

Five

MOBILISING STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I focused on the formation and emergent mobilisation phase of overseas students against government changes to its education aid program. During their first attempt at national mobilisation, overseas students leaders across Australia began to recognise that their disparate campaigns were having little impact because their loose overseas students campus based network was weak and informally structured. To attract wider overseas students and community support, the student leaders needed to create a formal structure that could help facilitate coordinated national response, pool limited resources from different overseas students grouping and establish an effective information dissemination network. The push to formalise a national coordinated structure had culminated in an inaugural national conference held in Sydney. Diverging views on how to respond to policy changes would however fracture the unity of a fledgling overseas students' action and threaten to prematurely end an attempt at establishing a national body that could better coordinate and represent students' interests.

This chapter will examine the development phase of overseas students' political mobilisation with the establishment and development of a national coordinating body, the *National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia* (NLC). During the development phase, organisations generally tend to undergo a process of formalisation,

professionalization, internal differentiation and integration. (See Chapter two) The NLC underwent a process of formalisation in which it developed a formal membership process, established a national constitution, introduced formal statutes and procedures and created formal leadership and office structure. The NLC gradually moved toward greater professionalization with systems and processes introduced and division of labour between state and national established. During its development phase, the NLC would focus its efforts on building grassroots representation. This would involve lobbying for campus level overseas student organisations to be fully resourced and adequately represented within the campus student body structure, and that state bodies had access to NUS state resources. By 1990, the export of education services sector had undergone a period of significant growth with the government deciding to phase out the overseas students subsidised scheme and expand the overseas students full fee program. The ending of the subsidised program and growth in the export of education sector would force the NLC's leadership to undertake radical restructuring of the organisation. The restructuring would involve centralising the NLC structure by transforming autonomous state organisations into NLC State Branches. The process of centralisation was intended to create a more unified body and contributed to the stability of the organisation.

In this chapter I will first describe the students' second attempt at forming a national representative body. I will then discuss the campus, state and national structures that emerged after the second National Overseas Student Conference and the structure's significance in framing the NLC's agenda. I will outline some of the key challenges the fledgling body faced during its developmental stage as it sought to establish structures and policies needed to underpin some form of effective opposition to policy changes. As the export of education services sector developed, the NLC responded by streamlining and adapting its structures to maintain an effective opposition.

THE POST-1985 CAMPAIGN

The failure of the overseas students to unite against the government's education aid reforms continued to present an impediment to forming a more coordinated and effective opposition. Following the inaugural national overseas students conference held in 1985 in Sydney, the 'abolitionist' and 'pro-freeze' factions decided to part ways to pursue their own anti-fee campaigns. Two observations can be drawn from this decision. First, the campaigns organised throughout the country remained an incoherent and ad hoc response to government policy. Frequently a campus or a coalition of campuses in each state would organise their own actions, often with little exchange or sharing of information occurring between states. Second, there was less effort in coordinating research and survey projects. New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia each commissioned their own research analysing the fee impact on their constituents, which commonly led to research duplication and wasted limited resources.

Despite limited success in creating a unified front, their disparate efforts did however contribute to raising community awareness of their grievances. Actions in Victoria and New South Wales for example, attracted considerable interest and assistance from local university students in particular, who in turn publicly mobilised in support of the overseas students cause (See Chapter four). Such support however did not last long since it was largely based on similar government plans to introduce nominal tuition fees that would have had comparable impact on local students. Even though initial local support for overseas students was robust, it waned after the government decided to withdraw its domestic tuition fees proposal.

Notwithstanding the success of the previous year's anti-fee campaigns, factional leaders were still concerned about the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of maintaining ongoing action or procuring any meaningful policy change. OSCAFF President, Mr Peter Subramaniam captured the group's post-campaign sentiments:

I am certain that many of us in OSCAFF will not forget (however hard we try!) campaign 1985. There is a sense of achievement currently felt by us, but for OSCAFF the

achievement will be marked only by its survival and dynamic growth in coming years.¹

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT CAMPAIGN

The summer holidays afforded the Victorian student leaders a much-needed break and an opportunity to re-assess their strategies for the coming year. Feeling certain to expect more policy battles, the students chose to concentrate their efforts on organising a state-wide campaign specifically targeting newly enrolled students. This strategy would serve two purposes: to provide an opportunity to raise awareness of fee changes; and recruit new students in support of their cause. Attracting new support was particularly critical for the students to maintain continued opposition against government policy, as they found it exceedingly difficult to replace their transient leadership ranks, which had an ‘activist’ life span of a year or two in an average student’s three-year degree program.

Students who did not return home for the summer vacation remained in Australia to work on printing and distributing orientation materials. Materials would contain information about recent government changes to the aid program and an appeal for support in opposing further fee changes. Some campuses would also plan orientation activities such as cultural events and gala dinners to welcome new students. These social activities presented an opportunity to highlight government policy changes and their impact. In February 1986, OSCAFF organised a major gala dinner at Monash University. The dinner attracted more than 300 students from all Victorian campuses and included the Malaysian Deputy High Commissioner, Encik Fuzi Haji Abdul Razak. The Deputy High Commissioner attended to present the inaugural OSCAFF Award for outstanding contribution to overseas student affairs.² The excitement of a social gathering organised at the beginning of a student’s first year at a foreign higher education institution, coupled with an award presentation ceremony by a high-level dignitary for contribution to student affairs, would add the much needed association of

¹ Subramaniam, P, 1985, OSCAFF campaign 1985 – End of year report, President of OSCAFF – Vic 1985 – 86, p.3

² OSCAFF (1986). OSCAFF activities - 1985 - 86. Melbourne, OSCAFF

prestige important in potentially drawing new recruits to participating in the overseas students 'cause'.

While students prepared for social events and public campaigns, those that returned to their home country volunteered to assist in pre-departure briefings. For example, OSCAFF members assisted the Australian High Commission in Malaysia to organise briefing seminars for new students in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.³ Their active participation in seminars was important in extending further opportunities to connect and engage with the new student cohort before they arrived in Australia. The volunteers would intentionally use the seminar as a platform to raise student awareness of current issues and developments in Australian Government policy.

SECOND ATTEMPT AT NATIONAL FORMATION

By the beginning of 1986, the marked policy tension between the abolitionist and the pro-freeze camps was appearing to wane. Despite policy differences, the success of their disparate anti-fees campaigns in raising public awareness led to both sides finally agreeing to negotiate a 'cooperative framework' for future joint actions. To be couched in broad terms, the framework would outline general principles of cooperation for discussion at the upcoming national overseas students conference in Melbourne. It would focus specifically on two issues: to continue the fight against full fees by salvaging 'the OSP for what it morally stands for, that is, using aid to provide educational facilities to assist the development of the third-world'; and work 'positively towards the formation of a national coordinating body to act as an umbrella organisation of all overseas students associations.'⁴ Despite agreeing on a general approach of forming a unified campaign, the philosophical differences underlying their policy divergence remained unresolved.

³ Ibid

⁴ Monash Overseas Students Services, 1986, The 2nd national overseas student conference, Monash University.

By April, the Overseas Students Association at Monash University had begun preparations to host the second National Overseas Students Conference. While conference arrangements were underway, the OSCAFF Central Committee adopted a motion to change their name from Overseas Students Campaign against Full Fees (OSCAFF) to OSCAFF—Overseas Students Council of Victoria.⁵ The name change would reflect the transforming nature of the organisation's role and broadening of its activities from predominantly an anti-fees emphasis to include welfare concerns. The students however, decided to retain the use of its well-known acronym, OSCAFF in all its campaign materials to avoid potential confusion. Following the name change, OSCAFF began to re-work its original proposal to establish a national coordinating body. The new body would now function as a 'councillor structure' that would deal immediately with fee increases, provide a clearer position on privatisation of education and promote the creation of state organisations that would help facilitate information flow to and between campuses.⁶ The organisation would also coordinate wider-scale actions, formulate policy positions and develop strategic plans for future campaigns.

SECOND NATIONAL OVERSEAS STUDENTS CONFERENCE

On 21 May, delegates from universities across Australia gathered in Melbourne for the start of the Second National Overseas Students Conference. This time, politicians, policy-makers and diplomats were invited to address the proceedings. They included the Malaysian Consul for Melbourne, Encik Aman Shah, the Director of the Department of Education's Overseas Students Office, Mr Charles Belts, the Australian Labor Party's Education Policy Committee representative, Ms Barbara Preston, the National Association for Foreign Students Affairs, Mr Robert Fels, and parliamentary member for La Trobe and member of the ALP Education Committee, the Hon. Mr Peter Milton.

While the previous year's conference operated informally and encouraged open discussions, this year would be different, with standing orders imposed to dictate

⁵ Subramaniam, P., 1986, Privatisation and formation of National Overseas Students Coordinating Body, OSCAFF, Melbourne, p.2.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 2 - 3

proceedings and ensure all urgent non-policy matters were dealt with sufficiently and quickly. Under new conference rules, each campus would be entitled to a maximum of two voting delegates.⁷ (See Table 5.1) Any resolution adopted would not bind any participating organisation; it would instead reflect the ‘views of the conference’ and not preclude individual organisations from taking ‘individually determined actions’.⁸ In other words, the emphasis on non-binding decision-making was aimed at avoiding any possible distraction from the group achieving their ultimate goals of creating a common policy platform and establishing a national body.

Campuses	Participating Delegates
Queensland	
University of Queensland	2 voting delegates
Griffith University	2 voting delegates
New South Wales	
University of Newcastle	2 voting delegates
University of New England – Malaysian Students Association	1 voting delegate
Sydney University – Overseas Students Association	1 voting delegate
New South Wales Institute of Technology	2 voting delegates
University of New South Wales	2 voting delegates
New South Wales Overseas Students Collective	1 voting delegate
Australian National University	1 voting delegate
South Australia	
Flinders University – Flinders International Students Association	1 voting delegate
Adelaide University – Overseas Students Association	2 voting delegates
Tasmania	
University of Tasmania – Malaysian Students Association	1 voting delegate
University of Tasmania – Overseas Students Association	2 voting delegates
Western Australia	
Murdoch University	2 voting delegates
University of Western Australia	2 voting delegates
African Australia	1 voting delegate
Victoria	
Monash University – Borneo Students Association	2 voting delegates
Borneo Students Association - Victoria	1 voting delegate
Chisolm Overseas Students Association	1 voting delegate
Footscray Institute of Technology – Overseas Students Association	2 voting delegates
Monash – Law Students Association	2 voting delegates
La Trobe – Malaysian Students Association	1 voting delegate

⁷ Monash Overseas Students Service, op.cit. p. 5

⁸ Ramachandran, L., 1986, Post-document: The 2nd National Overseas Students Conference, Monash University, Melbourne, pp. 22 - 23

⁹ Ibid.

Monash University – Malaysian Students Association	2 voting delegates
Monash University – Overseas Students Service	2 voting delegates
Melbourne University – Overseas Medical Students Service	2 voting delegates
OSCAFF	2 voting delegates
Riverina College of Advanced Education	2 voting delegates
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) – Overseas Students Association	1 voting delegate
RMIT – Malaysian Students Association	1 voting delegate
Warrnambool College of Advanced Education	1 voting delegate

Despite the conference formalities, achieving a common policy position remained an elusive undertaking.¹⁰ Rudolph Lopes, in his paper examining the philosophy of the overseas students' anti-fee action, suggested that there was in fact little philosophical difference between the pro-freeze and abolitionist camps. Both sides certainly did not differ in their fundamental philosophy.

...both sides disagreed with the concept of full fees and both sides continued to believe that education in Australia should be treated as a right not a privilege. This was essentially the start of the international student philosophy in 1985/86: the fight against full fees and the concerted effort to see education as a right, not a privilege of the rich only.¹¹

Despite sharing similar fundamental philosophy, their divergent approach to public campaigns did however pose a significant obstacle for any unified form of action. The 'abolitionists', led by the New South Wales Overseas Students Collective (NSWOSC), continued their strong advocacy of a 'common goal for the abolition of fees' and a policy of non-deviation based on the 'principles of social justice and precedents.' They argued that the institutionalisation of fees only meant the rich may attend university and, based on such inequality, the conference should seek to totally reject fees. 'Anything else' they affirmed 'will indicate a weak and meagre position.'¹² Moreover, negotiating a concession would 'compromise ourselves and this concession may disappear in a few years.' Also, 'we should only take a concession if we moved toward total abolition.'¹³

¹⁰ Subramaniam, P., 1986, Preamble to structure, OSCAFF, Melbourne, p.8

¹¹ Lopes, R., 1991, Evolution of philosophy in the international student movement, NLC Newsletter, Melbourne

¹² Ramachandran, L, Op. Cit. p. 18

¹³ Ramachandran, L, ibid. p. 18

The NSWOSC used developments in New Zealand to support their position, claiming that Prime Minister David Lange had announced that from 1987, overseas student fees would be abolished for students coming from South-East Asia.¹⁴ ‘Overseas students’, according to NSWOSC, ‘were effective in mobilising a wide base community opposition towards fees.’¹⁵ ‘Through active public campaigns, the students were able to turn community opinion in support of their cause, which emphasised the intangible cultural and political benefits that the overseas students program offered to the community.’¹⁶ The New Zealand University Students Association (NZUSA) largely led the overseas students campaign. The national student body brought a case to UNESCO against Lange’s government in ‘violation of one of the human rights law on charging overseas student fees’. They claimed that the ‘law on overseas student fees represents a case of discrimination on the basis of nationality, which is specifically prohibited under the human rights law.’¹⁷ The NSWOSC argued that the New Zealand case represented a ‘tremendous victory for overseas and New Zealand students alike who have been campaigning against fees in the last five years.’¹⁸

NSWOSC’s claim was not entirely accurate. Until 1987, the New Zealand Government was indeed cautious about actively following Australia’s entry into the export education services market. By 1986, there were 2551 international students enrolled in New Zealand universities, and of these 589 were government and commonwealth funded students. The majority were private overseas students who paid either no fees because education was free or paid the same as local students.¹⁹ In fact, the right to charge full fees was restricted to a few approved institutions in the private sector. According to Ted Duhs *et al.*:

¹⁴ NSWOSC, 1986, Lange done it again! Fees abolished in NZ!, OSSD Students Union, University of New South Wales, p.1 New Zealand switched from aid to trade approach to international students in 1989 & Memo to Executive, Staff Association Secretaries and Education Committee from Jane Nicholls, ‘Marketing full cost higher education: implications for FAUSA’, 23 August 1985, Ref: 94/5:1061W

¹⁵ Ramachandran, L., *op.cit.* p.20

¹⁶ Monash Overseas Students Service, *op.cit.* p. 18. New Zealand however switched policy from an aid to trade approach for overseas students in 1987 when the government re-introduced a new fee system for private overseas students – New Zealand Vice-Chancellor’s Committee Annual Report, 1989

¹⁷ NSWOSC, 1986, Lange done it again! Fees abolished in NZ!, OSSD Students Union, University of New South Wales, p.1

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Duhs, T., Duhs, A., and Alvey, J, (date unknown), Educational Exports: a comparison Queensland and New Zealand, publishers unknown, p.27

New Zealand watched the change in Australia in 1986 from an aid to a trade approach to foreign students. The New Zealand Market Development Board state [*sic*] in 1987 that New Zealand was already a late entrant to the “growing international market for educational services”. Nevertheless, it recommended policy changes to lift existing constraints on entering the market and argued that New Zealand “should aim to make educational services a major source of international exchange”.²⁰

In 1989 however, the government finally relented and introduced full fees for overseas students. Tuition fees rose from \$516 to full cost in the vicinity of \$8 000 for arts, commerce, humanities and law students, and \$14 000 for students in applied subjects such as agriculture, computer science, engineering and science.²¹

The pro-freeze faction on the other hand argued for a more ‘rational’ and less ‘fatalistic attitude’ towards government policy. They claimed that the current rise in fees ‘is not adjusted to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures and therefore freeze on current fees, which allows for inflation should be the main and immediate concern.’²² The faction advocated that the conference ‘come up with something concrete for presentation at the upcoming budget and ALP National Conference.’²³

After hours of intense debate over their fee positions, two motions proposing contrasting positions were put to a vote, a substantive motion moved by the pro-freeze supporters advocating a freeze on fees, and a foreshadowed motion from abolitionist supporters recommending abolishing fees. Both motions were critical, as they stood to form the basis of the overseas students national policy agenda and actions. The substantive motion was put and carried.²⁴ The failure of the abolitionists to capture the policy agenda led them to threaten withdrawal from further participation in the conference. In an attempt to salvage what appeared to be another likely failure in national mobilisation, the abolitionists actively lobbied the conference delegates to vote

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.27

²¹ *Ibid.* p.27

²² Monash Overseas Students Service, *op.cit.* p. 20

²³ Monash Overseas Students Service, *ibid.* p. 21

²⁴ A voting breakdown was not provided. Prior to the vote, a procedural motion that the substantive motion be now voted on was moved. The motion was carried in favour: 22 FOR, 5 AGAINST.

on removing the Standing Order on meeting procedures. The meeting procedures, they argued, created tension and gagged any constructive debates on fee policy.

The fact that people are forced to vote (by procedural motion) meant that compromise was lost. Voting also prevents a conference from respecting other people's views. Their position is not a representative one, and by voting, it is implied that they hold a representative role.²⁵

Conference organisers intervened to resolve the tension. That intervention however failed when on the final day of the conference a number of NSWOSC aligned campuses staged a walkout, withdrawing from further participation.²⁶ OSCAFF student leaders attempted to broker a compromise to resolve the issue. Their intervention also failed.²⁷

Despite an unsuccessful attempt effort at forging a common policy framework, the conference nevertheless represented a critical turning point in overseas student mobilisation. Firstly, when the final session convened to discuss establishing a national coordinating body, there was now no opposition to the idea. The interim national structure was unanimously adopted (the motion was carried 20 votes in favour and 0 against)²⁸ with remaining delegates 'pledging' their affiliation to the new body,²⁹ the National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia (NLC). The walkout did not seem to have a major impact on the credibility of the new body for two reasons:

²⁵ The 2nd National Overseas Student Conference minutes, Monash University, Day 3.

²⁶ NSWOSC aligned campuses include: University of New South Wales, Murdoch University, Griffith University, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and NSW Institute of Technology

²⁷ OSCAFF Central Meeting No. 3, 26 July 1986, p.2

²⁸ Ramachandran, L, op.cit. p. 54

²⁹ Dasan, S., 1989, Future directions / challenges: National Overseas Students Conference 1989, National Liaison Committee Overseas Students in Australia, The University of Tasmania, 1 – 4 July, p.1. The following organisations registered their organisation to the NLC: Victoria was represented by the OSCAFF, which represents 24 overseas students organisations; South Australian members include the Malaysian Students Association, Adelaide University Overseas Students Association and Flinders International Students Association. Western Australia included: University of Western Australia Overseas Students Association, University of Western Australia Malaysian Students Association, Western Australia Institute of Technology, Overseas Students Association and Murdoch University Overseas Students Association. Tasmania members included University of Tasmania Overseas Students Association, University of Tasmania Singapore Association of Students and University of Tasmania Hong Kong Students Association. New South Wales members include the New South Wales Institute of Technology (NSWIT) Malaysian Students Association, NSWIT Hong Kong Students Association and the Riverina – Murray College Overseas Students Association. Queensland members included the University of Queensland Overseas Students Association, University of Queensland Malaysian Students Association and Griffith University Overseas Students Association.

First, the majority of campus based organisations in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland overwhelmingly supported and later affiliated to the new body in comparison to the abolitionist faction's three main opposing universities in New South Wales (University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney and University of New South Wales). Second, despite the abolitionists' withdrawal from participating in the rest of the conference, the NLC leadership subsequently created flexible arrangements within its new structure to ensure that the 'abolitionist' faction were accommodated and included.

Secondly, the conference delegates that remained also took the opportunity to discuss and introduce new policies to reframe the activities of campus overseas students associations. Until then, campus organisations were mainly involved in pursuing social and cultural activities, and welfare concerns remained at the periphery of student representation. There was however overwhelming support to recognise the welfare of overseas students as a 'serious sector' to be 'incorporated as a valid part' of all organisational activities.³⁰ Its preponderant policy support signalled a return to a more welfare-oriented role similar to the one played in previous decades. The only difference this time however, was that the emphasis on welfare would be driven by fast paced radical changes to the higher education sector.

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL COORDINATING STRUCTURE

By end of 1986, a national overseas student structure was beginning to take form as broad terms of reference agreed to at the recent conference were being implemented. The terms outlined at the conference listed general principles of the NLC's role and responsibilities, yet allowed it enough flexibility to respond appropriately to a rapidly changing policy environment.³¹ Under its principles, the NLC would have a 'limited and renewable' mandate that expired at annual national conferences. Its main role and function would be confined to coordinating national campaigns on issues relevant to the

³⁰ The 2nd National Overseas Student Conference minutes, Monash University, Day 3.

³¹ Overseas students working group, 1986, The rationale for setting up of the NLC, OSCAFF, Melbourne, p.3

interest and welfare of all overseas students, including students in private colleges. Its primary role was to actively disseminate policy updates and campaign information to all university overseas student organisations. It would also assist organisations, particularly those that were small in membership, located in regional areas and lacking operational support, make the transition from a predominantly socially orientated club to welfare based associations.³²

The terms of reference also outlined how the new organisation would operate. It specified in particular its membership guidelines, voting procedures and financial management framework. To be members, all state and campus overseas student organisations were required to directly affiliate with the national body by submitting a membership application to the National Executive Committee. The Committee would have the authority to accept or reject affiliation applications. However, ultimate power to ratify or overturn membership decisions would remain with the national overseas student conference.³³ Affiliation to the NLC allowed members to nominate two voting delegates to participate in conference decision-making process, initiate policies and elect national executive office bearers. The decision to allow each organisation to hold a maximum of two votes took into consideration apprehension smaller campuses had about being overrun by campuses with larger overseas student populations if votes were based on size of overseas student body.³⁴

Voting on national policy issues would be decided based on a fifty plus one simple majority, as ‘majority indication’ of support with such support being non-binding.³⁵ In fact members who ended up in a minority position would have the option to either participate by accepting the majority decision, or alternatively withdrawing their involvement on a particular issue, choosing instead to run their own campaign while still participating within the NLC.³⁶ Such arrangement allowed all factions the flexibility to continue their participation within a national structure, while campuses that

³² Overseas students working group, *ibid.* p. 4; The National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Constitution, p. 1-2 (Section 3.0)

³³ The National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, *ibid.* p. 2 (Section 4.0)

³⁴ Dasan, S, 1989, Future directions / challenges: National Overseas Students Conference 1989, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, University of Tasmania, 1 – 4 July, p.1

³⁵ Subramaniam, P., 1986, Rationale for setting up of the NLC, OSCAFF, Melbourne, p.9

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.9

did not agree on a campaign could also abstain from further participation without losing their membership of the NLC.³⁷ This structure was mooted to maintain unity while allowing as much flexibility as possible in every stage of the organisation's process.

On financial matters, the NLC relied heavily on state and campus affiliation fees to support its national campaigns, lobby trips to Canberra and administrative operations. The NLC generated its financial income through a \$50.00 affiliation fee from each campus overseas student organisation and \$200.00 from each state. By December 1986, the NLC had managed to raise \$1050.00 through affiliation fees.³⁸

CHALLENGES FOR THE TRANSITION TEAM

In sustaining its viability as a fledgling national organisation, the student leadership recognised the importance of establishing an effective structure to promote national, state and campus level interactions; rejuvenate their leadership ranks by encouraging active student participation; and secure adequate financial resources needed to continue their public campaigns. By simply establishing an active and participatory organisational structure, the student leadership understood that it would not necessarily ensure strong, active and vibrant grassroots activism, as any success was largely contingent on having access to sufficient financial resources able to fund an effective network and associated activities.

Our main concern then, was to ensure the survival of the organisation in the face of financial shortfalls and difficulties in getting campuses to provide opportunities for Overseas Students representatives to participate within the NLC. It was also a time when, a national body representing ALL students was non-existent in Australia, Thus, it was extremely difficult for us to coordinate our activities nationally.³⁹

³⁷ Dasan, S, 1989, op.cit. p.1

³⁸ Ng K.K, 1987, NLC Financial Report, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, p.2

³⁹ Dasan, S, 1989, Convenor's report to NLC National Conference, University of Tasmania 1 – 4 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p.3

During the National Overseas Students Conference, the remaining delegates agreed to appoint Mr Peter Subramaniam to head a leadership transition team to establish the NLC. The transition team comprised a treasurer, a publications officer and five sub-committees concentrating on a range of issues including fee policy, Overseas Students Office (OSO) procedures, collection of visa charges, privatisation and an organising team for the 1987 National Conference.⁴⁰ (See Figure 5.1) A representative nominee from each state would take charge of each sub-committee.

Figure 5.1: Interim NLC Executive Committee Structure



The transition team began acting on policies formulated at the conference and developed campaign strategies for the upcoming year. At their first national executive phone link-up meeting held on 20 September, the transition team was confirmed with Mr Peter Subramaniam from the University of Melbourne as national convenor, Mr Cheng Kong Eng from the University of Melbourne as Treasurer and Mr Rajah Kanan from the Footscray Institute of Technology as Publications Officer.⁴¹ The new executive would be responsible for leading the organisation until the next year's national conference. It is interesting to note that all three confirmed office bearers came from a narrow base – they were experienced student leaders, they all lived in Melbourne, they led the 'pro-freeze' faction, and they played a critical role in leading OSCAFF's anti-fees charge against the Federal Government.

⁴⁰ Subramaniam, P, 1986, Structure and functioning of the NLC, OSCAFF, Melbourne, p. 2

⁴¹ Correspondence to Indragowrey Arunachalam, Overseas Students Services, University of Western Australia, from Peter Subramaniam, convenor, National Liaison Committee of Overseas Students, 1986. It is interesting to note that the three inaugural members of the NLC Executive came from OSCAFF.

While the new team made haste in establishing the NLC with strong support coming from campuses in Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and a handful of campuses in New South Wales, the abolitionist faction proceeded to set up a rival body, the National Overseas Students Collective of Australia (NOSCA). The alternative representation would operate mainly in New South Wales with the University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney and University of Sydney as a central hub and continue its public campaign to abolish fees.⁴² However, NOSCA would also be invited to participate as a member of the NLC national executive committee.

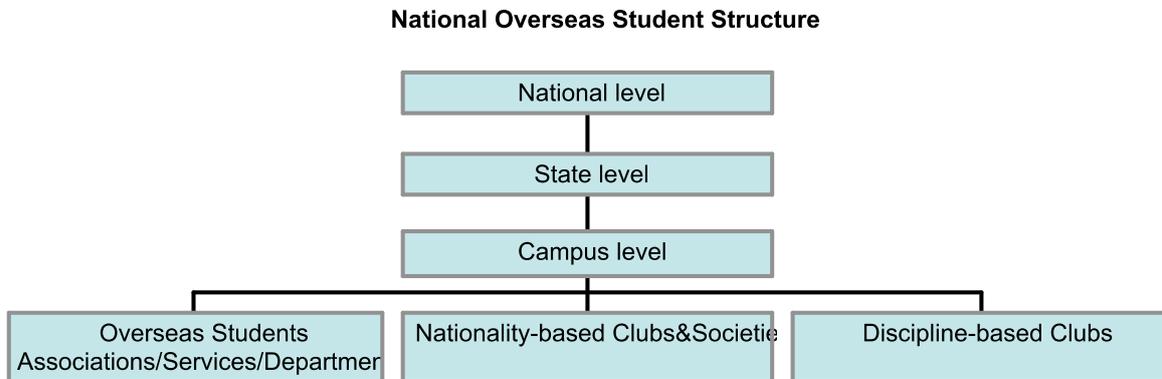
DEVELOPMENT OF THE NLC

By the beginning of 1987, a three level overseas students representation structure had emerged: campus, state and national. (See Figure 5.2) At campus level, overseas students at most universities were represented by a variety of overseas student bodies. Some operated as services within the Student Union or Student Representative Council, while others operated as clubs or societies. Those operating under student representative structure benefited from having direct access to funding and resources such as printing, communication and student facilities. For example, at the University of Western Australia, its Overseas Student Service (OSS), formed in 1964, grew to become the sole representative body for all overseas students operating as a department in the Student Guild and receiving ten percent of the \$145.00 per student overseas students fees paid to the student guild. Those that operated independently of the student unions were mostly nationality based clubs, or societies such as the Malaysian Students Association

⁴² Some examples of NOSCA's activities include: 1986 Anti-fees campaign; 1987 Education as a right campaign organised in conjunction with the local student organisations. In 1999 the students ran the "Buy – Sell – tenial" campaign to coincide with the Bicentennial celebrations. In 1989, the campaign shifted to focus on Medicare and travel concessions. In September 1990 the students supported a seminar on Malaysia's post New Economic Policy at the University of Technology Sydney. In 1991, they shifted their attention towards East Timor issues. One of its members was shot dead during the Dili Massacre. In 1992 NOSCA joined with the NSW Thai Students Association in organising a protest against the shooting of pro-democracy protestors in Bangkok. In the same year the organisation participated in Peace Marches, International Women's Day, Reclaim the Nite March and May Day.

or discipline-focused groups like the Malaysian Law Students. These groups had limited funding derived from membership fees and little to no access to resources and facilities.

Figure 5.2: National Overseas Student Structure



State based organisations formed the second level in the national overseas student structure. State organisations emerged as a result of campus based, grassroots mobilisation in response to the government’s fee changes. States would become critical conduits between national and campus levels, by encouraging active grassroots participation and organising leadership training to help develop leadership skills for state and national levels.⁴³ By the late eighties, only two state groups existed: the Victorian Overseas Students Council (OSCAFF) and the New South Wales Overseas Students Collective. South Australia and Western Australia were the next two states to establish a state organisation. In April 1990, Flinders University and the University of Adelaide formed the Confederation of International Students Association of South Australia (CISSA). CISSA would help form international students associations at TAFE colleges and the South Australian College of Advanced Education (before it became the University of South Australia).⁴⁴ In April 1990, Murdoch University, the University of

⁴³ Lee, R, 1990, South Australian State Report, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Adelaide, p. 2

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Western Australia and Curtin University established the Overseas Students Association of Western Australia.⁴⁵

At national level, the NLC had little choice during the initial years but to play merely a coordinating role, having little to minimal control over states and campuses. Constitutionally, the NLC could not interfere in how states operated or appointed their office bearers. Each state had the right to operate autonomously and under a structure with which they felt comfortable.⁴⁶ Any national campaigns could only be undertaken if there was two-thirds support for the idea at the NLC national executive, in which all states were represented and had equal voting rights. This remained fundamental to the ‘compromise’ that allowed those not supporting majority decisions to still organise as they saw fit. Campuses that did not agree with a campaign could abstain from participation without losing their membership to the NLC.⁴⁷ This model of operation would subsequently be challenged in coming years as the student leadership had little choice but to restructure in order to adapt to fast paced developments taking place in the export of education services sector and changing student demographics.

BUILDING GRASSROOTS REPRESENTATION

Ensuring that each campus established an adequately resourced overseas student run association would become a high priority on the NLC’s agenda. Current and subsequent national leaders understood that the lack of student support at campus level would inhibit the flow of information and hinder effective grassroots mobilisation necessary to oppose policy changes and sustain a viable national representation. Moreover, a weak campus based organisation meant a weak state body and therefore could adversely impact the NLC’s effectiveness at national level, as running a capable national body depended on drawing its human resources from state and campuses:

⁴⁵ Goh, G, 1990, Overseas Students Association of Western Australia, OSAWA Report, 27 April, Perth, p. 1

⁴⁶ Dasan, S, 1989, Future directions / challenges, National Overseas Students Conference, The University of Tasmania 1 – 4 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p.1

⁴⁷ Ibid.

A weak NLC results in a weak representation at Government level, which ultimately affects the overseas students. Therefore, student support is of utmost importance, simply because it determines the strength of the overseas student movement. It cannot and should not be taken lightly.⁴⁸

By 1990 only a few universities had fully functional and adequately funded overseas students services that operated within Student Unions or Student Representative Councils. They included Monash University, the University of New South Wales, the University of Adelaide and the University of Western Australia. The rest remained largely at the fringes, operating as clubs or societies with nominal funding, enough to support occasional cultural and social activities.

In 1989, the outgoing NLC National Convenor, Mr Satish Dasan pressed his case for universities to increase their focus on overseas student representation and services:

It has only been with the advent of students on full fee programmes in the last few years that institutions have begun to realise their particular shortcoming in this area. The Government endorsement of the “Code of Ethics” actually does make institutions tell student ‘[sic] from overseas what services exist in their promotional material. Hence, many institutions’ ability in the future to attract students will rely not only on the quality of the educational opportunities but on the level of services for the provision of services and representation for their members.⁴⁹

Student Unions, Mr Satish believed, were equally guilty of not providing overseas students with services or adequate representation.

Overseas students look forward towards getting involved in campus based activities just as anyone else. However, the bulk of overseas students lose that ability to assimilate into that culture due to their late enrolments. The first thing they do miss are the orientation camps where many of their peers meet for the first time. In most cases, the orientation programme is the first point of contact that makes lasting friendships, but overseas students miss out. Overseas students pay the full statutory fee just like any other student. It is time that student unions took up

⁴⁸ Leng, J, 1990, Looking ahead: a new perspective, OSAWA Report, 27 April, Perth, p. 6

⁴⁹ Dasan, S, 1989, Servicing overseas students on campus in Australia, National Overseas Students Conference, The University of Tasmania, 1-4 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 1

the responsibility of representing these students as much as anybody else.⁵⁰

The NLC's regular criticisms of university administration and student unions characterised an ongoing frustration faced in building an effective and adequately resourced campus based overseas student representative support network. Student unions in particular seemed to lack an understanding of how increased presence of overseas students with peculiar welfare demands was changing the demographics of their student membership and types of services. Mr Dasan argued that student bodies must be more representative and cater to special needs of overseas students by altering their 'structure to enable overseas students to participate in governance and policy formulation.' 'It is unfortunate' argued Dasan, 'at a time when overseas student numbers are increasing on most campuses, many student unions have only paid lip service towards the provision of representation and services to these students.'⁵¹

It is imperative that all campuses set up overseas students services departments as an integral part of the union structure. In not doing so, fee paying students question the relevance of paying a union fee to student bodies that provide them with the absolute minimum.⁵²

Mr Dasan warned student bodies that with changes to government policy on overseas students and introduction of full fee programs in universities, student unions must be prepared to accept the starkly different demands of a radically different cohort of students and the political implications associated with not meeting their needs and expectations.

In the coming age of full-fee students these people will want to know how their student body can help service their needs, just as they will question service provisions provided by the institutions. They will start to question the relevance of the statutory fee they pay. The onus is on student bodies to recognise this and attempt to find ways and means to service their needs. Those who fail to do this will also find that overseas

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Dasan, S, 1989, Convenor's report to NLC National Conference, NLC National Overseas Students Conference, University of Tasmania, 1-4 July, Tasmania, p. 6

⁵² Ibid.

students can be encouraged to use the ballot box just as any other students.⁵³

Recognising the increasing concerns and possible political implications of a growing number of overseas students on campuses, the president of the National Union of Students, Ms Lisa Neville, responded by writing to all member campuses offering assistance in setting up specialist services:

What is apparent is the growing number of overseas students in Australia and what was of grave concern, through a long discussion around the issue of overseas student services on campuses, was the lack of proper representation and services being provided on campuses. The government and higher education institutions are presently gearing up for an influx of full fee paying overseas students. It is my belief that it is imperative that student organisations also begin to address the needs of overseas students as quickly as possible. Just as full fee paying overseas students will question and challenge the service provision provided by their institutions so they will want to know how their student body can help service their needs. Overseas students must be given the opportunity to participate in the range of activities organised by their respective student organisations, but must also be able to organise themselves within that structure.⁵⁴

Despite the NLC's continued efforts in promoting greater participation of ordinary overseas students on campuses, inadequate services and representation remained an ongoing concern. Subsequent national convenors continued to press strongly for increased recognition and support for overseas students, however with limited success.

STREAMLINING THE NATIONAL STRUCTURE

By 1990, the government began phasing out the overseas students subsidised scheme, replacing it with a limited number of full scholarships – the *Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme*. That same year, the government's full fee program had been fully

⁵³ Dasan, S, Servicing overseas students on campus in Australia, op.cit. p. 1

⁵⁴ Neville, L, President NUS, 2 August 1989, to Campus Presidents, pp. 1-2

implemented and operational. The NLC had reached its critical juncture in its development and previous attempts at influencing government policy were becoming increasingly ineffective. A new strategy was needed. The overseas students left faction, *National Overseas Students Collective in Australia*, which still maintained a small delegate presence at the Annual Overseas Students Conference was determined to continue the fight against full fees, while the majority moderate students were eager to not only push for a total overhaul of its oppositionist full fee policy position but restructure the NLC.

The moderate students' focus on redefining the NLC's future direction were driven in part by recent policy changes to phase out the subsidised scheme, and a 'generational change' which was beginning to take place within the student body. The 'old' leadership cohort, mostly students under government scholarships or subsidised programs would gradually be replaced by a new generation of students required to pay the full cost of their degrees. The way the new leadership cohort viewed overseas student issues would be starkly different from the 'old'. If 'old' leadership focused primarily on securing rights to education aid, the 'new' generation on the other hand would be more concerned and demanding about quality of education services they 'purchased'. Moreover the increasing transfer of government responsibility for the overseas students program management to universities now meant that any target for actions would need to be expanded to include public and private universities.

In July 1990, overseas students delegates convened at the University of Adelaide for their fifth annual national conference. Moderate students with majority delegate votes at the conference and holding nine out of ten NLC national executive positions decided to push to reshape the NLC's policy agenda. The failure of the left – from mainly the University of Technology Sydney, the University of New South Wales and the University of Western Sydney and a number of smaller Victorian campuses – to stop the push eventually led to a total withdrawal of the left from further participation in the conference and the NLC.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ NLC, 1991 and 1992, Annual Report

Having finally captured the overseas students national policy agenda, the moderates subsequently began plans to overhaul the structure of the national student body.⁵⁶ One aspect of restructuring involved streamlining their national and state structures. Under the current arrangement, there existed a lack of uniformity and coherence, with each state having the flexibility of operating autonomously, organising their own state activities and regularly competing for limited national resources. It was also becoming clear that the NLC had either a low profile on some campuses or remained relatively unknown on others, resulting in claims that the national body had ‘lost touch’ with its membership.

To address the lack of coherence and low profile, the national conference delegates resolved to work towards reforming their state structure by establishing uniform NLC State Branches. Establishing NLC State Branches meant two things: first, autonomous state organisations such as OSCAFF (Victoria) and OSAWA (Western Australia) would have to give up their organisational autonomy by embracing a name change and adopting a new standard state branch constitution. Second, a NLC State Branch would be established in states and territories such as Tasmania, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory with no state level overseas student representative organisation. The NLC State Branches would continue to function and respond to particular needs of their state constituents, while ensuring that the NLC was appropriately promoted on all campuses, thus ensuring that ‘one body, and one body only’ represented overseas students.⁵⁷ Under a new state model, it would be the:

...role, duty and responsibility of the State Branch not only of establishing and maintaining the presence of the NLC within the State, but also within the campus itself. In effect, the ordinary international students should always know who their representative body is in Australia.⁵⁸

The national conference directed the incoming national executive members to develop ‘a consistent state branch constitution, both in form and substance, before the next

⁵⁶ National Overseas Students Conference, 14-16 July 1990, University of Adelaide, Conference Agenda

⁵⁷ NLC, 1992, International student policy, Section 87.8, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia

⁵⁸ NLC, 1992, International student policy, Section 87.8, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia

Annual Conference.’⁵⁹ The national conference also voted for funding to be set aside for state branches to be established immediately in Queensland and Tasmania.⁶⁰ State branches, a Queensland delegate suggested:

...will remain a positive way of uniting the national overseas students movement in Australia. The maturity of the overseas students movement hinges upon the creation of a sustainable structure, which promotes the sharing of ideas with minimal impediments between associations and individuals involved in the movement.⁶¹

Within two months of establishing the Queensland and Tasmanian branches, the NLC National Executive provided a special grant of \$500 to encourage the Confederation of International Students of South Australia (CISSA) to re-establish itself as the NLC South Australia branch.⁶² By July 1991, the NLC National Executive formed the NLC Australian Capital Territory and NLC New South Wales state branches.⁶³ The national executive applied more pressure on Victoria’s OSCAFF and Western Australia’s OSAWA to make the change. The new NLC national convenor, a strong advocate and immediate past president of OSCAFF said:

With due respect to OSCAFF and OSAWA, I would urge them to consider the concept of State Branch as it is only in the long term interest of the Overseas Students Movement that this is proposed. As is stated in the preamble to the Proposed Constitutional Amendments: That the main thrust underlying these Constitutional Amendments are to ensure the continuity and perpetual existence of the Overseas Students Movement (OSM) via the streamlining of human, financial or other resources whilst maintaining the following principles: protection of the interest of the OSM as a whole, and not of the interest of such individual entities as Campus, State and National organisations; coordination of a national OSM agenda;

⁵⁹ National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 1992, International Student Policy, Motion 87.24, State Branches

⁶⁰ Leng, J, 1990, Conference report and motions, National Overseas Students Conference, University of Adelaide, 14-16 July 1990, p.19

⁶¹ Sackey, D, 1991, NLC Queensland State Branch report, NLC Annual Report, in National Overseas Students Conference, University of Adelaide, 14-16 July 1990, p.20

⁶² Minutes of the Second NLC National Executive, by Telephone conference, 2 September 1990, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 2

⁶³ Leong, J, 1991, Annual Report 1990/91, National Overseas Students Conference, Monash University, 12-14 July 1991, p.11

recognition of the right to exist and decision-making, and; retention of State autonomy.⁶⁴

Despite continued resistance towards adopting an NLC State Branch constitution, OSCAFF finally relented, adopting the new name and constitutional changes in May 1992. The pressure to relent was largely influenced by moves from other states towards embracing the state branch model, which left OSCAFF increasingly isolated and out of sync with converging aspirations of a 'national movement'. By the sixth national overseas students conference, all states had adopted the new model with the NLC national convenor declaring:

The NLC is on the right track of moving toward a solidarity overseas students movement image. This will boost up the status of the NLC in representing overseas students in Australia. I am confident that the NLC is in a better position to serve overseas students with a more consistent structure....It is my opinion that the long term benefit that accrued to a consistent overseas students movement outweigh any short term inconvenience adjustment.⁶⁵

RESTRUCTURING THE NLC

With state branches established in all states including the Australian Capital Territory, the process of restructuring continued to intensify in the next couple of years as universities continued to transform the international education sector with rapidly expanding marketing activities abroad in a bid to attract more fee paying students. The enlargement in the numbers of full fee students and the decline in subsidised fee students were transforming the overseas student demographics, posing new questions about the NLC's future role. In response to the changes taking place in the export of education services sector, the NLC national executive considered a significant rethink in its policy direction, focusing on reviewing their policy platform, which until then had

⁶⁴ Leong, J, 1991, Annual Report 1990/91, National Overseas Students Conference, Monash University, 12-14 July 1991, p.11

⁶⁵ National Executive Meeting, National Convenor's Report, 23-24 May 1992, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, p.6

continued to emphasise the aid dimensions of education as a right instead of the commercial realities of an emerging export education services sector:

We have to re-define our vision, direction and policy to meet the challenges ahead. Besides, this will enable the NLC to identify itself with the new generation of international students. Otherwise, the NLC simply cannot claim that it represents international students.⁶⁶

In the next few years, consecutive national executives would implement changes to reflect new developments in government policy and in response to changes in the export of education services sector. First, the word ‘overseas’ was replaced with ‘international’ in NLC’s name, constitution and all policy documents to reflect the government’s increasing use of ‘international’ in its export of education services policy – the NLC would now be referred to as the National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia.⁶⁷ This would also include replacing the name of their annual National Overseas Students Conference with the NLC Annual Conference, incorporating the NLC Seminar and NLC Training Workshops to be held before every national conference.⁶⁸ The adoption of ‘international’ reflected an already significant shift in government policy tone and rhetoric from an over-emphasis on education commercialisation to a more ‘holistic’ view of ‘International Education’. Indeed in September 1992, the new Minister of Education, the Hon. Kim Beazley announced a refocusing of government policy on international education.⁶⁹ The refocusing would involve, as Beazley declared, ‘a move away from a concentration on “exporting” of student places to a recognition of wider activities integrally involved in international education and the wider, sometimes direct benefits which flow from seeking to internationalise our education system.’⁷⁰ It would also mean a ‘shift away from

⁶⁶ Quek, N. M, 1992, National Convenor’s report, NLC Annual Report, National Overseas Students Conference, University of Adelaide, p. 3

⁶⁷ National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 1992, International Student Policy, Motion 87.20, International

⁶⁸ Compiled by Rudolph Lopes, National General Secretary and Foo Chin Yen, NLC(SA) State Convenor, National Executive Meeting, 6.91/92, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, pp.18-19

⁶⁹ Beazley, K, 1992, International education in Australia, An edited text of the Ministers statement on International Education in Australia in the 1990s, Australian Campus Review Weekly, 3-9 September, p. 7

⁷⁰ Ibid

commercialism towards a new professionalism of those involved in Australia's international education effort.⁷¹

Second, the NLC executives sought to improve the way they communicated and targeted media releases, focusing their efforts on three particular groups: campus overseas students newsletters, Australian media and the international media. The creation of a new office bearer position, National Media Officer, and a National Media Committee was considered as an idea for improvement. The position would be responsible for convening a National Media Committee made up of editors of overseas students newsletters and communicating with them on a regular basis; establishing ongoing contacts with the Australian media and regularly disseminating information to them, as well as putting out press releases; and establishing and running the international dissemination of information via direct contacts with international media.⁷²

Third, each national office bearer was encouraged to establish a committee to assist their portfolio. The committee would help ease the workload, but also 'be used as training ground for future Executive members of the NLC'.⁷³ An Education and Research Department was established in 1992 to assist in formulating campaign strategy, and research and communicate issues to state and campuses. The committee would be directed by the National Education Officer and supported by State Education officers.⁷⁴

Finally, the NLC would recognise 'the sacrifices, both personal and financial, that its leaders make for the benefit of the overseas students movement' by introducing a 'Remuneration of Representative' policy.⁷⁵ The policy would involve moving toward a part-time salaried position for the national convenor.

National Convenor - \$10,000 – part time wages; National
General Secretary - \$2,500 – honorarium; National Education

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² National General Secretary, 1992, Report to National Executive 4.91/92, NLC, Melbourne, pp.21-23

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Chang, S, 1993, Towards a streamlined National Liaison Committee, NLC West, Perth, p.1

⁷⁵ National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, 1992, Overseas Students Policy, National Overseas Students Conference, p.22

Officer - \$1,000; National Women's Officer - \$1,000; National Services and Welfare Officer - \$1,000.⁷⁶

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

In August 1993, the NLC National Executive for the first time developed and implemented a three-year strategic plan that would govern the way it attended to quality of education issues, organisational management, financial sustainability, and research and development. The strategic plan, the national convenor argued, '...provides a reference base to plan the management and structure of the NLC. Above all, it renews our principles and defines direction so that all our efforts can be focused and resources deployed to achieve our purpose'.⁷⁷ The Plan comprised seven sections:

- (1) Membership – the NLC would improve the services offered to its membership through the improvement of communications via state branches and providing leadership development programs for students' representatives at campus level.
- (2) Organisation – this would involve redefining its financial and professional relationship with the National Union of Students (section covered in Chapter six), identifying alternative funding support and assisting campuses establish proper organisational structures for representation.
- (3) Education and research – besides conducting research to build the organisation's internal knowledge base, the NLC would seek to offer 'advice to government, other research organisations and professional bodies' on the needs of international students.
- (4) Representation – continue to build media profile through regular campaigns and gain representation on advisory and industry bodies dealing with international students.
- (5) Communication image and promotion – positively promote the NLC's image and 'its value and existent as the voice of international students' nationally.

⁷⁶ National Executive Meeting, National Convenor's Report, 23-24 May 1992, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, p. 5

⁷⁷ NLC, 1993, Strategic Plan August 1993 – 1995, p.3

(6) Publication – publish articles in industry newsletters, newspapers, conferences, journals to ‘advance the presence of international students in Australia’.

(7) International affiliations – establish links with international bodies that shared similar issues and concerns.

The strategic plan had three points of significance. Firstly it represented an important juncture in the development of the national overseas student body. One executive member noted:

It is the life-blood of this organisation’s survival, integrity, structured progress and advancements. We must have consistency and continuity and this plan is the instrument that ensures that. A mechanism must be put in place to review this plan from time to time and for it to be successful, everything that happens in the NLC must be a reference to or a reflection of the plan.⁷⁸

Secondly, despite the lack of finances, a fledgling grassroots support network and poor access to resources and facilities, the strategic plan represented a sense of shared optimism of an organisation in transition from a struggling to a more organised structure:

...the transition, it brings with its change in format and reorientation. This shift is prompted by considering the organisation’s many difficulties in its relationship with the current national union, the constraints faced by NLC in its progress and an increase in its membership.⁷⁹

Thirdly, for the first time in its history, there emerged an overwhelming consensus among the collective national leadership to create a space to make a move toward a form of self-sufficiency:

... a state of financial independence from NUS, having the flexibility to operate without the element of political influence or duress. An encountered state of constrained financial resources as a result of funding dependence on NUS, nevertheless creating opportunities to expand or enhance

⁷⁸ Wong T.K, 1993, NLC and streamlining: where are we and where do we want to be?, NLC South Australia report,

⁷⁹ Mahmud, A, 1993, NLC in transition: Onto greater and better things, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, September, p.1

resources through alternative means – research grants, entrepreneurial endeavours, affiliation fees collected on its behalf, etc.⁸⁰

The strategic plan was also crucial in articulating the roles and responsibilities of national and state levels. The state branches would be responsible for representation at state level, disseminating information and acting as a communication link between national and campuses levels. The national level would be responsible for representation and lobbying at federal level; updating states on government policy changes; coordinating national campaigns; and assisting states on state based issues and campaigns. The national and state levels would interface and operate as a singular entity; mutually interdependent, jointly determining national priorities, strategic in initiating research and campaign activities, and more coordinated in their approach to state and national representation on key issues.⁸¹ In terms of financial mechanisms, the distribution of limited resources would be based on ‘concerted priorities’ rather than ‘singular priorities’. Concerted priorities involved distributing funding ‘based on policy priorities of the international students movement, however allowing flexibility in the consideration and incorporation of state needs consistent with the overall organisation’s objectives’⁸², in contrast to the singular priority approach in which funding distribution is based on ‘separate needs, national policy priorities separate from state policy priorities.’⁸³

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I mapped the early development phase of the NLC and the shaping and reshaping of a national, state and campus overseas students structure. Since the demise of the Overseas Students Services (OSS) in the early eighties, there seemed to be no pressing need to re-create a national body to represent all overseas students in Australia. The geographical distance, the limited inter-organisational interaction and the lack of

⁸⁰ Author unknown, 1993, Streamlining, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Date unknown – broadsheet of issues for discussion.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

financial support had contributed to reinforcing a general disinterest towards any national coalescence. The existence of a loose informal network and connective structures was however an important factor in the re-mobilisation of overseas students in response to policy changes. The lack of national coordinated representation and ongoing changes to the Overseas Students Program had in fact exposed the students' structural weakness. The first attempt at formalising a national structure failed. The second attempt succeeded despite fracturing of the overseas students positions on formulating a unified response. Despite the 'abolitionist' faction walking out on the last day of the second annual conference, remaining delegates proceeded to establish a national coordinating body. To maintain unity within the new body, the transitional NLC leadership created flexible arrangements in its new structure to accommodate and include the opposing faction.

This chapter focused on the 'meso-level' analysis of the National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia. It explored the students' choice in selecting a particular formal mobilising structure which could flexibly accommodate diversity of views and policy positions within a culturally and nationally diversified overseas student body. I argued that in the early phases of collective action, the loose grouping of overseas students was weak and informally structured. To attract public attention to their cause, and create a 'constituency of support' from overseas students across universities, the student leaders moved to formalise and better coordinate their disparate campaigns. After the establishment of the NLC, the student leaders proceeded to professionalise their internal structures by establishing a national constitution, introducing formal statutes and procedures, creating formal leadership and office structures and establishing membership process. The internal structuration was important in achieving a vertical overseas students structure which comprised national, state and campus level representation. As Hanspeter Kriesi argues (See Chapter two), the process of internal structuration is virtually inevitable, if the organisation is to have success in the long run.

However, another aspect of what is virtually inevitable is the need to undergo centralisation. By 1990, the NLC had undergone a process of centralisation in which it integrated autonomous state bodies into a national/state branch system. The push for

centralisation was largely necessitated by a rapidly changing export of education services sector. Centralisation involved in particular, building a more effective grassroots representation under an NLC umbrella body, and improving communication and information dissemination under a streamlined central organisational structure. A lack of funding however would significantly impair the organisation's long-term viability. In the next chapter I will explore another aspect of mobilising structures, the search for funds and how the NLC attempted to resolve its financial predicament.

Six

MOBILISING RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

By 1980, the *National Overseas Students Service* (NOSS) had ceased its affiliation with an embattled and highly factionalised *Australian Union of Students* (AUS). Before its disaffiliation, NOSS's status as a department of the AUS had double significance. As a department operating within a structure of a peak body representing all tertiary students in Australia, it gave overseas students' representation the added credibility of being part of a larger students' movement, particularly when dealing with government agencies and the general community. More importantly, the association with the AUS gave NOSS direct access to funding resources badly needed to sustain its portfolio of activities. When NOSS ceased its affiliation to the AUS, it inevitably cut itself off completely from the secured funding stream needed to underwrite much of its organisational functions.

In Chapter five I focused broadly on the formation and emergent mobilisation phase of overseas students against the government's education aid reform. I examined, in particular, the establishment and development of a national coordinating body, the *National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia* (NLC). The NLC represents an outcome of a mobilisation of an overseas student group. I described the students' attempt at forming a national representative body to respond to government policy changes. I proceeded to describe the transformation of the NLC in response to broader changes taking place in the export of education services sector. A key part of its transformation, I argued, involved restructuring the way the organisation operated. The NLC leadership focused their efforts on building effective grassroots representation,

improving communication and dissemination of information, and streamlining its organisational structure to better mobilise national campaigns and recruit new leaders at the grassroots level. Having an effective organisational structure in place was one key challenge faced by the NLC. By 1990, the state and national leadership undertook to radically restructure the NLC, undergoing a process of centralisation by transforming autonomous state organisations into NLC state branches. The process of centralisation created a more unified body and contributed to the organisation's stability.

In this chapter I will focus on another key challenge the organisation had to contend with; entrenching their credibility within a broader student movement and securing access to a stable funding source to sustain its mobilisation efforts and its viability as a national overseas students representative body. One aspect of an organisation's development phase is external structuration. (See Chapter two) External structuration refers to the integration of a formal organisation into its environment. An important aspect of this integration is forming key alliances to enhance legitimacy and access to resources. Having support from strong allies may provide important resources on the one hand, but on the other hand risk reducing the organisation's autonomy and threaten its stability in the long run.

In examining the financial challenge faced by the NLC, I will focus on the development of its relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS), the peak body representing all tertiary students in Australia. I will begin with the NLC's participation in the NUS when it was invited to establish the National Overseas Students Department. As a department, the NLC would have direct access to funding and resources critical in ensuring its survival. I will also consider how increasingly the NLC had to actively participate in NUS politics in order to maintain access to financial resources and avoid political marginalisation. Though the NLC's participation within the NUS structure may have provided much needed access to resources, it did not necessarily resolve its financial difficulties in the longer term. The ongoing political contestation for limited resources led to increasing strain in the NUS-NLC relations, which ultimately resulted both organisations agreeing to redefine their relationship in response to exacerbated tensions.

SECURING FUNDING AND RESOURCES

By mid-1987, the financial situation of the new national overseas students body, the National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia (NLC), was becoming increasingly precarious. Supported by meagre income drawn largely from state affiliates and campus affiliation fees, the fledgling national body struggled to meet its monthly expenses. Their revenue for the year stood at \$3600, with more than three-quarters derived from affiliation fees while the remaining amount was raised through conference registration charges.⁸⁴ Less than half of its budget was allocated towards its annual Canberra lobby trip and the remaining amount was absorbed by administrative and communications expenses.⁸⁵ In June, the NLC's Treasurer reported that the organisation faced a deficit of over two hundred dollars. Though the deficit may not have been significant, it however raised, according to the Treasurer, 'the question again of the further need for more resources to enable the continuing functions of this organisation.'⁸⁶

As the NLC continued to struggle financially, an invaluable opportunity to address questions around securing ongoing financial support, at least in the intervening period, would emerge. With recent moves by the Hawke government to re-introduce tertiary fees for local students through a new system of deferred tuition payment, the *Higher Education Contribution Scheme*, campus student unions and associations around Australia decided to act quickly to re-establish a national organisation to oppose the government's new policy regime. In December 1987, student representatives met at the University of Melbourne to establish the National Union of Students (NUS). Like its predecessor, the AUS, the NUS would operate as a lobby group and representative body for all students, local and international. During discussions however, it became clear that the NUS would not be able to adequately service the needs of overseas students as emerging factional interests began competing for limited resources and key office bearer positions. To address the obvious lack of overseas student representation, union leaders decided to invite NLC representatives to consider forming an association with NUS to ensure that overseas students were appropriately represented.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ng, K.K, 1987, NLC financial report 30/9/87, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students, Melbourne, p. 2

⁸⁵ Ibid p. 3

⁸⁶ Ng, K.K, 1987, NLC Financial Report (30/9/87), 2 October – Memo to NLC Executive

⁸⁷ Dasan, S, 1989, Future directions / challenges: National Overseas Students Conference, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, University of Tasmania, 1 – 4 July, p.4

Senior NLC executive members met with NUS leaders to discuss ways in which they could best participate in the new structure and obtain financial support to assist with their campaign activities.⁸⁸ Negotiations would however be fraught with some difficulties. The NLC leadership needed to resolve three important issues before deciding to move ahead with any arrangement. First, they had to decide how to best maintain their independence and autonomy within a separate organisational structure. NLC feared that affiliation with NUS might ‘abrogate’, even ‘subjugate’ their decision-making authority over overseas students policy, which was represented by their annual National Overseas Students Conference. Moreover, operating exclusively under the NUS structure risked undermining the important principle encapsulated by the NLC, that is, an overseas student body elected by overseas students.

Currently the major forum for determining policy which forms the basis of the campaign conducted by its affiliates, the NLC, in its dealings with the government and its agencies, has maintained its views as that of the national overseas student movement as represented by the NLC. The question of its role in policy formulation within the NUS structure and the effects of this on its credibility and dealings with the government(s) and its agencies it deals with currently forms a central consideration.⁸⁹

The NLC’s leadership team recognised however, the enormous benefits of being part of a larger student body. They understood that if they decided to continue autonomously and in isolation of a local student organisational structure, they might in fact limit their capacity to effectively serve the long-term interest of their own community.

It has never been our intention to isolate ourselves. In fact, the aim of the NLC has always been to carve us a place as a legitimate part of the student community. ...we have learnt to organise ourselves with and through our campus unions. However, it is my belief that if we attempt for total autonomy we will marginalise ourselves to the point that could be detrimental to our needs, within the larger student community.⁹⁰

‘While our work in macro terms’, NLC leaders reflected ‘has had positive beneficial effects for all overseas students the main challenge for the future is for us to entrench

⁸⁸ Dasan, S, *ibid.* p.2

⁸⁹ Subramaniam, P, 1987, *The overseas student movement in the context of a national union of Australian students*, The National Liaison Committee of Overseas Students, Adelaide, October, p. 7

⁹⁰ Dasan, S, *op.cit.* p.3

ourselves as a legitimate part of all student unions and its activities.⁹¹ A form of incorporation, they believed, would therefore need to consider the implications of the overseas students policy formulation role when deciding the form of its affiliation to NUS.⁹²

The second issue the NLC needed to resolve involved understanding how they would maintain and protect their discrete identity when dealing with home governments. In the past three years, overseas students had succeeded, through their public campaigns and lobbying, in establishing an independent identity. The NLC always maintained a position that its body represented the views and welfare concerns of all overseas students in Australia, and that any involvement within a broader student representative framework risked affecting the NLC's approach to dealing with their home governments.

There is a greater reluctance for governments of countries of origin of overseas students to deal with an overseas student body comprising nationals of a particular country that is supported within the context of a union involved in domestic issues internal to Australia as this may constitute 'interference'.⁹³

The third issue involved identifying what benefits they could procure from a formal relationship with the NUS. The students recognised two important reasons for embedding themselves within a broader national student structure: while it added credibility including legitimacy to their cause⁹⁴, it also gave them access to much needed financial resources.⁹⁵ NLC Convenor, Mr Satish Dasan argued firmly in favour of formalising an arrangement with the Union:

The NLC has been given this opportunity to become a legitimate part of the Australian student community because it has earned that right through the hard work we have done over the last 3 ½ years. Our ability to continue performing well is conditional on the support that we get from our campus unions

⁹¹ Ibid. p.5

⁹² Peter Subramaniam, 1987, The overseas student movement in the context of a national union of Australian students, The National Liaison Committee of Overseas Students, Adelaide, October, p. 7

⁹³ Ibid. p.8

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.8

⁹⁵ Dasan, S, op.cit. p.3

and the added strength of a national students body – a role that NUS fulfils.⁹⁶

Also in favour of the association, Mr Peter Subramaniam emphasised:

Such support will go a long way towards countering personnel and financial constraints currently experienced by the NLC and lead to a more effective representation and campaigning.⁹⁷

Legitimacy and access to financial resources became the two important factors that finally influenced the leadership's ultimate decision to join the Union. Remaining autonomous did not seem a realistic long-term option; as Dasan pointed out: 'if we choose to be autonomous, we must also find a way to be financially autonomous – a concept that I believe is unrealistic, based on our past performance.'⁹⁸

This link is the most flexible one possible under both structures. It gives us a degree of autonomy in setting goals and priorities on behalf of the overseas students in Australia. It also ensures that the NLC has a steady source of funds to enable it to achieve its objectives.⁹⁹

ESTABLISHING A NLC-NUS RELATIONSHIP

After lengthy negotiations, it was finally agreed that the NLC would form a *National Overseas Students Department* (NOSD) within NUS. The NLC's National Executive would constitute the department's leadership while its National Convenor would represent overseas students on NUS's National Executive Committee.¹⁰⁰ Both parties also agreed that NUS conference was not an appropriate forum to debate overseas students issues '...due to the number of issues discussed on the (NUS conference) floor, overseas students issues would not get a fair hearing.'¹⁰¹ Therefore, NOSD would continue to convene, as part of the arrangement, their annual National Overseas

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.5

⁹⁷ Peter Subramaniam, 1987, The overseas student movement in the context of a national union of Australian students, The National Liaison Committee of Overseas Students, Adelaide, October, p.8

⁹⁸ Dasan, S, op.cit. p.3

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.4

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.3

¹⁰¹ Satish Dasan, 1988, Position of overseas students within the national overseas students department of the National Union of Students, National Overseas Students Conference, Normanby House, Monash University, 21 – 24 July, p.1

Students Conference, sponsored by NUS and held prior to the NUS National Conference in December. The annual conference would remain the primary policy making body on all issues relating to overseas students. Policy decisions agreed at the National Overseas Students Conference would be submitted for ratification at NUS conference.¹⁰²

Besides raising awareness of overseas students issues' in Australia and overseas, the NOSD would have a broader role that included promoting international understanding and multiculturalism, providing a network of information and resources to encourage overseas student participation in NUS, and representing the needs and interests of overseas students within NUS, the broader community and state and federal governments.¹⁰³ The department would also have access to all NUS national and state facilities. NOSD administrative duties would be allocated to a member of staff at NUS head office in Melbourne. Finances would be provided on a line item basis in which the overseas students committee would recommend individual project expenditure to the NUS National Executive. It was also agreed that a guaranteed minimum level of finance be given, determined by the NUS Finance Committee in consultation with the NOSD for continuing operation of the department.¹⁰⁴ The NUS-NLC structural arrangement in particular, was unique to the extent to which the overseas students department was the only department within the Union that was administered by an outside group. The Education, Welfare and Women's departments were established and administered by elected NUS representative, while postgraduate students and mature-age and part-time students were represented by independent bodies outside the Union – the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and Mature Age and Part-Time Students Association respectively. The 1988 NUS National Conference established the department and approved a budget of \$30 000.¹⁰⁵ The NLC's participation within the NUS structure may have provided much needed access to resources; however, as subsequent sections will show, it did not necessarily resolve the NLC's financial difficulties in the longer term.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. The key NUS players that helped brokered the arrangement were Ms Tracey Ellery the NUS President in 1988, Ms Lisa Neville (General Secretary), Mr Evan Thornley (Services and Welfare Office) and Ms Helen Tierney (Victoria Student Union president).

¹⁰⁵ Dasan, S, 1989, Convenor's report to NLC National Conference, University of Tasmania 1 – 4 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p.4

LOOKING OUTSIDE FOR MORE FUNDING

Becoming a department of NUS also created opportunities for state overseas students organisations to access funding from respective NUS state branches. At a state level, the NLC began negotiating with NUS state branches to include state overseas student organisations within its structure. A preferred arrangement was the formal representation of the president of state based organisation as Overseas Student Officer within the branches. NUS Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia were a few state branches that incorporated overseas student representation within their structure and offered as part of the arrangement, access to facilities, a budget and administrative support. NUS Queensland provided overseas students with funding in support of their activities. Not all states, however, were as embracing of any arrangement that included funding. For instance, the NUS Western Australia (NUS West) branch were agreeable to providing limited administrative support to the Overseas Students Association of Western Australia, which included the use of telephone, fax machines and photocopying. NUS West was, however, reluctant to provide funding support mainly due to their small state budget, lack of administrative support and limited office space – operating temporarily out of a small room at Curtin University of Technology.¹⁰⁶

Access to state based funding, facilities and administrative support remained a significant issue. State funding was largely based on three key factors: (1) limited financial resources available at state level; (2) availability of office space and access to facilities; and (3) politics – depending on which faction ran the state executive and how sympathetic they were to the overseas students cause. Success in securing funding at state level was influenced partly by the relationship the state overseas students organisation had developed with their NUS state counterparts. Developing good working relationships and ‘ensuring effective communication’ seemed to be an important aspect of state to state bodies interaction. For example in Victoria, the OSCAFF President wrote in his annual report:

¹⁰⁶ Leng, J, 1990. Secretary's report, National Overseas Students Conference, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, 20 April, pp. 3 - 4

OSCAFF being the representative of the Overseas Students Department within the National Union of Students (Victoria) NUS VIC, needs a close and intimate relationship with NUS (VIC) to ensure effective communication and interaction between the two bodies. It therefore follows that rapport is necessary to ensure the smooth running of the transactions between these two bodies. Of course, both organisations (or more importantly, the Executive members of the two bodies, especially the Presidents) require a willingness to contribute towards a climate of a constructive working relationship. In my term in office, OSCAFF has been continually beleaguered by NUS (VIC) particularly in the area of finance. Although I appreciate that there is a perceived shortage of fund within NUS (Vic), I fail to see why OSCAFF's budget line is always continually under threat. This has hampered the Executive's functions throughout the year, for a considerable amount of time has then to be spent trying to ensure that we do actually have sufficient funding for our year's activities. After all, OSCAFF has done much to contribute to the Overseas Students Department of NUS (Vic). The way I see it, we have been quite successful in our endeavours to protect and further overseas students' interest in this state.¹⁰⁷

Though national funding secured from NUS was adequate to support a limited number of NLC campaigns, the NLC and its state bodies continued to explore alternative forms of funding. OSCAFF, for example, applied to the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission to fund its proposal to review the full fee program. The proposal submission was, however, unsuccessful. They also tried to source funding from the Youth Affairs Division of the Department of Labour of Victoria, and the Office for the Status of Women of the Prime Minister's Department.¹⁰⁸

In 1992, funding and financial resources for campaigns were gradually becoming more strained. The NLC passed a policy to 'seek alternative funding for their campaigns and publications such that no more than 50 per cent of the total cost of the activity is paid from the NLC National Budget.'¹⁰⁹ Considerations were put forward to seek special funding to employ a staff member to help 'administer the affairs of the NLC and to

¹⁰⁷ Neo, E, 1991, President's Report, Annual Council Meeting 1991, Overseas Students Council of Victoria, p. 12

¹⁰⁸ Leong, J, 1990, Victorian representative report 1990, National Overseas Students Conference, 14-16 July, University of Adelaide, p. 9

¹⁰⁹ International Student Policy, 1992, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia. 90.1

engage in work directed by the Executive.’ That attempt was made in 1990. It however failed to be implemented in the following year because of limited funds.

Other sources of funding included an attempt to recoup a total of approximately \$2000 through the sale of excess NLC Education and Welfare and Women’s Handbooks.¹¹⁰ The NLC successfully secured \$5000 sponsorship from Students Travel Australia (STA Travel) for its conference. Part of the arrangement involved promoting STA to its membership through conference materials and orientation handbooks. The NLC also provided incentives to attract as many students as possible to utilise STA Travel.¹¹¹ However by end of 1992, the NLC’s relationship with STA was not going anywhere. When the National Convenor met with STA’s Marketing Manager, STA expressed their unhappiness concerning the ‘small returns from the \$5000 sponsorship of the Conference.’¹¹²

Companies recognising the lucrative overseas students market began to approach the NLC to negotiate financial arrangements to gain endorsement for their products and services. In 1993, an insurance broking company, Sedgwick Macdermott Pty Ltd approached the NLC to supply overseas students at higher education institutions and private colleges with overseas students insurance policies. Sedgwick Macdermott was formed in 1987 to provide specialised insurance broking and advisory services.¹¹³ There were high hopes within the NLC’s leadership that the income from the sale of health insurance could generate considerable income, eventually leading to self-funding.

Income from the sale of policies can be generated to the National Liaison Committee, which can make the committee self-funding. Initially, we are willing to offer \$35.00 per policy for every policy sold up to 500, increasing to \$70 per policy when the number of policies sold exceed 1,000, with the higher sum of \$70 being paid retrospectively on all policies.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Lopes, R, 1992, National General Secretary report to National Executive, April, p. 25

¹¹¹ Quek N.M, 1992, National Convenor’s report, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Overseas Students Department of the National Union of Students, p.6

¹¹² National Executive Meeting, 1992, Minutes, compiled by Rudolph Lopes, 4.91/92, p.6

¹¹³ Sedgwick and Macdermott brochure: A tailor made policy to provide security to overseas students in Australia – Overseas students insurance policy. Sedgwick Macdermott Pty Ltd CAN 006 692 600

¹¹⁴ Facsimile transmission from N.C.G Young, Account Director to Ali Mahmud, NLC National Convenor, 1993, Subject: overseas student insurance policy, 23 November, Brisbane

The arrangement with Sedgwick however failed because a majority of the NLC executive members deemed it was too risky to promote a new health insurance company with a limited track record.¹¹⁵ More opportunities to form business partnerships would emerge as the number of overseas students grew and the export of education services sector expanded.

POLITICS OF MOBILISING RESOURCES

Since becoming a department of NUS, the political dynamics within the union had transformed significantly whereby maintaining access to financial resources grew increasingly challenging, as it became highly dependant on factional politics to compete for limited funding and prioritise scarce resources for campaign activities. At an NLC National Executive meeting on 13 March 1993, the leadership noted the challenge with procuring adequate funding:

There is always a problem especially when it comes to the budget time during NUS National Conference where the NLC budget is always the main controversy and the area from which cuts can be made to suit the budget of the other departments within the NUS. Even if the NLC's budget was agreed at National conference, it risked being adjusted at National Executive level.¹¹⁶

To avoid being politically marginalised in the funding and resource allocation process, the NLC had little choice but to ensure that it actively participated in campus, state and national local student politics. They understood that in order to protect their annual budget, it was necessary to secure enough delegate votes at annual conferences to be able to position themselves as a serious participant in a highly competitive factional environment to negotiate or trade votes for influence. By 1990, the NLC's senior leadership members were actively visiting universities across Australia and within their states to encourage overseas student organisations to nominate candidates for upcoming NUS delegate elections. For example in an NUS delegate election held at Flinders University, South Australia in May 1992, the Flinders International Students

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ National Executive Meeting Minutes, 13 March 1993, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 1

Association for the first time ran three candidates for five NUS delegates' places. Traditionally, the Left Alliance had dominated four out of five NUS delegate positions at Flinders University. The overseas students for the first time succeeded in taking three out of the five positions, securing more than 60 percent of the total students votes.¹¹⁷

It became even more important for the NLC to ensure that they had enough delegates to elect their representative to the NUS National Executive Committee at the election that occurred at every conference. Having votes in National Executive would be significant in influencing the direction of national student policy and allocation of Union resources. It became common practice that even though a department's budget was agreed at the National Conference, the new National Executive Committee would regularly intervene to adjust a department's budget, its level of administrative support, campaign activities or allocation of office space based on policy priorities.¹¹⁸ Other departments within the NUS were also subject to similar budgetary intervention. The extent of budgetary cuts depended on the faction that was able to organise support from other factions.

To avoid being marginalised, the NLC decided to form an overseas student caucus at the 1990 NUS conference.¹¹⁹ The caucus would seek to be an independent grouping within the Union, which comprised three major groupings that included the National Organisation of Labor Students, Left Alliance, and Independents. Its membership would be opened to accredited NUS delegates involved in national overseas students conferences or national, state and campus overseas students organisations.¹²⁰ Even though the caucus' main focus would be to 'discuss the constitutional amendments and

¹¹⁷ Flinders University Weekly Student Information Bulletin, 1992, Students association election results, Clubs and Societies, Issue 13, Week 9th June – A total of 1037 students voted in the 1992 student elections. Overseas students took the lead in forming an 'international' coalition of independent and labor students to weaken the Left Alliance's traditional stronghold on the Students Association and Union: two overseas students and one Labor student (Student Unity – right wing faction of the Australian Labor Students) out of the five positions. The remaining two went to the Left Alliance. In the Students Association Co-ordinating Group elections (equivalent to Student Council), the overseas students alliance for the first time took 7 out of the total of 15 positions. The successful overseas students campaign '*More time on issues, less time on political rhetoric*' was adopted in other overseas students campaigns across Victoria and Tasmania.

¹¹⁸ Leong, J, 1991, Annual Report 1990/91, National Overseas Students Conference 1991, Monash University, 12 – 14 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 1-12

¹¹⁹ National Executive Meeting 4.90/91, Convenor's Report, 6-7 April, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Raymond Priestly Room, University of Melbourne, p.1

¹²⁰ Overseas students meeting standing orders for NUS conference 1990, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne, p.1

policy motions affecting overseas students, as well as the position of overseas students at this conference',¹²¹ its main intention was to organise a fragmented overseas students delegates into a significant voting bloc.

By the following National Conference, the caucus strategy began to produce positive results when the overseas students succeeded in getting a representative elected to the Conference's Budget Committee.

Overseas students played an important role in this year's conference. We held some 52 votes in all. This was just short of the quota required to send an overseas student on the NUS General Executive.¹²²

The Budget Committee was particularly important because it was responsible for reviewing each department's submission and recommending final budget allocation for the conference's approval.¹²³ In 1991, the NLC successfully managed to increase their annual budget from \$30 000 to \$42 500. The NUS National Executive however later reduced that amount to \$40 500.¹²⁴

Following its successful budget increase, the National Convenor introduced a plan to further bolster the NLC's 'voice' within the student union, by proposing that all state bodies actively co-ordinate campaigns aimed at fielding as many overseas students candidates for NUS delegate elections. The NLC National Executive even appointed a senior member of the Executive to be given primary responsibility for overseeing a nation-wide NUS delegate campaign.¹²⁵

In 1991, NLC's proactive campaign to increase their delegate numbers improved slightly in comparison to the previous year.¹²⁶ The improvement did not however help

¹²¹ Leong, J, 1990, Letter from NLC Convenor to overseas student delegate, re: NUS conference overseas students meeting, 29 November, 1990, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Melbourne

¹²² Leng, J, Report on NLC Activities July 1989 – March 1990, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students, Melbourne, pp. 10-11

¹²³ National Executive Meeting 4.90/91, Convenor's Report, 6-7 April, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Raymond Priestly Room, University of Melbourne, p.1

¹²⁴ Leong, J, 1991, Annual Report 1990/91, National Overseas Students Conference 1991, Monash University, 12 – 14 July, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 1-12

¹²⁵ Minutes of the National Executive meeting 2.91/92, compiled by Rudolph Lopes, National General Secretary, p. 7

¹²⁶ Number of votes was not specified. It is estimated that an overseas student caucus would average between six to ten percent of the conference floor. In 1993 however, caucus held close to 15 percent.

increase their budget. In fact, the NLC's proposed budget recommended by the Budget Committee, and its education and welfare policies passed at the recent National Overseas Students Conference, was not passed at the NUS conference ostensibly creating considerable anxiety among NLC caucus members. At an NLC National Executive meeting, the National Convenor reported:

The conference was disappointing. Perhaps, I would think that the words *[sic]* disillusion would be more appropriate to describe the feeling of *[sic]* overseas students delegation. The motions that passed through the NLC Conference (National Overseas Students Conference 1991) were not ratified and the NLC budget was hang *[sic]* in the air as the proposed budget recommended by the Budget Committee was not approved by the conference delegates, with the likelihood of NLC obtained *[sic]* an insufficient budget, \$45,000.¹²⁷

Despite the budget disappointment, the overseas students caucus still managed to secure a National Executive Committee position, achieving 'the highest primary votes'.¹²⁸ Their conference success significantly boosted their confidence. The National Convenor noted:

I was pleased that every overseas students delegates *[sic]* and observers were united in overseas students issues. As such, we could show our strength fully in the eyes of other factions. It is hope *[sic]* that the united forces that was *[sic]* shown during the conference will be adhered to in any future conference simply because the motto of 'working for overseas students' require *[sic]* us to do so.¹²⁹

A place at the National Executive would invariably yield consequential material benefits for the NLC. At the first NUS National Executive meeting, the NLC's budget was adjusted and accepted leaving them with an operating fund of \$58 000, a significant

¹²⁷ National Convenor's report, National Executive Meeting, 28 – 29 March, 1992, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 2

¹²⁸ National Convenor's report, National Executive Meeting, 28 – 29 March, 1992, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 2. In 1992, the overseas students caucus had enough votes to get one of its members elected. Out of the 18 available voting positions, the 1992 factional breakdown was as follows: 2 Left Alliance; 2 National Organisation of Labor Students; 3 Liberals; 1 Student Unity; 1 National Liaison Committee; 1 Non-aligned left; 1 National Organisation of Labor Students/Independent; 1 Independent; Six state branch presidents: WA (Student Unity); South Australia (Independent); New South Wales (National Organisation of Labor Students); Queensland (Non-aligned left); Victoria (Student Unity); Tasmania (Student Unity)

¹²⁹ National Convenor's report, National Executive Meeting, 28 – 29 March, 1992, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, p. 2

increase from the previous year.¹³⁰ The competition for increased budget usually occurred between the overseas students, Women's department and the Small and Regional Campus group. The Education and Welfare and Services departments remained largely immune to budget haggling since they were core to NUS's representational and political activities. Notwithstanding the increase in funding, there remained growing frustrations about the Union's budgetary process. Their frustrations stemmed largely due to the uncertainty about the level of budget allocation for the forthcoming year, which made it difficult to plan campaign activities. The students were also becoming increasingly disillusioned by the budget process, which required focusing a lot of energy and attention towards organising politically at grassroots level to ensure they had enough NUS delegates elected to protect funding.

Despite their ongoing frustration, the NLC's senior leadership still believed it was important to continue reaffirming to their membership their firm commitment to the relationship with the Union, if not only for maintaining ongoing access to an invaluable funding resource, at least in recognition of the importance in being part of a broader student anti-fees agenda. At the 1992 National Overseas Students Conference for example, the NLC National Convenor reminded delegates about how 'integral' NUS was to NLC when it came to issues covering overseas students:

The NUS always render full support to the international students campaign and issues. This is especially true for some of the NUS activities. Such support is essential as in the eyes of the public, the international students are not shown to be alone in their grievances. They do not have 'friends' who are standing behind them. This will boost up the morale of NLC campaign and increase the chances of success.¹³¹

Delegates were however also reminded about the distinctive differences in the NLC's policies compared to NUS's and the importance of actively participating in NUS to preserve and direct their own policy agenda.

Having said that, we must recognise the degree of autonomy that NLC has vis-à-vis NUS. To some extent, the problems of

¹³⁰ Ibid. When voting together, the 'right' would have the numbers. The factional breakdown is as follows: 10 votes – (Student Unity, Liberals, Independents, Overseas Student); 8 votes (Left Alliance, NOLS, non-aligned left). - Author unknown, National Executive Report to Left Alliance

¹³¹ Quek N.M, 1992, National Convenor's report, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia, Overseas Students Department of the National Union of Students, p.6

international students are different from those faced by the local students. The area of support services is a good example. The international students are eventually different from the local students in their background. In other words, our agenda is not identical to that of NUS. Hence the NLC needs to maintain its strength by standing on its own feet. One way to achieve this is to formulate and implement our own policy through a resourceful education department. However, international students should continue to participate actively in the NUS representatives structure simply because without a loud voice at the NUS National Conference, the NLC will be brushed aside by the NUS political waves.¹³²

STRAINING RELATIONS

The politics of securing ongoing financial resources was beginning to take its toll on the NLC's relationship with NUS to the extent that senior NLC executive members began considering options for breaking away from the Union.¹³³ By July 1993, the growing tension and deepening frustrations had become so pronounced that the NUS president was invited to address National Overseas Students Conference delegates about issues concerning the bilateral relationship, in particular difficulties around securing ongoing funding and accessing NUS's physical resources. An article produced by an immediate past National General Secretary, Rudolph Lopes, appropriately captures the students' frustrations:

The only real link that we have with the NUS is financial. The overall support from the NUS has been lacking since the beginning. For the survival of NLC, it is essential that we think about the independence of NLC from the NUS. This does not mean that there should be a division of the international students from the student association on campus itself. There is always a problem especially when it comes to the budget time during NUS National Conference where the NLC budget is always the main controversy and the area from which cuts can be made to suit the budget of the other departments within the NUS. There is always a problem for state branches to get funding from the NUS state branch. The presence of NLC within the NUS has been little noted. Most of the time the NLC spends time sorting

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ National Executive Meeting minutes, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 4 July 1993, Room B 100, University of Tasmania, Launceston, 4.20 – 6.00pm, p.1

out the political situation in the NUS rather than to look [*sic*] into the real issues that are affecting the international students in the country. The international students are only concerned with the issues of the day, working through the things rather than to fight internally and is not interested in the political factions that exists [*sic*] within the NUS.¹³⁴

The meeting with the NUS president resolved little in addressing the tension. Emerging from the discussion however was a paper that would form the basis for articulating an alternative funding arrangement.¹³⁵ In the paper, two options were considered. The first option involved adopting a similar yet ambitious type of affiliation fee-based financial model as used by NUS. Overseas students would pay an affiliation fee directly to NLC, ‘comparable to current NUS arrangements’.¹³⁶ Another option involved sourcing funding from ‘various government departments, which will be able to provide grants for projects that we can work on together with them.’¹³⁷ The optimism of securing potential financial support seemed to stem from the NLC’s recent discussions with key government agencies and potential business prospects.

The two meetings with DEET and others with the AVCC have shown tremendous support for the NLC. We can also look into major sponsorships from companies etc. Being independent will also enable international students from the other education sectors as well as from non-NUS member campuses to become directly affiliated to the NLC. Only with this additional link can we help these students which at present do not have a united voice.’¹³⁸

The viability of such support would however depend on the NLC taking the significant step of employing a full-time staff to assist in its venture. Such a step would involve committing a significant portion of their already limited budget, which would inevitably impose further strains on campaign resources.

¹³⁴ National Executive meeting (special face to face), March 13 1993, Melbourne, Victoria, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p. 1-2

¹³⁵ National Executive Meeting minutes, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 4 July 1993, Room B 100, University of Tasmania, Launceston, 4.20 – 6.00pm, p.2

¹³⁶ National Executive meeting (special face to face), March 13 1993, Melbourne, Victoria, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p. 1-2

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ National Executive meeting (special face to face), March 13 1993, Melbourne, Victoria, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p. 1-2

The growing frustrations between NLC and NUS continued in the lead-up to NUS's 1992 National Conference. The conference in fact represented a critical turning point in the NLC-NUS relationship with the budgetary tension escalating. The NLC's National Convenor reported to the National Executive:

The National Conference in general was a failure as usual. NLC's budget like last year did not get to the conference floor and again not surprising to many, NLC was a whipping dog for other factions to be taken advantage during the budgetary processes.¹³⁹

RE-DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP

In April 1993, the NLC National Convenor, Mr Ali Mahmud, circulated a confidential paper, '*NLC Transition Issue: On To Greater and Better Things*', to National Executive members. In the paper, the National Convenor called for an organisational shift towards independence from NUS. 'The shift', Mr Mahmud argued, 'is prompted by considering the organisation's many difficulties in its relationship with the current National Union of Students and the constraints faced by NLC in its progress and increase in membership.'¹⁴⁰ Mr Mahmud believed that the NLC had now reached a stage in its development for it to seriously make a 'transition' in its 'format and reorientation'.¹⁴¹ Transition to him, represented a state in which Executive members would commit to a two-year plan towards resolving NLC's financial dilemmas. The word, 'transition':

...seems fit, and favours the path of a mere shift in perception together with a need for expansion, to view adjacent fields as potentially liberating rather than limiting. In this light, 'transition' will focus on a concept of ideas and solutions and possible alternatives, which will be accorded the importance of encouraging propositions.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ National Executive Meeting minutes, 13 February 1993, NUS Victoria, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p.3

¹⁴⁰ Mahmud, A, 1993, NLC transition issue #93: Onto greater and better things, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Launceston, Tasmania

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

There was an overwhelming consensus and a sense of urgency to ensure that if such a transition were to succeed, it needed to occur within the Executive's current term of representation:

This is a crucial time for all of us, it is our fate to change NLC. If this doesn't happen now, than when. When we leave, with us will go the knowledge. Will it be possible for others to take this step? Will it happen? Transition has a purpose in mind. In this context, of the alignment of the opportunity to change with the opportunity to build NLC. Transition would hopefully promote this.¹⁴³

The National Executive also acknowledged that any transitional success depended largely on arresting the deteriorating relationship with the Union and renegotiating a new arrangement for managing the National Overseas Students Department. If the relationship was not resolved, any attempts at making a transition would ultimately fail as a result of the limited resources available.

At the July 1993 conference, a resolution was passed directing the incoming NLC National Executive to renegotiate the NUS-NLC relationship and establish a new mechanism for determining funding arrangements. The new Executive sent a letter to the NUS National President conveying a list of 'serious concerns'.¹⁴⁴ The list identified three primary issues that needed immediate resolution: (1) a lack of clarity in the NUS Constitution on the relationship between NUS and NLC; (2) inadequate financial procedures in place to expedite payment for NLC activities and reimbursement of honorariums; and (3) an untenable political nature of budget allocation in which the overseas students 'department faces funding cuts first and foremost before other departments at every NUS National Conference.'¹⁴⁵ Points i and ii were process-related issues that could be resolved through either clarifying or improving the organisational relationship and financial management procedures. For example, in terms of clarifying the relationship, the NUS Constitution clearly recognised the NLC as the 'principle

¹⁴³ Mahmud, A, 1993, NLC transition issue: onto greater and better things, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Launceston, p.2

¹⁴⁴ Correspondence from Ali Mahmud, NLC National Convenor to Ken Fowle, NUS National President and Simon Hoffman, NUS National General Secretary, Re: NLC and National Union of Students – A difficult relationship, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 19 May, 1993, p. 1

¹⁴⁵ Mahmud, A, 1993, Proposal for a redefined relationship and new agreement between NLC – NUS, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Month unknown, Melbourne, p.2.

national organisation representative of overseas students in Australia’ and, subject to the Constitution of the Union, ‘as the administrator of the National Overseas Students Department of the Union (s.96)’.

...the relationship between the NLC and NUS is relatively clearly defined. Section 96 makes clear that the Union shall have an International Students department, which shall be administered by the NLC. The Constitution goes on to imply that the NLC is a separate, distinct organisation, by reason of its separate Constitution (s97), separate Executive Committee (s105ff), separate policy formulation process (s104).¹⁴⁶

The political nature of budget allocation, however, required negotiating a new arrangement that would attempt to divorce politics from the annual budgetary determination by ensuring a fixed income was channelled directly to NLC without having to go through the annual NUS Budget Committee process. To implement such an arrangement, the NLC National Executive proposed that a working party consisting of four senior members from NUS and NLC meet to resolve the matter.¹⁴⁷ The working party would comprise NUS’s National President and General Secretary, while the National Convenor and General Secretary would represent the NLC.

NEGOTIATING A NUS-NLC SCHEDULE

The working party met and communicated regularly over three months to formulate details of the NUS-NLC Schedule, which would attempt to broadly clarify their relationship. It was agreed that the draft schedule document would in particular, outline a manageable mechanism to better regulate the bilateral relations. To meet the requirement of NUS incorporation, the Schedule would exist subject to the NUS Constitution and regulations in which only the NUS National Conference may amend or repeal this Schedule by a Special Resolution passed in accordance with the Association Incorporation Act, 1991, (ACT).¹⁴⁸ This in effect not only made the Schedule a part of

¹⁴⁶ Fowlie, K, 1993, NUS and NLC: NUS Issues Paper, National Union of Students, Melbourne, 28 August, p. 1

¹⁴⁷ Report of National General Secretary to National Executive, 21-22 August 1993, Union Board Room, Flinders University, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p.3-4

¹⁴⁸ Ken Fowlie, 1993, NUS and NLC A new future – a discussion paper, National Union of Students, Melbourne, p.8

the Constitution but it would also protect the new arrangement from future vulnerability and intensity of factional politics.

Even though the NUS Constitution adequately allowed for a balance between autonomy and integration between NLC and NUS, both parties acknowledged that competing objectives, the absence of a ‘collective commitment’ to ‘work through the implications of the constitutional structure, and to strike a proper working balance’ and lack of cooperation had contributed to ongoing tension.¹⁴⁹ The Schedule would attempt to address the underlying tension by seeking to ‘re-capture and if possible articulate, the spirit and functional aspect of a sustainable cooperative relationship between the two organisations.’¹⁵⁰ The NUS President however made it clear that the Union was not interested in any substantial structural change in the relationship:

NUS accepts the need for a functioning International Students Department within the Union. We are interested in minimal change that will see the most effective functioning of that department.¹⁵¹

What would that minimal change encompass? Before discussing the extent of any structural change, both parties agreed on two key principles that would be important in governing negotiations: the importance of mutual recognition and respect and acknowledgement that existing arrangements could be improved. Even though negotiations were essentially around reworking the budgetary arrangements, the NUS’s President, Ken Fowlie, was particular in outlining that mutual recognition and respect had to extend beyond matters of budgetary priorities. In revisiting the relationship, ‘any attempt to boil the issues down to solely matters of budgetary priority miss the complexity of the dispute and will not deliver a lasting settlement.’¹⁵² Both parties needed to accept some accentuating differences. The NUS, for example, needed to accept that, unlike its competing national overseas students counterpart, NOSCA, the NLC is indeed the only ‘pro-union, national organisation representing international students, and that the NLC has a continuing real commitment to the existence and

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 3

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ken Fowlie, 1993, Memo to NLC National Executive, National Union of Students, Melbourne, 25 August, pp. 1-2

¹⁵² Fowlie, K, NUS and NLC A new future – a discussion paper, op.cit. p. 3

growth of NUS.’¹⁵³ That despite its commitment to the Union, the NLC’s ‘democratic processes and legitimacy of decisions taken by its leadership’ needed to be respected.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, despite the similarities of each organisation’s mission, to the extent that both strongly advocated for student rights, there were however differences in approach in the way both organisations pursued policy objectives. Though the NLC formulated its own policy agenda in a fashion that was largely based on promoting consensus building through working closely with government agencies and industry stakeholders, the Union, in contrast, undertook action campaigns that promoted vocal public opposition to policy. There needed to be recognition of different approaches to achieving policy objectives. The NLC, on the other hand, needed to accept the existing realities according to Fowlie, ‘conventions of the national student movement relating to issues of operation, and accept the fundamentally limited resources that are available to student representative organisations and the sensitivity that needs to be shown to their allocation.’¹⁵⁵

The second principle involved acknowledging that existing arrangements could be improved despite the current impediments to structural arrangements in the bilateral relationship. There was indeed recognition that existing funding arrangements could be improved to take better account of the present structure. Both parties accepted that the NLC could indeed mount a convincing argument for guaranteed funding not due to particular activities it undertook, but by reason of the administrative and structural arrangements that placed the NLC at odds with every other department of the Union. As Fowlie recognised:

In the end the nature of the NLC as a separate entity, with an independent structure and officers, is the sole basis for proposing a model of guaranteed funding. If one accepts the philosophy of guaranteed funding, the question then is what principles to follow, and what form the arrangements should take.¹⁵⁶

The NLC role with the Union was indeed unique. It was the only department within NUS in which representation of a specific constituent – overseas students – was ‘sub-

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. pp.4-5

contracted' to an external independent organisation. As part of the arrangement, the NLC, as an 'outsider' in the relationship – with its separate constitutions, organisational structure, narrow membership – had to frequently negotiate for administrative and resource support, unlike other departments, which had direct access to support and resources.

After months of negotiations, both parties agreed on six principles that would frame a new financial administrative arrangement. First, the total amount allocated to the international student budget should not exceed total income from international students less an amount that: (1) equals a contribution to the infrastructure of the state and National Offices; (2) reflects the fact that international students like all students benefit from the work that NUS performs generally and should contribute to the cost of that work. Second, the allocation to NUS should be specific and the allocation to the NLC residual. Further, there should be no discretionary allocation over and above the guaranteed allocation (with the exception of special projects). Third, the resources and facilities of NUS should be available to officers of the NLC without discrimination or charge. This reflected the practice with all other NUS office-bearers, and justified the contribution by the NLC to NUS infrastructure. Fourth, the NLC should contribute to NUS infrastructure costs in a proportion that approximated the number of members of NUS that were international students. Fifth, the NLC should contribute to NUS campaigns and activities in a proportion that fairly approximated the benefit of those activities either to the NLC or to international students on campus. Last, allocations to the NLC should be made in one sum nationally to be allocated by the NLC between the State Branches of the NLC as determined by the Executive or National Conference of the NLC.¹⁵⁷ It must be noted that these principles were distinctive to the NLC-NUS arrangements. Other departments were not explicitly subjected to any of the above principles. NLC's distinctiveness is largely due to the historical nature of its 'outsider' relationship with Union.

After reaching agreement on the six principles, both parties subsequently proceeded to define the three key issues that the Schedule would attempt to address: the principle allocation of annual budget, the determination of affiliation fees and both organisations' financial and administrative obligations.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.5

Principles of budget allocation

Under the current arrangement, for every \$1 received from overseas students, one-third was automatically allocated to the NUS State Branch. From that money, the States Branches then agreed to a budget for their international department. With the remaining two-thirds, the NUS National Office retained the amount, with 70 percent allocated to the NLC and the remainder contributed to the general NUS activities.¹⁵⁸ Under the proposed Schedule, of every \$1 that was received from an overseas student just over one-third would be retained by NUS and just under two-thirds automatically allocated to the NLC, in the same fashion as allocations were currently made to the states. Of the 35 percent that was received by NUS, the portion, as specified in the Constitution, should be allocated to the State Branches of the Union. From the two-thirds allocated to the NLC, national and state campaign expenditure of the NLC would be drawn. NUS State Branches would no longer allocate monies to the NLC directly in each state, but the infrastructure of the State Branch would be available without cost.¹⁵⁹

Affiliation fees

The second issue involved affiliation, subscription or other NUS membership fees. The fees derived from overseas students, under the Schedule, NUS would allocate an EFTISU – effective full time international students units represented by member organisations – fee income according to a formula.

Sixty-five percent fee income derived from the first 30 000 EFTISU would be allocated to the NLC. Ninety percent of fee income derived from EFTISU greater than 30 000 would be allocated to the NLC. The total subscription fees derived from this formula allocated to the NLC was to be known as the “NLC Contribution”. There are a number of principles that base part 3 of the schedule. Firstly, only income derived from international students is considered for allocation. Secondly, the model deliberately has two tiers to reflect the fact that as total international student membership numbers

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.6

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

increase there is not a proportional increase in the costs that are borne by NUS. In effect, costs of infrastructure level out. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 gives the following allocation to the NLC and NUS.

Table 6.1: NUS-NLC Affiliation Fee Formula¹⁶⁰

EFTISU	Fee Income Allocation	
	NUS (%)	NLC (%)
0 – 30,000	35	65
30,001+	10	90

Table 6.2: NUS-NLC Affiliation fee breakdown¹⁶¹

	TOTAL (\$)	NLC	NUS (STATE)	NUS (NAT)
20,000 EFTISU	84,000	54,600	9,800	19,600
30,000 EFTISU	126,000	81,900	14,700	29,400
35,000 EFTISU	147,000	100,800	15,400	30,800

Finance and administration

The third key issue covered in the Schedule related to NUS and NLC's obligations in finance and administration. Under the Schedule, NUS would transfer the NLC Contribution into a separate bank account controlled by the Union. (This would however alter the current arrangements in respect of finance, only to the extent that a separate account would be opened but the account would still be controlled by NUS). The process outlined would be similar to current arrangements with the states, that is, NUS would allocate the NLC Contribution within a reasonable time following the collection of any fees. With regards to the honorarium of the NLC National Convenor or designated NLC National Executive, the NUS would transmit to the NLC the NLC Contribution funds equivalent to the honorarium. The honorarium would be determined

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p.11

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

by a resolution of the NLC National Executive. It was agreed that the honorarium of the NLC National Convenor would be less than a full time officer's allowance until EFTISU was greater than 30 000. The NUS would also make available without charge or discrimination, all services and infrastructure of the Union, including but not limited to, postage, staff resources, telecommunications, photocopying and stationary.¹⁶²

The Schedule also outlined two other important points to reflect the co-operative nature of the new arrangement. First, if a dispute arose as to the interpretation of the Schedule, it was agreed that the National President of the NUS and the National Convenor of the NLC would jointly interpret the schedule and subject it to the resolution of NUS National Executive. Second, both organisations agreed to establish a joint campaign fund. The joint fund would involve co-contributions by the NLC and NUS for the purpose of conducting nation-wide campaigns that served the interests of students represented by both organisations. Though the joint fund would seek to develop a sustainable cooperative relationship, it would also be an attempt to systematise the provision of campaigns within the Union that have the broadest appeal. In other words, both organisations would try to better coordinate public campaigns with limited resources in the interest of domestic and international students. For instance, some NUS campaigns undertaken were not particularly relevant to overseas students; for those that were, the level of contact between the NLC and NUS was at best sporadic and dependent on personalities.¹⁶³ Under the joint arrangement, the quantum of contribution would be agreed by both organisations following the first National Executive meeting of each organisation in every calendar year. All funds remaining within the joint campaign funds by end of October each year would be retained in the joint campaign account for use in the following year. A committee comprising the national office bearers of the NUS and the NLC would identify campaign priorities and allocate funding.

The Schedule represented a significant juncture in the NLC's development. It firstly introduced a semblance of certainty to the extent that the NLC could plan activities and campaigns, knowing the amount they would receive in the following year. Secondly, the funding would increase in proportion to the growing number of overseas students

¹⁶² Ibid. p.10

¹⁶³ Ibid. pp.11-12

studying at university. Thirdly, despite their department status, the NOSD would be treated similar to NUS State Branches in the way their budget arrangement were determined at the outset based on guaranteed fixed percentage income. This arrangement would contrast with the way other departments' budgets were allocated, which would be based according to budget submissions at the annual conference and subject to factional negotiations.

On 30 October, the NLC national convenor reported that discussions regarding the schedule were progressing well.

...I attended the NUS National Executive meeting in Sydney. The main focus of the Executive meeting was the upcoming NUS National Conference and the NLC Schedule to be adopted by the conference. Also as usual, there were lot of speculations etc. regarding the conference and the office bearer position of NUS. I also had meeting with Ken Fowlie NUS 93' President regarding the NLC Schedule, the outcome was very good.¹⁶⁴

A month later, the NLC National Executive committee met to discuss the proposed Schedule and unanimously passed 'Resolution 1 1993/94' in support of the proposed Schedule.¹⁶⁵ The next stage would require submitting the 'NUS-NLC Schedule' for endorsement at the December's NUS National Conference.¹⁶⁶ There were however potential complications to the submission. The NLC National Executive lacked confidence that the National Conference would indeed accept the new funding model. Most factions with vested interests within NUS were traditionally reluctant to operate under a model that sees a growing number of segments of the organisation with guaranteed budget allocations. Some factions, particularly from the Left believed that, guaranteed budget allocation for all NUS departments, for example, would lead to the danger of the student union not having the financial flexibility to reallocate or divert scarce resources in response to significant changes in government policy, such as the anti-Student Union legislation.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, factions from the Left were opposed to

¹⁶⁴ Mahmud, A, 1994, National Convenor's Report, NLC National Executive Meeting, 18 – 20 February, Adelaide, p. 4

¹⁶⁵ National Executive Meeting 3.93/94, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Melbourne, 1993, p.3

¹⁶⁶ Mahmud, A, 1993, National Convenor's Report, National Executive Meeting, Date unknown, p.2

¹⁶⁷ National Executive Meeting 3.93/94, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, Melbourne, 1993, p.2

significant Union funding going to ‘right-wing, conservative and pro-government bodies such as the NLC.’¹⁶⁸ The NLC National Executive acknowledged that there was no guarantee that their new arrangement would be accepted at the Conference and understood that if the Schedule were to succeed, they would need to actively mobilise enough NUS delegate votes to ‘bargain’ for the smooth passage of changes proposed under the schedule.¹⁶⁹

NUS conference

While negotiations on the Schedule were underway, the NLC had already begun to actively pursue a nation-wide campaign to increase its NUS delegate numbers. On 22 September 1993, the NLC National General Secretary reported on the progress of the NUS campus delegate elections.

I hope that you have all been busy looking into this matter in your various states. It is important for each of us to realise that if we want to be able to negotiate with the NUS, we need to have the ‘bargaining’ power by having votes of the international students delegates at the NUS conferences. I will be calling around to have a chat with each state convenor regarding this, so you may have heard from me before this. I just want to continue to impress upon you the necessity and the importance of the delegate elections and hope that you will work on it as hard as possible. Please inform me of the result of any such elections as soon as it becomes available so that I can compile all the results for the NLC. I hope to be able to give you a full update in the next memo.¹⁷⁰

By early November the National General Secretary, reported that with the exception of two universities, the University of Canberra and the University of South Australia, the NLC had done ‘quite well’ in increasing its delegate representation.¹⁷¹ Overseas student

¹⁶⁸ The anti-schedule position of the left is reflected in their votes against the NLC-NUS schedule. See NUS National Conference 1993 results, National Union of Students, Melbourne

¹⁶⁹ National Executive Meeting 3.93/94, op.cit. p.2

¹⁷⁰ National General Secretary, 1993, National Executive Memo 3.93/94, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, September 22, Melbourne, p.2

¹⁷¹ National General Secretary, 1993, National Executive Memo 4.93/94, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, November 3, Melbourne, p.1

caucus delegation that year was the largest since joining NUS in 1988. Caucus had at least a delegate each from ten universities¹⁷²:

Curtin University (WA) – 1 delegate

University of Adelaide (SA) – 1 delegate

Flinders University (SA) – 2 delegates

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (VIC) – 1 delegate

University of Melbourne (VIC) – 1 delegate

Ballarat College of Advanced Education (VIC) – 1 delegate

Warrnambool College of Advanced Education (VIC) – 1 delegate

Philip Institute of Technology (VIC) – 1 delegate

Monash University (VIC) – 1 delegate

University of Tasmania (TAS) – 1 delegate

The NUS National Conference was held between 11 and 14 December 1993, at La Trobe University, Melbourne. The NLC National Convenor reported to the National Executive that the conference was ‘hugely successful’. With a large delegate representation, the NLC caucus succeeded in securing the endorsement of its Schedule with 906 votes for and 227 against (See Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: NUS National Conference 1993 results¹⁷³

¹⁷² Mahmud, A, 1993, NLC National Convenor’s Report, National Overseas Students Conference, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, p.2

¹⁷³ NUS National Conference 1993 results, National Union of Students, Melbourne

Campus	For	Against	Abstained	Not Exercised	Total votes
Victoria					
University of Melbourne	57	28	14		99
Monash – Clayton	51			10	61
Latrobe Uni	18	37			55
RMIT – City	9	38			47
Monash – Caulfield	28	7			35
Deakin (Warnum Ponds)	19	7			26
RMIT Northern	24				24
VUT – Footscray	17	6			23
VUT – Western	-	-			0
Ballarat Uni College	10		5		15
Deakin (Warrnambool)	10				10
Deakin (Rusden)	4	3		3	10
Deakin (Toorak)	5				5
NSW					
University of Sydney	51	39			90
Uni of NSW	63	12	13		88
Macquarie University	8	9	25		42
Newcastle			48		48
Wollongong	36				36
UWS (Nepean)	17		6		23
UWS (Macarthur)	12	6			18
UNE (Northern Rivers)	15				15
Queensland					
Queensland Uni of Technology	59			12	71
Griffith	34	9			43
James Cook	20	7			27
South Australia					
Adelaide University	45				45
Flinders Uni	14	13		7	34
USA (City)	21				21
USA (Levels)	10				10
USA (Underdale)	9			4	13
USA (Magill)	11				11
USA (Externals)	3			3	6
Western Australia					
Curtin University of Technology	55				55
Edith Cowan	41		8		49
Uni of WA	44				44
Murdoch Uni	12	6	6		24
Tasmania					
Uni of Tas (Launceston)	10			5	15
Uni of Tas (Hobart)	24				24

Northern Territory					
NT University	11				11
ACT					
Uni of Canberra	29				29

The caucus also managed to secure an unprecedented three NUS National Executive positions from a total of 12 available positions. Caucus also managed to get their representative elected to a NUS National office bearer position, the Small and Regional Campus Officer, giving the NLC for the first time, a significant presence and influence in NUS. Acknowledging the overwhelming success of the overseas students, the NLC National Convenor, Mr Ali Mahmud reported:

I must thank the International Student Delegates who attended and those who couldn't make it for some personal reasons. Without the support of these people and those who helped NLC on campus elections, members of the State Branches and National Office Bearers, we would not have been successful, I thank them all for a job well done. Please note that NLC also have 3 NUS National Executive members.¹⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to trace another key challenge that the NLC faced during its development stage. In Chapter four, I discussed why and how the overseas students collective action group formed. Chapter five focused on the conditions of overseas student mobilisation, particularly how the group developed a national 'collective' structure in which to engage in action. Developing a national organisation is critical to group mobilisation because it reduces the cost of participation, removes duplication of effort and resources, is important for recruitment of participants and may help increase chances of success. In this chapter, I have extended the conditions of mobilisation to include challenges to mobilisation, particularly in acquiring resources and making them available for collective action. A key dimension of external

¹⁷⁴ Mahmud, A, 1994, National Convenor's Report, NLC National Executive Meeting, 18 – 20 February, Adelaide, p. 5

structuration (see Chapter two) is developing a strong relationship with powerful allies to gain access to important resources. Taking up the role of the National Overseas Students Department of the National Union of Students was a critical to the development of the NLC. The department status, similar to the case of its predecessor, the National Overseas Students Services, was important for two reasons. As a department operating within a structure of a peak body representing all tertiary students in Australia, it gave overseas students representation the needed recognition and credibility when dealing with government agencies and the general community. It also gave the NLC direct access to funding resources badly needed to sustain its portfolio activities.

Gaining access to an ally's resources however has its negative side; it reduces the organisation's autonomy and threatens its stability in the long run. In this chapter, I have shown that the NLC's relationship with NUS was subject to political manoeuvrings and contestation. To maintain or increase levels of financial resources it was necessary to actively participate in NUS politics. Overseas student leaders not only had to ensure they passed their exams because their visa was dependent on their academic success, the students also had to lobby the government and mobilise politically in the Union by running candidates at campus, state and national level to ensure that their access to limited resources were protected. The strain of securing resources did pose a significant threat to the organisation's survival, which led to both organisations revisiting their original arrangement and proposing a more manageable solution to the financial stress. In the next two chapters, I will shift my focus towards examining how the NLC responded to changes in government overseas student policy in the late eighties and early nineties.

Seven

THE TRANSITION TO EDUCATION TRADE

INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters, I discussed the establishment and development of a national coordinating body, the National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia (NLC). I sought to explain how overseas students attempted to mobilise and engage in collective action. In Chapter five, I traced the development stages of the NLC and how it established a national organisational structure and attempted to build strong grassroots support. In Chapter six, I examined how the NLC attempted to secure access to stable funding sources in support of its mobilisation efforts and to sustain a long-term viable national representation for all overseas students. This ‘meso-level’ organisational focus, comprise the building blocks for Chapters seven and eight in which I will proceed to explain how the NLC, as a representation of overseas students collective action, mobilised in response to subsequent government policy changes and wider developments in the emerging export education services sector.

Chapters seven and eight form an important discussion on framing processes within the collective action framework used in this thesis. (See Chapter two) Framing processes involve fashioning a shared understanding of a problematic condition or situation that is in need of change. The process involves three framing approaches: (1) *diagnostic framing* in which the problem or situation is interpreted – what is wrong and why; (2) *prognostic framing* where a solution to the problem is presented – what is to be done; and (3) *motivational framing* which attempts to give people a reason to undertake collective action. In Chapters seven and eight I seek to demonstrate the NLC’s attempt at student representation in the context of framing process; in particular, how the

overseas students articulated and amplified their concerns in an attempt to instigate changes.

I will examine the NLC's policy response in two parts. The first (Chapter seven) considers how the national representative body responded to policy changes after March 1985 until about late 1991. This period of analysis is particularly important because it focuses on the government's decision to gradually phase-out the overseas students subsidised fee program and encourage universities' expansion of full fee offerings. In the second part (Chapter eight), I will examine the period after 1991 when export of education services sector underwent significant growth and transformation. Focusing on this period, I explore how the overseas students reacted to the rapid changes and framed their arguments to reflect new realities in international education. The important question I seek to address in both chapters is, how did the overseas students group engage in collective action and frame their claims? Both chapters will demonstrate a different approach in NLC's claims-making, which is largely influenced by rapid changes to the export of education services' landscape and a phenomenal increase in the number of full fee paying overseas students.

In this chapter, I explore the period after mid-1985 when Australia's economy had slowed down significantly, precipitating a telling reduction in government expenditures. The OSP underwent further rounds of fee increases, which had considerable effects on overseas students. Further fee rises, the expansion in full fee programs and reduction in government provision of welfare and support services significantly challenged the NLC's response to these rapid changes. Despite previous attempts at lobbying government for a freeze in fees, the NLC realised that any further opportunities to affect substantive policy change would diminish in light of the declining economic environment. The new economic and policy circumstances now required a rethink in campaign approach. Such approach would involve, in particular, actively cultivating links with foreign governments and media, while still engaging directly in the policy-making process. The change in approach would also include reframing and shifting the existing debate on education aid away from arguments of economic 'cause' in justifying policy change, to counter instead implications of policy 'effects' on overseas students. Reframing the issues may have partly succeeded in influencing some policy amendments in the short term; however, fast paced expansion in export of education

services trade, and changing demographic profile of overseas students would invariably force the NLC to transform its claims-making from one underpinned by notions of education aid as a right, to one that was opposed to ideas of education commoditisation, yet embraced some of the benefits consumerism entails, such as consumer rights.

In this chapter, I will firstly examine how the overseas students responded to further cuts to education aid. I will explore their shift in strategy, which emphasised increased links with local and foreign media agents, and its intentional effort to engage in the policy-development process. I will use the example of how they sought to lobby government to introduce certainty in determining fee charges over a fixed period and implement an instalment payment scheme to help offset existing financial strains imposed on students as a result of fee rises. I will then consider how collapses of private education colleges promoting full fee programs, international marketing concerns and subsequent crisis of confidence in the export of education services sector altered government policy significantly. Government policy shifted away from emphasising free market exports of education services to imposing new regulatory mechanisms and controls to safeguard Australia's education reputation overseas. The shift in emphasis was a critical influencing factor in subsequently transforming the content of overseas students' claims-making.

CUTS TO FOREIGN AID

In early March 1986, the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper revealed the growing tension within the Hawke government over the Treasurer's detailing of the government's budgetary problems.¹⁷⁵ The leaked submission document highlighted a slowdown in economic growth from an estimated 6 percent in 1985 to 3.5 percent over 1986/87, showing 'little hope for a substantial fall' in the unemployment rate, and a projected budget deficit of around \$5.1 billion over the same period. The Treasurer's submission called for an expenditure reduction of up to \$1.4 billion across all departments.

¹⁷⁵ Hywood, G., 1986, Govt enters era of low growth...as philosophical tension spills over into public arena, *Australian Financial Review*, 5 March, p.1

The leak had underlined that an official war had been declared between “spending ministers” and those ministers wanting to rein expenditure in.¹⁷⁶ Dispute over economic policy highlighted the ‘battle between the old guard and the new.’ On the side of the new guard were the Treasurer, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Trade and others who had embraced economic rationalism. On the other side were the old guard, composed largely of the ‘left but also containing elements of the Centre and the Right who hark back to Labor “traditions”.’¹⁷⁷

To slash budget outlays, the Federal Cabinet directed the *Expenditure Review Committee* (ERC)¹⁷⁸ to find the \$1.4 billion cuts to government programs. Within three months, the Committee raised its spending cut target from \$1.4 billion to \$2.5 billion¹⁷⁹ and placed all government ministers on notice that their departments’ programs were up for review.¹⁸⁰ On 13 July, a day before facing the ERC, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Bill Hayden appeared on the television program *Sunday* to volunteer cuts to Australia’s \$1 billion foreign aid budget to help the Federal Government reduce its \$2.4 billion spending.¹⁸¹ Without identifying specific areas for cuts, Hayden said he was willing for his department to make sacrifices to help the ailing domestic economy. ‘The most important thing we have got to do,’ Hayden announced, ‘is to get this economy back into a decent sort of shape and operating much more satisfactorily.’¹⁸²

So, if that means I have to make some sacrifices in my department or I’ve got to cut the corners a bit on the aid program

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.; Gruen, F., & Grattan, M., 1993, *Managing government: Labor’s achievements and failures*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, Ch. 6

¹⁷⁷ Hywood, G., op.cit. p.1; Walsh, P., 1995, *Confessions of a failed finance minister*, Random House, NSW

¹⁷⁸ Australian Financial Review, 1986, *Expenditure pruned across the board*, 20 August, p.3. The Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) is a powerful decision-making body that funnels and coordinates the budget process and takes responsibility for budget outcomes. The ERC comprised: five senior members: Bob Hawke, Paul Keating, Ralph Willis, John Dawkins and Peter Walsh. See Walsh, P., 1995, *Confessions of a failed finance minister*, Random House, NSW, p.101 and Wanna, J., & Bartos, S., 2003, ‘Good practice: Does it work in theory?’, *Australia’s quest for better outcomes*, Ch. 1, in John Wanna, Lotte Jensen and Jouke de Vries, *Controlling public expenditure: The changing roles of central budget agencies – better guardians?*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

¹⁷⁹ Hywood, G., 1986, *Labor aims for \$2bn in budget cuts*, Australian Financial Review, 25 June, p.1

¹⁸⁰ Hubbard, R., *Hayden volunteers sacrifices in his Dept for sake of economy*, Australian Financial Review, 14 July, p.3

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Similarly, the proposal to introduce an ‘administration charge’ as a substitute for tertiary fees for local students was put up by John Dawkins when the ERC was desperately seeking ways to reach the target – see also Walsh, P., op.cit. p.153

¹⁸² Lynch, P., 1986, *Hayden to volunteer foreign aid reductions*, Australian Financial Review

in areas where it's not going to hurt...I'm going to volunteer it.¹⁸³

Hayden's easy surrender of the aid budget was not surprising. As Whitlam's treasurer in 1975, Hayden had made his mark putting together a responsible budget strategy that was economically rational.¹⁸⁴ As opposition leader, Hayden was instrumental in redrafting the Labor party's economic platform in 1978 to 1983. Hayden also formed and led the 'centre-left' faction that 'came to represent economic rationalism to a degree greater than the Right' and actively pursued 'responsible, market and efficiency oriented policies from the start of the government.'¹⁸⁵

OVERSEAS STUDENTS' RESPONSE

Fearing possible budget cuts to an important element of the aid budget, the *Overseas Students Program* (OSP), the NLC sent a letter to the Minister of Education expressing deep concern and seeking reassurance that the program would be spared:

Recent media reports suggest that the Government is working at decreasing the subsidy for private overseas students to enter Australian tertiary institution as part of the Australian Overseas Students Program. Of the three categories of students in the OSP (sponsored, subsidised and full fee paying), it appears that the former two are the ones the proposed cuts will affect most, being those categories of students which actually receive aid pursuant to the OSP. ...if the situation had indeed changed and the details of the proposal have reached your office, we would greatly appreciate any light you may be able to throw on this area of great concern to us. As you might well imagine such a move in the forthcoming budget will have a tremendous impact of the OSP and could well significantly, diminish the essential aid component of the program.¹⁸⁶

Neither the Minister's office nor the Overseas Students Office (OSO) knew much about Mr Hayden volunteering overseas aid cuts.¹⁸⁷ Aid officials did however confirm that the

¹⁸³ Hubbard, R., op.cit. p.3

¹⁸⁴ Catley, B., 1996, *Globalising Australian capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.69

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Subramaniam, P, 1986, Letter to Senator Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, 21 June

¹⁸⁷ Dawson, C, 1986, Foreign students face aid cuts, *Higher Education*, The Australian, Wednesday July 16, p. 13 – The article reported that neither Minister for Education Senator Ryan's office nor the Overseas

government might look at reducing the \$97 million subsidy for private overseas students entering Australian universities.¹⁸⁸

In anticipation of further OSP cuts, the NLC prepared to launch a national budget awareness campaign similar to actions taken less than a year previously in their opposition against fee hikes. This time however, the students feared that the government would use incremental fee increases as a way of methodically shifting the majority of students on the subsidised program to the full fee paying scheme.¹⁸⁹

On 29 July, the NLC National Convenor, Peter Subramaniam, wrote to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, raising the Australian Finance Minister's recent announcement to slash the OSP subsidies in the forthcoming budget. The Convenor argued that Mr Hayden's new proposal to cut aid was another attempt at threatening the viability of the program.¹⁹⁰ If 'a decision to slash subsidies is made then, it would be very unlikely that reversal of the decision would occur.'¹⁹¹ To bolster the NLC's argument, the National Convenor highlighted the importance of the fee increase issue specifically for Malaysian students:

As you would well be aware, Malaysian students form the largest percentage of the private overseas student population in Australia (approximately 57 percent of a total 22,000 students) and this fact is reflected in our membership where approximately 90 percent of our members are of Malaysian descent.¹⁹²

The NLC received no response from the Prime Minister. A month later, the students made similar representation to Malaysia's High Commissioner to Australia. They requested that the High Commissioner help 'channel their concerns to the relevant

Students Office knew much about suggestions made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Hayden, volunteering overseas aid cuts to help chop \$2.3 billion off Budget outlays.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 13

¹⁸⁹ OSCAFF, 1986, Private overseas students face funding cuts, campaign pamphlet

¹⁹⁰ Subramaniam, P., Letter to *Yang Amat Berhormat, Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, Perdana Menteri Malaysia*, 12hb Ogos (12 August)

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Malaysian officers of government'.¹⁹³ Again, they did not receive a response to their petition.

On 19 August, the Treasurer Paul Keating unveiled the 1986 Budget measures announcing cuts of nearly \$3 billion from its existing social security, health, education, defence and overseas aid programs. Total aid spending was reduced by 12.8 percent in real terms to \$929 million, representing 0.39 percent of GDP, the lowest ratio in more than 20 years.¹⁹⁴ The government reinforced its commitment to the OSP by maintaining its 'three-track approach' to the program: fully sponsored students under the aid program, private subsidised students and full fee paying students. It however announced that it would not increase but maintain its intake quotas for subsidised students at the 1986 level of 3500. Overseas postgraduate research students were exempted from the fixed quota because the government was conscious that some potentially excellent research students might be lost to Australia because of quota restrictions.¹⁹⁵ The OSC would be increased by approximately 44 percent of full cost¹⁹⁶ representing the single highest increase in visa charges since its introduction under the Fraser Liberal government in 1979.¹⁹⁷

In response to policy changes, the NLC wrote a letter to the Editor of *The Australian* newspaper arguing the significant impact of the Federal Budget on all overseas students. The article took two angles: it firstly argued the implication of the government's short-sightedness with its short-term saving at a long-term cost:

...even in the short term there are real economic advantage [*sic*] accrued to Australia by the Program. The annual influx of foreign moneys into Australia via the spending of overseas students has been substantiate at A\$105 million per annum

¹⁹³ Subramanian, P, 1986, Letter to Tan Sri Zakaria Ali , Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia, 5 August.

¹⁹⁴ Alston, R., 1986, Why our aid cuts to the Pacific could be costly, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 October, p.11 - Senator Richard Alston (liberal Victoria) Is A Former chairman of The Australian Council For Overseas Aid, And a member of the opposition's foreign affairs and defence committee. Budget reduced aid to Indonesia by six per cent, Malaysia by 12 per cent and Thailand by 27 per cent See also Earl, G., 1986, Spenfing on foreign aid cut 6.8 pc, Australian Financial Review, 20 August, p.14

¹⁹⁵ Minister for Education, 1986, Changes to overseas student arrangement, news release, 19 August

¹⁹⁶ Ryan, S., 1986, Changes to overseas student arrangement, Minister for Education, 19 August - Students enrolled in their first year in 1986 will be facing an increase of A\$1,416 in the 1987 academic year bringing their total charge to A\$5,756 (for a high cost courses) and A\$4,916 (for lower cost courses)

¹⁹⁷ Subramanian, P, 1986, Regressive step spells hardship for students, Letter to the Editor, The Australian, Higher Education, August

(Goldring Report 1983). The value of post-graduate research undertaken by overseas students [*sic*] are in the range of A\$20 million per annum (Goldring Report 1983) and the tourism spin-offs from overseas students are quantified at approximately \$1 million per annum. (Goldring Report 1983) The longer term trade benefits that will accrue to Australia cannot be underestimated as is [*sic*] Australia's access to Asian markets, given the amount of pro-Australia sentiment generated by the education of the people from the region. Already Australia has a trade surplus in its favour of the magnitude of \$1.4 billion (1983) with Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore collectively.¹⁹⁸

Secondly, they warned that the budget would force significant number of overseas students to discontinue their courses in midstream. Using OSCAFF's commissioned 1985 survey in support of their position, they argued that 51 percent of overseas students surveyed at the University of Melbourne, 56 percent at Monash University and 35 percent at RMIT would have had to terminate their courses of study if they had had to pay an increase of \$2000 in 1987; while 72 percent of overseas students surveyed at the University of Melbourne, 41 percent at Monash and 33 percent at RMIT would have had to increase hours of paid work to help pay for the cost of their education.¹⁹⁹

To press their claims further, the NLC contacted a number of Malaysian newspapers to report the impact of the second dramatic fee increase on Malaysian students already enrolled in Australia and its deterrence to potential students. 'These charges', they said, 'will affect approximately 7000 Malaysian students currently enrolled in tertiary education in Australia as well as approximately 1800 enrolled in secondary schools and 100 students enrolled in Technical and Further Education Colleges.'²⁰⁰

Another appeal was made to the Malaysian Prime Minister and his Ministers for Education and Foreign Affairs, this time suggesting the considerable impact fee increases would have on bilateral trade:

Given Australia itself is currently in a an economically vulnerable position (hence its costs cutting measures), we appeal to your good offices to remind Australia that the overseas students program does accrue very real economic benefits to Australia and in fact Australia itself enjoys very favourable trade

¹⁹⁸ Subramaniam, P, 1986, Regressive step spells hardship for students, The Australian, August

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Subramaniam, P, 1986, OSCAFF Report, 22 August

and commercial relations with countries such as Malaysia. The trade imbalance of AUD\$200 million in 1983, between Malaysia and Australia in Australia's favour, has not shifted significantly. Reciprocation in the form of educational aid can only be seen to be a just and fair return. The increasing of fees cannot be interpreted as anything but an act of self-interest with little regard for countries affected by it.²⁰¹

The fee increase finally drew a response from the Malaysian Government. In the Malaysian press, the Education Minister, Mr Anwar Ibrahim, attacked the Australian Government fee increases, saying that such hikes would affect 2000 government-sponsored Malaysian students and another 10 000 private students. Mr Anwar even went to the extent of encouraging students '...who could not afford the higher fees should think of moving to countries offering cheaper education'.²⁰²

IMPACT OF FEE INCREASE

The August 1986 budget announcement had begun to exacerbate the pressure on overseas students unable to pay for their fee increase. For example, less than a month after Treasurer Paul Keating's announcement, a Malaysian student studying at the Australian National University in Canberra was taken into custody by the Department of Immigration when he went to the Department of Education to pay his overdue overseas student charge of \$2875.²⁰³ The student was five months late in paying his fees. To avoid deportation, which meant being barred from re-entering Australia for five years, the student voluntarily flew home. A number of students organisations led by the New South Wales Overseas Students Collective condemned the government's decision during a demonstration at Sydney's airport. Within the same month, four students staged a hunger strike at Sydney's Martin Place in protest of the fees hike.²⁰⁴

In December, a report published by the University of New South Wales found that 80 percent of more than 1000 overseas students surveyed were more concerned about their

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Malon, G, 1986, WA threat to block \$250 slug, The Sun, Saturday 23 August

²⁰³ Aubin, T, 1986, Late fee puts him on course for home, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 September, p.3

²⁰⁴ Susskind, A, 1986, Overseas students face high fees, or deportation, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 September, p.3

financial plight than about study demands or racial discrimination.²⁰⁵ The report also found that contrary to popular belief, most of the overseas students came from low or middle-income families. A significant proportion, about 81 percent, were concerned about finding part-time work to relieve the considerable financial burdens placed on their parents, while only 48 percent reported having a regular part-time job to support fee increases.²⁰⁶

Over the coming months, anti-fees protest grew. In March 1987, fourteen students were arrested after refusing to leave Department of Education offices in Sydney, which had been occupied by more than 300 students following a day of protest over tertiary fees.²⁰⁷ Earlier in the day, about 6000 local and overseas students from all over New South Wales had gathered at Moore Park and marched to the Town Hall. A couple of months later, 100 overseas students and supporters marched in Sydney to protest fee rises.²⁰⁸ While protest continued, threat of deportation intensified. In August, the Department of Education announced that more than 170 overseas students could be deported because they had not paid their fees. In a letter to the NLC National Convenor, the Department said that ‘students who had not paid had been declared prohibited non-citizens and were liable for deportation.’²⁰⁹ According to the Department, 13 non-paying students had been deported in the last two years and over 950 students had still not paid the charge two months after its May 15 deadline.²¹⁰

The day after the Department’s announcement, the Malaysian Deputy High Commissioner called on the government to delay deportation of the students until all avenues of paying their fees were exhausted.²¹¹ Mr Muhamad Sani said he wished the government were more flexible in its procedures for students who had not paid the OSC. The National Union of Students was less diplomatic. The president, Mr Roger

²⁰⁵ Barratt, A, 1986, Money biggest worry for overseas students, Sydney Morning Herald, 23 December, p.2

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Pitt, H., and Larriera, A, 1987, 14 arrests after tertiary fees protest, Sydney Morning Herald, 26 March, p.1

²⁰⁸ Curtin, J, 1987, Students hide from officials over fees, Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July, p.5

²⁰⁹ 1987, Overseas students face deportation, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 August, p.4

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ 1987, Overseas students fear being kicked out, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 August, p.7

Cook, called the threat of deportation “absolutely abhorrent” and said students would hold a stop work meeting the following month to protest fee increases.²¹²

In early 1987, the ongoing publicity generated by the students’ efforts led to some temporary relief with the Malaysian Government deciding to make available a one-off \$250 000 Ringgit for interest free loans for Malaysian students affected by the drastic fee increases. In April, the NLC National Convenor also met in Melbourne with the visiting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (Malaysia) Datuk Yahya Ibrahim. The Convenor lobbied for these ‘funds to be maintained in the future and issued an invitation to the Malaysian Minister for Education Anwar Ibrahim to visit Australia to view for himself the problems facing overseas students in light of the fee hikes and the threats of reduction of support services.’²¹³

CERTAINTY AND INSTALMENTS

Despite numerous attempts to secure a freeze in fees by the end of 1986, the NLC realised that any further opportunities to affect substantive policy change was diminishing. With rapid reforms to the OSP and unlikely policy reversal on full fees, the students needed to form a new and a more effective campaign approach to deal with the government. Such an approach would require pursuing a greater recognition of their role as a legitimate voice for all overseas students in Australia and becoming pro-active in proposing alternatives instead of merely reacting to change. The students decided to pursue a two-prong strategy. First, it would continue to actively cultivate links with foreign governments and media. The Malaysian Government and media in particular formed a convenient and considerably more successful link, since the majority of student leaders and overseas students hailed from Malaysia.²¹⁴ In a letter to campus student leaders, the National Convenor for example noted the favourable relationship with the Malaysian media:

²¹² 1987, Overseas students fear being kicked out, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 August, p.7

²¹³ Subramaniam, P, 1987, Update to overseas student organisations, Convenor, National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students in Australia – letter dated 28 April

²¹⁴ Convenor Peter Subramaniam; Treasurer Cheng Kong Eng and Publications Officer Rajah Kanan. Peter Subramaniam’s letter to Indragowrey Arunachalam, President of the Overseas Students Association of Western Australia, 1986 - three NLC executive office bearer’s positions – Convenor, Treasurer and Publication Officer – were occupied by Malaysian students

We will be sending you media articles to give you the good reception that NLC has obtained from the Malaysian press. It appears that the legitimacy of the NLC has been concretised and it is important that we capitalise on it now. And the fact does remain that without sufficient financial support we will not be able to capitalise to ameliorate our position.²¹⁵

The second prong strategy involved engaging directly in the policy process. An opportunity for policy engagement emerged on 25 June 1986. In a policy statement, the Minister of Education announced that the government would adopt a recommendation by the Goldring Committee to establish an advisory committee, the *Australian Council for Overseas Students* (AUSCOS). During the review of Australia's private overseas students program, the Goldring Committee expressed its dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) established in the mid-seventies to coordinate OSP administration and the lack of diversity in the advice provided by the group – the IDC was virtually the sole source of advice to the government on the OSP. Goldring argued:

The Committee believes that advice to the Government should not exclude the views of interested departments and agencies, but should also draw on and encourage participation by other interested groups, such as the students themselves, the governments of source countries, and educational interests.²¹⁶

Goldring believed if a greater diversity of 'interests are involved in the development of policy in the future', the 'policy is likely to be effective.'²¹⁷ Such diversity would be represented through a new advisory body comprising nine members from cross-sections of the OSP. They would include representatives from the education sector, overseas governments, Australian Government agencies and private education service providers.²¹⁸ The new advisory committee would advise the Minister on a broad range

²¹⁵ Peter Subramaniam's letter to Indragowrey Arunachalam, President of the Overseas Students Association of Western Australia, 1986

²¹⁶ Goldring report, p.177

²¹⁷ Goldring report, p.177

²¹⁸ Members of the Council included: a representative of the non-government representative sector, Mr A.J.de.V. Hill, headmaster of Christ Church Grammar School, Claremont, Western Australia; tertiary sector representative, Professor K. McKinnon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Wollongong; overseas government representative, the Malaysian High Commissioner, His Excellency Tan Sri Datuk Zakaria bin Haji Mohd. Ali; non-formal sector representative, Mr R. Bastian, Executive Director, Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia Ltd.; State government education authorities representative, Mr G. Woodburn, Director of Student Services, NSW Department of Education; Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr J.H. Brook, First Assistant Secretary, Legal and Consular Division (and alternative member was Dr R.

of issues impacting the new export sector and highlight possible implications on national policy formulation.

The Minister's decision to establish an advisory committee gave the overseas students' campaign a much-needed impetus. The NLC believed if they succeeded in securing a seat on the advisory committee, it would, firstly, offer overseas students for the first time unprecedented access to internal policy structures of government and therefore widen possibilities for influencing the OSP's developments. Secondly, it would create a space for the NLC to voice their grievances concerning the adverse impact policy was having on students. Finally, it would help establish the NLC's legitimacy as the only overseas students representative in Australia; a recognition that would give its claim-making enormous credibility especially among other policy stakeholders in a rapidly expanding export education services sector.

The attempt to secure a seat on council took place soon after Senator Ryan's announcement. The NLC immediately drafted a letter to the Minister outlining three things: it introduced the NLC as the new peak national body representing all overseas students in Australia; it raised concerns about the possible fee increase as a result of budget cuts; and it requested an urgent meeting to discuss recent changes to the OSP.

On 4 September 1986, the NLC received an invitation from the Department of Education to nominate a person to represent overseas students on the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS).²¹⁹ Professor John Goldring, author of the Goldring report would be appointed to chair AUSCOS. The Council would consider a range of administrative and policy issues including quality of information materials, English language issues, guidelines for full fee secondary schools, and co-ordination of the full fee program.²²⁰ The NLC's nomination to AUSCOS would now give the NLC the recognition it needed and an unprecedented opportunity to participate in further policy developments. At the National Overseas Students Conference, the Convenor reported:

C. Manning, First Assistant Secretary, Community Commercial and International Program, ADAB); and Overseas Students Office, Director International Education (ex officio) Mr David Buckingham. Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, confirmation of nomination letter to Mr Peter Subramaniam, NLC Convenor, 27 November 1986

²¹⁹ Wells, L., Deputy Director, Policy and Liaison Branch, Department of Education, 4 September 1986, letter to Peter Subramaniam, NLC, University of Melbourne.

²²⁰ Draft minutes of 1st Meeting of the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS), 4 December 1986, MLC Tower, Woden, ACT

The acceptance to participate in the national policy advisory council, demonstrated the government's recognition of the NLC as the peak body representing the views of all overseas students.²²¹

ENGAGING IN THE POLICY PROCESS

The changed approach involving active cultivation of foreign governments and media, while still engaging directly in the policy-making process would also include reframing and shifting the existing debate about education aid away from arguments of economic 'cause' in justifying policy change, to counter instead implications of policy 'effects' on overseas students. In October, the NLC began formulating a strategy that would shift the focus of the debate away from economic 'cause' argument for OSP changes, to highlighting instead its policy 'effects' on overseas students. To encapsulate their new position, the students wrote a paper entitled, *'The Australian Overseas Student Program – A Time for Change'*. The paper advocated two important changes: the need to incorporate principles of certainty and predictability in charging of fees; and implementing an immediate relief to financial pressures imposed on students through introduction of a payment by instalment scheme.²²²

Such a proposal, however, was not new. It derived its principle ideas from those considered by the Goldring Committee and ALP backbencher, Mr Peter Milton. The Goldring Report originally considered the payment by instalment proposal, yet rejected suggestions that OSC be paid in instalments even though Goldring judged that, 'while instalments would certainly help ease the payment burden on students, they would be an added complication to the already considerable administrative problems connected with the annual collection of the OSC.'²²³ In other words, the implementation of such arrangement would be too administratively difficult and costly to manage. The principle of certainty was, on the other hand, an argument put forward by ALP backbencher, the Hon. Peter Milton. Influenced by overseas student lobbying soon after the full fee program was introduced in 1985, Milton backed the Coalition's initial opposition to the

²²¹ Subramaniam, P., 1987, Update to campus overseas students organisations, NLC, Melbourne, p. 5

²²² OSCAFF & NLC, 1986, The Australian Overseas Student Program – A time for change, proposal to the Minister of Education, Australia, Senator Susan Ryan, 8 October

²²³ Goldring Report, para 7.46

fee increase, arguing the effects of such increases on currently enrolled students. He proposed instead, a three-year fixed period for charges to ensure at least that the program had 'elements of stability and certainty'.²²⁴ (See Chapter four)

PRINCIPLE OF 'CERTAINTY'

In the position paper, the students outlined two concerns on the issue of fee charges. First, the increase in fees had resulted in some courses, such as medicine, costing \$12 000 per annum. Substantial increases, they argued, created a situation where students able to afford the level of charge in the year of enrolment may find their fee liability in later years of their course far more than they would be able to reasonably afford or expected to reasonably anticipate.²²⁵ Such increases affected two groups in particular: those already enrolled at universities and final year secondary school students – affecting 4000 students in total. These students were disadvantaged because there was no information about the 1987 OSC liability when they enrolled directly to institutions or through Australian missions overseas. Even the government and the newly formed Overseas Students Office had admitted that information dissemination was not conducted well.²²⁶ In fact, students enrolled in 1986 were not informed until the August budget that there would be a fee increase in 1987; by then, the affected students were already enrolled in the system and therefore 'locked in'.²²⁷

Secondly, the fee increase imposed in 1986 on students enrolled before 1 January that year and subsequent increase in 1987 were not reflective of the official Consumer Price Index (CPI) released by the Treasury. In 1986 a 'protection' clause was included in the *Overseas Students Charge Amendment Act* 1985 to ensure that the fee increase for students enrolled prior to January that year would be in line with inflation and to a maximum of 15 percent. The government had agreed to the amendment because they were 'aware that the proposed increase could place some hardship...and may result in

²²⁴ Overseas Students Charge Amendment Bill 1985, House Hansard, 20 November 1985, p. 3259

²²⁵ OSCAFF & NLC, 1986, The Australian Overseas Student Program – A time for change, proposal to the Minister of Education, Australia, Senator Susan Ryan, 8 October, p. 4

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 5

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 5

some students withdrawing from their courses.²²⁸ However, for two subsequent years, the NLC claimed the government continued to increase charges for students on the subsidised program that they had given prior undertaking to protect, increasing instead their liability by the maximum increase allowed under the Act.²²⁹

The NLC argued that increases in liability had created uncertainty and was therefore a fundamental cause in increasing hardship confronting students.²³⁰ The government should therefore amend the 1986 Overseas Students Charge Act to allow students enrolled at least the certainty that their fee liability was kept at the level which they were liable for in the year of enrolment and in line with official inflation rate.²³¹

PAYMENT BY INSTALMENT

To preserve the aid element of the program and protect financially disadvantaged students affected by fee increases, the NLC proposed that the government introduce an across-the-board instalment payment scheme.²³² The rising fee liability levels were beginning to produce cases of students unable to meet the legislated 15 March deadline, facing instead prospects of automatic disenrolment, subsequent visa termination and deportation. According to statistics compiled by the NLC, over 94 percent of the subsidised students in New South Wales and 80 percent in Western Australia had not paid their fees by the due date.²³³ They argued that late payments were largely due to a range of factors. Firstly, the late payments were not a result of the student's lack of willingness to pay their fees. Based on student payment patterns over the previous three years, it seemed that cash flow issues were one of the reasons for late payment.

By the end of June, the vast majority of the students have paid the charge. This clearly indicated that students are willing to pay but have difficulties in raising the money by the 15th March. Cancellations of enrolment presuppose that students are not

²²⁸ Dawkins, J., 1985, House of Representative Hansard, November 20, p. 3270; Also see Chapter 3.

²²⁹ OSCAFF & NLC, 1986, The Australian Overseas Student Program – A time for change, proposal to the Minister of Education, Australia, Senator Susan Ryan, 8 October, p. 5

²³⁰ Ibid. p.8

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid. p.1

²³³ NLC, 1986, Proposal for the payment of the Overseas Student Charge by two instalments, Melbourne, September, p.1

paying because they do not want to and not because they cannot do so. Over the last three years, the NLC has repeatedly pointed out that the problem of late payments is soluble by incorporating an instalment payment plan.²³⁴

The second issue that contributed to late payment was inadequacies in the current overseas students charge legislation.²³⁵ The *OSC Collection Act 1979* defined granting of a temporary entry permit as conditional upon payment of the Overseas Students Charge. Once the student status is terminated (legally any time after 15 March), the student automatically goes through a process of deportation executed by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA). The Act however lacked any provision to protect financially affected students via challenging the DIEA or the Department of Education and Youth Affairs' decision to deport. Given the 1987 fee levels continuing to erode the aid element of the Overseas Students Program and in absence of an alternative method of payment, the NLC argued that the problem of non-payment would continue to exacerbate.²³⁶

The third issue involved the lack of flexibility and discretion under current fee collection arrangement. There was little scope for students to prove they were having financial difficulty in meeting their fee payment. Moreover, any leniency offered, for example allowing temporary deferment of payment, was at the discretion of the Overseas Students Office officials. The NLC questioned the appropriate training and lack of clear guidelines of an official in sufficiently assessing the financial difficulty of a student. Furthermore, 'the inability to pay due to financial constraints and refusal to pay in defiance of the existence of the charge', the NLC argued, 'were stipulated as being no different from each other'.²³⁷

Another important factor in the late payment stemmed largely from uncertainties created by fee increases and their implications on students, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who simply did not have the financial capacity to meet fee liabilities. The NLC argued:

²³⁴ NLC, 1986, Proposal for the payment of the Overseas Student Charge by two instalments, Melbourne, September, p.1

²³⁵ OSCAFF & NLC, 1986, op.cit. p. 13

²³⁶ Ibid. p. 14

²³⁷ Ibid. p. 13

Given that the background of the financial status of students, acknowledged by both Government and Opposition as being from the lower socio-economic groupings of the source countries from which these students originate, there is no capacity for students to be able to absorb increases in mid course if students are to be given a fair chance to finish the courses of study they have embarked on.²³⁸

To address the fundamental cause of financial hardship, the NLC Executives developed a proposal offering three options for instalment payment. **Proposal A:** Instalment Payment Scheme for financially constrained students; **Proposal B:** Instalment Payment Scheme for all overseas students; and **Proposal C:** Choice of Payment Methods. The NLC particularly favoured Option A because it would benefit financially constrained students while causing ‘less upheaval’ to the government’s administrative implementation.

Proposal A: Instalment Payment Scheme for financially constrained students

Proposal A proffered a ‘needs’ basis option that recommended ‘financially constrained students’ be given maximum flexibility in payment of their overseas student charges.²³⁹ This option would require the government amending sections of the *Overseas Students Charge Collection Act* to allow fees to be paid on a semester basis, in two or three payments. They however recognised that such arrangement would necessitate substantive changes, particularly with processing students’ passports, which may need to occur more than once a year after each payment. The students argued that introduction of new computer systems planned by the Department of Education the following year would considerably lessen difficulties involved in visa processing.²⁴⁰

The NLC proposed three different criteria as options to help determine students who were considered ‘financially constrained’. The first criteria would involve means testing students interested in participating in the Instalment Payment Scheme. The NLC considered such method expensive since it would be difficult to means test overseas students as they so often came from combined income backgrounds or their fees were

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid. p.13

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

financed through family and friends pooling together resources. The second criteria included assessment undertaken by the Overseas Students Office (OSO). Using a standard guideline, an Overseas Students Officer could continue using the current method to assess students. They also recognised that this assessment method may not be advantageous to genuinely disadvantaged students:

It may however work to the disadvantage of some genuinely disadvantaged students as each case will have to be assessed on individual merit, so general leniency will have to be practiced to give these students the benefit of the doubt. Simultaneously, too lenient a system may be abused because too many student who can afford to pay lump-sum, decide instead to use the Instalment Payment Scheme.²⁴¹

The third criteria to consider would involve students assessed by ADAB social workers on campuses and recommended to the OSO. There was however risk that it may produce confusion about ADAB's and OSO's roles in regards to overseas students.

Proposal B – Across the board Instalment Payment Scheme

Proposal B involved applying the *Instalment Payment Scheme* on a semester basis to all students. The universal availability of the scheme would be simpler to implement not requiring selection criteria since it would only mean changing the current method of fee collection. There were however two complications to this method: the visa administration arrangement, which would require processing student visas at least twice a year. Moreover, visa processing for some countries could take at least two months to process. If students needed to return home in case of emergency, they could have had problems if their passports were still being processed. To expedite the visa processing timeline, the NLC suggested that the government allow 'state-based processing of passports'.²⁴² The second complication involved amending current legislation to allow all overseas students to pay their fees in instalments.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Proposal C: Choice of payment method

Proposal C incorporated a choice between current method of fee collection or Instalment Payment Scheme on March 15 when the fees were collected. This would however not involve imposing a list of selection criteria for students to qualify for this arrangement.²⁴³

LOBBYING FOR INSTALMENT PAYMENT SCHEME

With a proposal outlining the three options, the NLC began their campaign to lobby the government to adopt an instalment scheme in one of the forms proposed. A month after the August budget announcement, the NLC Executive were invited to meet with the Minister of Education, Senator Susan Ryan. The meeting would coincide with the students' lobby trip that involved meeting with Ministers and politicians from major parties – Labor, the Coalition and Democrats – to discuss the fees hike, certainty and predictability in determining full fees and their proposed solution to alleviate financial pressures through the implementation of an instalment scheme. The three-day long lobby trip however achieved mixed outcomes. On the one hand, the Opposition declared that they would not oppose the government's policy on fee increases. On the other, the government expressed its willingness to consider introducing certainty in fee increment and a form of instalment payment scheme to help alleviate the short-term financial burden on students seriously affected by fee rises. The NLC reported that the trip was:

...negative in the sense that the legislation on the level of the charge was not going to meet with opposition from the Liberal–Nationals in the Senate (even though the Democrats would—as per usual—vote against the fee hike). This meant, as you would only be too aware, that the level of the OSC is 45 percent of full-cost for students enrolled after 1 January 1986. The positive side to the trip is the recommendations on the principle of certainty and predictability and the instalment payment scheme are being considered by the Australian government.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Subramaniam, P., 1987, NLC update to overseas student organisations, 28 April, p.1

On 3 December the NLC National Convenor, Mr Peter Subramaniam met again with the Minister to discuss the NLC's participation in the *Australian Council for Overseas Students* (AUSCOS). The Minister reaffirmed her recognition of the NLC as the peak representative body for all overseas students and expressed her continued interest in involving them in all government deliberations on overseas students policy issues. The NLC Convenor wrote:

We both agreed that the NLC should—because of its recognition by the Government as the peak national organisations of overseas students at the current time—represent all views put to it from the different affiliate states.²⁴⁵

At the first Council meeting held on 4 December in Canberra, the Minister requested that Council members agree on a list of 1987 Work Programs for incorporation in next year's Budget process.²⁴⁶ Included on the list of items was the OSC Payment by Instalment Scheme. Even though Minister Ryan had previously raised doubts about the practicality and 'cost effectiveness' of implementing such a scheme, she nevertheless agreed to the Council considering the NLC's proposal.²⁴⁷

At the second AUSCOS meeting held in February 1987, the Council discussed at length the Instalment Payment proposal. Discussions about the proposal were however contentious and inconclusive. The main contention involved specifically the question of payment of the OSC by instalment and the predictability of its level.²⁴⁸ The Overseas Students Office (OSO), Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA),

²⁴⁵ Senator Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, Parliament House, 27 November 1986, letter to Peter Subramaniam, Ng Kong Peng and Satish Dasan, NLC. Arrangements to attend the inaugural meeting are made by the new Director of International Education, Mr David Buckingham, 28 November – 85/4651

²⁴⁶ Minutes of 1st Meeting of the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS) 10.30am – 4.15pm, 4 December 1986, 4th Floor Conference Room MLC Tower, Woden ACT. Attendance: Other items in the work program would include: quality of information materials; English language issues; guidelines for full fee secondary schools; coordination of the full fee program; issues arising from the report of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility; and other countries' attitudes to Australia as destination for education of overseas students. Council members – Professor J. Goldring, Chairman; Mr David Buckingham, OSO (ex-officio); His Excellency Tan Sri Datuk Zakaria bin Haji Mohd Ali, overseas government; Mr A. Hill, non-government secondary education; Mr J. Brook, Department of Foreign Affairs; Mr P. Subramaniam, Overseas Student; Mr Bastian, Non-formal education. Visitors: Senator Susan Ryan, Minister for Education and Ms S Portway, Minister's Private Secretary.

²⁴⁷ Draft minutes of 1st Meeting of the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS), 10.30am – 4.15pm, 4 December 1986, 4th Floor Conference Room, MLC Tower, Woden, ACT.

²⁴⁸ Goldring, J, 1987, AUSCOS report to Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, Letter to Senator Ryan on Macquarie University letter head, p.1

Department of Finance and the Australian Development Aid Bureau (ADAB) were not supportive of the scheme. The OSO was not in favour due to the administrative and cost burden associated with implementing such a scheme. They argued that introducing a two-payment instalment system would in fact increase the workload of staff. Moreover, such a scheme would require that all staff at the Department of Education's state offices deal with each student at least twice a year to receive payments and issue receipts, effectively doubling their workload. In addition, non-paying students would need to be 'pursued for both the first and second instalments.'

Recovery of the full charge from students dropping out after six weeks of study would become more difficult and the task of keeping track of students with outstanding debts will also be more complicated.²⁴⁹

Increase in workload would also result in the need to boost the number of staff in State Offices and change the current system of processing. The Sydney's State Office, for example, estimated that it would require eight additional positions to deal with 5000 students on their list.²⁵⁰ Additional hardware and software would also be needed to accommodate changes.

Although a computer-based record keeping system is currently being installed in State Offices, it has not been designed to accommodate instalment payments and would need to be considerably modified to deal with the complexities of an instalment system.²⁵¹

DIEA was also concerned about the increased workload and administrative impact on the department. DIEA argued that it would also require additional staff to issue temporary visas to cover the period of the fees paid, or risk students continuing in Australia as prohibited non-citizens until the charge was fully paid.²⁵²

The Department of Finance also shared OSO and DIEA's concerns, arguing that such an arrangement would not only require legislative changes to amend the Act that strictly

²⁴⁹ OSO, 1986, Payment of the overseas students charge (OSC) by instalment, discussion paper, December, p. 2

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

required that fee liabilities were paid by 15 March, but would have budgetary implications due to student charges being spread across a much longer period.

In the first calendar year of an instalment scheme with the receipts would actually fall between two financial years – with a budgetary shortfall being encountered in the first of those years. Finance would press for the absorption of the additional costs involved within the portfolio allocation for ongoing purposes.²⁵³

The Australian Development Aid Bureau (ADAB) reinforced the practicality and financial concerns, arguing that increasing burden for funding of the subsidy would fall on the Bureau and the instalment system would require more frequent issue of shorter-term visas than now occurred.²⁵⁴

In response to various bureaucratic concerns, Professor Goldring requested that the NLC present data on students who had terminated their study due to financial hardships to the next AUSCOS meeting to enable a further definitive discussion on this question.²⁵⁵ Despite some reservations about the instalment scheme, the Council nonetheless endorsed the ‘principle of predictability’ on the level of the OSC, recognising the considerable hardship of rising fees on overseas students. The Council also agreed that students enrolling in the first year of their course should be assured that adjustments to the fee scale would be announced annually and limited to *Consumer Price Index* movements, or less, for the duration of the course. The Council also recommended that a review of the base of the Overseas Students Charge scale should occur every five years and any new scale should subsequently apply progressively to new students.²⁵⁶

At the third AUSCOS meeting held on 29 May, the NLC reported that due to heavy study workload and exams they required more time to collect case studies of hardship. The Department of Education on the other hand submitted statistical data, which provided information on the numbers of liable overseas students who had not paid the OSC by 15 May. In total, over 1000 students had not paid the OSC. The significant

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Minutes of 2nd Meeting of the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS), 10.30am – 4.00pm, 24 February 1987, 4th Floor, Conference Room, MLC Tower, Woden, ACT., p.4

²⁵⁵ Goldring, J, 1987, AUSCOS report to Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, Letter to Senator Ryan on Macquarie University letter head, p.1

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

number of late payments seemed a powerful indicator to underline the extent of impact fee rises were having on students. Despite ongoing concerns around the practicality of implementing an instalment payment scheme, support from council members for an instalment system to help alleviate immediate financial hardship began to grow.²⁵⁷

Over the coming months, discussions about an instalment scheme would make significant progress after it was first mooted at the AUSCOS's meeting early in the year. In Parliament on 14 December 1988, the new Minister for Education, Mr John Dawkins, gave an undertaking that 'there would be instalments for any overseas student still required to make overseas student charges.'²⁵⁸ Such undertaking did not necessarily mean that the government would implement the instalment scheme; it instead meant that students facing difficulty would be allowed to pay their fees in instalments. The announcement nevertheless represented a significant development in the NLC's instalment payment campaign. Despite Dawkin's undertaking, the instalment scheme for financially disadvantaged students would only be available for financially affected students two years later due to three reasons: first, the Department of Education required additional resources and changes to its administrative and computer systems to cope with the additional administrative burden.²⁵⁹ Second, the Minister had received advice from the Attorney General's Department informing him that students were only permitted to pay the arrears by instalment and were required to pay their overseas students charge in one payment. To allow students to pay their charges in instalment required amending the legislation to permit such an arrangement.

By the time that advice was received, it was too late to have the appropriate legislative amendments drafted and passed by both Houses of Parliament in the 1989 Budget sittings. I therefore propose to have a Bill prepared for introduction to the Parliament in the Autumn sittings. The Bill will amend the OSC legislation to permit the OSC for a full academic year to be paid in 2 installments, one installment to be payable for each semester in the academic year.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Minuted of 3rd Meeting of the Australian Council for Overseas Students (AUSCOS), 10.30am – 4.00pm, 29 May 1987, 4th Floor, Conference Room, MLC Tower, Woden, ACT, p. 2

²⁵⁸ Estimates Committee, 1989, Department of Education, Employment and Training: Program 2-Higher Education: Sub-program 3-International students, 3 October, p.112;

²⁵⁹ Letter from Hon. John Dawkins to Senator Baden Teague, 7 December 1989 – quoted in Senate Hansard, Parliament of Australia, 12 December 1989, p.4361

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Third, the government would proceed with its plan to overhaul the Overseas Students Program by abolishing the subsidised program and replacing it with a new scholarship scheme, the *Equity and Merit Scholarships*. The government would also encourage universities to fully expand their full fee offerings by 1990.²⁶¹ The phasing out of the subsidised program concomitant with growth in full fee programs effectively meant the decentralisation of government's role and responsibility over collection of student fees. Indeed, with the full implementation of fees, institutions would now have complete control in determining fee levels and terms and method of payment. With full responsibility over their full fee programs, universities proceeded to introduce semester fees payable in advance for courses of a year's duration, which in reality represented a form of instalment.²⁶²

In December 1989, Senator Gareth Evans, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, publicly confirmed the phasing-out of the subsidized fees program by 1990. For students affected by the new policy, the Minister reassured that the government would take good care of students already in Australia by allowing them to complete their studies under the current scheme.²⁶³ In the same month, the government introduced the Bill to provide a 'payment fee, which will be incurred where the overseas student charge is paid by two instalments each year from the beginning of the 1990 academic year, as provided for in the *Overseas Students Charge Collection Amendment Bill 1989*.²⁶⁴ On the same day, the Opposition agreed to give the *Overseas Students Charge Collection Amendment Bill 1989* and the *Overseas Students (Installment Payments) Charge Bill 1989* priority and a speedy passage.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Reid, R., and Power, J, 1988, New scheme for foreign students, *Australian Financial Review*, 13 December, p.3

²⁶² Estimates Committee, 1989, Department of Education, Employment and Training: Program 2-Higher Education: Sub-program 3-International students, Parliament of Australia, 3 October, p.112

²⁶³ Milne, G, 1988, New aid plan for overseas students, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December, p.3

²⁶⁴ House Hansard, 1989, Overseas Students (Instalment Payments) Charge Bill 1989: Second Reading, Parliament of Australia, 21 December, p.3419

²⁶⁵ House Hansard, 1989, Overseas Students Charge Collection Amendment Bill 1989, 21, Parliament of Australia, December, p.3419

COLLAPSE OF COLLEGES AND CRISIS IN THE SECTOR

As the export education services sector continued its transformation, its rapid expansion had imposed considerable strain on government policy. A stark episode in its turbulent growth was a series of collapses of private colleges in the non-formal sector. Full fee paying overseas students enrolled in short courses had grown from 1400 in 1986, to 23500 by mid-1990.²⁶⁶ In the same period, the number of institutions providing those courses mushroomed from 19 to 105, of which about two-thirds were privately owned, some apparently by overseas interests.²⁶⁷ English language courses flourished, particularly due to an influx of students from China and colleges expanded to meet that demand, processing thousands of admission applications.²⁶⁸ In the *English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students* (ELICOS) market, China became the major source of students studying English courses. In June 1989 there were about 11 400 Chinese nationals studying in English in Australia. By 1992, the number had jumped to 34 793. Such a surge in numbers was indeed not surprising since it coincided with Deng Xiaoping's significant liberalisation of the Chinese Government's policy towards overseas travel and education.²⁶⁹

Tremendous growth in student numbers did however coincide with increasing visa infringement and overstays. Three years after the introduction of full fees, the Department of Immigration reported that 58 000 people were living illegally in Australia, an increase of 8000 since June 1986.²⁷⁰ According to figures, 66 percent of Australia's illegal immigrants arrived with a visitor's visa, 14 percent arrived as students, 11 percent had been given temporary residency and 2 percent had been given a few days transit visa but had failed to leave.²⁷¹ Policy-makers now faced a fine balance of maintaining policy sensibilities in a successfully expanding sector while ensuring integrity of visa rules. An Industry Commission established to investigate the collapse of private colleges declared:

A balance must be sought between the need to minimise the

²⁶⁶ House Hansard, 1990, Overseas Students (Refunds) Bill 1990: Second Reading, 17 October, p.3075

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Clout, J, 1994, Stupidity blamed for failed colleges, Australian Financial Review, 10 May, p.44

²⁶⁹ Kendal, T., 2004, Exporting Australian educational services to China, Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, Vol. 26, No. 1, March, p. 26

²⁷⁰ Fife-Yeomans, J, 1988, 58,000 living in country illegally, The Daily Telegraph, Tuesday, 14 June, p. 10

²⁷¹ Ibid.

costs of excessive illegal immigration, in the form of finding and deporting those who overstay or otherwise fail to comply with visa restrictions, and the need to minimise the intensity of checks on students as possible. There are costs in being too strict, and there is a different set of costs if policy is too lenient.²⁷²

To strengthen the integrity of temporary-resident entry, the government introduced new guidelines requiring students intending to enrol in private colleges to lodge their full fees including \$100 a week for living costs with their prospective institutions.²⁷³ The prepayment requirements caused significant problems. Institutions depositing funds did not necessarily check the bona fides of students, while there was no safeguard to protect students' prepaid fees, making them financially vulnerable. A series of visa tightening measures that culminated in a crackdown on the issuing of visas to Chinese after the massacre in Tiananmen Square meant many students already accepted into courses were not able to come to Australia. Institutions that had enrolled students were required to refund fees, which eventually led to many collapsing. With the reputation of a fledgling sector at stake, the government had little choice but to intervene, spending almost \$65 million in refunding students' fees. Within three years, 30 colleges had closed affecting thousands of students around the country and raising doubts about the credibility of the export education industry. While some of the collapses of colleges related to tightening and 'policy backflips' of the Federal Government in the area of visa applications, the main issues however concerned the financial administration problems of many colleges operating in a highly unregulated environment.²⁷⁴

In 1989, the Australian Government invited the NLC to sit on the Policy Advisory Council (PAC) responsible for the setting up of the International Development Programme of Australian Universities and Colleges.²⁷⁵ The PAC was not only responsible for guiding the government on international marketing and responding to unscrupulous methods of recruitment adopted by some institutions to attract overseas students, they were also instrumental in advising on a comprehensive set of policies on

²⁷² Industry Commission, 1991, Export of education services, Report No. 12, 14 August, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p.3

²⁷³ McKnight, D, 1987, Education seen as a ticket from China, Sydney Morning Herald, 5 October, p.3

²⁷⁴ Dwyer, M, 1992, Need to create a better overseas image, Australian Campus Review Weekly, 10-16 September, p.31

²⁷⁵ Lopes, R., 1993, Evolution of philosophy in the international student movement, in International Students News, NLC, May 19, Melbourne, p10

marketing strategies and the operation of Australian Education Centres (AECs) abroad.²⁷⁶ The PAC became another avenue for the NLC to voice their concerns about the collapse of private education colleges and call on the Federal Government to regulate institutions enrolling overseas students and provide guarantees against adverse effects on overseas students enrolled in case of closure.²⁷⁷ However, it seems that an unregulated market approach to export education services was not the only concern plaguing the fledgling sector. The free market approach to selling education services had influenced institutions to create new internal structures within their organisations, such as International Divisions to drive overseas students' marketing and recruitment. Behind the lack of immigration and corporate governance control, there were issues already emerging around how institutions were marketing and recruiting students. The Malaysian High Commission, for example, raised concerns about the closure of institutions and the marketing approach adopted by institutions in recruiting students. Mr Kaddyran Salam said:

I am aware that a number of agencies from Australia have appointed people in Malaysia to recruit students. Some are more or less interested only in getting numbers of students to come over here without providing students with sufficient information about the facilities, or the high rate of fees and other conditions, especially the high cost of living.²⁷⁸

The sector's turbulent developments had an adverse impact. In the mid-1980s, there were more than 15 000 Malaysian students in Australia; by November 1990 the figure had fallen to 10 000.²⁷⁹ There were calls from some industry stakeholders and the government Opposition for the Education Minister, Mr Dawkins, to resign or be sacked 'for this wicked fiasco, marked by the inefficiency and stupidity of his own department' and 'scandalous fraud within the private sector.'²⁸⁰

In November 1990, the government had little choice but to move quickly to arrest its downward spiralling education reputation by introducing the *Education Services*

²⁷⁶ National Convenors Report to the NLC National Executive, Meeting 23 April 1989, p.7

²⁷⁷ Leng, J, 1990, Conference report and motions, National Overseas Students Conference, University of Adelaide, 14-16 July, pp.10 - 12

²⁷⁸ Slattery, L, 1991, How a \$500m education industry fell apart, *The Australian*, 27 September, page unknown

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

(Export Regulation) Bill in Parliament. The Bill was an attempt to quickly solve the problem by regulating the marketing and provision of education services to the overseas market through the registration of institutions and courses.²⁸¹ Within a year, the *Education Services for Overseas Students (Registration of Providers and Financial Regulation) Act 1991 (ESOS Act)* and State and Territory legislation was enacted. Under the new legislation, the Commonwealth would maintain a register of institutions and courses which had been registered by State and Territory Governments. The accreditation of institutions was essential in introducing order in an increasingly chaotic sector, while intending to indicate that an institution had met, or would endeavour to meet, certain quality standards. A month after the introduction of the Bill, the Treasurer, the Hon. Paul Keating, established an Industry Commission inquiry into the export of education services sector. The inquiry would primarily investigate the effects of enrolling growing numbers of overseas students in Australian educational institutions.

The collapse of private colleges and Australia's aggressive marketing of its education services had severely damaged its reputation internationally. A report prepared by Murdoch University's Asia Research Centre argued that growth in Australia's export of education industry might be jeopardised by its poor image as an education provider.²⁸² Taking Singapore as a case study, the report concluded that Australia did not presently enjoy a reputation as an outstanding academic destination. 'The reputation of Australia as an educational destination has been damaged somewhat in recent years,' it said.²⁸³ Education is viewed with respect in the Singaporean culture and consequently the promotion of Australian education by the Federal Government as an export industry has not gone down well with many influential Singaporeans. Treating education as a commodity seems inconsistent with the status, Singaporeans attach to education.²⁸⁴

In early 1992, research company AGB Australia undertook a study of overseas student to determine perceptions of education services in Australia. The study, covering a wide range of issues, found Australian education had a mixed international reputation and was not perceived to have any areas of excellence. 'Australia is at risk of being regarded

²⁸¹ House Hansard, 1990, Education Services (Export Regulation) Bill 1990, 8 November, p.3

²⁸² Dwyer, M, 1992, Australia image as education provider is 'under threat', The Australian Financial Review, 14 April, p.37

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

with suspicion when promoting Australian education,' the report found.²⁸⁵ 'The closure of some English-language institutes has caused concern, and there is also an impression that Australia is racially prejudiced, especially against Asians.' It says the impression is being created that Australia is only treating education as a means of generating export income. 'Some Asians regard educational promotional activities with suspicion. They believe that if an institution has a good reputation then word of mouth will promote it. If an institution needs to advertise, its quality is sometimes questioned. Education is not a product, and should not be treated as such.'²⁸⁶

While both reports advocated that the government take a broader and long-term view of overseas student recruitment and promote policies that would help rehabilitate its image as an education provider, the Industry Commission established by Keating strongly criticised the government's handling of education export and called instead for widespread deregulation.²⁸⁷ The export of education services had indeed reached an important juncture in its development. The contrasting policy approach embracing fully the marketisation of education with minimal government involvement on the one hand and on the other imposing stringent border controls through strict regulation of student entry requirements were creating policy contradictions that were having considerable impact on the sector, perpetuating the adverse negative image to Australia's education reputation.

In September 1992, the Minister for Education, the Hon. Kim Beazley attempted to address the hard crass marketing image associated with Australian education by announcing a significant refocusing of government policy on international education. The 'refocusing' would involve a move away from concentration on "exporting" of student places to a recognition of wider activities integrally involved in international education.²⁸⁸ The shift would de-emphasise education commercialisation while over-emphasising and promoting the 'indirect benefits which flow from seeking to internationalise' Australia's education system.

²⁸⁵ Aubert, E, 1992, The overseas student octopus, Australian Campus Review Weekly, September 3-9, p. 9

²⁸⁶ James, D, 1992, Education industry gets low marks, Business Review Weekly, 26 June, p.22

²⁸⁷ Industry Commission, 1991, Export of education services, Report No. 12, 14 August, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra

²⁸⁸ Beazley, K, 1992, International education in Australia, An edited text of the Minister's statement on International Education in Australia in the 1990s, Australian Campus Review Weekly, 3-9 September, p. 7

It also involves a shift away from commercialism towards a new professionalism of those involved in Australia's international education effort. It acknowledges that Australia has much to learn from participation in international education. Australia's international education activity must be examined in a number of contexts, including – quality of education and training for Australians; international diplomatic and trade relations; and Australia's economic performance.²⁸⁹

In the same year the government invited the NLC to sit on a newly formed National Consultative Committee on International Education and Training Services (NACCIETS). The committee was established to advise the Federal Minister for Education and Training regarding aspects of the overseas student program. Other members of this committee included key government departments and peak educational bodies such as the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I focused on how the NLC initially mobilised in response to further government policy changes and wider developments in the export of education services sector. Cuts to foreign aid aimed at reducing the Federal budget deficit had resulted in further fee increases. The NLC responded to fee hikes by taking their case to the domestic and international community. To the domestic audience, they framed their case using trade and foreign policy arguments. They purported that the overseas students program not only generated revenue through overseas students' domestic spending, but also improved Australia's trade surplus as a result of the goodwill generated from education aid. To international governments, the NLC argued that fee increases were having considerable social impacts – causing financial stress and increasing deportation – and that the overseas student charges, along with trade imbalances, were another form of exploitation of developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. The students' international strategy did lead to a response by the Malaysian Government; however, their arguments did not seem to resonate locally to have any meaningful effect.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

With rapid reforms to the overseas students program and unlikely policy reversal on full fees, the students considered alternative strategies. Besides pushing for more active engagement within the policy-making process, the students decided to propose alternative policies instead of simply reacting to change. The students diagnosed the problem of the impact of fees on students, and proposed principles of certainty to fee charges and the instalment payment scheme as solutions to the problems. Through their involvement in the government advisory mechanisms, they strongly advocated these solutions to help alleviate the short-term financial strain of the fee hikes. The NLC's efforts in actively lobbying for certainty in fees and instalment payment options were a significant contribution to the policy development process. The strategy to shift the focus towards welfare concerns of students that highlighted the economic 'effects' was effective to the extent that it resulted in the government deciding to amend legislation to accommodate students' concerns.

Two critical developments in the export of education services sector would however have a significant influence on how the NLC would subsequently attempt to re-frame its claims. First the changing demographic profile of overseas students represented in the growth of full fee paying students with discerning needs and demands. Second, the rapid deregulation of the sector from 1986 to 1991 and its subsequent partial re-regulation and rapid expansion of the industry would force the NLC to re-think its policy position. The next chapter seeks to explore in detail the re-thinking of the NLC's policy position, represented by its jettisoning of education aid as a right, to embracing the language of 'economic liberalisation' in the way it represented its concerns to government, universities and industry stakeholders.