

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - A SEGREGATED AND  
VULNERABLE WORKFORCE**

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## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - A SEGREGATED AND VULNERABLE WORKFORCE**

The growth of the international education market has generated a new workforce that works part-time while studying in a host country. These workers are highly vulnerable, growing in number and are very much under-researched. Drawing on interviews with 200 international students studying in Australia we argue international student workers are in many cases compelled to accept forms of work and levels of payment that are unacceptable to domestic students.

The growing proportion of the workforce that undertakes post-school education has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of students with part-time jobs. This expanding workforce has been the subject of a discussion which has noted students tend to be an unorganised and vulnerable sector of the workforce. In this paper we contribute to this debate by examining the work experience of higher education students who study outside their own country. A large number of these students choose or must accept paid work in order to fund their studies. Nevertheless, the nature of their work experiences has gone largely unexplored. Building on UK and Australian research that has explored how class and gender segment and stratify the student workforce, we argue student workers are also segmented by residential status with internationals being vulnerable to a level rarely known amongst domestic students. The paper begins by discussing the student-worker literature and then proceeds to identify themes that emerge from interviews that clarify the nature of the international student work experience and helps explain why these students tend to be situated at the lower end of the student-worker strata.

## **STUDENT WORKERS – SEGMENTED AND STRATIFIED**

The literature that details the experience of domestic students who engage in paid employment tends to focus on quantifying the increasing proportion of students who work, the number of hours laboured, and the effect part-time employment has on academic results and wellbeing (Bexley et al. 2007; Manthei and Gilmore, 2005; Curtis, 2000; Tam and Morrison 2005; Manthei and Gilmore, 2005). Overall, the literature suggests students gain both financially and academically from part-time employment so long as they do not work more than 15 hours per week (Neill and Mulholland et al. 2004). It also suggests the growth in the number of students who engage in paid employment is due largely to state policies designed to both increase participation in post-school education and compel students and their families to bear an increased proportion of the cost (Dex and McCulloch 1995; Bexley et al. 2007). Firms, particularly in the service and retail sectors, have responded to the increase in the supply of students old enough to work legally by redesigning aspects of the labour process. As a consequence, in companies such as Kwik Save, students constitute 50 per cent of the workforce while at Pizza Hut, 60 per cent of employees are students (Curtis, 2000).

Much of the literature that has discussed student workers fails to recognise that as a body they are both segmented and stratified. Lucas (1997), by contrast, has shown student workers are segregated by gender with more females than males being employed and that 'in the main' students are employed in unskilled jobs. The qualifier, 'in the main', is important for it constitutes an acknowledgement that not all student-workers lack skills and that many take jobs requiring a high level of proficiency such as research assistants, library staff, tutors, IT technicians, etc. In short, Lucas' qualification recognises the student labour force is both segmented and stratified. Both of these features are also highlighted in the work of Christie et al. (2002) who, in a study of student accommodation, showed the class background of students is a primary determinant of whether they participate in the labour force, how many hours they labour and the type of paid work they are willing to accept. In this paper we add to the growing body of literature on student worker segmentation and stratification by examining the work experience of international students. Though our empirical data is derived from interviews conducted in Australia we discuss relevant UK and Australian literature in order to show diversity exists across countries and that this diversity requires explanation.

International students are likely to be disadvantaged and consequently stratified within the student labour market of their host communities as a consequence of racial discrimination, stereotyping, and a relative deficiency of local kin support, language skills, cultural knowledge, non-wage financial assistance, and inability to realise many of the rights that automatically accrue to domestic student workers. There exists a paucity of literature on international student employment. This is unfortunate, not least, for what data exists suggests there are marked contrasts across the domestic and international student-worker populations. In the United Kingdom UKCOSA, a body that promotes the wellbeing of international students and the UK's involvement in the international education market surveyed students across twenty UK universities in 2004. The data reveals just over fifty per cent of internationals report they have undertaken paid work at some time while in Britain. Summarising their results, UKCOSA noted international research post-graduates are most likely to be employed and internationals enrolled in newer universities are more likely to be employed than are those in long established institutions. When asked if they had worked in a paid job it became clear that even amongst internationals there is a degree of segmentation for 53 per cent of non-EU internationals reported they had worked compared to 46 per cent of EU-internationals and 47 per cent of domestic students. UKCOSA's 2004 report did not state the number of hours international students work for pay but a 2006 UKCOSA study of further education students found they report working more hours than their domestic peers:

International students currently in paid employment earn on average £112 pw before tax which is a little more than the £92 pw that UK students earn on average. Nearly half (46 per cent) of those international students in paid jobs are working 16 or more hours a week which is a little more than UK students (where 36 per cent do) (UKCOSA 2006).

The data on hours needs to be treated with some caution for non-EU student visa holders are permitted to work only 20 hours per week in term time. It is reasonable to assume therefore that they would be wary of acknowledging they work beyond this limit. One study that managed to circumvent student caution found that three-quarters of the non-EU internationals they interviewed were employed more than twenty hours per week in term time and a little over two-thirds were working more than 30 hours (Anderson et al. 2006).

The UKCOSA studies also found 58 per cent of international students who wanted paid employment found it hard to obtain work and students from non-EU countries found it very much harder to obtain employment than EU internationals (64 per cent of non-EU internationals compared to 26 per cent of EU internationals). Non-EU students are also notable in the extent to which they report employer disinclination to offer them employment. The most common reason offered for this perceived disinclination (31 per cent non-EU and 10 per cent EU internationals) are problems with the National Insurance system though five per cent of students reported they had experienced direct discrimination when applying for jobs. Students from East Asia, South-East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa were most likely to report discrimination.

UKCOSA's finding that a significant number of employers were reluctant to employ international students confirmed a 2003 Loughborough University study employer attitude study. This was conducted by the university's International Students Working Group (ISWG) because anecdotal evidence had led its members to suspect many employers believed they had to assist international students obtain a work permit before they could be employed. In reality, individuals who have a UK student visa of more than six months have a right to work 20 hours per week during term time and as many hours as they wish at other times and whether they have this entitlement can be determined merely by examining the student's passport (UKCOSA 2007). Concerned employers misunderstanding of the situation might limit the ability of internationals to gain employment, ISWG surveyed employers and when their suspicions were validated launched a campaign to raise employer awareness (ISWG 2004).

The UKCOSA data suggests internationals studying in the UK are more likely to be active participants in the labour market and work longer hours than are domestic students. Australian

research, by contrast, suggests a greater proportion of domestic students have part-time jobs than do internationals and the latter work less hours. Surveying first year students at a representative range of universities in mid term time, Krause et al (2005) reported 23.3 per cent of full-fee paying international students were employed and that on average they claimed they were working 11.62 hours per week (domestic student participation was 58.7 per cent and time employed was 12.45 hours). Rosenthal et al, (2006), by contrast, found a 27.2 per cent level of participation by international students and a number of hours lower on average than is the norm for domestic students though this was based on just one elite university that has an international student community that is younger and more affluent than most. Finally, a third study, found 31.5 per cent of internationals had earned some income from employment in the previous year (AEI 2005) though this last study included high school children and hence casts only limited light on the extent to which higher education students are employed.

Irrespective of which set of results are utilised it remains the case that internationals studying in Australia appear to be less active than both their domestic counterparts and internationals working and studying in the UK. One factor that helps explain this divergent pattern is that UK researchers ask internationals if they have worked when studying while Australian researchers generally ask students if they are currently employed. If conducted during term time, the latter approach has the benefit that it clarifies which students work and study concurrently. However, this insight is achieved at the cost of clarity as regards to how many students work overall, for it does not capture students who are only employed outside of term time or who have worked in the past but are not currently employed. It is of course possible that the differing results are also a reflection of the relative rigor with which immigration officials enforce the work provisions tied to student visas but whether this is the case is unknown. However, what is obvious is that internationals have very good reasons to shade the extent to which they are active in the labour market.

That international students studying in Australia do work more than they admit is suggested by the fact that there are few scholarships offered to these students compared to by UK and while the cost of inner urban living in cities such as Sydney is not as high as London it is high by international standards. The likelihood that students understate their participation is also suggested by research that found many internationals have a non-wage income less than half the Australian poverty line (Forbes-Mewett et al. 2007). What this latter finding reveals is that many of these students must be working long hours just to guarantee food and shelter. Finally, we note the belief that internationals understate their labour market participation to protect themselves has been suggested by McInnis & Hartley (2002). The latter surveyed a total of 1563 domestic and international students and from this effort concluded that while no international student was willing to admit working more than twenty hours per week they gained the impression this was because of possible repercussions that might stem from telling strangers they are acting in ways that can lead to deportation.

Our consultations suggested that there is a strong financial imperative for some full fee-paying overseas students to work their allowed 20 hours and sometimes more. .... Given the limits placed on the number of hours these students can work we suspect that we did not reach many international students in this position or that, despite our reassurances, they did not feel free to divulge the full extent of their paid work.

International students studying in Australia have good reason to be cautious when discussing their workforce participation. We managed to circumvent this caution to a limited extent because we utilised interviews rather than a survey instrument. This method of gathering data allows for more depth, particularly through follow-up questions and through the manner in which apparently separated issues can be connected and synthesized. Being less pre-emptive of the possible data and interpretations, interviews also allow new issues or slants on issues to be identified by the interviewees and not foreseen by the researchers to come onto the agenda. In short, interviews allow a greater scope for new and deeper knowledge to be created than surveys can permit, though at the price of some loss of representivity of sample. We now turn to the data generated.

## THE INTERVIEWS

Our data owes much of its significance to the method utilised. We draw on structured, in-depth conversations conducted in 2005 with 200 international students (101 females and 99 males). This approach enables the interviews to be 'mined' for evidence regarding delicate issues such as compliance with visa requirements. Students were drawn from nine universities representing the geographic, urban-rural, and status diversity that characterises Australia's higher education sector. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis for 30-50 minutes and covered a range of areas including finances, accommodation, paid work, networks, and personal safety. In order to determine if international student-workers are a segregated and vulnerable workforce we address the key issues of participation, occupation, remuneration, discrimination and crowding.

### Workforce Participation

Approximately one third of interviewees revealed paid employment was their main source of income while 57 per cent indicated they were employed at the time of interview. A further 13 per cent indicated they had worked at some time while studying in Australia, meaning 70 per cent worked at some stage. This level of participation is close to that undertaken by domestic students.

While not specifically asked, 37 per cent of those employed offered information about the number of hours they worked. The responses are thought to be related to sensitivity about providing information that may contravene visa restrictions relating to permitted number of working hours. Similar numbers of the employed students indicated they worked between 1-5, 6-10 and 11-15 hours per week (22.7 per cent, 21.3 per cent, and 18.7 per cent respectively), while a third of the employed students (33.3 per cent) indicated they worked between 16-20 hours. It is notable and understandable that, of those who offered information regarding the number of hours worked, only 4 students acknowledged working more than the permitted 20 hours per week. Given the consequences for working beyond this limit are particularly draconian in Australia, involving mandatory withdrawal of visa, it is reasonable to assume others are not prepared to admit they work more than 20 hours. For example, when one student was asked about employment, the cautious response was, 'maybe 20 hours' (P68 female, aged 25, China, Commerce). By contrast, the following students had no qualms about discussing the number of hours they work presumably because they were approaching the end of their period in Australia or because they accepted we would protect their confidentiality:

I'm working at two jobs. I work five days in a real estate company as office administrator but I work from 9 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and in the evening ... in the Indian restaurant I work only on Thursdays and Fridays. That's from 5.00 – 12 in the night. (P36 female, aged 25, India, Media and Communication)

Another student working many hours over the limit presents a similar case:

I'm working as a tutor in the Faculty ... and I'm also working at the lab, at the help desk. These two jobs and a job in a Sydney café - I am working at a part-time job as a café barrista - I basically make coffees. Making some good money there. You work 3 days and you make two to three hundred bucks, everything's free, snacks, coffee, everything's free! I work 3 days there, and 2 days here [at university]. (S96 male, 24, India, Information Technology)

The above account is one where the student is happy about being able to earn 'good money' and enjoy fringe benefits. This example suggests the student is working equivalent to full-time employment, as was another who indicated he suffered stress and depression from prior work commitments:

I had to work a lot, I mean in my first two years when I was studying I had to work a lot to support myself so staying like 30 – 40 hours of work, and I was also trying to achieve high marks in my studies (P 132 male, aged 27, India, Music Therapy)

The above accounts are not representative of the majority of interview responses but they may be more representative of the international student community than the data reveals. Regardless, these accounts are important because they highlight the fact that some students do resort to working longer hours than permitted in order to have some financial security and it is worth noting that given the rates paid those who claim they work within the 20 hour limit appear to be earning less than needed for financial security.

The evidence provided in the interviews demonstrates international student-workers experience similar problems to migrant workers (Hawthorne 2005). That is, though often qualified they nevertheless find it difficult to find work in their profession and frequently need to undertake employment in occupations that rank low in terms of employment stratification. The interviewees did not always specify their type of employment and some named two or three industries/occupations. According to one interviewee, international students 'do all weird kind of jobs to sort out their financial problems' (P109 male, aged 30, India, Dentistry). Table 1 presents the range of employment undertaken by 71 per cent of the interviewees who work.

**Table 1: Number of students employed by industry**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>No. in industry</b>	<b>% totals</b>
Health/medical	2	1.4
University	44	31.0
Education	9	6.3
Human services	4	2.8
Professional	22	15.5
Labouring	9	6.3
Hospitality	37	26.1
Retail	15	10.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100</b>

The large proportion of international students working in the higher education sector as shown in Table 1 is most likely a reflection of the relatively large proportion of postgraduate interviewees who participated in the study. Accounting for this fact, it remains that the results correspond with domestic student employment patterns and demonstrate that many international students (43 per cent) work in occupations at the lower status end of employment. Working in low status occupations often means remuneration is low and this certainly appears to be the case with international students.

### **Remuneration**

In line with the tendency to withhold information about the number of hours worked, students did not always provide details about remuneration. However, 62 students (31 per cent) gave information revealing the hourly rate they were paid and from this we were able to ascertain that many students are paid well below the legal minimum as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Amount paid per hour**

<b>\$ per hour</b>	<b>No of students</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
\$7 - \$10	21	33.9
\$11 - \$15	15	24.2
\$16 - \$20	18	29.0
\$21 - \$25	3	4.8
\$26 - \$30	0	0
\$31 - \$40	1	1.6
\$41 +	4	6.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

Of the students who reported their hourly rate 58 per cent earned between \$7 and \$15 per hour at a time when the legal minimum for a casual waiter was \$16.08 an hour and the rate for a casual shop assistant was \$17.97 per hour. Of these students, 5 were under the age of 21 and may therefore have been paid a junior wage. Nevertheless, the data reveals many students are being paid well below the legal minimum rate and suggests many are working in the cash economy. The following accounts testify:

...it's a waitressing job. You're doing everything from cleaning the cutlery ... we are paid shift wages. I am getting \$60 per shift ... like 5 pm 'til 12 midnight. (P36 female, aged 25, India, Media and Communication)

The above student has indicated that she is working a 7 hour shift in a restaurant for less than \$8.60 per hour. This rate of pay strongly suggests the arrangement sits within the cash economy. Given this is the case, it is reasonable to assume the student is not afforded work rights such as shift allowance or injury insurance. The following account indicates an even lower rate of pay for similar work in another restaurant:

Its bad, just \$7 an hour before they said they gave lunch and then they didn't give me anything after I worked there she said I gave you probation so I have lunch for a week for free and then they lied to me they said when I started to work properly they didn't give anything. (P175 female, aged 33, China, Education)

Although the above account is somewhat confusing, it is clear the rate of pay is well below the legal amount. It is commonly thought that Chinese restaurants frequently employ international students and pay poor wages – a view supported by the following:

...surprisingly that's the case with lots of Asian employers. They usually pay you below standard especially in Chinatown as well, they usually pay you \$7 or even \$6. I think that is certainly too low. (P38 female, aged 20, Indonesia, Commerce)

Another commented:

I worked for one of my friends to do some paper work I worked in Chinese restaurant ... the pay is very low, like nine dollars per hour. I don't want to work in the restaurant anymore.' (P177 female, aged 27, Chinese, Education)

While the rate of pay indicated above is higher than the previous example it is still below the legal minima. The contribution also brings to light the fact that students are often exploited by 'friends' or those from their own national community. One interviewee summed the majority view by simply saying:

Chinese restaurant give you very low pay. (P79 male, aged 19, Chinese, Commerce and Economics)

Although seemingly more prevalent in Chinese restaurants, the interviews indicate illegal remuneration is spread across the low status occupations. For instance:

I'm doing part-time work ...Cashier in a grocer shop. \$8 [per hour]. (P32 female, aged 25, China, Business and Information Technology)

And,

Restaurant, nearby where I live ... \$8 [hour] ... I want to change some administrative job, less hard, maybe more pay, \$11, \$12. (P68 female, aged 25, China, Commerce)

While it is regrettable the student quoted above is being underpaid, it is interesting to note her estimate of a more appropriate rate is still well below the legal minima. That international student expectations of remuneration sit outside basic Australian norms further supports the argument that this group of workers are both segmented and vulnerable.

Very few interviewees indicated they would become assertive if they had problems in the workplace. However, the views of those that did must not be overlooked:

If I had a problem I think I would just go straight up to the boss and tell him what's going on, and say I'm not happy with this, not happy with that. (P46 male, aged 21, Malaysia, Commerce)

And another:

Like \$9... I wasn't happy with the rate. I went back to the boss, I said I'm not happy with the salary, I think I deserve more and he was happy to increase it by \$1. (P63 male, aged 27, Sri Lanka, Technology)

The findings to date support the views of Takeda (2005), an international student who worked as a waitress for the legal minimum. She described how her hours were reduced once her employer found it was possible to employ international students who would work for less and adds internationals are willing to work for these illegal rates because they can get jobs in only a very small range of occupations. As a consequence, large numbers of student job seekers are crowded into a limited market and rendered vulnerable to exploitation. Takeda rejected the notion her difficulties were a consequence of racism insisting it was simply the operation of the market. Many interviewees shared her view and only a minority believed their difficulties were a consequence of discrimination.

## **Discrimination**

While internationals may blame the market for their employment difficulties it is employer practices that are responsible for the exploitation many endure. International students are vulnerable both because they are often in need of income and employers actively seek to profit from this situation. As a consequence international student expectations are often lower than their Australian counterparts. However, the extent of discrimination is unclear. Most references to discrimination related to the inability to find decent work though a small number of students declared they had experienced discrimination:

She was a bit racist (laughs). The boss. She was a particularly nasty old woman. ... She often she'd make remarks sort of leading to the fact like, ... you people, you don't know how to cleanup, or sweep the floor, this is how you sweep the floor and things like that.

Basically it just meant I'm not doing things her way but she makes generalizations that her way was the right way, culturally but she's not representative of her culture. She was a nasty piece of job. (P116 female, aged 26, Malaysia, Medicine)

The past tense of this student's experience reveals she is no longer working in these unsatisfactory conditions. Her perspective is that she believed the racist behaviour was not representative of the culture of her boss. An example of racist behaviour was offered by another student who insisted he had been subjected to discrimination 'plenty of times' and who offered no such qualification:

Yeah, plenty of times it's happened. I got the experience from my faculty itself because of one lady working in our department and she's very discriminatory. When you go and talk to her, she really looks at your colour ... (P96 male, aged 24 Indian, Information Technology).

However, the majority of interviewees did not believe they had experienced discrimination and often suggested other dimensions to explain unfriendliness:

In the working place some people are not so friendly you can't really guarantee that everyone is as friendly as you are so I don't think its discrimination just depending on the different personality. (P174 female, aged 28, China)

Clearly, individual characteristics play a role in perceptions of discrimination. However, this does not diminish the fact that discrimination exists and, even though it was experienced by a minority, greater effort needs to be made by employers and agents responsible for worker wellbeing to address these unacceptable practices. Fortunately, many students found their workplaces friendly and management and supervisory staff helpful and approachable. Reports such as, 'I can learn English there and the people are nice' were not uncommon (P178 female, aged 30, Japan, Interpreting). Also, there was very little comment on discriminatory behaviour of customers or clients in workplace settings. There was, however, numerous comments associating difficulties at work with language. The following example shows how difficulties associated with language can become discriminatory:

.... the problem is because language one time I work for an Indonesian shop and they all speak Indonesian I can't understand anything they just communicate with me in English and sometimes like they make a joke of me so I don't really like it. (P124 female, aged 21, Vietnam, Commerce)

The inability to understand the language spoken by employers is clearly a disadvantage and, as shown by the above account, can develop into feelings of discrimination, particularly when an individual feels ridiculed by being made the butt of jokes. It is interesting that Hawthorne (2005) discussed the high proportion of Asian or Oceanic migrants who are unable to find work in their qualified position compared to the migrants from UK, USA, Europe and Africa and while not attributing it to discrimination as such, has observed the language background of the migrant is a major reason for the difficulties experienced. Hawthorne's perspective may well apply to the following example, which also highlights the existence of differing perceptions of discrimination:

...Some subtle things may be when you find a job, we are English teachers but they want native speakers [for] this kind of things (P202 female, aged 30, China, Education)

The interviewee believed he had experienced a subtle form of discrimination related to his non-English speaking background and that this was the reason he was not successful in securing the job for which he had applied. From an employer perspective, it is likely that native English speaking applicants are more desirable for an English teaching job. Both this and the following example provide understanding of how international students who are qualified in their field, often have no alternative but to seek employment further down the stratification levels of work:

I was applying for a lot of part-time jobs and I don't want to name the company. I had gone there and may be just because of my way of speaking – it was a sales job – ... whatever they had asked me I had done very well, but I just don't get any reply from them, but they had a second interview of two hours, but they did not reply to me ... I have good sales experience back in India but they never took me. I don't know why. (P36, female, aged 25, Indian, Media and Communication)

The student above indicates that she doesn't know why she didn't get the job for which she applied, however, like many others she suggests the reason may be related to her manner of speaking. English language deficit is clearly a great hindrance for international students seeking work while others attribute their difficulty to their appearance. For example:

people are not very willing to give me a job because of my appearance, because I can't do most of the jobs, you know I can't be an accountant, they don't want me there, they don't want me to be anywhere where I'm visible, and with other jobs I'm not too comfortable doing them. (P109 male, aged 30, Indian, Dentistry)

The student has not specified what he thinks it is about his appearance that makes him not acceptable in a 'visible' occupation. Given he is a Sikh his headgear may be what he thinks sets him aside from others when applying for work. Despite his difficulties, it is notable that he appears to insinuate that, unlike many other international students, he is not prepared to be segmented into a lower status job. His approach both supports and contrasts with the following perspective. It supports the notion that Indian students often do not gain employment in their preferred or qualified profession and suggests they recognise they may have to be prepared to undertake lower status jobs:

It's just like the labour kind of work and we Indians we don't get any professional work. I have got another friend in my house, he is 33 years old and he has been working for 12 years I guess in India .... He is so capable of doing so many things but all he can do now is clean dishes in restaurants or manage the till in 7-11. Things like wash cars or waiter.' (P8 male, aged 23, India, MBA)

This perspective also suggests that student status is a drawback when seeking employment. In a similar vein, the following two perceptions attribute the lack of success in obtaining employment to residential status. In the first instance, the student refers to experiencing hostility and prejudice in Australia:

Not directly, but I feel now, because I am hunting for jobs, I feel most of them don't want to give jobs to those from other countries, especially when they hear our voice and they understand our accent are different, they know that we are from other countries, ... they try to give excuse that we need people with PR only, or this is a full-time job, or they say something but they don't give the job to us. I keep trying of course. (P65 female, aged 34, Sri Lanka, International Business)

The perception that permanent residence (PR) in Australia is a determining element for obtaining employment is not uncommon, as illustrated by the following example:

...there is too much discrimination between the international and national students, or the Australian and non-Australian residents, especially for getting work ...For example getting a job - if you apply may be they have an interview which you are doing the steps, but finally they decide to ... give the work to a nominated person that they have from previous, and it's very hard to accept, because in this ... instance, you couldn't do any legal action against them. (P37 male, aged 40, Persia, Physiotherapy)

Apart from the perceived discrimination relating to residential status expressed by the student, it appears there is an unawareness of workplace recruitment practices. Specifically, the perspective

above is based on a lack of understanding that there is a legal requirement to advertise some jobs even when the incumbent is reapplying and likely to retain the position. Another interviewee believed that work tasks were assigned in accordance to residential status:

... sometimes they see you're a foreigner so they assign you to some hard job. They separate to different groups and maybe some easy job, good job for the local, but if you're a foreigner they give you a hard job. (P28 male, aged 25, China, Information Technology)

This example suggests employers unfairly assign tasks in relation to difficulty and residential status – meaning those without residential status are given the more difficult tasks without additional remuneration. This claim not only supports the notion of segmentation of international students in relation to different types of work, it raises the issue of segmentation within the workplace. Despite this unfortunate observation, the student wished to maintain the employment because he had a good relationship with other workers and an 'okay' relationship with the boss.

Even when students are successful in gaining employment, they often experience difficulties because they lack language and cultural capacities that are generally given amongst domestic students. This phenomenon is likely to exacerbate what often proves to be a downward spiral for international students who find they must accept work that is much lower in the student-worker strata than they expected. One student summed this up by commenting:

...the problem out here is the international students are not informed of everything. We are coming from different cultures and the work ethics from the countries we come from are very different. (P190 male, aged 25, Bangladesh, Engineering Telecommunication)

The above influences manifested in specific difficulties as illustrated by the following example where a student was employed in a call centre where she had to have sophisticated language skills and a capacity to relate to Australians with problems that may be culturally specific:

I have many problems. I don't know how to handle the calls and everything ... when you get a very nasty customer and they've got difficulties...(P154 female, aged 21, China, Commerce)

The interviews show that difficulties experienced by students in the workplace are sometimes overcome but often the students' employment is terminated or s/he leaves and is compelled to seek work in that crowded sector of the student labour market where language and cultural sensitivities are even less important than they are at Pizza Hut or McDonalds.

Unable to gain employment in what they deem decent jobs students occasionally expressed feelings of shame. The following student indicated she not only had to deal with circumstances that were not in accordance with her expectations, but she also had to consider the shame expressed by her family:

Because I see a lot of Indian students coming and they're working in some situations that they would have never imagined to work back in their country, but yes, whatever your work..... I would have never imagined working as a waitress in India. My parents would have never, never, allowed me in my entire life to work as a waitress...[and] they have told me never to tell to other people of my family that I'm working as a waitress. (P36 female, aged 25, Indian, Media and Communication)

The interviews show that changes in social status are more important to some than others and for some the effect is not just on the person experiencing the change. This perspective may attract little sympathy in some circles but it does raise the need for prospective students to be given a realistic picture of the likely employment circumstances they will encounter when studying in a foreign country.

Some students were more accepting and less shameful of the lowering of both their social and employment status:

Main difference is back home I am an officer. I'm doing my job. There actually I'm a government officer there and I'm a magistrate there so I have a designation and have another status there, and here I'm a student without any money. It's totally different. (P20 male, aged 33, Bangladesh, Environment Management)

This student appeared more accepting about shifting from a position of power and influence to being a student without money. The fact that he seems less surprised than others about his new status gives the impression his experience was in line with his expectations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The growth of the international education market has begun to generate a discussion around the amount and form of part-time work that is undertaken by international students. In this paper we have shown that the role of the new labour force is similar to its domestic counterpart in many ways. As with the local student labour market it is a field that is unorganised, segmented, stratified and often characterised by cash in hand payments and exploitation. By undertaking interviews with 200 international students we have been able to show that the form of segmentation and stratification internationals experience has distinctive characteristics. These stem from the disadvantages internationals experience relative to their domestic peers, from employer willingness to profit from their vulnerability, and from the failure of governments to protect their rights as workers. As a consequence of these developments in many cases international students are compelled to accept jobs and conditions of employment that are unattractive to domestic students and in many cases are illegal, dangerous and render these students open to deportation. Through the coming two decades it is estimated that the number of internationals will triple. As this process unfolds the problems and exploitation that our interviewees have highlighted will become ever more acute unless these issues are confronted. Growing numbers of students will find themselves forced to compete for the jobs available in the small part of the labour market where language and cultural attributes have a limited role in the labour process and competition will ensure employers exploit this opportunity if left under-regulated. Governments have shown a clear tendency to ease immigration and labour laws in ways designed to assist their education providers market their wares in the developing world. But they have also shown a marked disinclination to regulate in ways that can ensure student workers are neither endangered nor exploited. Indeed, in Australia the Commonwealth government has enacted legislation that was consciously designed to undermine the capacity of student unions to protect the work rights of students and taken no steps to ensure the diminished capacities of these bodies are compensated for by the strengthening of other institutions. We believe this is immoral and unacceptable. The current situation and the likelihood that the situation of international student workers will further deteriorate if current practices and policies are continued requires a determined response from governments, universities, unions and all other agencies that have a responsibility to ensure international student workers can access decent work and have their rights protected in both the labour market and the workplace.

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