Overseas students' discounts restricted

BY: JOHN ROSS
From: The Australian
October 30, 2012 12:00AM

INTERNATIONAL students will have to buy quarterly or annual tickets and restrict their travel to the major centres to benefit from the NSW government’s long-overdue introduction of transport concessions.

Premier Barry O’Farrell announced the change yesterday during a visit to India. It leaves Victoria as the only state that doesn't provide discounted public transport to overseas students.

It also addresses a major grievance of international students, who consider concessions an equity as well as a cost issue.

The NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee chairwoman Caroline McMillen said the move "dovetailed" with the Asian Century white paper, which highlighted international education's skilled migration and soft diplomacy benefits as well as its export earnings.

However, unlike local students who receive 50 per cent off any ticket they buy, the concessions will apply only to 90-day and annual "MyMulti" tickets for services operating in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.

The Council of International Students Australia national president Aleem Nizari said NSW's and Victoria's refusal to offer concessions had made them feel unwanted. "It's a big change for us having some kind of concession at least. But whether or not students are actually going to use MyMulti passes, that's the question."

The vice-chancellor of the Armidale-based University of New England, Jim Barber, said he was disappointed his was one of three regional universities to be excluded from concessions.

"If we were able to access (concessions), we would remove one of the major obstacles to participation by international students in regional education," he said.

"Maybe regional isolation will be addressed in the next stage."

A spokeswoman for Acting Premier Andrew Stoner said giving international students the same concessions as local students was not possible "given the tough economic climate".
She said the government had instead developed "an innovative solution" that was expected to be cost-neutral.

The Victorian government said it had been given advance notice of NSW's intention and was "studying" it. A spokesman for Transport Minister Terry Mulder said concessions would require more money "for what's already a highly subsidised mass transport system".

Documents obtained by The Australian last year, under Freedom of Information legislation, showed the two states had costed transport concessions at between $19 million and $93m a year.

Click here to view the story online.