

Foreign students are a \$12 billion-a-year gold mine for universities - but t

**T**housands of Australian students feel cheated by universities seemingly corrupted by the dollars of foreign students.

What's bringing this anger to a head is the mad insistence of universities on group assignments.

These are socialistic projects in which groups of students work collectively and share the same mark - which means conscientious ones carry the slackers and strugglers.

Yes, plenty of Australians are slackers, but the problem is now much worse because a fifth of our university students are from overseas, and many struggle with poor or sub-standard English.

Result: an Australian student in a group assignment can be dragged down or a foreign student with bad English gets dragged up to a good mark they don't deserve.

How high is the resentment? One postgraduate student at Melbourne University posted a complaint on the University of Melbourne Confessions website that resonated so strongly that it got 9500 likes and 2500 comments, many from students adding their own horror stories.

The post-grad student, call him "A", told of being given a group assignment with seven international students, all friends. Only one turned up to meetings to discuss the project with "A". She represented the others, but presented no ideas.

When "A" complained to his course co-ordinator he was allegedly told this was a test of his leadership.

So "A" took on most of the work and "just started on an idea on my own", regularly posting drafts of this "group" assignment to their joint Facebook page.

Eventually one of the others wrote back to say the group's English was terrible and could "A" rewrite and correct their own contributions.

"They wrote about 50 words in each," "A" noted. And "ALL of them were copied from Wikipedia".

So "A" made a deal. He would write most of the assignment, and the international students could just do the formal presentation to the co-ordinator. But with just one day to deadline, the others messaged him that "their English was too crap to do the presentation and that they want me to do it". And that was that.

Now, here's the big picture. Fee-paying foreign students are a \$12 billion a year gold mine, paying nearly a third of the total income of some universities.

More than 200,000 now study here, a quarter from China. Of course, many are Asia's best young brains. Many work harder than Australians and bring great skills. Educating them



also builds us a great bridge to our neighbours.

But universities meanwhile struggle to cope with many foreign students with inadequate English, but who wants to fail them and lose the fees? And how to find the extra staff?

Enter group assessments. Universities claim these are important exercises to build teamwork and leadership. As Deakin University puts it: "The successful completion of a group assignment usually means that you have acquired many very important skills, particularly communication, analytical and interpersonal skills. These are highly valued by employers."

Maybe, but they certainly help universities. Instead of having to mark, say, 100 assignments, an academic

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now marks just 20. Even better, students with bad English can get carried along by ones with good English. Fewer fail, then.

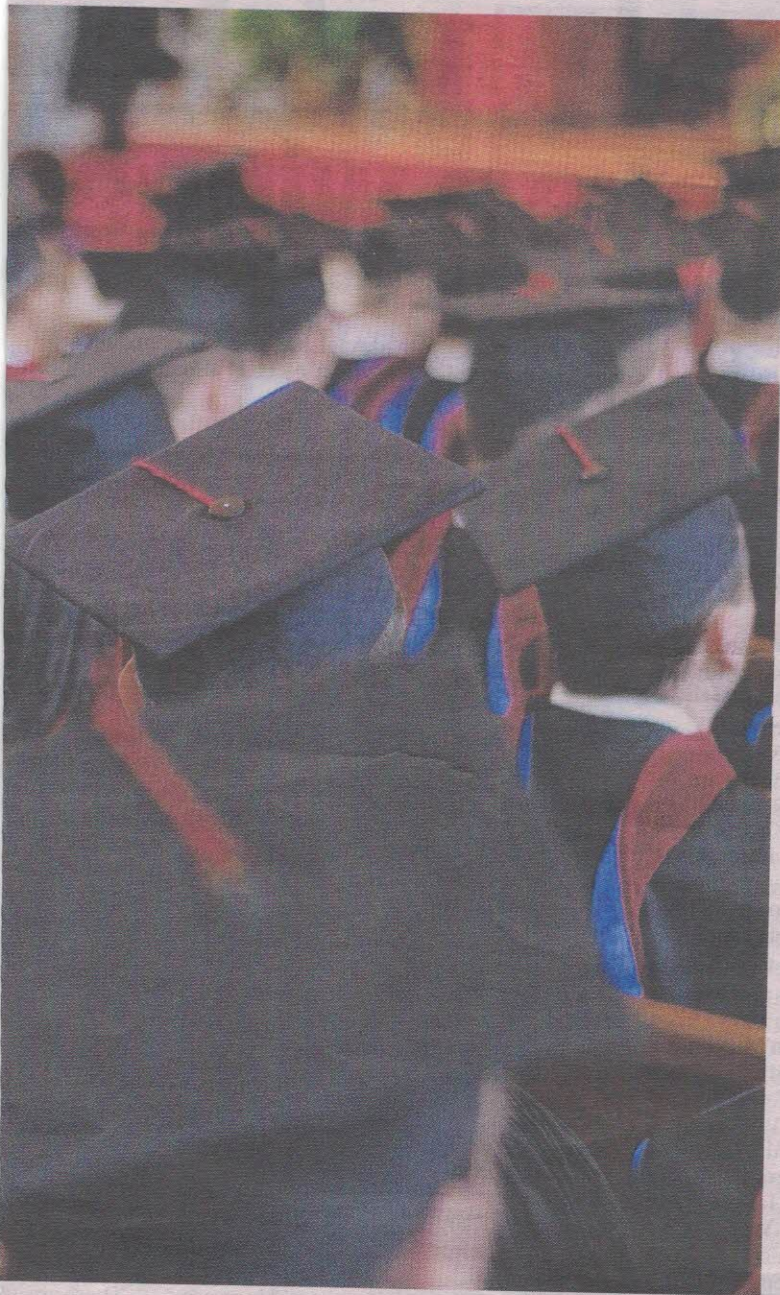
Again, I repeat. Australians can be bludgers, too. And students with poor English can still bring other skills to a group assessment, such as scientific nous.

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or universities – but they're dragging down standards, argues **Andrew Bolt**



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Reader Al: "When I was complet-

ing ... an engineering degree I was emailed exactly this at 2.30am to compile into a group project due at 9.30am that day by a mature age Chinese student:

"Personnel Issues lack of expert to execute the project and labours get

exhausted because every year there are many infrastructures ongoing and require a large number expert and experience labours ..." And so on.

Reader Dean: "I graduated in engineering in 2009. One of our final assignments was a six-month, 30,000 word feasibility study with five other students, two of whom were Chinese internationals. The international students would have written 1000 each at most but it had to be rewritten."

Reader P: "I am currently doing a third year unit with an international student. She is very well versed in the

content, although her English is poor ... I do feel that I am doing double the work I should be doing and I will be lucky to get a distinction."

Reader JohnO: "While doing my undergrad degree (at Monash), I was quite often the only Anglo ... I was appalled at the utter lack of English capability in the students I was working with. In many cases their work was literally cut and pasted from the internet. To make things even worse, Monash began failing entire teams of people if even one member was guilty of plagiarism."

Reader J: "When I did my Bachelor of Laws, I was put in a group of five for a presentation. One student rarely turned up to class, and the other three had issues speaking English. I ended up having to write a script for each person, which we then delivered to our tutor. One student couldn't read the script (English wasn't his first language). We got 62 per cent (a pass) for the assessment, which dragged my final mark down to a credit as opposed to a High Distinction."

Reader Z: "I did an accounting degree with roughly 80 per cent foreign students. I was in a group with two foreign students. Their parts consisted of paragraphs of terrible English that you would expect from a primary school student, plus very well written sections that were clearly copied from reference material.

"As all group members were given the same mark, I was up all night editing the assignment, improving the English and rewriting the plagiarised sections. The foreign students got a high mark due to all my hard work."

Reader Stuart: "I lectured at (university name withheld) in the business school from 2006 until 2012. I had to basically mark as softly as I possibly could to allow these students through. Group assignments are a huge curse. The idea is there will be someone in the team who will keep things in line to make sure there is no plagiarism. But it severely disadvantages good students."

Yes, these are anecdotes, untested, but there are dozens of them, and the pressure on universities to shovel through foreign students is real.

Dr Robert Waldersee, of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, confirms that academics reported feeling "pressure ... to pass students that they believe should not have passed".

"In one case," he told the ABC, "an academic described where he had failed 50 per cent of the class and under pressure had to reconsider, and ended up only failing 20 per cent."

So how badly has the money from foreign students corrupted our standards, dragging down our brightest students?