


UTAS expert agrees further regulation needed for voluntourism industry to prevent exploitation

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Educating young people about the potential negative impacts of 'voluntourism' is key to ensuring they aren't unwitting participants in unethical tourist practices, a University of Tasmania expert says.

Dr Jo Ingram is an associate lecturer in Asian studies, and runs a unit specifically studying the impacts of volunteering in Asian countries, including the power balances and cultural needs.

Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham said on Monday (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4905609/ethical-volunteering-in-spotlight/>) that he was "disgusted" by the idea that Australian school and university students could be unwittingly working at international orphanages housing children who are not orphans, but being exploited for tourism gain.

Dr Ingram agreed with the federal government's concerns that voluntourism, or volunteering through large-scale tourism companies at international orphanages or similar, badly needs more regulation.

She said young people leaving on a gap year were particularly vulnerable to booking with commercial tourism operators and "not thinking any deeper" about what they were doing.

"We find quite intentionally, people going over [to Asia] not questioning, where is my money going, what am I going to be doing, how is this going to be helping," Dr Ingram said, noting that regulating the "blurred lines" between genuine volunteer opportunities and exploitative voluntourism would be a challenge.

Mr Birmingham said he was "looking forward" to working with states, territories and universities to ensure students weren't part of exploitative programs.