

“How do students make a difference when they can’t vote?”

Presenters:

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International students have been extremely influential in shaping international education in Australia. In the last five years, Sharon Smith has observed the striking difference between the way the two cohorts of student representatives work and effect the education sector as a whole through working in the national office of the peak representative body for international students, the National Liaison Committee as well as the peak representative body for all higher education students, the National Union of Students, Charlotte Long has worked in Sydney University SRC and has observed these differences at the campus level with local and international student representatives working side by side in the university SRC.

Local students are voters, their parents vote and their friends and relatives vote. Regardless of political persuasion, local students who attend university in Australia are able to affect the education policies of the political parties that shape the sector by exercising their right to vote. In comparison, international students may be seen to have an advantage, because they are definitely able to talk with their feet. At times, they are listened to because of the economic value international education has in Australia, but not always. Stakeholders in international education realise that international students contribute much more to Australia than the economic value; the cultural value, the diverse educational value and the connections that students who are educated in Australia build for future relations with other countries and communities. Students feel empowered when they know the rules of the game they are playing – that is, if they know how to resolve their problems and access support, they feel stronger. International students in Australia should be able to do this through the legislation that is supposed to protect them.

This presentation will:

1. Describe the key differences between domestic student representation and international student representation at the national and state and campus levels.
2. Outline some of the methods and areas in which international students have been instrumental in making changes to international education in Australia.
3. Describe the impact of other organizations that represent international students in the community, such as AFIS, Polyglot, FAIV, and other community organizations.