



# Principles of Good Practice for Enhancing International Student Experience Outside the Classroom

Christopher Ziguras and Aramiha Harwood  
RMIT University

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by:

- Dr Christopher Ziguras, Associate Professor of International Studies, Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University
- Dr Aramiha Harwood, Research Fellow, Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University

This project was commissioned by Australian Education International in the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations as part of the Study In Australia 2010 initiative.

The authors would like to thank Dr Felicity Fallon, Immediate Past President of ISANA for her enormous contribution to the project.

### Acknowledgements

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations would like to thank Christopher Ziguras and Aramiha Harwood (RMIT University) for conducting the research and producing the report.

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

ISANA has a licence (including a right of sub-licence) from the Commonwealth to 'to use, adapt, modify, reproduce and publish the Contract Material for educational, research and development purposes' and persons wanting permission to use, adapt, modify, reproduce or publish the Contract Material for educational, research and development purposes may apply to ISANA for such permission.

### Disclaimer:

The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of ISANA: International Education Association or the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Table of Contents .....	3
ISANA: International Education Association .....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
Approach .....	8
Pre-Arrival Information and Advice.....	10
Arrival and Orientation.....	14
Maintaining Supportive Social Networks.....	18
Accommodation .....	21
Employment.....	24
Health and Wellbeing.....	26
Finances .....	28
Critical Incidents .....	30
Completion .....	33
Conclusion and Future Directions .....	35
References.....	36

## **ISANA: International Education Association**

ISANA: International Education Association is an association of Australian and New Zealand international education professionals whose members are dedicated to the advancement of international education through:

- Leadership, promotion and advocacy of best practice standards in the service of international education;
- The facilitation of relevant forums, training and information exchange for its membership and the community; and
- Working in partnership with stakeholder organisations including international students, educational, government, business and community groups

ISANA aims to assist those directly and professionally engaged in the provision of international education services. It does this by:

- Providing a means for the exchange of information and networking
- Facilitating professional development of members
- Building links with associated organisations locally and overseas
- Recognising the interests and rights of international students in Australia and New Zealand

ISANA's membership consists of about 600 professionals in Australia and New Zealand across schools, universities, polytechnics, TAFE colleges, ELICOS centres, private providers and other industry bodies. Membership is open to those who formally acknowledge and abide by the ISANA Code of Ethical Practice. The current membership includes practitioners involved in student welfare, marketing, admissions, research, teaching and service provision.

[www.isana.org.au](http://www.isana.org.au)

## Executive Summary

International students living in Australia encounter a wide range of challenges outside the classroom. In addition to the transition from one educational institution to another, international students relocating to Australia are faced with a range of trials and tribulations, some trivial and some relatively straightforward (such as setting up a bank account) and some significant and complicated (such as building a supportive social network). Australian education providers play a key role in helping international students negotiate these challenges to ensure that their experience of life here is rich and rewarding.

During 2009 the welfare of international students in Australia received more public attention than ever before, both in Australia and in students' home countries. As a professional body representing those who provide support to international students, ISANA is keen to contribute to the further improvement of student experience by promoting the good work that is being done in institutions across Australia. In July 2009 the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned ISANA to conduct a research project on 'Good Practice in Enhancing the Social Dimension of International Student Experience On and Off Campus'. ISANA contracted researchers at RMIT University to carry out the research and produce this report.

This project set out to canvass the views of Australian education providers in order to enunciate a set of good practice principles for international student support services. After an extensive review of the literature, we carried out detailed interviews with 30 people involved in key roles in international student support in a wide range of educational institutions and related organisations. The interviews sought to understand the level and type of support that interviewees considered was appropriate for their institution to provide at this point in time. We also elicited numerous examples of good practice, along with examples of service delivery which was considered sub-standard or exemplary. Drawing on the literature and these interviews, we developed a list of principles that aim to encapsulate current expectations of good practice across the sector in an accessible manner. This approach is consistent with that employed in the Australian Universities Quality Agency's (2008a) *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities*.

The project framework and a selection of these principles was presented at a dedicated session of the Australian International Education Conference in Sydney in October 2009, which was attended by around 100 people. Considerable feedback was received following the presentation, confirming the usefulness of the approach and providing many detailed comments and additional examples. A draft of the report was presented at the ISANA National Conference in December 2009 and posted on ISANA's website, which elicited further detailed feedback.

The key finding from this study was that the level of support for international students, described by the institutions and organisations we consulted, far exceeds the minimum legal requirements across all of the service areas covered. Clearly, most Australian education providers have a long-standing commitment to ensuring international students' welfare, and many are enhancing the level of support provided in light of rising expectations of students and their families, governments and the broader community. However, the significant gap between the levels of service documented in this report and the minimum standards set out in the ESOS National Code 2007 is concerning, as this situation allows providers who lack a strong commitment to student welfare to operate legally while providing a level of care that would appear to be below community expectations. This report illustrates the gap between minimum registration requirements and accepted good practice across the industry in nine areas of international student support.

This point is highly pertinent to the review of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act. The findings of this report suggests that the minimum standards of student support set out in the ESOS National Code 2007 could be strengthened significantly without imposing additional regulatory burdens on the majority of providers

who are concerned for the best interests of students. The benefit of such strengthening would be to ensure that every student receives a level of support that better reflects industry standards and community expectations.

In the course of the research for this project, it became apparent that international student services are currently in a state of fluidity in many institutions, with the ongoing search for more effective ways to deliver services currently trending towards integrated services for international and domestic students where possible. This shift has aroused concern among some staff in some institutions, but was beyond the scope of this study. Similarly, the location of international student service functions within institutions varies widely, with responsibilities of different units continuing to evolve. A consistent finding in our investigation was the requirement of all staff involved in international student support to have a high level of training in both counselling skills and in the regulations which govern provision of education for overseas students. In turn, it is recognized that there is a need to support staff to consistently update skills and knowledge to better provide for international students.

A very encouraging observation was the extensive sharing of expertise between institutions that the project encountered, which is facilitated by professional development opportunities, formal and informal professional networks, dissemination of case studies through conferences and publications, and staff mobility between institutions.

## **Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework**

It should also be noted that, subsequent to the finalisation of this report, the final report of the Review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 undertaken by the Hon Bruce Baird AM was released. The Review considered the material presented in early drafts of this research report. The report of the Review titled Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students was released on 9 March 2010. It contains a number of recommendations that effectively address many of the issues raised in the research report. The report is available from the AEI website at:

[http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/InternationalStudentsTaskforce/ESOS\\_REview\\_Final\\_Report\\_Feb\\_2010\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/InternationalStudentsTaskforce/ESOS_REview_Final_Report_Feb_2010_pdf.pdf)

The Government's response to the Baird Review will be implemented in stages through changes to the ESOS Act and its associated legislation. The first tranche of the legislative changes recommended by the Baird Review were enacted in April 2011. These changes will better protect international students by further strengthening education providers' registration requirements, supporting more effective enforcement and expanding the role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman for external complaints by international students relating to private providers. All of these measures will help to build the foundations of a stronger, higher quality and more sustainable international education sector.

The National Code referred to throughout this report is the National Code of Practice for Registration authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 which outlines provider registration requirements and provides a set of minimum standards that set out obligations on and procedures for registered providers of education and training to overseas students.

The second tranche of legislation to implement the Government's second response to the Baird review is due to be introduced into parliament later this year. It will have a central focus on review recommendations for reforming the tuition protection framework. Additional changes to the National Code and Regulations are anticipated to ensure standards are objective and enforceable. These changes build on amendments to the ESOS Act and the re-registration measure undertaken in 2010 to raise entry standards for international education and enable regulators to more effectively manage risk and enforce legislative compliance.

Further, in 2010 the Council of Australian Governments announced a number of initiatives to support the quality of international student experience as part of the International Students Strategy for Australia. This includes a new online portal for international students available made available from 1 July 2010.

The International Students Strategy for Australia can be found on the COAG website at:  
[http://www.coag.gov.au/reports/docs/aus\\_international\\_students\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/reports/docs/aus_international_students_strategy.pdf)

## Approach

This project seeks to build on two recently published studies on international students' experiences in Australia, *Enhancing the Student Experience and Student Safety: A Position Paper*, which was produced by Universities Australia and *Examples of Good Practice in Assisting International Students to Integrate with Australian Students and the Wider Community*, which was produced by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in conjunction with TAFE Directors Australia, Universities Australia and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training.

In this context, ISANA sought to complement these previous studies by contributing the expertise of international student support staff in order to highlight good practice in educational institutions across Australia. The project differs from the earlier studies in focusing on the range of international student support services provided by educational institutions, and in identifying a series of good practice principles that underpin the services provided by institutions.

The purpose of the project is to elaborate the level of service delivery for international students that the majority of Australian international education providers currently consider good practice. These are described and contrasted with the minimum legal requirements, as stipulated by the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* and the accompanying *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* (the ESOS National Code).

In the preliminary stages of the project, international student representatives were consulted in relation to issues in international student experience in Australia both on and off campus. From this, a set of issues was identified as the basis for our investigation. These issues were further categorised to better match the common patterns of organisation of international student support and/or student services within institutions.

The authors reviewed a wide range of research reports and case studies, both Australian and international, dealing with international students services. Interviews were conducted with 30 key stakeholders in international student support, with a range of mainly public and some private sector roles, higher education and vocational education, training institutions and related organisations across Australia. The interviews sought to understand the level and type of support that participants considered appropriate for their institution to provide at this point in time. We also elicited a range of case studies in good practice, along with examples of service delivery which was considered sub-standard or exemplary.

The good practice principles were developed by summarising the explicit and implicit expectations described in interviews, case studies and previous research on international students' experience. The project framework and a selection of these principles were discussed at a dedicated session of the Australian International Education Conference in Sydney in October 2009, with an attendance of approximately 100 people. From the considerable feedback following the presentation, many additional detailed comments and examples were incorporated into a draft report, along with feedback provided by the project steering committee.

The report is divided into nine sections, each dealing with a distinct aspect of international student support.<sup>1</sup> Each of the sections in the report outlines:

- The circumstances of international students that create a demand for support services
- Minimum legal requirements as stipulated in the ESOS National Code 2007
- Enunciation and elaboration of good practice principles, based on

---

<sup>1</sup> Given the extensive focus on student safety in the Universities Australia study, this topic was not included in this project so as to avoid unnecessary duplication.

- Further resources and case studies of good practice

From this framework, it is hoped that the report itself will serve two functions. Firstly, it can provide a useful reference point for those involved in international student support within institutions, so that they may gain a greater understanding of regulatory requirements. Readers may also get a comprehensive view, through the identified principles of good practice, of what is actually happening in international student support throughout the higher education and VET sectors. Secondly, this paper can serve to inform policymakers of the gap that exists between regulated minimum standards in the sector, and what is considered good practice in the majority of institutions.

## Pre-Arrival Information and Advice

It is clear that appropriate preparation can help new students and their families to adjust to the challenges of living and studying abroad, and minimise initial feelings of cultural shock and dislocation for students. Most prospective students now have access to a range of pre-departure information from various sources mainly dealing with the technicalities of relocation, including visas, contact details of the learning institution, overseas student health cover, living costs, accommodation, necessary documentation, arrival at the airport, and so on.

Detailed information about student life in Australia is more difficult to come by, and so students are more reliant on advice from friends, relatives and agents. There is clearly a need for high quality resources explaining the challenges students commonly face in adjusting to living and studying in Australia, adjusting to life away from familiar social networks, making new friends, and establishing connections with student organisations, support services and foreign diplomatic posts. The International Student Roundtable in September 2009 expressed concern about the “lack of quality information provided by overseas agents” and requested that all prospective students receive a comprehensive manual to living and studying in Australia prior to departure (DEEWR 2009, p.2).<sup>2</sup>

There are two main challenges at present. First, institutions are concerned that students may be overwhelmed by the volume of information that they receive in print format and in links to informational websites, and are exploring various means of providing richer content for students to access as required. Second, concerns have been raised recently that some students are arriving in Australia with inaccurate preconceptions. Worse, there have been widespread reports of some students having been misled by agents, who have deliberately painted an overly rosy picture of life in Australia to prospective students, particularly in relation to the cost of living and accommodation and the availability of part-time work.

### Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code requires that students receive, “relevant information on living in Australia, including:

- indicative costs of living
- accommodation options
- where relevant, schooling obligations and options for school-aged dependents of intending students, including that school fees may be incurred” (Standard 2.1)

The Code also stipulates that education and training providers must only use agents who provide international students with accurate information about study in Australia and who act honestly in their dealings with students.

### Good Practice Principles

- ❖ **Provide comprehensive information on key aspects of student life in the relevant location**

---

<sup>2</sup> The Roundtable, organised by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, brought together 31 international students at Parliament House in Canberra to discuss issues relating to the student experience in Australia including accommodation, welfare and safety.

Most institutions provide a wide range of pre-arrival information, including customs regulations, emergency contact numbers, transport arrangements on arrival, accommodation options, and so on. This is delivered to prospective students in a combination of print brochures, emails and websites. Student Life @ UNSW is an example of this, providing a guidebook for international student concerns such as preparing to leave home, arriving and living in Sydney. In 2008 ISANA produced a pre-arrival guide template, *The Rainbow Guide*, for providers to customise as required. It is essential that pre-arrival information be tailored to meet the needs of students at each provider, in addition to general Australia-wide advice. The 2009 International Student Roundtable called for prospective students to be provided with "comprehensive information about safety and security issues and provisions *particular to their institution and location*" (DEEWR 2009, p.3, emphasis added).

#### ❖ Provide honest and accurate information about costs

Institutions must by law provide advice about living expenses, and institutions should ensure that they provide realistic estimates, even if this dissuades some students. Underestimates of living expenses are likely to cause significant hardship to students during their studies. The University of Adelaide provides students with evidence-based estimates for higher education students in Adelaide based on a large government-commissioned survey of students' spending (Western *et al.*, 2005). Some cities now provide a pre-departure guidebook that includes a comprehensive and honest assessment of living costs in that city, which all institutions can make available to students, such as the ACT's guide to living and studying in Canberra. Such guides should include costs such as accommodation, eating, mobile phone, stationery, transport and entertainment expenses.

#### ❖ Ensure that agents provide sufficient and accurate advice to students

For many students, a recruitment agent is a key source of information and advice about studying and living in Australia. During 2009, concerns were raised concerning misinformation provided by some agents who grossly understated living costs and overstated the income available from part-time work. Institutions need to have confidence in the quality of advice that students are receiving from agents acting on their behalf, which requires a robust process for selection and retention of agents, and checking that incoming students have been adequately informed. Ensuring adequate training and/or management of education agents, through institutions themselves or Professional International Education Resources (PIER) Online Education Agent Training, may help in this regard.

ISANA, with funding support from DEEWR released an *Education Agents Manual* in 2011 to assist recruitment agents with the type of information international students require to make informed decisions and prepare for their transition to study in Australia.

#### ❖ Use multiple channels to provide a range of options for students to access information over time as required

Students often appear not to have read and remembered all of the comprehensive pre-departure information that has been carefully provided by the institution. Increasingly, institutions are acknowledging that providing text-based pre-departure information is important but insufficient. Students are often not able to understand the significance of the information at the time, and may have more pressing matters to deal with. Many institutions now provide a stream of information over time through various media, and allow students to access information as required. Face-to-face pre-departure orientation sessions for intending students and their families are effective, but resource-intensive. Structured online pre-departure programs can provide such information in a media rich and

well-designed learning environment. Short video programs introducing prospective students to life and study in Australia are increasingly common, such as those produced by NMIT ([http://www.nmit.edu.au/international\\_courses](http://www.nmit.edu.au/international_courses)), and these can be accompanied by more detailed programs for students who have accepted offers. Some institutions have begun establishing peer-to-peer or mentoring relationships between students prior to arrival so that students can more easily share information between themselves.

## Case Study 1

### Choosing the right channel

Education Queensland International has developed an innovative Online Pre-departure Orientation Program for international students intending to study at Queensland Government Schools. While this report focuses on the tertiary level, the Queensland program provides an interesting illustration of the ways in which new media can be used. The online interactive pre-departure package replaced a printed booklet, which was available in English only and which had limited uptake with teenage students and their parents. Students receive a password to the site with their confirmation of enrolment.

The program uses animated characters to tell stories, as well as interactive modules, multilingual support, games and quizzes, and the web-based format allows easy update and inclusion of additional modules as required. The program covers what to expect when arriving in Queensland, what to bring useful phrases, living with families and safety, and early indications are that students are arriving better prepared with realistic expectations of their study experience. Students can access the program for up to 12 months after arrival. An audit tool allows staff to identify new students who have not yet accessed the program, and schools also have a supporting document prepared by Education Queensland International.

## Case Study 2

### Images of student life in Australia

The Australia Network provides extensive programming about life in Australia, which is very informative for students intending to studying in Australia. The Network is a 24/7 international television and online service (<http://australianetwork.com>), funded by the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade operated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The Network's television service is available in key source countries across Asia, the Pacific and the Indian sub-continent, while its online platform is accessible worldwide. Australia Network's television schedule contains much Australian-themed education content and English language learning programs, including *This Australian Life*, *Inspiring Teachers*, *Down Under Grads*, and *Nexus8* which all provide a unique perspective on Australian campus life and society. English language learning programs include IELTS preparation and *Passport to English*, *the Business of English*, *Living English* and *Study English*. These programs are also streamed online, and English-language learning programs account for around 38% of all Australia Network website traffic. For more information, see: <http://www.australianetwork.com>.

Another ABC International service, Radio Australia, also provides programming for prospective international students, such as "English for Study in Australia". This program helps students prepare to study and live in Australia by following the journeys of four international students living in Melbourne. Over 26 lessons, listeners are introduced to many aspects of Australian culture and student life. For more information, see: <http://www.radioaustralia.net>.

## Resources

- AEI (2009) 'Living in Australia', Study in Australia Website, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, <http://studyinaustralia.gov.au/Sia/en/LivingInAustralia/LivingInAustralia.htm>
- AEI (2009) 'Using Education Agents: A guide for providers of education and training to overseas students' Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/QuickInfo/Using\\_Education\\_Agents\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/QuickInfo/Using_Education_Agents_pdf.pdf)
- Arthur, E (2009) 'Tick off to take off: the pre-departure guide', *Perspectives*, 13(1), pp.22-29
- ISANA (2008) *Orientation and Pre-Arrival Handbook: The Rainbow Guide*, <http://www.isana.org.au/site-general/consumer-protection-project-orientation-pre-arrival-handbook-2.html>
- ISANA (2011) *Education Agents Manual*, <http://www.isana.org.au/files/EducationAgentsManual.pdf>
- Lipson, C (2008) *Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada*, University Of Chicago Press
- Ong, D (2009) *International Students' Handbook: Living and Studying in Australia*, UNSW Press
- Wadsworth, A (2008) *Study Abroad in Australia: the Complete Student Guide to Spending a Semester 'Down Under'*, <http://www.semesterinaustralia.com/>
- Western, M; Boreham, P; Laffan, W; Haynes, M; Chesters, J; Tighe, M; Arts, D (2005) *Final report of the survey of international students' spending in Australia*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia, [http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/MIP/ItemsOfInterest/05Interest72\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/MIP/ItemsOfInterest/05Interest72_pdf.pdf)

## Arrival and Orientation

The arrival of international students to begin their program of study is recognised as a difficult period for both students and education providers alike. For students there are many practical challenges – organising accommodation, transport, bank accounts, mobile phones, shopping, etc. – as well as deeper challenges of understanding an unfamiliar culture and establishing new friendships and support networks. While trying to do this, students must also try to negotiate their courses of study in a new institution.

For providers, it is difficult to cater to the wide variety of support needs of a diverse student population who are arriving at different times or who may already be living in Australia. Some students may be well-prepared months ahead of time, or may have strong support networks in Australia to assist them on arriving. Others may have little idea about the demands of their course or the challenges involved in living away from home for the first time. Many commencing have already studied locally in a pathway program of some sort and may have little interest in orientation sessions, while others arrive in Australia after the beginning of their course, and may miss out on orientation sessions as a result. Those students who do participate in the full orientation program can be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information provided.

Because of this, many providers have a range of orientation programs and activities each targeted to a particular area of need. Some of the orientation needs of international students are the same as those of domestic students, and combined orientation sessions for those issues are increasingly common, while issues that are specific to international students still usually require dedicated sessions for international students.

### Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 mandates, “the provision of an age and culturally appropriate orientation programme”, and stipulates the type of information that must be provided to students:

- a. student support services available to students in the transition to life and study in a new environment
- b. legal services
- c. emergency and health services
- d. facilities and resources
- e. complaints and appeal processes, and
- f. any student visa condition relating to course progress and/or attendance as appropriate (Standard 6.1)

### Good Practice Principles

#### ❖ Ensure that newly arriving students are able to be met at the airport if requested

Arrival for the first time in Australia is a key moment and many institutions now take care to ensure that all students who are able to be met at the airport upon arrival and taken to their accommodation. This service provides an early opportunity to provide advice and support to the student and identify any issues that may need to be resolved urgently, particularly concerning accommodation. In an effort to build community connections early on, Edith Cowan University has involved the local African community in providing this initial welcome service for African students, who are met on arrival, taken for meals and provided with initial information on living in Perth.

❖ **Provide information and support from time of arrival in Australia**

Some students arrive well before the formal orientation period and they need to be able to readily access information and support services. Much of this will have been arrived through pre-arrival channels, but students should be able to access campus-based services as required preceding commencement of their program.

❖ **Provide orientation related to student life and educational culture in Australia**

While the ESOS National Code 2007 stipulates practical information that must be provided, most institutions also seek to assist new international students to understand the common challenges of student life in Australia, including health and safety issues, and the culture and expectations of Australian educational institutions. Such orientation sessions can be used to introduce international students to key sources of support beyond the institution itself, as Victoria University has done by involving members of the police and fire services in orientation programs as a means of encouraging international students to call upon these services later if required. Educational orientation sessions are often incorporated into the beginning of formal studies and are program or discipline-specific, involving teaching staff in making explicit the expectations of students and teaching staff, including approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, which are otherwise often difficult for international students to glean.

❖ **Ensure that students have ongoing access to orientation information**

Many students miss orientation sessions for a variety of reasons, and some who do risk being overloaded with too much information to absorb at a time of rapid change and acclimatization. For these reasons, many institutions are experimenting with creative ways of staggering the orientation experience, or producing orientation materials that students can draw upon as required. The Faculty of Science, University of Melbourne, has trialled a semester-long voluntary orientation program tailored for international students, which provides various opportunities for students to participate in a range of sessions during their first semester of study. Many institutions incorporate essential information and contact details into student diaries and web-based resources that students can find easily as needed.

### Case Study 3

#### Twenty-First Century Mateship

RMIT's MATE (Mentors Assisting the Transition Experience) program connects commencing international students with an experienced RMIT student. MATE Mentors and Mentees make initial contact by email, usually when the Mentee is still in their home country at which point the Mentor can provide practical first-hand advice about life in Melbourne and study at RMIT. After arrival, they engage in a series of activities and events through the international student's first semester, culminating fittingly with an AFL game at the MCG.

Potential Mentors are encouraged to participate with the assurance that their 'mateship' will provide the opportunity to: Gain insights into the processes of transition and adjustment to new cultures

Practice and improve your leadership skills

Apply social support strategies

Expand your cross-cultural communication skills

Strengthen confidence in working with small groups of students

Add to your experience of student support services

The MATE program is part of a wider initiative, RMIT LEAD, which aims to foster student engagement and leadership development through volunteering in a range of activities and events. As LEAD volunteers, Mentors receive a certificate signed by the Vice-Chancellor in recognition of the following requirements of the MATE scheme:

Five hours of leadership training

A minimum of 15 hours of volunteer work

Five hours of email contact with up to five mentees

Six hours of volunteering in orientation and transition activities at RMIT

Four hours participation in a social or cultural event in Melbourne

Some students take on a greater level of responsibility with the MATE scheme, amounting to 30-35 days work, for credit towards the Work Integrated Learning requirements of their academic program.

### Case Study 4

## Students Passing on Their Experience

Curtin University's discipline-specific student mentoring program was initiated in the Midwifery course in 2006, expanded to other schools in 2007 and now involves all faculties. Staff members in each discipline area oversee student mentors who are linked up with newly-arrived international students in the same course. The University reports that its mentoring program have had significant positive value for international students, both in terms of integration into the student community and academic success (AUQA, 2009). A detailed evaluation of the School of Nursing and Midwifery's program showed that careful selection of mentors is critical since mentors who fail to maintain quality support lead to dissatisfaction among commencing students and damage the reputation of the program as a whole (Stanley, 2008). Arrangements vary between schools, with mentors in some areas being paid and others receiving a prepaid voucher valued at \$300 on completion of specified period in the role. In addition, all mentors also receive leadership training and experience, a Certificate of Participation, and assistance with how to use their mentor experience in future career goals.

## Resources

Beard, C (2008) 'The 3C model: communicating the important stuff to new internationals', in *19th ISANA International Education Association Conference Proceedings*, T McGrath (ed.), ISANA International Education Association, <http://www.isana.org.au/cross-cultural-communication/the-3c-model-communicating-the-important-stuff-to-new-internationals.html>

Green, D & Healy, L (2008) *Planning and Running Orientation Programmes for International Students*, UK Council for International Student Affairs

ISANA (2008) *Orientation and Pre-Arrival Handbook: The Rainbow Guide*, <http://www.isana.org.au/site-general/consumer-protection-project-orientation-pre-arrival-handbook-2.html>

Ong, D (2009) *International Students' Handbook: Living and Studying in Australia*, UNSW Press.

## Maintaining Supportive Social Networks

One of the effects of relocation is that international students begin their studies with a smaller social and support network than local students. This relative social isolation can affect their subsequent engagement in social networks and their sense of connection with their peers and the educational institution. The most recent review of research on the experience of first year students in Australian universities observed that:

One of the worrying signs in the 2004 dataset is the apparently lower level of social integration of international students. Fewer international students [compared with domestic students] report they feel part of a group committed to learning (46 per cent compared with 56 per cent) and fewer are experiencing a sense of belonging (35 per cent compared with 52 per cent). Fewer are confident that a staff member knows their name and fewer believe staff take an interest in their progress (Krause *et al.*, 2005, p.76).

While international students do usually develop supportive social networks during their studies, especially with fellow students from the same country or region, a significant proportion feel disappointed upon completion of their studies that they were not able to make friends with local students to the extent that they had hoped to. The recently published report, *Examples of Good Practice in Assisting International Students to Integrate with Australian Students and the Wider Community* (DEEWR, 2009) describes a wide range of useful case studies demonstrating various formal and informal ways in which institutions can facilitate stronger social connections for international students, both within the institution and with the broader community.

The September 2009 International Student Roundtable identified social integration as a major challenge for international students in Australia, particularly integration into communities.

## Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 requires providers to ensure “the opportunity for students to access welfare-related support services” (Standard 6.3) and that “the registered provider must designate a member of staff or members of staff to be the official point of contact for students” (Standard 6.5). There is no requirement for an education provider to support international students to develop supportive social networks and nor to facilitate the social integration of international students into the broader student community or the local communities in which they live. The Code acknowledges the special needs of international students who are under 18 years of age and places the onus for support and monitoring completely on the education provider, except where the student is being cared for in Australia by a parent or suitable nominated relative. However, very few tertiary students fall into this category.

## Good Practice Principles

### ❖ Support and encourage international students’ participation in dedicated social activities and networks

Education providers can play a key role in supporting the growing number of social activities and social support services for international students, particularly in major metropolitan centres. For example, city councils have been staging welcoming events for international students, and welfare agencies have established drop-in centres for international students such as ‘The Couch’, a free space in the Melbourne CBD to socialise, relax, rest, study, and seek information and assistance on a range of issues including housing, employment, counseling, student services, legal aid, and more. Established

by the Salvation Army, the Australian Federation of International Students and the City of Melbourne, the centre is open several evenings per week, providing an environment where students can eat cheaply, socialize and relax.

#### ❖ **Facilitate engagement between international and domestic students**

The extra-curricular activities fostered by educational institutions provide very important means for international students to meet others students with similar interests. Clubs and societies, voluntary associations, sporting groups, work placements, mentoring, and other activities on campus provide a wide range of social settings in which students can get to know one another as people with diverse interests that transcend nationality. This task has been made more difficult for universities by voluntary student unionism legislation. Despite such setbacks, these extra-curricular opportunities have for generations played a key role in shaping the social life of tertiary students both in Australia and in most of the countries from international students travel. Another difficulty in fostering engagement is the tendency of domestic and international students to be balancing work and study, which may leave little time for extra-curricular activities. The University of Western Australia takes a whole of university approach to promoting genuine interactions between local and international students. It argues that the total student experience is enhanced by promoting graduates who can function effectively in cross-cultural settings ([www.teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/staffnet/policies/interactions](http://www.teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/staffnet/policies/interactions)).

#### ❖ **Facilitate engagement between international students and local communities**

Many education providers are drawing on established partnerships with local community organisations and sporting clubs to provide opportunities for international students to engage with the local community in a range of ways, either for recreation, voluntary service or work experience. This interaction can benefit both the local groups, who are able to involve a young and energetic group, and international students, who are able to experience aspects of Australian life far beyond the horizons of student life. The Living in Australia section of the Study Adelaide website, for example, includes a detailed listing of local cultural groups and places of worship, making an asset of the city's vibrant cultural diversity (<http://www.studyadelaide.com/living-in-adelaide.aspx>).

## Case Study 5

### Welcome to the Community

Around Australia, more and more local communities are actively welcoming international students upon arrival, both to ease the transition into a new environment and in an effort to help students forge supportive and productive relationships with other students, local organisations and service providers.

One such initiative is the Welcome to Wollongong (W2W) program, which has hosted a civic reception and the W2W Festival each February since 2008. It is supported by a website (<http://unicentre.uow.edu.au/w2w/>), which provides international students with information about the city and local services for and local organisations with information about international students and W2W events. It began in 2006 with the formation of community working group comprising staff and students from different sectors at the University of Wollongong, Wollongong City Council, the local business chamber, local businesses, Illawarra Ethnic Communities Council and Illawarra TAFE.

The involvement of such a range of local stakeholders provided the organisers with the ability to draw upon the most appropriate local performers and to choose the time and place that best suited the event, as this account by of the festival by some of the organisers attests

"The mini festival involved a number of local artists including Arabic "belly" dancers, a Chinese lion dance and a multicultural youth rap group. The main performer was a former 'Australian Idol contestant'. The local radio announcer and an international student were the MC's for the day. Community groups and business group conducted information stalls on the day and included legal aid, health advice and well as student clubs and societies. The date and day of the week of the civic reception and mini festival were chosen to coincide with the Friday markets in the mall. This was done as it was thought that the markets would enhance the festive atmosphere on the day and ensure that a number of community residents would be in the mall when the Welcome to Wollongong activities were conducted on the day" (Kell, *et al.* 2008).

### Resources

Australian Education International, Universities Australia, TAFE Directors Australia and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (2009) *Examples of Good Practice in Assisting International Students to Integrate with Australian Students and the Wider Community*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia, [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/GoodPractice\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/GoodPractice_pdf.pdf)

AEI (2008) *2007 Follow-up International Student Survey: Executive Summaries – Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia, <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/Shop/Products/Publications/Publication635>

Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) (2008a) *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities – Final Report* Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia, [http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Documents/Final\\_Report-Good\\_Practice\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Documents/Final_Report-Good_Practice_Principles.pdf) (Especially Theme 4: Transition and Social and Academic Interaction)

Krause, K; Hartley, R; James, R; McInnis, C (2005) *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia, [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/first\\_year\\_experience.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/first_year_experience.htm)

## Accommodation

In recent years there has been growing concern about the accommodation of international students, a situation that has brought about by rising housing costs and increasing numbers of international students, particularly in the largest cities. The September 2009 International Student Roundtable called on education providers to collaborate with state and federal governments to improve the availability of affordable accommodation options for international students (DEEWR 2009, p.3). Fincher *et al.* (2009) argue that the proliferation of small low-quality and unsupported student apartment blocks in central Melbourne, and common to other cities, is creating an international student 'ghetto' in the inner city. Because most of their everyday interactions are conducted with one another in their apartment buildings, many international students do not establish significant connection with the greater student or local community, they believe. Fincher *et al.* encourage institutions and developers to improve the range of available accommodation options, including cheaper apartments with more shared spaces, dormitories catering to both domestic and international students.

Living close to inner-city accommodation can be prohibitively expensive and many students prefer to rent privately with friends once they are established in a city. There have been many media reports about international students living in 'unacceptable' private rental accommodation in Australian cities, usually related either to overcrowding or very poor quality premises. International students appear to be being targeted for exploitation by landlords and real estate agents who are taking advantage of students' desperation for affordable housing and their lack of familiarity with their rights as tenants

### Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 requires education providers to provide prospective students with advice about accommodation options, and must also either offer support services related to accommodation, or refer students to such support services available elsewhere:

The registered provider must provide the opportunity for students to access welfare-related support services to assist with issues that may arise during their study, including course progress and attendance requirements and accommodation issues. These services must be provided at no additional cost to the student. If the registered provider refers the student to external support services, the registered provider must not charge for the referral (Standard 6.3).

Education providers are required to approve the accommodation arrangements for students under 18 years of age (Standard 5.1). In many cases, homestay accommodation is used to meet this requirement for approved accommodation for minors, but there are no standards governing this type of accommodation nor the relationship between the homestay provider and the education provider.

### Good Practice Principles

- ❖ **Support students to access a range of accommodation options, catering to different needs, locations and price ranges, including emergency accommodation**

Most educational institutions provide a student housing service catering to both domestic and international students and these should support students to access a range of accommodation options to suit their particular needs. For example, Victoria University's (2009) *Housing Guide* provides students with information on on-campus accommodation, share housing, renting alone, homestay/boardings, hostels/rooming houses and student apartment blocks, including practical

advice, legal requirements, and links to more personalized information available from the University's housing service.

❖ **Maintain close working relationships with quality accommodation providers and agents**

Education providers can help students by working closely with providers that they know they can rely on to provide quality accommodation options. For example, a range of providers in Melbourne's north Eastern suburbs work closely with the City of Darebin's aptly named 'Boarders without Borders' program. Similarly, the Australian Homestay Network (AHN) works in close relationship with education providers to encourage homestay options for international students. Education institutions supervising their own student homestays are able to manage their homestays through AHN, using a compliance system and associated support services. AHN also recognises the need to train hosts in providing a good experience for students. Orientation, fact sheets and training for all homestay hosts together with orientation for students is supplied online together with policy and procedural documents. AHN provides important pre-arrival orientation material relating to homestay and student safety and living in Australia. Each student and host is appropriately insured and has access to a medical and critical incident management telephone helpline twenty four hours a day seven days a week.

❖ **Provide advice to students entering into private lease agreements and support to students who have difficulties**

Inevitably, some students will encounter accommodation difficulties, and education providers should be able to assist students to deal with these situations by providing tenancy information, legal advice and referral to legal advocacy when required.

## **Case Study 6**

### **Tapping House Hunting Skills**

Victoria University selects students who are experienced in finding accommodation in Melbourne to act as Housing Mentors. They are students who understand the issues newly-arrived students face when looking for accommodation, including potential language difficulties, and are able to share strategies and introduce students to the range of services available to support them. The University's Housing Officers and Student Welfare Officers provide further advice on housing options, rental trends, tenants' rights and responsibilities, and assist in resolving tenancy problems. As well as assisting with accommodation at the start of semester, the program has broader benefits in helping international and new-to-Melbourne students by establishing supportive peer-to-peer relationships early on, where possible in the students' preferred language, thereby building engagement with the university community and support services.

## Resources

Fincher, R; Carter, P; Tombesi, P; Shaw, K; Martel, A (2009) Transnational and Temporary: Students, Community and Place-Making in Central Melbourne – Final Report, University of Melbourne,  
[http://www.transnationalandtemporary.com.au/publications/tat\\_final-report.pdf](http://www.transnationalandtemporary.com.au/publications/tat_final-report.pdf)

Brisbane City Council (2008) International Education Futures Brisbane Taskforce: Report of Taskforce Findings, Brisbane City Council  
Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Victoria (2008) Taskforce Report, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria,  
<http://www.isana.org.au/files/Overseas%20Student%20Experience%20Taskforce%20Report%202008.pdf>

Victoria University (2009) Housing Guide, <http://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/student-engagement/pdfs/Housing-Guide.pdf>

## Employment

For international students, working in Australia serves as a means of generating extra income, learning about life outside the campus, making friends, and developing skills that may help build a career after graduation. In return, international students clearly make a major contribution to the workforce in many parts of Australia. Many education providers are very active in facilitating both paid part-time work and work-integrated learning experiences for international students.

However, international students may be especially vulnerable to unscrupulous employment practices. Nyland *et al.* (2009) have found that many international students are surprised by the high cost of living in Australia. This higher than expected cost drives them to work longer than the 20 hours per week allowed by their visa. Some employers exploit this situation by offering international students work for more than the 20 allowable hours but below minimum wages or in sub-standard conditions. Nyland *et al.* argue that the increase in numbers of international students seeking illegal employment has only served to make wages and conditions for them worse over the years. In addition, international students are usually less familiar with their legal rights compared with domestic students who are often able to draw on advice and experience from friends and family.

The September 2009 International Student Roundtable identified fair treatment as a major challenge for students and recommended stronger regulation of exploitative employers.

It is difficult for educational institutions to monitor the working conditions of students, and this is clearly a matter of enforcement of existing legal protections, which governments have recently reiterated a commitment to, but there are steps that education providers can take to support international students in this area.

### Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 does not stipulate any obligations for education providers in relation to international students' employment. Education providers are not required to monitor international students' number of hours of employment but are required to monitor class attendance in VET programs and academic progress in higher education programs.

### Good Practice Principles

#### ❖ Provide support to students in finding and applying for employment, and advice on legal requirements

Some institutions provide dedicated services for international students seeking employment, such as Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, whose International Centre provides advice on legal requirements for work in Australia, applying for or renewing a working visa and applying for a Tax File Number. Many aspects of the employment advice international students require are common to domestic students, such as where to look for job, writing application letters and preparing a resume, and these services are often provided by a careers and employment unit serving all students. Such units also provide a means to connect employers and students directly, and are the key means for advertising part-time on-campus work which is particularly suited to international students.

The Fair Work Ombudsman gives advice and help to understand workplace rights and responsibilities. A fact sheet for international students on workplace rights is available at: <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Fact-sheets-tools/Pages/FWD-fact-sheet-International-Students-Study-your-workplace-rights.aspx?role=employees>

## Resources

AEI (2009) Work Rights for International Students, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations,  
[http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/Workrights\\_for\\_international\\_students.htm](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/Workrights_for_international_students.htm)

Nyland, C, Forbes-Mewett, H, Marginson, S, Ramia, G, Sawir, E, and Smith, S (2009) 'International student workers in Australia: a new vulnerable workforce' *Journal of Education and Work*, 22 (1), pp.1-14

Ong, D (2009) *International Students' Handbook: Living and Studying in Australia*, UNSW Press

## Health and Wellbeing

While there may be very little difference between international and domestic students in relation to the need for medical services, the challenges of relocation and consequent risk of social isolation make international students more dependent on institution's counselling services. Cultural and language barriers may also prevent students from accessing the range of health services available to them. Education providers need to ensure that international students have easy access to culturally-sensitive healthcare services, and counselling services in particular, and are encouraged to use services when required (Russell *et al.* 2008).

The September 2009 International Student Roundtable identified access to basic life services as a key challenge facing international students. It recommended medical and child care services be on fairer terms and suggested the Government provide students with more options of medical insurance providers.

### Legal Requirements

All students studying on a student visa are required to have Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) for themselves and their family members as a condition of their visa to study in Australia. This provides international students with access to out of hospital and in hospital medical services. The ESOS National Code 2007 requires that information on emergency and health services be provided to students during orientation (Standard 6.1). In addition, providers must "provide the opportunity for students to access welfare-related support services", which is broadly defined as "services which address the mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being of overseas students", including medical issues, mental health and stress-management. These services may be provided directly by the provider or the provider may refer students to other agencies who provide these services. The education provider may not charge students for these services or for referring students to other agencies (Standard 6.3).

### Good Practice Principles

#### ❖ Ensure that convenient and culturally-sensitive healthcare services are readily accessible

Some large education providers have their own on-campus centre providing medical care and health advice to students, while others refer students to a range of nearby services.

#### ❖ Ensure that vulnerable students are referred to counselling services that are sensitive to the specific needs of international students

International students who are struggling with relocation or who are without support networks in Australia are especially vulnerable, and institutions need to ensure that staff at all levels are able to assist students in accessing appropriate counselling services.

#### ❖ Ensure that students are aware of specialised healthcare services and resources that are available

Students may not be aware that in addition to the obvious medical and hospital services, there are many specialised healthcare services and information resources provided by a wide range of

government, community and private providers. Providers should draw upon these resources where appropriate and promote these services to students who may benefit from them.

## Case Study 7

### Expert Advice, Multilingual Dissemination

The City of Sydney and the NSW government Multicultural Health Communication Service provide an entire suite of sexual health advice resources, translated into a variety of languages. While these resources have been designed with NSW's multicultural population in mind, particularly young migrants, international student counsellors have perceived the usefulness of this information for students with a need for advice in a language other than English. Student counsellors from a variety of education providers – University, TAFE and private sector – direct international students to the sexual health resources database, as a means for the student make discrete sexual health-related enquiries, often in their own language. For more information, see [http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/topics/Sexual\\_Health.html](http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/topics/Sexual_Health.html).

## Resources

- Hsu, PHC; Krageloh, CU; Shepherd, D; Billington, R (2009) 'Religion/spirituality and quality of life of international tertiary students in New Zealand: an exploratory study', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 12(4), pp.385-399
- Rosenthal, D; Russell, J; Thomson, G (2008) The health and wellbeing of international students at an Australian university higher education, *International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 55(1), pp.51-67
- Russell, J; Thomson, G; Rosenthal, D (2008) International student use of university health and counselling services, *International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 56(1), pp.59-75

## Finances

For many international students, management of personal finances is a key concern, and finances clearly have a significant bearing on study decisions, accommodation choices, social engagement and part-time employment. And for international students, personal finances are more often intertwined with family relationships, as parents are usually the main source of funds. The key issue is to ensure that students and their families are well aware of the entire cost of living in Australia, as discussed earlier in the pre-arrival section of this report, so as to minimise hardship during studies.

The September 2009 International Student Roundtable identified cost of education as a major challenge facing international students, especially the pressure of rising tuition fees. It suggested the Government impress on students the importance of their consumer rights prior to any initial payment of fees and also require greater transparency among providers with regards to their current fees and potential fee increases.

## Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 makes no mention of the provision of assistance for international students in managing their financial situations or of providing direct financial assistance to international students, apart from the requirement that information be provided to potential students of “indicative costs of living” in Australia (Section 2.1).

## Good Practice Principles

### ❖ Provide financial advice

Given the importance of financial management in international students’ lives, education providers need to be able to assist students to create and manage a budget, access available sources of income, loans and scholarships and student concessions. Where possible, they should ensure that parents are informed and included in such discussions of financial advice.

### ❖ Provide emergency loans and payment plans

By providing access to emergency loans education providers can help students deal with unforeseen financial problems and ensure they can complete their program of study. Options for students to pay tuition fees in installments can also assist in reducing financial stress for students facing difficulties.

## Case Study 8

### Measuring Satisfaction

The Australian Universities Quality Agency has commended the University of Adelaide for the high levels of satisfaction expressed by international students with the services and support provided by the International Student Centre. While other institutions have been 'mainstreaming' many services for international students, Adelaide's International Student Centre serves effectively as a one-stop shop for international students. It provides pre-departure information and assistance, reception service on arrival in Adelaide, orientation, initial temporary accommodation and liaison with the University's Accommodation Service, ongoing support from international student advisors, information on Overseas Student Health Cover, a returning home re-entry program, and a peer mentor program. Adelaide's participation in igraduate's International Student Barometer provides it with comparative data on many aspects of international student satisfaction. Results from the 2008 survey show a high degree of international student satisfaction with the International Student Centre in both absolute and comparative terms (AUQA 2008b).

### Resources

- Forbes-Mewett, H; Marginson, S; Nyland, C; Ramia, G; Sawir, E (2006) 'Income security of international students in Australia' in *Educate Advocate Empower: ISANA 2006 Conference Proceedings*, ISANA
- Forbes-Mewett, H; Marginson, S; Nyland, C; Ramia, G; Sawir, E (2009) 'Australian university international student finances', *Higher Education Policy*, 22(2), pp.141-161.

## Critical Incidents

A critical incident is commonly defined as any event that is unexpected, acute, stressful and exceeds the normal coping capacities of individuals. When all is going well international students are usually very effective in managing the demands of distance from family and friends and in negotiating unfamiliar cultural and bureaucratic environments. However, when serious misfortune strikes, these issues can be overwhelming and international students often require considerable support from educational institutions and a range of specialised services. In addition to the direct impact on the student concerned, their family and friends, there is now a high level of expectation from media and government in students' home countries, and the way in which institutions respond to critical incidents can have dramatic positive or negative consequences for the reputation of the individual provider and of Australia as a destination.

Critical incidents can include: missing students; severe verbal, written or psychological aggression; death, serious injury or any threat of these; natural disasters; issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, drug or alcohol abuse; signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, and neglect. Also, critical incidents in students' home country can have a serious impact on students abroad, including natural disasters, socio-political disruption, and personal tragedies.

In its identification of social integration as a significant challenge facing international students, the September 2009 International Student Roundtable recommended better and faster communication between police, students and providers. It also suggested that students should receive information about safety and security issues particular to their institution and location, prior to arrival in Australia.

### Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 states that, "the registered provider must have a documented critical incident policy together with procedures that cover the action to be taken in the event of a critical incident, required follow-up of the incident, and records of the incident and actions taken" (Standard 6.4).

ISANA (2008) has produced a Critical Incident Kit to assist providers in critical incident planning. It includes a range of guides and templates that can be customized to meet the needs of providers. The kit is downloadable from the ISANA website.

### Good Practice Principles

#### ❖ **Provide 24 hour access to a readily accessible emergency service with appropriately trained staff**

While some institutions have their own 24-hour emergency service, they may not always be able to provide appropriate help for international students. More institutions are working in conjunction with Overseas Students Health Cover providers to have a 24-hour triage service, catering to international student needs, that incorporates trained helpers who can direct students to both useful contacts within the institution itself and/or contacts with relevant agencies if more immediate help is needed.

#### ❖ **Maintain a critical incident plan that is broad enough to include a range of emergencies**

Critical incidents can vary considerably in size and nature and such a policy needs to be detailed and flexible enough to cover all types of critical incidents. A great deal of both cross-cultural and local knowledge may be needed in dealing with a critical incident and such an incident can be handled more

effectively if such knowledge is documented prior to the incident occurring. It is also important that appropriate support be provided to the staff dealing directly with the critical incident.

❖ **Maintaining close working relationships with service providers inside and outside the educational institution and key stakeholders, such as consular offices and agents**

As a result of several critical incidents related to University of South Australia international students, the University's International Learning and Teaching unit promotes intra- and inter- institutional exchange. It is recognised that faculties and organisations within the University have a role to play in helping to identify and manage critical incidents through good communication and record-keeping. Good relationships with appropriate agencies outside of the Institution – such as emergency services, police, the media, local government and community organisations – are maintained through ongoing communication and planning.

❖ **Provide support to students affected by critical incidents in their home country**

In the case of humanitarian disasters education providers should communicate with affected students directly, such as through SMS or email, referring them to sources of information and counselling support.

## Case Study 9

### Having a Plan in Place

Southbank Institute of Technology's International Critical Incident Management Policy is a good example of the plans which all institutions are required to have in place. It defines a critical incident as "a traumatic event, or the threat of such (within or outside Australia), which causes extreme stress, fear or injury in the Student Community at Southbank Institute of Technology" (SBIT, 2009). Southbank's plan is public document that details those within the institution who are required to respond to critical incidents and their responsibilities, and specifies accountability for the development of specific action plans, media management, reporting and recording of actions, and review and evaluation processes.

In addition to an overarching policy, clearly articulated procedures outlining detailed responses to specific circumstances are essential for managing critical incidents. Some good examples are RMIT University's Missing International Onshore Student Procedure and Death of a Student Procedure (RMIT, 2006; 2008). Each of these specifies the steps that must be taken, the person responsible within the organisation, and the timeframe in which action must occur.

## Resources

ISANA (2008) *Critical Incidents Kit*, ISANA, <http://www.isana.org.au/files/ISANACriticalIncidentsKit.pdf>

RMIT (2006) 'Death of a Student Procedure', RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=o59aswka58b9l>

RMIT (2008) 'Missing International Onshore Student Procedure', RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=Qpk5xuyyhyj3>

SBIT (2009) 'International Critical Incident Management Policy', Southbank Institute of Technology, <http://www.southbank.edu.au/site/students/policies/application.asp#CriticalIncident>



## Completion

Within the transition from student to graduate, international students have several major changes in their lives to consider:

- Work and career considerations
- Adjustment to change when returning to countries of origin
- Maintaining peer and local Australian networks

Work and career pathways need to take into account the state of job markets in relative home countries, but also the potential for work and career skills from their overseas study in a regional and/or global market. While culture-shock is typically referred to in the initial arrival of overseas students to Australia, reverse culture shock may also apply. This could include the need for overseas student-graduates to negotiate multiple expectations and pressures from home-country politics, employers and family and friends. Finally, as a means of developing both the international student market, as well as enhancing future connections with Australia, facilitating and maintaining connection with fellow students and friends – both local and international – can be done through alumni associations or online social networks.

## Legal Requirements

The ESOS National Code 2007 does not require educational institutions to provide any particular services to students at the completion of their studies.

## Good Practice Principles

### ❖ Provide careers advice that caters to local and international pathways

Increasingly, the quality of educational institutions is judged by the outcomes achieved by graduates. In this context, careers centres are beginning to provide support specifically for international students looking to work in Australia after graduating, who face additional challenges compared with domestic students, as well as assisting students to begin careers in their home country through guides and global graduate recruitment initiatives.

### ❖ Prepare students for 'reverse culture shock'

Education providers should assist international students to deal with the challenges posed by two simultaneous life-transitions, moving from life as a student to the working world, and moving from their second (Australian) culture to their 'home' culture. In one example, Charles Darwin University provides a short brochure for international students on *Coping with Reverse Culture Shock*, which explains variety of formal and informal pressures on students returning home and suggests coping strategies.

### ❖ Assist graduates to maintain connections with alumni associations and fellow graduates

A variety of alumni associations attached to institutions provide networking and continued contact for students and friends. Facebook groups are a growing trend for alumni associations, whereby informal friendships and contact can be maintained and reunions can be organised.

## Case Study 10

### Departing Darwin

To help International students in the transition from student to graduate, and the relocation from Australia to home country, Charles Darwin University provides two useful web-based documents, *Preparing to Leave* and *Coping with Reverse Culture Shock* (CDU 2002; 2008).

The Preparing to Leave website includes a checklist of things to do before leaving Australia, including options for transporting belongings home, how to apply for graduation, paying off debts and fines, lodging a tax return, accessing superannuation funds, finishing off accommodation leases, arranging for disconnection of electricity/gas/water, closing bank accounts, obtaining references from teaching staff and joining alumni and professional bodies. The short guide to 'Coping with Reverse Culture Shock' advises international students that going home involves two transitions—moving from the student world to the employment world and moving from their 'second culture' in Darwin back to their home culture. Students are advised that if they are prepared from the beginning and know how to keep changes in perspective, returning home will be far less of a shock:

"You are not the same as when you left home. Your behaviour and communication patterns may have changed as well as your hierarchy of values. Therefore, anticipate where conflict is likely to occur with traditional home behaviour, communication, and values."

## Resources

- Arthur, N (2003) 'Preparing international students for the re-entry transition', *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 37(3), pp.173-185
- Calvert, G (2006) *Empowering International Students to Prepare for their Working Life - Through an Informed Career Framework*, ISANA, [http://www.isana.org.au/files/thurs\\_c2\\_calvert.pdf](http://www.isana.org.au/files/thurs_c2_calvert.pdf)
- CDU (2002) 'Coping with Reverse Culture Shock', Charles Darwin University, [http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/attachments/Reverse\\_Culture\\_Shock.doc](http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/attachments/Reverse_Culture_Shock.doc)
- CDU (2008) 'Preparing to Leave', Charles Darwin University, <http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/current/goinghome/preparingtoleave.html>
- Gibson, E (2005) 'The development of career services for international students', *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 14(2), pp.19-23

## Conclusion and Future Directions

In 2009 it became very apparent that the future of international education in Australia may be determined as much by students' experience outside the classroom as by the quality of the educational experience. Over time most well-established international education providers have developed a comprehensive range of support services, and this project revealed a surprisingly consistent set of beliefs about what constitutes good practice in international student support in 2009, among those we consulted in a range of institutions across the country. It is perhaps a sign of the maturity of the international education industry that a relatively consistent set of industry standards has come to be so widely accepted. These standards would seem to be quite closely aligned with the expectations of the Australian community, foreign governments and international student advocates, as best we can judge.

However, we should not expect that the principles of good practice espoused by participants in our study reflect the practices of all international education providers in Australia. As this report has shown, there is a gap between the requirements of the ESOS National Code 2007 and the good practice standards we have elaborated based on extensive industry consultation. This poses enormous risks for Australian international education as a whole, as we saw in throughout 2009 as a steady stream of students complained that their education providers treated them as paying customers and were indifferent to their welfare. We contend that any revision of the current ESOS National Code should consider narrowing the significant gap between the current minimum registration requirements and the principles of good practice outlined in this report.

There is also a need for government, industry groups and providers to ensure that the student support services outlined in this report are adequately resourced and supported in all institutions. Throughout the interviews conducted for this project we were repeatedly reminded that the delivery of high quality services is dependent on maintaining adequate staffing levels, the availability of training and ongoing professional development, opportunities for professional networking across institutional boundaries, and career development pathways that can channel expertise and experience into leadership roles.

A comparison with other key education exporting countries was beyond the scope of this project, and further research is needed to assess the extent to which industry perceptions of good practice in international student support differ, especially among the Anglophone countries with which Australia most directly competes. New Zealand has a legally-enforced framework, the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (2003), which is enforced by the Ministry of Education. In the United States and the United Kingdom voluntary codes of practices have been developed by various bodies. In the United Kingdom, the Council of International Student Affairs (UKCISA) has developed a Code of Practice for Members and a Code of Ethics for Those Advising International Students, and the British Council has developed a Guide to Good Practice for Education Agents. In the United States, NAFSA has developed a detailed set of Principles for International Educational Exchange and a Code of Ethics for members (NAFSA 2000 a, b). Comparing the standards specified in each of these documents and other similar documents from other countries with those set in the ESOS National Code is by no means straightforward, in part because most are voluntary guides rather than legally-enforced minimum requirements, and also because many aspects of international student services may be subject to diverse forms of regulation imposed by various branches and levels of government, especially in the United States. We are not aware of any published attempt to systematically compare these published standards internationally, but such a project would doubtless be of interest to government, industry groups and international student advocates in many countries. We are also not aware of any efforts in other education exporting countries to conduct a project like this one, that elaborates the principles of good practice that are widely held by practitioners and managers directly involved in the provision of international student services. Such research would be very valuable in fostering international benchmarking both at the level of industry regulation and institutional practice.

## References

- AEI (2008) *2007 Follow-up International Student Survey: Executive Summaries – Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia, <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/Shop/Products/Publications/Publication635>
- AEI (2009) *Work Rights for International Students*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, [http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/Workrights\\_for\\_international\\_students.htm](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/Workrights_for_international_students.htm)
- AEI, Universities Australia, TAFE Directors Australia and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (2009) *Examples of Good Practice in Assisting International Students to Integrate with Australian Students and the Wider Community*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia, [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/GoodPractice\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/GoodPractice_pdf.pdf)
- Arthur, N (2003) 'Preparing international students for the re-entry transition', *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 37(3), pp.173-185
- AUQA (2008a) *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities*, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Pages/GoodPracticePrinciples.aspx>
- AUQA (2008b) *Report of an Audit of The University of Adelaide*, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne, [http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/reports/auditreport\\_adelaide\\_2008.pdf](http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/reports/auditreport_adelaide_2008.pdf)
- AUQA (2009) *Report of an Audit of Curtin University of Technology*, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne, [http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/reports/auditreport\\_curtin\\_2009.pdf](http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/reports/auditreport_curtin_2009.pdf)
- Beard, C (2008) 'The 3C model: communicating the important stuff to new internationals', in *19th ISANA International Education Association Conference Proceedings*, T McGrath (ed.), ISANA International Education Association, <http://www.isana.org.au/cross-cultural-communication/the-3c-model-communicating-the-important-stuff-to-new-internationals.html>
- Brisbane City Council (2008) *International Education Futures Brisbane Taskforce: Report of Taskforce Findings*, Brisbane City Council
- Calvert, G (2006) *Empowering International Students to Prepare for their Working Life - Through an Informed Career Framework*, ISANA, [http://www.isana.org.au/files/thurs\\_c2\\_calvert.pdf](http://www.isana.org.au/files/thurs_c2_calvert.pdf)
- CDU (2002) 'Coping with Reverse Culture Shock', Charles Darwin University, [http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/attachments/Reverse\\_Culture\\_Shock.doc](http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/attachments/Reverse_Culture_Shock.doc)
- CDU (2008) 'Preparing to Leave', Charles Darwin University, <http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/current/goinghome/preparingtoleave.html>
- DEEWR (2009) *International Student Roundtable* Parliament House, Canberra: Communiqué, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/ReleaseData/Documents/090915\\_communique.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/ReleaseData/Documents/090915_communique.pdf)
- DEST (2007) *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia
- Fincher, R; Carter, P; Tombesi, P; Shaw, K; Martel, A (2009) *Transnational and Temporary: Students, Community and Place-Making in Central Melbourne – Final Report*, University of Melbourne, [http://www.transnationalandtemporary.com.au/publications/tat\\_final-report.pdf](http://www.transnationalandtemporary.com.au/publications/tat_final-report.pdf)
- Forbes-Mewett, H; Marginson, S; Nyland, C; Ramia, G; Sawir, E (2006) 'Income security of international students in Australia' in *Educate Advocate Empower: ISANA 2006 Conference Proceedings*, ISANA
- Forbes-Mewett, H; Marginson, S; Nyland, C; Ramia, G; Sawir, E (2009) 'Australian university international student finances', *Higher Education Policy*, 22(2), pp.141-161.
- Gibson, E (2005) 'The development of career services for international students', *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 14(2), pp.19-23
- Green, D & Healy, L (2008) *Planning and Running Orientation Programmes for International Students*, UK Council for International Student Affairs

- Hsu, PHC; Krageloh, CU; Shepherd, D; Billington, R (2009) 'Religion/spirituality and quality of life of international tertiary students in New Zealand: an exploratory study', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 12(4), pp.385-399
- ISANA (2008) *Orientation and Pre-Arrival Handbook: The Rainbow Guide*, <http://www.isana.org.au/site-general/consumer-protection-project-orientation-pre-arrival-handbook-2.html>
- ISANA (2008) *Critical Incidents Kit*, ISANA, <http://www.isana.org.au/files/ISANACriticalIncidentsKit.pdf>
- Kell, P; Schmelitschek, V; Smith, AM; Vogl, G (2008) 'Welcome to Wollongong Community Action Project', Paper presented at the ISANA National Conference, Auckland [http://www.isana.org.au/files/2008%20Conference%20Proceedings/paper\\_Kell.pdf](http://www.isana.org.au/files/2008%20Conference%20Proceedings/paper_Kell.pdf)
- Krause, K; Hartley, R; James, R; McInnis, C (2005) *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia, [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/first\\_year\\_experience.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/first_year_experience.htm)
- NAFSA (2000a) 'Principles for International Educational Exchange', in *NAFSA's Guide to International Student Recruitment*, Marie O'Hara, Karen Raftus and Joann Stedman (eds), NAFSA Association of International Educators, Washington DC, pp.163-70.
- NAFSA (2000b) 'Code of Ethics', in *NAFSA's Guide to International Student Recruitment*, Marie O'Hara, Karen Raftus and Joann Stedman (eds), NAFSA Association of International Educators, Washington DC, pp.171-6
- Nyland, C, Forbes-Mewett, H, Marginson, S, Ramia, G, Sawir, E, and Smith, S (2009) 'International student workers in Australia: a new vulnerable workforce' *Journal of Education and Work*, 22 (1), pp.1-14
- Ong, D (2009) *International Students' Handbook: Living and Studying in Australia*, UNSW Press
- Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Victoria (2008) *Taskforce Report* Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria, <http://www.isana.org.au/files/Overseas%20Student%20Experience%20Taskforce%20Report%202008.pdf>
- RMIT (2006) 'Death of a Student Procedure', RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse:ID=o59aswka58b9I>
- RMIT (2008) 'Missing International Onshore Student Procedure', RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse:ID=Qpk5xuyhyj3>
- Rosenthal, D; Russell, J; Thomson, G (2008) The health and wellbeing of international students at an Australian university higher education, *International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 55(1), pp.51-67
- Russell, J; Thomson, G; Rosenthal, D (2008) International student use of university health and counselling services, *International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 56(1), pp.59-75
- SBIT (2009) *International Critical Incident Management Policy*, Southbank Institute of Technology, <http://www.southbank.edu.au/site/students/policies/application.asp#CriticalIncident>
- Stanley, D (2008) 'Student Mentor Program Report: Foster Belongingness', Curtin University of Technology, School of Nursing and Midwifery, [http://retention.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/NURSING\\_STUDENT\\_MENTOR\\_REPORT12008\\_Sem\\_3.pdf](http://retention.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/NURSING_STUDENT_MENTOR_REPORT12008_Sem_3.pdf)