

Expert Members of the Council for International Education

Outcomes of issues considered by the Student Service
Delivery Working Group

August 2018

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
REDUCING EXPLOITATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	5
FACILITATING CONSISTENT AND ACCURATE PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION.....	7
IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ACCOMMODATION	9
FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES	11
IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICE IN IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.....	12
APPENDIX 1	13

INTRODUCTION

Goal 2 of the *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (the Strategy) is to deliver the best possible student experience for international students. As recognised in the Strategy, international students need a supportive and enabling environment to reach their full potential, and it is critical they have the assistance they need to perform academically and make meaningful connections.

Australia continues to be highly regarded as a study destination. 89 per cent of international tertiary students were satisfied with their overall experience in Australia¹. Australia also has strong quality assurance mechanisms, through the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018* (the National Code 2018) established under the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act). However, we cannot be complacent.

Both the sector and government must ensure Australia's offerings and policy settings are continually improved, and responsive to current issues impacting on international student experience.

To ensure we are continuing to provide safe and supportive environments for our international students, the Expert Members of the Council for International Education (Expert Members) formed the Student Service Delivery Working Group (Working Group), made up of a range of experts from the sector (**Appendix 1**), to determine what more could be done to enhance the international student experience. Over a period of six months, the Working Group considered the following key areas which align with the priorities identified by Expert Members in their 2018 Implementation Plan:

- Strategies to help reduce workplace exploitation of international students.
- Ways to facilitate consistent and accurate pre-departure information.
- Improving international students' experiences with accommodation.
- Fostering engagement between international students and communities.
- Identifying best practice in improving employability of international students.

Working Group members undertook a number of activities, ranging from surveys, analysis of current data, key reports and examples of good practice, and discussed the many support mechanisms already in place across government and by providers.

A key theme that emerged from Working Group's investigations is that despite current mechanisms and information available to international students, these can be inconsistent, not easily accessible and not always timely. Moreover, information without additional support is not always enough to ensure appropriate outcomes.

This document provides a brief overview of the issues considered by the Working Group and identifies approaches agreed by the Expert Members for further action.

¹ 2016 International Student Survey

AGREED APPROACH

1. Expert Members note that workplace exploitation issues are first and foremost issues for employers. Members welcome the Migrant Workers' Taskforce consideration of measures that can help address exploitation where it occurs, particularly in those industries where international students are most commonly employed, and to enable access to redress for victims of exploitation (for example, through the work of the Fair Work Ombudsman).

Expert Members reiterated their ongoing support for the continuation of existing workplace rights that are critical for international students, including the current essential 40 hour per fortnight limit on work during study periods, noting they are an important component of Australia's education offering.

2. Expert Members recognise that international students are a vulnerable cohort and that education providers have an important role to support them to avoid exploitation or seek redress. Expert Members agree in-principle that providers should:
 - a. support students by ensuring they have access to the right information at the right time. This information will vary depending on the needs of the students but should include information about workplace rights, how to identify and avoid potential workplace exploitation and how to seek assistance through the Fair Work Ombudsman where students may have been exploited;
 - b. advise international students experiencing workplace exploitation on how to access existing redress mechanisms. This support could be offered by a member of the provider's student support personnel, or through other services at no-cost to the student (such as the Fair Work Ombudsman, state or sector support services, or organisations such as Redfern legal Centre);
 - c. take a leading role in eliminating workplace exploitation and underpayment on campus by requiring on-campus businesses, including franchisees and contractors, comply with state and federal workplace laws.
3. Expert Members agree consideration be given to workplace exploitation issues when the National Code 2018 is next revised.
4. Expert Members agree the Department of Education and Training, the Fair Work Ombudsman and regulators develop guidance material to support education providers in dealing with workplace exploitation of international students.
5. Expert Members agree the government work with the sector and other stakeholders to identify mechanisms to collate data about international students' experiences of working in Australia.
6. Expert Members agree to develop a package of actions to enable education providers to better support international students experiencing workplace exploitation.
7. Expert Members endorse the Student Accommodation Association as one body that could:
 - a. develop clear definitions to provide structure to the international student accommodation market;
 - b. work with relevant stakeholders and regulators to ensure better understanding of requirements for students under 18 years old; and
 - c. work with states and territories to inform regulatory frameworks and minimum standards, review licensing around tenancy and sub-tenancy arrangements and ensure planning alignment for accommodation.

8. Expert Members will work with the education sector to encourage the development of standards around the quality of homestay accommodation for international students.
9. Expert Members agree to use their networks to encourage providers to exceed the minimum requirements under the ESOS Act pertaining to the provision of accommodation information, including in relation to their tenancy rights and responsibilities.
10. Expert Members agree to continue work on the identified priority 'Communicating the benefits of international education to the Australian community', and consider:
 - a. developing a non-economic narrative around the value and benefits of international education;
 - b. promoting study in regional areas;
 - c. developing strategies to encourage engagement between international and domestic students; and
 - d. communicating good practice in the area of community engagement.

FURTHER ACTIONS

The Expert Members discussed ways to facilitate consistent and accurate pre-departure information, and the range of issues that should be covered by a pre-departure guide for international students. Through the 2017-18 round of the Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, Universities Australia has been funded \$90,000 for the project: International University Students and Pre-departure information: What are they getting and what do they need?. The Working Group's feedback in relation to pre-departure guides will be considered by Universities Australia in the delivery of this project. Universities Australia will also continue to consult throughout the project's development.

The Expert Members also discussed issues relating to the employability of international students, and noted the importance of industry voice and representation in gaining a better understanding of the barriers to greater adoption of work-integrated learning (WIL) and workplace-based learning (WBL). As part of its future work program and communications strategy, Expert Members will seek to ensure greater industry engagement, and will call on the expertise of Working Group members as issues are considered. Further work is also being undertaken on the subject of WIL and industry engagement through projects funded through Enabling Growth and Innovation Program in 2016-17 and 2017-18.

REDUCING EXPLOITATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

(Expert Member Implementation Plan: A1)

International students are a cohort vulnerable to workplace exploitation. In many cases English is not their first language, they have less work experience and lower familiarity with Australian workplace conditions and laws. Exploitation of international students in the labour market is systemic where their employment is significant. Recent surveys have suggested that in excess of 40 percent of international students working are being paid less than minimum awards rates². The Fair Work Ombudsman has focused significant attention on the problems being encountered by international students³. However, for a range of reasons international students are often reluctant to complain to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

The international education sector, along with the Department of Education and Training, recognise the important role education providers have in reducing the vulnerability of international students and supporting those who have been exploited.

In examining the range of existing strategies and activities in this area, it was clear that the sector is already working to varying degrees to assist in preventing exploitation and to provide means of redress when exploitation has occurred. The heterogeneous nature of the international education sector means that approaches differ between university, VET, school and ELICOS providers.

Expert Members noted that, while education providers have a responsibility to support international students, workplace exploitation is primarily an employment issue, most effectively addressed at the workplace level. There are limitations on prevention and support activities that education providers can give to students, because it is the unlawful actions of employers which perpetrate exploitation of employees, including international students. This must be addressed directly at the workplace level. Further research is also needed to assess student compliance with the work restrictions under the International Student Visa.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities to better promote the international education sector's work, build on existing initiatives, and extend examples of good practice to ensure a comprehensive, sector-wide response. In particular, an independent survey of international students has highlighted the need for education service providers to provide more direct forms of assistance to international students to encourage them to report cases of exploitation to the Fair Work Ombudsman⁴.

² Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, *Wage Theft in Australia*, 2017; Alexander Reilly, Joanna Howe, Laurie Berg, Basina Farbenblum and Dr. George Tan, *International Students and the Fair Work Ombudsman*, March 2017

³ Fair work Ombudsman, "New strategy to raise international students' awareness of workplace rights", media release, 25 September 2017

⁴ "The survey suggested that a very productive way to improve international student access to FWO's services would be through engaging education providers in the provision of FWO's services. Over 70% of respondents indicated they would contact FWO about a workplace issue if they could do so through their education institution". Alexander Reilly, Joanna Howe, Laurie Berg, Basina Farbenblum and Dr. George Tan, *International Students and the Fair Work Ombudsman*, March 2017, p.6.

Expert Members acknowledged continuing work underway by the Migrant Workers' Taskforce, chaired by Professor Allan Fels AO, which has been set up to identify further proposals for improvements in law, law enforcement and investigation, and other practical measures to more quickly identify and rectify any cases of migrant worker exploitation.

AGREED APPROACH

1. Expert Members note that workplace exploitation issues are first and foremost issues for employers. Members welcome the Migrant Workers' Taskforce consideration of measures that can help address exploitation where it occurs, particularly in those industries where international students are most commonly employed, and to enable access to redress for victims of exploitation (for example, through the work of the Fair Work Ombudsman).

Expert Members reiterated their ongoing support for the continuation of existing workplace rights that are critical for international students, including the current essential 40 hour per fortnight limit on work during study periods, noting they are an important component of Australia's education offering.

2. Expert Members recognise that international students are a vulnerable cohort and that education providers have an important role to support them to avoid exploitation or seek redress. Expert Members agree in-principle that providers should:
 - a. support students by ensuring they have access to the right information at the right time. This information will vary depending on the needs of the students but should include information about workplace rights, how to identify and avoid potential workplace exploitation and how to seek assistance through the Fair Work Ombudsman where students may have been exploited;
 - b. advise international students experiencing workplace exploitation on how to access existing redress mechanisms. This support could be offered by a member of the provider's student support personnel, or through other services at no-cost to the student (such as the Fair Work Ombudsman, state or sector support services, or organisations such as Redfern legal Centre);
 - c. take a leading role in eliminating workplace exploitation and underpayment on campus by requiring on-campus businesses, including franchisees and contractors, comply with state and federal workplace laws.
3. Expert Members agree consideration be given to workplace exploitation issues when the National Code 2018 is next revised.
4. Expert Members agree the Department of Education and Training, the Fair Work Ombudsman and regulators develop guidance material to support education providers in dealing with workplace exploitation of international students.
5. Expert Members agree the government work with the sector and other stakeholders to identify mechanisms to collate data about international students' experiences of working in Australia.
6. Expert Members agree to develop a package of actions to enable education providers to better support international students experiencing workplace exploitation.

FACILITATING CONSISTENT AND ACCURATE PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

(Expert Member Implementation Plan: A2)

In 2016, 90 per cent of international tertiary students were satisfied with the support services provided during their study in Australia⁵. However, anecdotal reports suggest some international students face accommodation issues, feel isolated, struggle to adapt to a more self-directed and flexible study environment, and for those living away from home for the first time, are challenged by independence in an unfamiliar country. This emphasises the importance of the delivery of consistent, accurate and timely pre-departure information to international students.

The National Code 2018 acknowledges the importance of providing international students with information on adjusting to study and life in Australia (Standard 6). The Standard requires all providers give the required information via an age and culturally appropriate orientation program. However, as the Standards focus on an overarching framework, the provision content is subject to interpretation by education institutions. A single model pre-departure guide or framework for the sector to draw on would ensure a consistent approach and coverage for incoming international students, both at orientation and prior to departure. Any framework would consider all sub-sectors.

Considering current examples of good practice, and research previously conducted by International Education Association Inc. (ISANA) and RMIT in relation to enhancing social dimension of the international student experience, the Working Group considered the key features of good pre-departure information to be the provision of:

- honest, accurate and comprehensive information through multiple channels and languages on key aspects of student life in the relevant location, including on work rights, costs and safety;
- accurate and timely advice to students by agents;
- advice and support prior to arrival, at orientation and at key stages throughout their study.

Currently, many large education providers may have more capacity to address the needs of international students with these principles in mind. Common themes are checklists, visa and student health cover information, general information on studying, living and working and contact information for support services. Components of this information are already set out on the www.studyinaustralia.gov.au site.

Expert Members suggested the issues raised above could be moderated through up to date pre-departure guides, publicly available to parents and students, containing accurate, helpful and consistent messages. The Department of Education and Training, following earlier work by ISANA, are developing a pre-departure guide for Chinese students studying in Australia. Expert Members agreed that this guide, following editing, could be used as a basis for providers to use and/or complement information already available at some institutions.

FUTURE ACTION

Through the 2017-18 round of the Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, Universities Australia has been funded \$90,000 for the project: *International University Students and Pre-departure information: What are they getting and what do they need?*

⁵ 2016 International Student Survey

The Working Group's feedback in relation to pre-departure guides will be considered by Universities Australia in the delivery of this project. Universities Australia will also continue to consult throughout the project's development.

IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ACCOMMODATION (Expert Member Implementation Plan: A3)

The increasing growth in international student numbers means there is increasing pressure to provide safe, secure and affordable accommodation. The 2016 International Student Survey found 89 per cent of tertiary students were satisfied with their overall living conditions in Australia. However, international students remain particularly vulnerable to exploitation in their accommodation arrangements. Anecdotally, dissatisfaction is common but underreported, with international students frequently experiencing poor service and exploitation in overcrowded accommodation through sub-tenancy arrangements. Often, international students lack an understanding of complicated accommodation processes, namely leasing arrangements, and their rights as tenants.

Managing the expectations of students and improving the availability and quality of information around accommodation is crucial. Under the ESOS Act there is a requirement for education institutions to provide accommodation information to international students, however the level of assistance can vary from institution to institution.

Expert Members noted the Working Group had considered the recommendations of the KPMG report⁶, commissioned under the 2016-17 Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, in relation to sharing economy models, and user review rating schemes. In considering the report, the Working Group identified a need for clear definitions to provide more structure around the international student accommodation market. Definitions could be used as a guide across the sector and as a foundation for the development of quality standards and good practice guidance. Greater planning alignment and reviews of residential tenancy codes would also assist in improving the provision of student accommodation and prevent exploitation. Additionally, with the growth in the number of international students under the age of 18 undertaking courses outside the school sector, such as foundation courses at universities and ELICOS courses, there is a need to better communicate the regulatory requirements for this cohort on a jurisdictional basis.

AGREED APPROACH

7. Expert Members endorse the Student Accommodation Association as one body that could:
 - a. develop clear definitions to provide structure to the international student accommodation market;
 - b. work with relevant stakeholders and regulators to ensure better understanding of requirements for students under 18 years old; and
 - c. work with states and territories to inform regulatory frameworks and minimum standards, review licensing around tenancy and sub-tenancy arrangements and ensure planning alignment for accommodation.
8. Expert Members will work with the education sector to encourage the development of standards around the quality of homestay accommodation for international students.

⁶ KPMG, 'A Sharing Economy model for international student accommodation: Scoping Study and Recommendations', April 2018, commissioned through the 2016-17 Enabling Growth and Innovation Program

9. Expert Members use their networks to encourage providers to exceed the minimum requirements under the ESOS Act pertaining to the provision of accommodation information, including in relation to their tenancy rights and responsibilities.

FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

(Expert Member Implementation Plan: A4)

The Expert Members identified a need to develop advice on how the sector can enhance the study experience for international students, including through student governance on campus and in engagement with domestic students. In considering this identified need, the Working Group chose to look more broadly at how the sector can enhance the student experience not only on campus, but in the community.

As outlined in the National Strategy, engagement between international students and Australian communities is pivotal to a positive student experience. International students not only contribute heavily to our economy, they also enrich our local communities, building cultural understanding, respect and enduring relationships. However, a lack of understanding in the community about the economic, cultural and social benefits can lead to a negative perception of international students and a lack of willingness to engage with them. The reasons for this, anecdotally, relate to misconceptions about international students taking domestic student places, jobs and accommodation.

Through the 2016-17 Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) has been funded to develop toolkits to promote greater understanding of the benefits of international students in communities and by employers, and will identify good practice case studies. Acknowledging that this IEAA project was underway, the Expert Members discussed a number of areas where more effort could be focused. In particular, Expert Members acknowledged the importance of building a stronger narrative around the social and cultural benefits of international students in addition to economic benefits.

This narrative will reflect Working Group discussions of the importance of promoting and incentivising international students to study in regional and remote areas. Many of Australia's top research strengths are located in regional Australia, providing great opportunities in the fields of agriculture, marine science and tropical medicine. Living and studying in regional Australia also offers a unique community life. Taking advantage of these existing assets will unlock benefits for students, regions and Australia as a whole.

AGREED APPROACH

10. Expert Members agree to continue work on the identified priority 'Communicating the benefits of international education to the Australian community', and consider:
 - a. developing a non-economic narrative around the value and benefits of international education;
 - b. promoting study in regional areas;
 - c. developing strategies to encourage engagement between international and domestic students; and
 - d. communicating good practice in the area of community engagement.

IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICE IN IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

(Expert Member Implementation Plan: A5)

Work-integrated learning (WIL) or workplace-based learning (WBL) is generally acknowledged as a key element to enhancing employability in the workplace. Ensuring our education and training systems are producing international students with the skills they need to gain employment requires ongoing engagement with industry and business. The types of WIL and WBL are many, and vary from institution to institution and between education sectors.

In its discussions, the Working Group acknowledged the need to better utilise existing data and the need for further data on how WIL or WBL impacts on employability outcomes for international students. Further, the Working Group identified a need to engage with international students to better understand their employability needs. Universities Australia (UA), funded through the 2016-17 Enabling Growth and Innovation Program, is also currently conducting an audit of WIL across the university sector, which will serve as a national baseline to determine areas for improvement and showcase examples of good practice. A greater focus on data and the outcomes of the UA project will provide a base to develop advice on strategies to strengthen employability outcomes for international students. Further, examination of activity in the VET sector, where WBL experience is entrenched in many qualifications, will also provide examples of best practice.

The Working Group acknowledged the difficulty education providers experience in getting industry to the table to support WIL and WBL. Discussions regarding the employability of international students need to involve industry representatives to work through barriers to greater adoption of WIL and WBL, and ensure greater understanding of the benefits that international students can bring to business. The IEAA project mentioned previously, and some current resources such as IEAAs 'International Students: A Guide for Australian Employers' provide a good starting point here. The Working Group highlighted incentives as a potential mechanism to engage industry in the provision of WIL and WBL, such as payments to businesses and/or tax breaks.

FURTHER ACTION

As part of its future work program and communications strategy, Expert Members of Council will seek to ensure greater industry engagement, and Expert Members will call on the expertise of Working Group members as issues are considered. Further work is also being undertaken on the subject of WIL and industry engagement through projects funded through Enabling Growth and Innovation Program in 2016-17 and 2017-18.

APPENDIX 1

Student Service Delivery Working Group - Membership

The Expert Members acknowledge the input and advice from the Student Service Delivery Working Group members, as outlined below. While Expert Members took into account the advice from Working Group, the final approach does not necessarily reflect the views of all Working Group members.

David Riordan (Chair) – Director, City Operations, City of Sydney

Rebecca Bendall – Partnerships Manager, Urbanest Student Accommodation

Alex Chevrolle – Executive Director, University Partnership, Study Group

David Cousins – Deputy Chair, Migrant Worker Taskforce

The Hon Phil Honeywood – Chief Executive Officer, International Education Association of Australia

Mary Faraone – Chief Executive, Holmesglen Institute

Jane Favalaro - General Manager, Partnerships, Iglu Pty Ltd

Leigh Pointon – College Director & Principal, Griffith College

Bijay Sapkota - National President, Council of International Students Australia

Mary Ann Seow – Immediate Past President of ISANA International Education Association

Elizabeth Webber – Chief Education Officer, DE International, NSW Department of Education

Dr John Wellard – Policy Director – International, Universities Australia