

**2016 ENGLISH AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE
OPENING REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Good morning everybody. Thank you Marc for that welcome and introduction.

I note that the theme for your 2016 conference is “Create, Connect, Collaborate”. After a period of policy and regulatory change and challenge in 2015, when the dust settles, what shape will the industry take?¹ I also note that this is the first time that you have hosted your conference in Tasmania, so I extend a very big welcome to you all.

I can see from your program that you have a most interesting two days ahead. As a University academic I have been an inveterate conference participant and I know how valuable conference attendance is – for the networking of course – but also for the down time from everyday routine which gives you the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas and to reflect on the way you do things and how you might do better. I realise too, on this the first morning of the conference, that there will be many of you saying to yourself, ‘Why did I agree to come along to this conference? There are so many things waiting for me back at work on my desk.’ Unless of course you are giving a paper this morning or even this afternoon, in which case you could be sitting nervously in your seat wondering why on Earth you are putting yourself through the ordeal.

I also remember from experience that the opening session, if delivered by a local dignitary with no knowledge of the subject area, is usually the least valuable session of the whole conference, something to be politely endured, a time during which you might be able to catch up on a few emails. So for that reason I propose to keep this presentation short – knowing that conferences usually run behind time and finishing early will give you more time to network.

¹ Speaker notes provided by point of contact to ADC 2/9/16 via email- in the folder.

As a teacher at the Law School here at the University of Tasmania, where we had a cohort of international students, many of whom did not have English as a first language, I know the benefits of having an English Language Centre where students struggling with their English can be referred for assistance. In a subject like law where precision in language and the meaning of words is so important, competency in English is essential. Noting that you have a conference paper on teaching grammar effectively, I can't resist a grammar joke:

"Knock Knock!"

"Who's there?"

"To."

"To who?"

"To whom, not to who!"

Brett Blacker, CEO of English Australia, in his letter to me inviting me to open your conference, outlined the benefits of the international education sector. Yes, it provides life-changing opportunities for international students, but it also strengthens Australia's international relations, brings considerable benefits to our education institutions and builds on our already unique multicultural society.

The benefits to Australia, the fact that it is our third largest export industry, generating substantial revenue and creating jobs, means that we have a heavy obligation to our international students to give them the best educational experience and the best Australian cultural experience that we can. Too often we think of international students in terms of the fees they provide and the financial support they give to our Universities (international student fees account for 16 per cent on average of the revenue of public universities).² This was brought home to me in a discussion earlier this year with the Indian Ambassador, who was critical of Australian efforts to attract full fee paying students from a developing country such as India to help fund our University system. We can only begin to feel comfortable about that if we are in fact offering them an excellent product and value for money. This applies to both ELICOS and all sectors with international students.

² Australian Government Productivity Commission, *International Education Services* (2015) 21.

Turning to my experience with International students in the Law Faculty I was thinking about where they had most difficulty. It was I think writing court reports and oral presentation exercises. I will just refer to court reports. In some law subjects, such as the compulsory final year unit, Evidence, one of the assessments involved sitting through some 12 hours of court proceedings and writing a report on it which drew out, analysed and critiqued points of evidence arising in the proceedings. For all students this could be difficult. But for International Students it could be particularly difficult given the broad Australian accents of many witnesses, particularly in criminal cases. For them to get a grasp of the factual context was often hard, let alone the legal issues. How to fairly assess such an exercise was a dilemma, a dilemma that universities with foreign students have been grappling with for decades.

Thinking about language teachers, I was struck by the thought that language teachers are intricately intertwined with the lives of international students and that because international students tend to associate with other international students and that it is almost the norm for students of the same nationality to live together, the only real relationship with Australians for many international students will be with their classroom teacher. Higher education students who access English Language Centres for help with their English will often form a relationship with staff at the centre. English language teachers may well be consulted about a much broader range of issues and problems than English language skills.

As a criminologist, I have an interest in gender-based violence and I am aware of the particular vulnerability of international students to this. Gender-based violence is often less visible than the attacks by strangers on male International students in public places which attract more media attention and newspaper headlines.³

This does appear to be changing. I have found a number of recent articles in the media addressing the issue. News Corp's *News Life* published an article in June about on-campus sexual assault and its effects on international students after on-campus rape made headlines around the

³ Helen Forbes-Mewett and Jude McCulloch, 'International Students and Gender-Based Violence' (2016) 22(3) *Violence Against Women* 344-365, at 244.

world following the sentencing of Stanford University student Brock Turner for the rape of an unconscious woman.⁴ His failure to accept responsibility drew outrage and her powerful victim impact statement went viral.

A National University of Students (NUS) survey in February showed that a quarter of Australian university students reported unwanted sexual experiences last year. One in five occurred in a public space such as a library or a classroom. The survey found that 94% did not report what happened to the University and 95% did not report it to the police.

The NSW Rape Crisis Centre's Karen Willis is reported to have said that she frequently received calls from female University students, many of whom are International Students. She said that the language and cultural barriers, along with the shame many sexual assault survivors experience, can prevent international women from coming forward. They say that if their parents find out they will be sent home and there will be great shame on their family. The perpetrators know that they can rape these women and get away with it.

Views were also sought from Phil Honeywood, Executive Director of the International Education Association of Australia. He is reported as saying: "Many international students come from a countries where respect for people older than you is a cultural requirement, where body language issues can be totally misinterpreted and where the level of sex education in their home country is minimal. All of this makes for a potentially exploitative situation if the wrong people in Australia try to take advantage of their naivety and cultural differences."

He added: "The whole notion of just being able to say no to a Western male is something that is just not always understood."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* also reported the story of a Pakistani student at a residential college of University of New South Wales who was harassed with Facebook messages offering her money in return for sexual favours.

⁴ Rebecca Sullivan, 'Australia's on-campus sexual assault problem acutely affects international students, New Life, 14 June 2016, <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/australias-oncampus-sexual-assault-problem-acutely-affects-international-students/news-story/91ab4bfbc83410df2c5a0fb7b5bc0f57> accessed 19 September 2016

Her harasser had previously spread rumours that he had turned down her request for sex and she feared for her safety. She did report it the following day and the man left the college.⁵

That international female students are more vulnerable to gender-based violence is supported by a recent ARC funded study by Helen Forbes-Mewett and Jude McCulloch from Monash University.⁶ As they put it, “intersecting inequalities relating to gender, race, and class are often compounded by the status of ‘international student’.”⁷ The study draws on 65 interviews about international students and violence with International support service providers from Australia (46) and, for comparison, the United States (19). It considers the incidence of gendered violence and how the intersecting vulnerabilities of gender, race, class and international student status are implicated in such incidents. It looked at transactional sex, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence.

Transactional sex, as distinct from formal sex work, involves exchanging sex for rewards. This study suggests that female international students used transactional sex as an economic survival practice as well as to obtain desirable consumer goods and the social status that goes with them. There was also some evidence of lecturers accepting sexual favours for good marks and internet advertisements targeting international students for jobs and accommodation involving transactional sex. Transactional sex is of concern because it renders females, particularly international students particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Female international students were perceived as being vulnerable to sexual harassment in their places of learning, work and accommodation. Female students in homestay accommodation were perceived as being particularly vulnerable and it also a considerable problem in the work place. One example was of a beautiful Peruvian girl who was required to leave a number of jobs because of sexual harassment. Another of Chinese students

⁵ Cosima Marriner, ‘International students silent victims of assault and harassment’ Sydney Morning Herald, 22 May 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/international-students-silent-victims-of-assault-and-harassment-20160520-gp05ap.html> accessed 19 September 2016.

⁶ Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch, n 3.

⁷ Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch, n 3, 344.

receiving work experience with an accountant who asked for a back massage and walked around his home office with just a towel on.

Intimate partner violence was also identified as a problem in the study, with harassment and sexual and physical violence linked. For example, a dating relationship that involved some sexual or physical violence resulting in a break-up and this leading to stalking to try and gain the victim back. Stalking was considered to be fairly frequent by the interviewees with international students and it was not always seen as being a crime by them or something one could get help for.

The high incidence of non-reporting for all forms of gender-based violence was associated with power imbalances, visa concerns and fear of forced return to the student's home country. This was a qualitative study which did not enable precise findings to be made of the frequency of these kinds of gender-based violence. However, a recently launched national survey on sexual assault of University students for Universities Australia may provide better data on these issues.⁸

Why have I told you about these issues? You are in effect front-line service providers for international students, and may in many cases be the only Australians with whom the student has a real relationship. You may well be able to encourage them to seek help.

Perhaps another joke in closing?

Saint Peter hears a knocking at the gates of Heaven and calls out, "Who's there?"

"It is I," a voice responds.

"Very good," says Saint Peter. "You must be an English teacher."

And now I am pleased to officially declare the English Australia Conference open.

Thank you.

⁸ The Respect, Now, Always Survey, see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-23/universities-to-survey-students-on-sexual-harassment-and-assault/7773946>, accessed 19 September 2016.

