16 September 2011

Dr. Michael Spence
Vice-Chancellor
The Vice-Chancellor’s Office
The University of Sydney NSW 2006

Dear Dr. Spence

The Social Policy Committee of the Legislative Assembly has been asked by the Premier to conduct an inquiry into international student accommodation in NSW. The Committee agreed to the Premier’s request on 8 September 2011 and will examine in detail the matters set out in the attached terms of reference.

The inquiry has been prompted by concerns about the adequacy of regulation of accommodation for students, particularly international students in NSW. There are also concerns regarding the availability and standards of this accommodation.

The Committee invites you to make a submission addressing the specific terms of reference in order to assist our inquiry. Your input will make a valuable contribution to the Committee’s work.

I have attached an explanatory document setting out the format requirements for such a submission.

Submissions are requested by 7 October 2011, anticipating the calling of further evidence at public hearings to be conducted later in the year.

Should you have any other queries relating to the inquiry, please contact Mr Ben Connors, Research Officer, on (02) 9230 2363.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Notley-Smith MP
Chair
INQUIRY INTO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Terms of Reference

To inquire into and develop proposals for legislation, where appropriate, or other measures to address:

(1) The objectives of the Private Member’s Bill introduced by the Member for Ryde in the last Parliament (Environmental Planning & Assessment Amendment (Boarding Houses) Bill NSW 2010).

(2) Factors affecting the supply of and demand for affordable student accommodation and other accommodation used by students, particularly in relation to international students and implications for the export education industry.

(3) The appropriateness of existing standards for affordable student and other accommodation used by students.

(4) Appropriate or minimum standards for student accommodation, and the adequacy of current legislation in ensuring that such standards are achieved.

(5) The current extent of unauthorised student accommodation operations in NSW.

(6) The appropriate framework for the on-going operation of affordable student accommodation and other accommodation used by students, including the adequacy of local government powers to identify unauthorised operations and enforce compliance with the relevant laws.
The Parliament of New South Wales is made up of the Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and the Legislative Council (Upper House). One or both Houses of the Parliament may decide to appoint a parliamentary committee.

What is a parliamentary committee?

Committees are small groups of members of Parliament appointed by one or both Houses of Parliament to undertake a particular task or function. The membership of these committees tends to reflect the diverse political make-up of the House from which they are drawn, i.e. a majority from the Government and the remainder from the Opposition, minor parties and independents.

A committee which is appointed by both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council contains Members from each House and is known as a Joint Committee.

Committees focus attention on specific issues and encourage meaningful deliberations. Usually a committee studies an issue or sets of issues and reports back to the House. Committee members are able to study the subject matter in detail and deepen their understanding of particular issues.

Committees can raise awareness of an issue among Members of Parliament and the wider public. Committee reports can make recommendations to a House or both Houses of Parliament, which may lead to changes in policy or administrative arrangements or to amendments to legislation.

How do they work?

Committees are designed to be of a size that permits effective working relationships between members. While committees have rules and procedures, generally proceedings are less formal and much less adversarial than proceedings in the Chamber. Members are able to discuss issues informally and be less constrained by party discipline in committee deliberations than in debates in the Chamber. A non-partisan environment can emerge in committees, leading Members to assess issues in the interest of the public rather than simply in terms of their parties' policies.

Committees provide an opportunity for public engagement and participation in the democratic process. Committees often call for submissions from the public and hold public hearings and meetings that provide opportunities for interest groups, academics, experts and individual citizens to inform the committee of their views on particular topics. Participation in committee inquiries is a vital way for the public to engage directly with Members of Parliament.

Are there different committees?

Parliament appoints committees to undertake particular tasks or functions. The Legislative Assembly has four different types of committees:
Standing committees are appointed for the life of a parliament to look into particular issues, such as road safety, legal affairs, economic development, or particular portfolio areas. The Legislative Assembly has three Specialist Standing Committees and five Portfolio Committees.

Statutory committees are created by Acts of Parliament and continue to exist while those Acts are in force. They monitor and review the work of statutory offices or bodies such as the Independent Commission Against Corruption or the Health Care Complaints Commission.

Select committees may be appointed on a short term basis to consider specific issues. Previous topics for inquiry have included tobacco smoking and bush fires.

Legislation committees may be established to consider a specific bill before Parliament and make recommendations for amendments.

Current Legislative Assembly committees are listed on the Parliament's website at:


What is a committee inquiry?

Parliament can ask a committee to inquire into a particular matter. The terms of reference set out what the committee is to investigate, sometimes setting a deadline for the completion of the inquiry.

Some committees can set their own terms of reference and in certain cases Ministers can give committees terms of reference.

During an inquiry committees may gather evidence in a number of ways including:

Calling for submissions: A committee may start an inquiry by asking members of the public, relevant organisations and key stakeholders for their views. They may do so by advertising in newspapers or writing to persons or organisations with specialist knowledge or a particular interest.

Holding public hearings: A committee may invite experts and interest group representatives to public hearings to answer questions before the committee. This allows the committee to follow up points of interest and concern and for people who made a submission to amplify points and give additional information. People appearing at a hearing are called witnesses and the information they provide is called evidence.

In most cases committees take evidence in public. However, in some circumstances committees may decide that it is appropriate to hold in camera or private hearings.

Conducting other activities: Public hearings can be very formal events and in some circumstances committees may decide that less structured ways of gathering evidence are appropriate, for example holding public forums to enable committee members to better understand the personal experiences of individuals in relation to the matters under inquiry or having a round table discussion and briefings with key stakeholders.

Committees may also conduct visits of inspection, attend conferences or meet with committees from other parliaments.
After considering all of the evidence gathered, committees write reports with their findings and recommendations. Committee reports are then presented to the House (or Houses) of Parliament in a procedure known as tabling.

Within six months of a report being tabled, Ministers are required to respond to any recommendations within the report which require action within their portfolio responsibilities. Responses are to set out what action, if any, the Government proposes to take in relation to each recommendation. The Government’s response is tabled in the House and published together with the committee’s report on the Parliament’s website.

How can I follow the work of a committee?

Committees regularly update their web pages with information on current inquiries, submissions, public hearings and reports.

The web pages for individual committees also provide details of committee membership and the contact details for the support staff that assist the committees in their work.

Further information

For more information on any aspect of committee work please visit the Parliament’s website at:


Follow the link to the relevant committee and contact the Inquiry Manager.

Other leaflets in this series are:

- Preparing submissions to committee inquiries; and
- Information for committee witnesses.

July 2011
PREPARING SUBMISSIONS TO COMMITTEE INQUIRIES
Submission to a parliamentary committee is subject to legal proceedings.

For more information on any aspect of preparing a submission, please contact the committee manager.

The committee is available on the Parliament's website. The committee is responsible for the preparation of public information material in accordance with the committee's remit. The committee may also provide an opportunity to provide evidence.

The committee manager will be sent to you if you are called to give evidence.

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