic, there were also some abuses experienced by the landlord or agencies. One of the students shared a worrying story about an agency that refused to give their deposit back because they were recipients of Covid emergency government support for housing.

The last question was intended to challenge students to brainstorm or share their thoughts about the support that might be useful to them.

3. Considering your own experiences with housing, what kinds of support would you like to see for international students living in Sydney?

Many emphasises the necessity for more accessible information about their accommodation rights.

The stories shared by all participants brought a greater realisation that their experience of rental housing in metropolitan Sydney was not isolated. The group discussion also helped to create a listen space and the opportunity to discuss solutions.

Innovative ideas were proposed, such as creating an application to rate landlords with a star or score system.

All groups identified the need for more transparent and consistent regulation in leasing arrangements, to assure students know their rights.

In line with the previous point, some students proposed the creation of a compulsory course in the university about tenants' rights, rental policies, deposits, etc.

Another matter was that the universities should provide more affordable on-campus accommodation or link tuition with the cost of accommodation. Participants also expressed a need for the government to expand the opportunity for student to work beyond 20 hours in order to afford the cost of accommodation living.

Conclusion

The International Student Listening Event was perceived as a small project that when expanded became a challenging but extremely rewarding event. The event allowed me to utilize my skills in organizing and collaborating with Australian organizations to advocate for international student and their housing experiences in this country. The project enabled opportunities to enhance my personal and professional development and one I found very rewarding.

It was clear from the group discussion that international students have significant challenges when they come to Australia to study. They not only have to deal with what it means to study in another culture and language, but also the high cost of living expenses, and a housing market that exploits their lack of understanding regarding their tenancy rights. These conditions generate impacts, which in many cases, are not favourable to the added pressure of study.

The difference in costs paid by local and international students for accommodation created some frustration for international students who leave their comfortable home conditions but are confronted by higher student fees and accommodation which is often sub-standard and costly.

Despite being highly qualified professionals in their countries of origin, the students often do work that even Australian citizens do not want to do, such as construction, cleaning, or hospitality. This work is low paid and that makes it hard to pay for accommodation that is very expensive.

Recommendations

- International students contribute in a significant way to the Australian economy and the Australian Government should recognise their valuable contribution.
- The Australian Government should provide better conditions for international students regarding their study needs, including having a safe and clean place to live.
- Support organisations, could advocate on behalf of international students who do not vote, but contribute to the economy.
- Housing and support organisations, should advocate for better living conditions for international students in Australia.

Appendix 1. Participant Information Statement and Consent Form

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

You are invited to participate in an International Students' Listening Project to ascertain international students' stories regarding the housing conditions they have experienced whilst studying in New South Wales. We, the organizations whose logos are displayed on the last page of this information and consent form, hope to learn about international students' experiences of their accommodation in New South Wales. This listening project aims to investigate the issues and problems identified your voices.

If you decide to participate in this Listening Project, we will seek your responses to a series of questions concerning your experiences. It is anticipated there is minimum risk involved to you and every effort will be made to conduct these listening groups with care, to ensure that you do not experience any adverse discomforts and inconveniences. However, if you do experience any adverse emotional distress or discomfort in the recollection of events and discussions of your experiences you are advised to contact James Sherriff of Shelter who will arrange to offer counselling and peer support if required.

There are no perceived benefits to participating other than the identification of issues that concern individuals regarding the housing experiences of international students. Therefore, we cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this process. Any information that is obtained in connection with this listening process will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to describe the findings in a summary, which if this were to occur, the information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified, and feedback will be made available to participants on websites which will summarize identified themes and issues divulged by the participants.

Complaints may be directed to James Sherriff, Membership & Engagement Officer, Shelter, NSW (phone 0451 998 602, email james@shelternsw.org.au). Any complaint you make will be investigated promptly and you will be informed of the outcome.

Your decision whether to participate will not prejudice your future relations with any of the organizations identified on the first page of this document. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask us. If you have any additional questions later, James Sherriff of Shelter, telephone 0451 998 602, will be happy to answer them.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM (continued)

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the information provided above, you have decided to participate.

[illegible]

.....
Signature of Witness

.....
(Please PRINT name)

.....
Date

REVOCATION OF CONSENT

I hereby wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in the research proposal described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** jeopardise any treatment or my relationship with the organizations listed on the front page of this document.

[illegible]

The section for Revocation of Consent should be forwarded to:

James Sherriff (Shelter)

0451 998 602, james@shelternsw.org.au



Appendix 2. List of Students Registered to the Event

Order id	Event	Event time	First name
UMP9C720	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Sihan
MMGEXJBC	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Rei
1UQSI91T	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Carolina
MSGJ5R3B	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Yun
WJ5LT3VX	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Jasmine
2MTM2CCK	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	linette
RN33XLC5	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Asmita
EHCDF9WV	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Daniela
CGIF3DEA	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Valentina
DML0Q0QV	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Jade
1HXK70SS	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	belinda
UI4ML28N	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Zeynep
OEO42HP2	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Rubaisha
7Y6X4US8	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Iman
1VJWRDB0	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Alice
0LYNTKM3	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Natnicha
7A9XVVAB	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Freddy
M1OMK9YI	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Jessica marv
Q7FBUTIO	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Angelee
U7IBRU4H	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Jeremias
DFRNFNAS	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Shahil
VD0W2FCC	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	hillary
MMIAQCI3	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Mele
LKNXJ8Q3	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Brianna
HWTLQ5W1	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Janice
G0HGSE4B	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Nana Ama
KC4TW9PB	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Emily
5CHB9A89	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Diana Carolin
9GQ9CHJD	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Viharsha
S4W5DA76	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Jade
NYUNQFHM	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Yu-Chen
SQKSPEOX	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Raf
C54WFXAX	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Julieth
OGA900HL	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Elizabeth
DOYGXUCL	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Joan
HIKCI84F	International Students' Listening	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Pochien

ORGANISED BY UOW AND
WSU STUDENTS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LISTENING

HEARING INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS' STORIES ON THE
HOUSING CONDITIONS THEY
EXPERIENCED WHILE STUDYING IN
NSW.

OCTOBER 12

6:00 - 7:30 PM

**WSU, PARRAMATTA CITY CAMPUS, LEVEL 3 - STUDIO 1.3.39
161-169 MACQUARIE ST, PARRAMATTA**



DEMOCRACY IN COLOUR



Sydney
Community
Forum



OZ
International
Students
Hub

Appendix 4. 10 Resources for International Students in NSW

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Resources for International Students in NSW

Link2home



1800 152 152
A free, state-wide homelessness information and referral telephone service. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.

NSW Renting Policies



A portal for accessing NSW government policies on renters' rights, landlord responsibilities and minimum accommodation standards.

Service NSW Flood Emergency Accommodation



13 77 88
Temporary accommodation support and services for people affected by recent floods.

Study NSW



A portal for international students in NSW containing information on accommodation expenses, expectations and advice.

Tenants Union of NSW



(02) 8117 3700
Free information and advocacy for renters throughout NSW.

Redfern Legal Centre



(02) 9698 7645
Free, confidential legal advice for international students living in NSW.

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Resources for International Students in NSW

Anti-Discrimination NSW



1800 670 812
A state government body that offers free discrimination services such as complaint lodging and discrimination enquiries.

Lifeline



13 11 14
Free, 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Beyond Blue



1300 22 4636
Free, 24-hour support for mental health issues including depression, suicide and anxiety.

Kids Helpline



1800 551 800
Free, 24-hour support for people wanting to talk about relationships, studies or mental health.