

UKCISA
members' magazine
Summer 2008
Issue 25

PMI Overseas Study Visits Special

An investigation into international education initiatives to enhance the experience of international students

The involvement and development of international students within volunteer programmes

The integration of international students with Dutch students and the local community

A study of on-going programmes offered to develop intercultural awareness and communication

A comparative study of the processes of social integration

**World
Views**



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World Views, UKCISA members' magazine is published by UKCISA.

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ISSN 1468-652X

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Introduction

Dear colleagues

I am delighted that we are able to feature, in this special edition of World Views, reports on a number of carefully researched overseas visits by colleagues from the UK, looking at techniques and processes in other countries which help to contribute to the highest quality international student experience.

The visits were funded by the (UK) Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI) which has, as its over-riding objective, the positioning of the UK as the world's leading partner for international education. That might, at first sight, be seen in exclusively competitive terms – and without doubt that is one of the aims of the Initiative and doubtless one of the aims for individuals and institutions, to ensure their services are better than others.

UKCISA's interests, however, and clearly the interests of the authors, goes far wider and, as in other parts of the education sector, the key driver is to ensure that by sharing experiences and comparing and contrasting approaches, we all gain knowledge and insights which can help to raise standards for all, and

ensure, wherever they study, a higher quality experience for individual international students.

We hope you will learn from the reports and share them with colleagues (they are also available on our website at <www.ukcisa.org.uk/pmi>). If there are further points you would like to know, I am sure the authors would be happy to hear from you. We also hope that, with additional funding, there will be opportunities for others to make similar visits in the future and that, from these or future reports, institutions may consider introducing new practices or approaches.

All the authors have expressed huge gratitude to their hosts – both staff and students – for the generous amount of time and enthusiasm given to them during their stays and also to colleagues in their home institutions for supporting them, through providing extended leave or assistance in other ways.

Dominic Scott

Chief Executive

An investigation into international education initiatives to enhance the experience of international students (Monash University, Australia)

by Christina Leong,
Academic Registry, Keele University

My study visit focused on transition and integration initiatives to enhance international student experiences. Monash University, as I have observed, has developed a very positive atmosphere of openness and approachability for new students. Staff employ a very personal approach and this helps to foster a very positive personal experience. As a direct result of the broad range of procedures which were introduced for international students, Monash enjoys a very high level of student satisfaction and an outstanding international student retention rate of 94%. As a result of my visit, I discovered there are number of innovative procedures and initiatives which can be used at UK educational institutions.

Introduction

Australia is widely known as one of the primary destinations for international students seeking to study outside their home country, after the US and UK. The latest research by the Australian Education Promotion body (IDP) predicts a massive increase of 291,000 international students by 2025 (up from 165,000 in 2005) applying to Australian universities. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research report claimed that Australia is the country with the highest proportion of international students, with 17.3% of the campus population from overseas.

My overseas study visit was planned in order to investigate how one of the most major Australian universities, in this case Monash University, prepared for and managed international education initiatives in order to enhance the experience of international students and

thereby increase student satisfaction and encourage retention.

Monash University is arguably Australia's most internationalised university. It has eight campuses, six in Australia, one in Malaysia and another in South Africa, and a research and teaching centre in Italy. It is Australia's largest university with a student population of over 55,000. Of these, more than 14,000 are international students enrolled at Australian campuses. Monash's biggest campus, Clayton, was ranked the best institution for student experience by an Australia national student body in 2007.

[1] <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22482190-12332,00.html>

Monash is also a member of the prestigious "Group of Eight", a lobby group composed of some of the most research-intensive universities in Australia.

My visit was organised through Monash's Health, Wellbeing and Development office (HWD), a student services division offering support and advice to students and staff on counselling, family and child care, chaplaincy, financial issues, accommodation and issues to do with mental and physical health. A two-week visit programme was arranged by the International Student Experience Co-ordinator, which enabled me to meet the many other staff across the various departments who deal with prospective and current international student matters. This includes faculty staff, central administration staff, support services staff within HWD and residential services and also with various international student societies' presidents and committee members. As I had arrived towards the end of

Monash's orientation period and visited three campuses, I had the opportunity to get first-hand experience in some of the social activities they offer to new international students.

Key findings about Monash University

Feedback from Monash students suggests that the most important transition time for a student is during their first four weeks at university. Various programmes and activities have been established in order to support students through this often difficult time. A Monash Transition Policy was established in response to this with the aim of providing mass education whilst embracing student diversity with a comprehensive programme to support students in their process of adjustment to the university environment. An explicit requirement of this policy was the aim of meeting transition needs throughout the course of students' university experience and beyond.

[2] For general information on transition policy: <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/education/management/transition-policy.html>

Monash have created an impressive and varied programme of activities and initiatives, and the key elements of their support programme are listed below:

1. Transition – Orientation

New students are expected to attend the scheduled programme of activities held at the beginning of the academic year as part of the orientation process. Academic programmes, social activities and independent living skills have been designed to help students adjust successfully to university life and study. Faculties are responsible for academic

transition, while student unions and support services help students achieve social transition.

E-Orientation (Pre-Arrival)

An e-orientation programme was launched in 2006 to enable new students to plan their itinerary for orientation by using an online process. This tool allows students to tailor-make their personal orientation programme by selecting their home campus, faculty and a number of other criteria. The planner produces a list of activities which have been categorised as compulsory, highly recommended or general. Events are listed in date and time order and include a brief description of the event, details of location and presenter. According to a satisfaction survey, students have registered very positive comments in relation to this programme when it has been run in previous years.

Student Orientation checklist (On-Arrival)

This is a guide which aims to get students thinking about some of the issues they will face as a new student at university. To complete the checklist they have to investigate the University websites, participate in numerous activities and faculty-based programmes, and meet with other students and various Monash staff during orientation. New students are

required to complete a satisfaction survey at the end of the orientation week so the University can review the programme in the following years.

[3] <http://www.monash.edu.au/transition/current/checklist.html>

Orientation Week (O'Week)

Whilst the Study Abroad/International Exchange office hosts a separate orientation for overseas exchange students, O'Week has, over the years, evolved to become an integrated orientation for all new students, with specific sessions for international students. Programmes and activities are organised by faculties, support services and various student organisations and are similar to those found in UK HE orientation programmes. An interesting element of the O'Week timetable is the safety awareness session where safety officers or representatives of the police are invited to give talks or presentations on crime prevention and campus watch initiatives. In addition to this, a free engraving service for student property is provided by the university security department.

Student Survival Week

A Student Survival week is conducted around Week 4 to show students where to go to find help with adjusting to university life. On each campus, student

associations focus on activities that suit students' situations and issues that may arise for them, such as helping with a range of academic programmes, social activities and independent living skills. The aim is to be proactive about student life and to try to provide the tools for students to cope with the unexpected, or to know where to go if they need further support.

2. Integration and cross-cultural initiatives

Peer Mentor Programme

The Peer Mentor Programme is designed to assist new international students in settling in to their studies and becoming independent. It pairs up a senior student with a new student by faculty or home country.

Mentors are requested to commit to seeing between one and three new international students for one hour a week for the first six weeks of the semester. He or she will also be required to attend group mentor meetings and social activities with the mentees. Mentors benefit from this by receiving free leadership and cultural awareness training and certificates.

International Friendship Programme

The aim of this programme is to introduce international students to Australian volunteers and their families for the purpose of developing cross-



cultural friendships. It provides social and practical support for international students by establishing friendships and cultural exchange.

[4] <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/community-services/family/friendship-volunteer.html>

Students get to experience Australian culture first-hand as well as the opportunity to practise and improve their English language skills in real-life situations. Promotional material and emails are sent out to international students prior to arrival. These students can register their interest for the programme whilst still in their home country and are interviewed (after they have arrived at the University) before the co-ordinator matches them with a member of the community. Students and volunteers can sign up for the programme at any time in the year. Volunteers are recruited from appropriate sources within the local community, eg alumni, staff members, home students and Australians living in the local community who may not have had a direct link with Monash. Volunteers contact and meet the student once they have been matched and provide practical assistance and information to students about living in Australia, for example guidance on using the public transport system,

where to do shopping etc. Since starting this programme in 2006 at the biggest campus (Clayton), it has proven to be so popular amongst new international students that the University is now planning to roll it out to all Australian campuses in the near future.

Language Exchange Programme

This programme matches international students with Australian students who are studying a foreign language for one hour per week of language exchange and is strongly promoted by university lecturers. Once appropriate volunteers have been identified, contact details are emailed to the language partners for the first meeting arrangement. International students benefit from learning about Australian culture and developing their informal communication skills through language exchange.

3. Student health, well-being and development programmes

Mental health first-aid training programme for staff working closely with international students

This is a 12-hour course which was originally developed in 2001 at the centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University. The course provides participants with the knowledge and understanding to be able to make an initial response

to chronic or acute mental health illness. Participants learn the signs and symptoms of key mental health problems, where and how to get help and what sort of help has been shown by research to be effective. The university has set itself a target of at least 6% of Monash staff, especially staff from residential services, support services, academic tutors, to be trained in this course. Staff are more confident in providing help to students after the course.

Podcasting student support materials to promote positive health and well-being on Monash internet radio station

'The Clinic' is a radio programme aimed at students which has been developed and is hosted by administrative staff to maximise the quality of the student experience by informing students of how best to handle each stage of the student life-cycle, and letting them know about the resources available to help them. Students can download the podcasts if they have missed the original broadcast. Statistics indicate that a special podcast created for orientation week attracted 715 downloads. Further to above programme, HWD is currently implementing several other podcasts to raise services in general.

Further details can be found at [5] <http://radiomonash.net/index.html>



4. Faculty Transition Model

Faculty of Art and Design –

Discovery Week

Recognising the importance of social integration, the Faculty of Art and Design has tailor-made an innovative 'Discovery Week' for all its new students in the first semester. Twenty groups of cross-gender, cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary students are randomly selected into a 'subgroup' of five.

Each group of students is required to participate in a series of fun and creative activities which are designed by the committee to develop students' creative abilities and practices. During Discovery Week, students complete occupational health and safety training, visit art galleries and engage in various group activities and social gatherings with year 2 and 3 students. This helps to break down barriers and encourage the students to mix together in a relaxed, informal atmosphere, whilst sharing a common team focus. An interactive orientation package has been created to help ease the transition.

Details can be found online at [6] http://artdes.monash.edu.au/sas/students/orientation/content/im_in.html

As a Faculty with fewer international students compared to, say, the Business and Economics Faculty, the Dean of Art and Design has clearly made a concerted

effort to support new entrants from overseas and encourage the growth of a diverse learning community. Indeed they also boast an International Liaison Officer who is responsible for intervention and advocacy for the faculty's international students as well as supporting their teaching and learning.

Reflections on implementing learning points at Keele University

The current orientation/fresher week should be repackaged to include input from the student union and societies, faculties/schools, central administration, student support and facilities. The University should consider forming an orientation steering committee with representatives from each division, to introduce an integrated orientation programme for all new students, with specific sessions for overseas students.

Active Keele (CFM's healthy campus initiative which consists of a series of sport and fitness activities) should be promoted and introduced as part of orientation at the beginning of the academic year. Icebreaker games and activities, international film nights etc are all appropriate examples of interactive social activities that have been identified as effective support tools in making the transition to student life.

Working in conjunction with the relevant police department/borough

council in relation to promote safety and offering 'smartwater' kits (a property marking system which mark personal valuables discreetly so that lost property can be reunited with its owner) to students etc. Community support officers, security wardens and/or police representatives should also be invited to give presentations on safety awareness and crime prevention.

To further develop or implement current initiatives to attract international students and support them whilst they arrived at the University, Keele will need to have at least an International Office or a team of staff dedicated to service this group of students. Current limitation on resources and staff to support international students' transition and integration will need to be acknowledged by the University management.

Reflections on learning points for other UK institutions

According to the British Council's 'Creating Confidence' booklet, an international safety survey shows that over 60% of international students were not offered a chance to attend a safety talk by their institutions and over 85% had not attended a personal safety talk from the police. Some students suggested that safety issues should be addressed by institutions. 528 out of 535 students who have



attended safety talks found them to be useful and reassuring.

[7]http://www.britishcouncil.org/creating_confidence_-_international_student_safety_survey_-_july_2007.pdf

Personal safety and crime prevention awareness have become increasingly important, especially in recent years; UK institutions may therefore wish to consider implementing such workshops as a part of their induction programme.

International students' mental health needs – Mental health is an 'invisible disability' which needs to be addressed by many institutions if they have not already done so. As learning providers, UK institutions have a duty of care to students and need to be more proactive in looking after their well-being. Campus shootings have occurred in the USA and Australian universities in recent years, and whilst politicians and the media have focused on firearms legislation and campus security, the underlying issue is that there was no unified early intervention mechanism in place. This is a clear indication that educational establishments need to do more to promote positive well-being and prevent mental health problems.

Reflections on national policy issues raised

It has been identified that fostering

friendship between international students and British students/families would enhance international students' experience immensely. This type of programme has proved to be beneficial and popular amongst international students living and studying in the UK. In the light of these findings it seems appropriate that the decision to withdraw funding from the HostUK organisation in the UK in 2008, which provides a very similar service to that described previously, should be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The value of this type of scheme seems inarguable and to remove government funding for such a positive and renowned initiative seems a decidedly retrograde step and defeats the purpose of seeking to nurture the levels of satisfaction of international students.

A meeting with Monash's International Education Director revealed that Australian legislation, Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) national framework, has changed academia's perceptions and that they are now required to consider student experience as a priority. Staff who deal with international students are required to attend ESOS workshops. This, in return, has contributed to a better level of customer service for international students. A campus student experience network has been formed by Monash senior management

and there are regular meetings with staff representatives across all campuses. In addition, International Student Association presidents from all campuses hold meetings with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor to discuss various international student issues. I have found this legislation very intriguing, as there is currently no national code of practice or legislation in the UK to act as a service quality standards mechanism for learning providers to international students. It would be in the interests of international students in the UK to have similar legislation and adequate measures in place to protect them as consumers. After all, international education is a very expensive investment and could cause great distress and financial hardship should things go wrong.

The UK is a rapidly evolving multicultural society. In recent years, there has been an influx of Eastern European migrants, as well as immigrants of ethnic minorities previously settled in the UK. In addition to this, the UK government aims to attract an additional 100,000 international students to study in the UK. The sector must acknowledge this social transformation and develop in their students intercultural competencies that include various skills that allow the students to deal with social and cultural differences.





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The involvement and development of international students within volunteer programmes

(Boston University, University of Massachusetts, Northeastern University, Harvard & MIT)

*by Claire Massey, Volunteer Co-ordinator,
University of Plymouth Students' Union*

Introduction

In March 2008 I visited five Higher Education Institutions in Boston with the support of the Prime Ministers Initiative grant programme.

The objective of the visit was to look at the involvement and development of international students within volunteer programmes at the institutions, their accreditation, and their role in the enhancement of the overall student experience. The visit also focused on the development of a volunteer exchange programme between USA institutions and UK HEIs and the possible development of joint international volunteering projects in the developing world.

In November 2006, the General Manager of UPSU attended a conference in Boston and took in a tour of a number of institutions in the Boston area. During these visits it was noted how much the programmes were linked to the student experience and how much the international students at each institution engaged with them. This is something which is going to be fundamental to the development of the UK experience if competitiveness with other countries is to be improved.

During the ten-day visit, meetings were held with the following representatives from the following five HEIs:

- Director of the Student Activities Centre at Boston University
- Assistant Dean and Director of the Public Service Centre at Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Senior Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Athletics, Recreation, Special Projects and Programs at the University of Massachusetts
- Director of the Student Activity

Centre at Northeastern University
– Manager of Phillips Brooks House Association, Harvard University

The student population the five HEIs varied greatly – from 6,000 at Harvard to 13,000 at the University of Massachusetts. The student demographics and the number of international students taking part in community service opportunities also varied greatly, as can be seen in the Key Findings Section.

Outcomes

The PMI study visit to five HEIs in Boston showed the importance and commitment of the Universities to community engagement, the enhancement of student experience and the personal development of students. Volunteering and community action is extremely popular in Boston, and this has been related to the fact that many have previously taken part in community volunteering from an early age via faith-based activities for example, or through their schooling.

Investment is a major key to the success of many of their programmes. Investment not just by the University but through national policies, and the government, and investment that is long term, committed and focused on the sustainability of volunteering and community service departments. Funding for UK HEIs from the current TQEF is only committed currently until the end of 2009 and has been delivered in three-year rounds until now. The uncertainty of UK funding does not make long-term planning and the expansion of successful volunteering activities in UK HEIs an easy task, as

workers are always aware that funding their funding stream is time limited.

Each of the five HEIs has considerable investment from their University as well as a commitment for this to increase and for community engagement to be a major part of their mission statements as education providers.

Feedback from the five HEIs showed international students to be self-motivated and engage at high levels with volunteering. This is partly due to the length of their studies in Boston – their need to meet people, the fact that they cannot undertake paid work in the USA, and also due to the week-long pre-course activities promoted to them prior to starting their academic studies.

Key findings

International students

The study highlighted several key points regarding international students and their engagement with community volunteering projects. It became clear that at the five HEIs visited, engaging international students was relatively easy and highly successful as many students are on exchange programmes for one, two or three terms and as such often look to be involved in extra curricula activities as a way to make friends and learn about the city they live in.

International students are unable to work in the USA and so volunteering is one way of gaining valuable experience, accessing training programmes and meeting both students and the community.

Student tuition fees are high in the USA and international students can pay £25,000 a year to attend University. After meeting with the HEIs many felt

that due to the high cost of education international students are keen to maximise their experience and want to get involved with community volunteering projects right from the start.

UMass was the only public University visited and had the greatest diversity of students studying at their campuses. 13,000 students study a range of part-time, two-year, and full-time four-year courses; the average student age is 27 and there is no campus-based accommodation. The average travel time to campus is 45 minutes; many students are the first of their family to attend an HEI; are from blue collar families; have families to care for, are international students, and have to undertake paid work to support their studies. In 2007 there were nearly 2000 war veterans undertaking courses at UMass campuses and the number of refugees applying to attend was increasing.

As a result of the demographics at UMass, the Community Service Office targets international students for volunteering activities as they are unable to undertake paid work. All other community projects and volunteering projects are linked to student's studies and they receive course credits or are part of Service Learning programmes that provide grants and financial aid to those taking part in volunteering activities. Further details of some of the Service Learning programmes are highlighted later in this report.

'Pre-Orientation Weeks'

All five HEIs operate 'pre-orientation weeks' prior to the start of the academic year. These weeks offer a range of activities, talks and trips around the city in order for new students to orientate themselves with their new surroundings. The weeks are booked up to a year in advance in some cases and the number of students wanting to take part increases each year. According to the feedback gained from the meetings, the pre-orientation weeks are very popular with international students as it is seen as a way to make friends, move into their accommodation early and take part in volunteering activities. The International Offices at the HEIs are integral in the planning of the weeks and work with the students and staff that run the projects in order to make sure the support systems are in place and the correct information is provided.

Every year Harvard University runs a First Year Urban Programme

for 100 students who apply and pay for the course one year in advance. Students are provided with a pre-course reading package prior to the week for discussion sessions in the evenings. Subject matter in 2007 included racism, issues affecting international students, what volunteering means and how community engagement benefits everyone. 40% of those taking part in the Pre-orientation week at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2007 were international students, with 8% of those being graduates.

The First-Year Student Outreach Project (FYSOP) offers incoming Boston University students an opportunity to get settled in their new community by performing a week of volunteering activities before the academic year begins. FYSOP volunteers participate in introduction sessions, a day of education, and three days of volunteering projects and activities in areas of their choice. In 2007 the FYSOP volunteers completed over 13,000 hours of service in the Greater Boston Area. These hours have an immediate impact on the community and give volunteers the opportunity to learn and create new friendships through service.

Accreditation and Grant Programmes

The student demographics at UMass has led to faculty-wide accreditation of volunteering activity as this enables students who want to undertake such work but have many other commitments out of their University time, to do so. UMass was the only HEI visited that had formal accreditation systems in place.

A report commissioned by UMass in 2006 showed that there were 225 formal accredited courses that included Service Learning and Community Based Learning modules. 2485 students participated in those modules which equates to 20.7% of the total number of students at UMass. Students take part in community service as part of credit-bearing courses – credits are not awarded for the volunteering activity alone but for the reflection and written papers on their learning experience. This accreditation on a range and variety of courses enables international students, who are unable to undertake paid work, to gain valuable experience and skills.

UMass is proud to be seen as the 'Urban University' and community engagement at all levels is a priority of their mission statement and aims, and the executive leadership are hugely supportive of this and are driven to take community engagement further.

All of the HEIs have an extensive programme of grants and schemes available for students to apply, which range from one-off project funding for student-led projects to schemes where students can supplement their current volunteering with paid research or mentoring roles within the community. It was clear from the meetings that all the Public Service and Volunteering Departments have an enormous amount of financial support from their Universities and this enables them to tailor grants and funding to their student demographics. Alumni also play a huge role at Harvard and MIT in financially supporting the funding programme. A snapshot of the grants and project funding is highlighted below.

Stride Rite Community Scholars Programme

The Stride Rite Programme is available to students at four of the five HEIs visited. At Northeastern University it is a joint venture between the University, the Stride Rite Foundation and five community groups. The project is designed to offer intensive full-time volunteering experience to students who cannot afford to volunteer, and cover tuition fees and University costs, apply their skills and interests to their local community. The Stride Rite Community Scholars' mission is to support student community action, by making it possible for diverse students of all backgrounds to take leadership roles in community organisations, and by providing training in leadership development and public service skills.

At Northeastern University, Stride Rite Scholars perform 35 hours of volunteering a week for the duration of their six month placement. Community Scholars are paid weekly from an allowance of \$7,200 for the six months of their volunteering activities. Student participants may continue their service after the completion of their commitment to the programme as a volunteer.

Student Civic Engagement Grants

The Student Civic Engagement Grant project at Northeastern University started in 2005 in order to support student-led community projects and activities. Grants of up to \$500 are awarded twice a year to students, or student groups, who can show that their project/activity has real benefit to the local community and raises the level of partnership working with the University, and highlights the issues faced by community groups.

Service Learning

Service Learning at UMass gives students the opportunity to link community engagement with academic studies. Projects can be part of one of the student's current courses or an independent study or research project. All projects are approved by Academic Departments or course instructors and students receive a \$1,000 Scholarship Award after completing 300 hours of project-linked volunteering.

The Public Service Centre at MIT operates very differently to all the other HEIs visited. They encourage students to seek out their own volunteering activities and to think about how they can use their studies, learning and skills to help solve problems faced by both the local and global community. MIT has some of the brightest minds studying at their campus and have developed a range of grants to support innovative ideas and projects. The annual IDEAS Competition encourages teams to develop and implement projects that make a positive change and address the needs of an under-served community. Six teams are awarded up to \$7,500 to then turn their idea into reality. Previous winners have included a low-cost battery-powered microfilm projector for use in Mali.

On a more local scale MIT students can apply for Public Service Centre Grants to support local art projects, tutoring projects and teaching activities. The main criteria for all the MIT grants and projects are that they must be sustainable and they must be community driven.

Campus Compact

The Campus Compact was formed in 1985 to encourage students to become active citizens who work with their community to make it a better place to live and work. There are now over 1,100 members including public and private universities and colleges, rural and urban HEIs and those offering a range of courses from part-time, two years, to the full time four-year options. The Compact has a national office and 33 state offices that co-ordinate the local HEIs and help to disseminate good practice to the entire membership.

The Compact works to develop a co-ordinated approach to community programmes, through research, policy development, training to both workers and student volunteers, and provides national advocacy and leadership training to all student volunteers in order to develop the socially responsible leaders of the future. The Compact also raises funds to support campus-

based community outreach work and provides professional development for all staff and administrators.

On a local scale, such as the Massachusetts Compact, it has enabled the workers at Boston HEIs to share good practice, and access funding for VISTAs and projects that do not duplicate work and research being carried out in neighbouring HEIs. They have been given the opportunity to attend other institutes to experience other community service centres and workshops designed to improve community-based teaching, learning, and research.

Campus Compact Volunteers in Service to America (VISTAs) spend one year working at a campus that is a member of the Campus Compact and work on projects that enhance community engagement and partnership working. The programmes are monitored and administered by the state Campus Compact and the host site supervises and supports the VISTA throughout the year. Training for the VISTA is also organised and delivered by the state Campus Compact. Projects completed by VISTAs have included the developing of student leadership courses; co-ordinating volunteer placements with local community groups; creating publicity for volunteers and community agencies and the mentoring of student volunteers. Every Campus Compact VISTA who completes a year of service receives:

- A post-service Education Award of \$4,725 to pay for college tuition or student loans or an allowance of \$1,200.
- Monthly subsistence living allowance
- Health insurance
- Student loan forbearance
- Relocation allowance
- Non-competitive eligibility for federal employment in the year following service
- Housing and meal plans are available at some campuses

The VISTA programme is an excellent model of a nationally organised project that offers hands-on experience for graduate students wishing to gain skills in project management in the community engagement and student volunteering field. The management structure provides excellent support for workers in the Universities and this in turn enables them to give the required input and support required by the VISTA whilst still balancing the work of a busy volunteering department.

Alternative Spring Breaks

Each year, hundreds of students spend an Alternative Spring Break volunteering through the five HEIs' Alternative Spring Breaks programme. The goal of ASB is to provide the student body with a unique volunteering activity and the opportunity for students to organise and participate in community service trips during the Autumn and Spring Breaks.

ASB trips promote community service, develop leadership skills, and create strong bonds amongst the student volunteers. The trips allow students to visit other parts of the country and learn about various social issues first-hand. The ASB project helps students improve their environment whilst learning valuable transferable skills.

On average the five HEIs visited offered 15 ASB projects during the Autumn and Spring holidays, and are always over-subscribed. Students complete an application process and are interviewed prior to being accepted. Volunteers can choose from a variety of trips, each with a different focus. Some trips are environmentally based; others work with children, people with disabilities, the homeless, refugees, or those affected by natural disasters. Volunteers stay in a variety of accommodation, ranging from campsites to churches to community centres.

The fee for the Alternative Spring Breaks at Boston University in 2007 was \$275, with between 10 and 15 student volunteers on each trip. This covered food, housing, and transportation for the week. Two student co-ordinators who have been responsible for the organising and developing the project, and a paid staff chaperone also accompany each trip.

Next steps

After meeting with the five HEIs all agreed that they would be very interested in further conversations about possible exchange programmes between the University of Plymouth, or other UK universities. The exchange could take the format of 10-15 students from America visiting Plymouth and gain experience of community action as it is run in the UK, followed by the American HEIs hosting a group of UK students the next academic year. This process could then lead on to joint international volunteer projects in the developing world once more substantial links are made between the Universities. It was agreed that I would compile a short proposal and circulate it to the group.

Future Study Visits

A key theme that became apparent from the visits to the five HEIs was their involvement with the Campus Compact scheme and the benefits gained from the organisation. The Compact now represents more than a quarter of all of the American HEIs and is a powerful tool in the development of community action.

In the UK, organisations such as Student Volunteering England provide a national forum and information for workers in student community volunteering, and new initiatives such as 'V' promote involvement in volunteering by young people. Further study of the Campus Compact and how areas of its work can be implemented or used in the

UK would be beneficial. The study could look at the funding of a national VISTA style programme and how to set up regional networks for workers.

The Pre-Orientation Week projects are also another area of further study as these attract a high number of international volunteers and provide a solid introduction to University life and community engagement. Research has shown that the activities have assisted with the reduction of drop-out rates – they are highest within the first four weeks of the start of the year, often because of feelings of homesickness or loneliness. The Pre-Orientation scheme aims to encourage students to interact and make new friends from the start of their time at university.

INTERNATIONAL

UNIAID | **student**
CALCULATOR

The International Student Calculator will help you plan and manage your money for your studies in the UK

UNIAID and UKCISA have released a new online student lifestyle calculator, with support from the Prime Minister's Initiative. This tool helps international students plan and manage their money for studies in the UK. UKCISA's research showed that almost a quarter (23%) of international students said they didn't have enough money to live on. Of those who had experienced hardship, 72% said they underestimated the cost of living.

The International Student Calculator enables students to:

- build a lifestyle budget and see how it balances by week, month or over a year.
- understand how they will spend their time as well as their money in the UK
- learn from case studies and top tips from other students
- save their budget so they can use it before arriving or during their study.

The International Student Calculator is at www.studentcalculator.org.uk/international

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The integration of international students with Dutch students and the local community

(Eindhoven University of Technology, Maastricht University, Stenden University & Wageningen University)

By Alana Holland, International Student Adviser, University of Surrey

Introduction

The Council for Higher Education (CIHE) and i-graduate report: "Does the UK lead the world in International Education?" and the subsequent article in The Independent on 27th September 2007: "Foreign Students: Overlooked and over here" suggested that the UK lags behind countries such as the Netherlands in terms of integrating international students. The report used data from the International Student Barometer (ISB) survey which was distributed to institutions in the UK, Netherlands, USA, South Africa and Australia.

Objective

The objective of my visit was to observe how Dutch institutions go about integrating students and whether it is an institution- or student-led process.

Institutions

Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) – Education and Student Service Centre/International Relations Office

TU/e is based in the fifth largest city in the Netherlands and has a total of 7044 students, 739 of whom are international (2006). The majority of international students study on postgraduate taught or research courses; there are few international students that study at undergraduate level as there is currently only one course taught in English at this level. At present international student numbers are relatively small in comparison to the other institutions I visited and to the University of Surrey itself but the numbers are growing, which the International Relations Office believes is aiding international student integration.

TU/e is one of Surrey's Erasmus partners in the Netherlands and offers a similar range of courses in the science and engineering area. In terms of atmosphere the campus at Eindhoven has architecture and surroundings similar to that of the University of Surrey.

The International Relations Office undertook its own student survey and found that although there was a lack of integration between international and home students, the students do want to integrate. The International Relations Office runs a summer course for Masters students which is a three-week programme of activities that introduces students to living and studying in the Netherlands. This course is immediately prior to the start of the academic year and amongst other things takes students through registration and several other formal procedures, Dutch culture and language training, English language skills, introduction to faculties and an introduction to prospective employment. The summer course also covers training in cultural awareness and several social events. This year a buddy scheme will probably also run as part of the summer course.

Throughout the course of the year a representative group of international students have the opportunity to speak to the Rector about their experiences at the university and also meet with each other to discuss any problems such as study issues. The International Relations Office organises a Christmas drinks events for international students and last year each student was given a TU/e body-warmer as a gift.

The international students' first opportunity to meet Dutch students happens when they are

met in Eindhoven and taken to their accommodation. Other opportunities to meet Dutch students are through the Mentor System run by the International Student Network Eindhoven (ISN) which aims to bring Dutch and international students together through their programme of excursions and monthly dinners. There are also a number of other student organisations such as AIESEC (the largest student organisation in the world), BEST/e, AEGEE and faculty student associations which provide opportunities for Dutch and international students to integrate. International students will shortly be asked whether they feel integrated and what can be done to improve integration. If it is felt that the current societies do not fulfil the needs of the international students the International Relations Office will look in to establishing an additional international student society which would be part funded by the university but independent of the university.

One of the main places that international and Dutch students integrate outside the classroom and society environment is the Students Sport Centre.

Maastricht University – Student Services, Central Office/Strategic Planning & International Relations, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences and representatives from student associations. (Currently participating in the International Student Barometer Survey)

Maastricht University established in 1976 is one of the newest institutions in one of the oldest Dutch cities and chose from the outset to be an innovative and international university. Nearly 10% of

TU/e

A photograph of a modern, multi-story building with a facade of vertical slats and horizontal window bands. The building is partially obscured by a large, leafless tree in the foreground. In the foreground, there are two tall streetlights and a paved area. The sky is clear and blue. The text 'TU/e' is visible on the upper part of the building's facade.

The university is aiming to increase international student participation in both the university's decision-making bodies and in student organisations. As a relatively new university it will take time for both Dutch and international students to integrate into the local community but there are many steps being made such as new housing and more international student-centred initiatives.

Like many institutions in the Netherlands, Maastricht uses the Problem Based Learning (PBL) method (developed at McMaster University, Canada) and was the first institution in Europe to adopt this teaching and learning method. The PBL system introduces unfamiliar real-world problems or situations to a small group of students where they consider the situation using shared knowledge and experience. Students are expected to undertake self study and then bring this to the wider group structure. Groups are usually randomly generated and participants are assigned specific roles within the group. Teachers act as facilitators guiding students when they meet rather than transmitting information. This close group work ensures that students work together both in and out of class time. Because the groups are randomly generated, students are less likely to remain in groups of their own nationality.

Students do however tend to socialise within their own nationality groups outside their studies.

The university is housed throughout the city in buildings both ancient and modern. There is currently no university housing and students often live in their own nationality groups in private housing. Housing for international staff and students is planned and due for completion in 2010. Due to its proximity to Belgium and Germany many of the Belgian and German students return home at weekends in addition to a large number of Dutch students who do the same. Many German students also choose to learn Dutch and together with the Flemish-speaking Belgian students they often find it easier to integrate into local life as it is easier to communicate or get a job locally because of their language skills.

International students do not often have the opportunity to mix with Dutch students at weekends. Due to this the University, student chaplaincy and International Student Association Maastricht (ISAM) aim to run many of their activities at weekends. As with other universities in the Netherlands university student societies often have low participation by international students and are often perceived by international students as very Dutch. ISAM runs parties during the week and weekend trips in addition to helping

international and exchange students settle in. The society receives some funding from the university and charges a fee to members as well as receiving sponsorship from a local café. ISAM have a growing membership of both international and Dutch students.

ISAM has close links with the student chaplaincy, Tafelstraat, who run weekly international dinners, open house on a Sunday and the "Get to know the Netherlands" programme. This programme introduces international students to Dutch geography, history, religion, politics and art. International students are also encouraged to get to know culture in Maastricht and the Netherlands through reduced entry fees to the local Bonnefanten museum and the English language section of the weekly university newspaper. It has been recognised that students may wish to utilise university facilities during the weekend with a sports programme available on Saturdays and extended opening hours at the University Visitors Centre and library.

The university itself offers training in the form of the "What you leave behind" course for those students suffering from culture shock. This has been a great success and has been fully booked. The Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences also offers workshops for both Dutch and international students on cultural differences and



looks at the differences and diversity of teaching and learning styles. They also hold workshops to train staff to prepare for the differences in culture, communication and learning styles.

Stenden University, Leeuwarden (formerly known as CHN University before merging with Drenthe University) – Student Counselling, Chaplaincy, International Relations, Retail Business School, Institute of Hospitality & Office Management and representatives from student associations. (Stenden (CHN) was one of the Dutch universities which participated in the International Student Barometer Survey 2006/7.)

Stenden University is a university of professional education based in Leeuwarden, the capital of the northern Dutch province of Friesland. Leeuwarden itself is home to two other higher education institutions with around 30,000 Dutch and international students which make up nearly a third of the town's population. Friesland itself has its own language so international students can face the challenge of using and understanding more than just English and Dutch.

The university introduced the Problem Based Learning (PBL) study method in 1987 and as part of this current students can earn study points by becoming a 'buddy' or a 'host' to

new international students. Issues surrounding differences between cultures and culture shock are covered in PBL tasks, workshops and lectures on Intercultural Sensitivity as part of the curriculum. The 'Bridging Cultures' orientation course, written by an international student, has now been adopted by all schools and covers all aspects of culture shock and intercultural awareness.

Within International Hospitality Management all students have a host and international students also have a buddy. The host is a second or third year student who covers the educational side of life at Stenden, assisting students in getting to know a new method of study and offering support during the first few modules. Having a host is obligatory for the student with both the host and their students (2 hosts per group of 12/14 students) meeting regularly and completing a series of assessments. The Host Programme covers training for the hosts, a host contract and the opportunity for both the host and the new student to evaluate the programme.

The Buddy Programme is designed to cover aspects of life outside the university such as showing students around town, opening a bank account or registering at the town hall. Buddies also sign a commitment statement and receive training in addition to organising meetings and producing

a final report. Meetings cover issues such as culture shock and identity as well as practical matters such as how to complete official documents or where to buy a bike. As with the Host Programme both the buddy and the new students evaluate the Buddy Programme. Although both programmes are for a limited time students often stay in contact with their host and/or buddy and will themselves become a buddy or host. Both programmes require a large amount of administration and rely on the commitment of the students involved. The fact that both these programmes carry study points does give home and international students the incentive to integrate.

Students who participate in the Foreign Relations Committee (FREC) can also earn study points through their involvement. FREC consists of Dutch students who primarily organise events and assist international exchange students to help integrate them into life at Stenden and Leeuwarden. In addition to the weekend trips, parties and sports events, FREC produce a students' guide to Leeuwarden and give students a welcome pack with local food. They also involve students in Dutch festivities such as Sinterklaas and Queen's Day.

The main opportunity for students to integrate is through their class time, and in the case of International Hospitality Management students, by



helping to run the on campus cafes together. As the courses are taught in English it means that all students are in the same position by working and studying in a second language. Students have the opportunity to improve their English skills and to learn Dutch which is essential if they wish to have a part-time job.

University services reflect the bilingual nature of the university with some services such as the Student Counselling department offering counselling in German too thanks to having a German Student Counsellor. Having academic and support staff with similar backgrounds to international students also helps to improve quality and integration by giving students someone else to talk to. As with other Dutch institutions there are relatively large numbers of German and Chinese students and these groups amongst others often socialise and live within their own nationality groups. This can make the adaptation process longer and lead to a lack of interest in Dutch culture and lifestyle. Equally Dutch students often remain in their own groups and seem to be happier to integrate when they are overseas exchange students.

On campus there is an opportunity for both Dutch and international students to have a 'home away from home' with Hestia: The International Lounge. Hestia is not only a venue for students to meet but a house run by four live-in students who arrange events and run the lounge. The host students that run the house not only get the chance to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds but can also earn study points through their position. The house hosts a variety of events such as pool tournaments, dinners and cookery or dance classes. Larger events such as parties are organised at an off-site venue. The Culture Club also host their events at the Hestia lounge. These events showcase not only each other's cultures through festivals like Diwali and Thanksgiving but Dutch culture as well. Stepping into Hestia is like visiting any well-kept student home; the welcome and enthusiasm of the host students really does make it a homely environment.

The Chaplaincy and Meditation Centre is another place where students can feel more in their comfort zone. The three prayer rooms (Buddhist/Hindu, Christian and Muslim) allow students and staff to practise their religious traditions in a peaceful environment and meet people from different backgrounds. Cultural, social and religious activities are organised

through the Meditation Centre 'Expect' programme and include the Dutch language game and the Dinner Group. There is also strong involvement in the community with students visiting local schools to talk about their home country and the Leeuwarden World Charity Festival.

Wageningen University – Education & Research, Central Student Administration, Student Council, university sports facilities and representatives from student associations. (Currently participating in the International Student Barometer Survey.)

Wageningen University is part of the Wageningen University and Research Centre (Wageningen UR), located centrally in the Netherlands. The town of Wageningen is located in a rural environment with a population of 35,000. The university buildings are located throughout the city and are all within cycling distance of each other. The city has the advantage of being centrally located, making travel around the Netherlands and beyond an attractive option, while retaining a village atmosphere.

The University specialises in studies allied to the areas of life sciences and natural resources. The subject areas offered have an international focus and this attracts very focused students. Students from over 100 countries study on Masters Courses taught in English. Bachelor courses are taught in Dutch and attract home and German students. There are 4,941 students at Wageningen and around one fifth are international. The relatively small size of the university ensures that study takes place in a personal and creative environment which makes it easier for students to make contact with each other. The study schedule is intense; however there are opportunities for Dutch and international students to integrate outside studies through several university bodies.

Like all Dutch universities Wageningen has a Student Council which participates in the running of the University, approving decisions such as budgets for facilities or policy decisions. Student Councils are formal bodies independent of the university and each university is required to have one by law. The members of the Student Council are elected by the student body to represent their interests; in the case of Wageningen there are three student parties. The Student Council as a whole uses English when it meets and reports, which means that it is much easier for both Dutch and international

students to participate; this is not always the case at other universities. Wageningen Student Council includes the Internationalisation Committee, which deals with all issues relating to international students, from the quality of education that international students receive to welfare-related matters such as housing or health. The Internationalisation Committee is not only involved with policies that affect international students and staff but also the international image of the University. The committee is keen to enhance the international climate of the university by working to improve integration between Dutch and international students, improving the level of English used and improving the availability of information in English. Prior to Wageningen University taking part in the 2007/8 wave of the International Student Barometer the Internationalisation Committee was also thinking about surveying international students regarding their experiences.

Student organisations frequently work together at Wageningen when it comes to internationalisation – for instance working to improve the information given to students during the University introduction days. The Wageningen Student Organisation (WSO), CAID (Commissie Algemene Introductiedagen – association in charge of introduction days), International Student Organisation Wageningen (ISOW) and 'Otherwise' (see below) worked together to provide workshops for international students on social, practical and education issues. The international student organisations also work with the Internationalisation Committee and Student Council. The student organisations have paid board members with different rates of pay for international and Dutch students; this money compensates students for the time spent as a full-time board member as study can be delayed. It is often difficult for international students to become board members due to study; many must complete their courses within two years as they are funded by grants. The high level of involvement by international students in the various student organisations is a reflection of their dedication and motivation.

Student organisations also very much rely on volunteers. ISOW has student volunteers to teach its varied programme of language and dance classes and aims to bring Dutch and international students together in an intercultural environment through its classes, cultural evenings and of course,



parties. Most activities take place in the ISOW building which is a great asset for a student organisation as students have an easily identifiable meeting place and good access to facilities. Rooms can also be rented out for use by the members. Students pay a small membership fee for either 3, 6 or 12 months which gives them full access to all activities. ISOW also organises larger scale events such as 'Uganda Festival' and 'Egypt Festival'; these events involve not only university staff and students but local people as well.

Public activities are also offered by 'Otherwise', a small NGO based at Wageningen University which is interested in the interaction of society with science. Members are Dutch and international staff and students who are interested in topics such as sustainability and social justice. 'Otherwise' co-operates with organisations within the University and also maintains links with Dutch and overseas NGOs. Events organised include showing documentaries, lectures and an annual cultural day.

In order to aid Dutch and international student integration the organisations involved have adapted to the difference between Dutch and international student life. Events are often scheduled from Monday to Thursday to reflect the fact that most Dutch students go home on a Friday. It has been easier to have the

involvement of Dutch students in the international organisations because the (non university owned) student housing blocks are mixed so students have the opportunity to socialise outside their studies.

Within the University students have the opportunity to integrate when they begin their studies. The Welcome Week includes a day of cross-cultural training for both Dutch and international students in addition to their faculty introductions. Dutch and international students are split into groups to talk about topics relating to their respective cultures. Central Student Administration is the first port of call for new international students and as well as providing an information point they arrange a buddy system where new students are matched with a current student from the same continent as them.

Both the university and the student organisations succeed in making Wageningen University feel both international and Dutch.

Background information

The Dutch university system offers two types of institution: research universities (39% of international students) and universities of professional education (61% of international students). Of the institutions visited only Stenden (CHN) University is a university of professional

education, the other institutions are research universities.

The Netherlands was the first non-English speaking country to offer degrees taught in English (source: VSNU Research Universities in the Netherlands) with around 1,300 courses available. Tuition fees for non-EU students are around €9,500 (£11,000) in the Netherlands and around £11,000 in the UK for a course such as MSc Retail Management. EU students in the Netherlands pay from around €1,500 per year compared to £3,145 per year for undergraduates in the UK. Living costs are also generally lower.

The number of non-Dutch students in the Netherlands for the 2006/7 academic year stands at 49,750, with the majority of students being from within the EU/EEA (25,500), the remaining number are made up of Non-EU/EEA (17,500) and exchange students (6,750). The total number of students in higher education in the Netherlands is 571,750. (Figures courtesy of NUFFIC: Internationalisation in higher education in the Netherlands – Key Figures). 8.7% of the student population in the Netherlands are from overseas, 3% are from outside EU/EEA. The main country of origin for international students in the Netherlands is Germany (13,900) followed by China (4,950). This is very different to the origins of the 351,470 international students in

the UK with the majority of students coming from outside the EU (239,210 compared to 112,260 students from within the EU). Here, the main country of domicile is China (49,595) followed by India (23,835). The largest number of students from within the EU are from the Republic of Ireland (16,255) closely followed by Greece (16,050). (Figures from HESA: Students in Higher Education Institutions 2006/07). 14.9% of the UK student population are from overseas, 10.1% are from outside EU/EEA.

A number of the integration issues at Dutch and British institutions are shared. Home students are often uncomfortable with mixing with those from another culture, especially if there are large groups from a particular country. In many ways it is easier for international students to integrate in Britain as our visa regulations allow students to work up to 20 hours per week during term time and full time during vacations. This gives students the opportunity to integrate with the community they live in and take part in British life. In the Netherlands international students are permitted to work either 10 hours per week alongside their studies or full time during June, July and August; they cannot do both. Many jobs also require that students speak good Dutch which means that very few international students have the opportunity for integration in this way. As many international students are on courses taught in English their knowledge of Dutch may only be quite basic. The fact that many courses are taught in English does mean though that both Dutch and international students are studying in a second language which gives students something in common.

Student life is also different between home and international students. Many Dutch students for instance return home at the weekend or participate in different social activities. International students in both the UK and the Netherlands do not often join more traditional home student societies, instead preferring international organisations. In the institutions visited the international societies were for all nationalities with some involvement from home students, especially in the societies for Erasmus/exchange students. This compares to the UK where international students often belong to a society directly representing their nationality or culture. Having the use of a building specifically for international students such as at Stenden and Wageningen would be an asset for home and

international students alike as there would be an easily identifiable place to go to meet people or join in activities. Many universities do not have the resources for such a building on or near campus; however such a facility would be especially useful in smaller towns where access to social activities may be limited.

The University of Surrey currently runs the Surrey Hosting Scheme where students sign up to visit a member of University staff for lunch or afternoon tea. We hope to extend the scheme to members of the local community in the near future as a way of increasing integration. Our feedback from current students who have participated is very positive and we have found that the students and hosts do stay in touch with each other. Both the Surrey Hosting Scheme and the host/buddy schemes at the universities that I visited show that these schemes have benefits beyond their initial objective.

Future plans

The outcome of our visit is that we would like to further enhance the orientation and social programme that we offer at the beginning of the year. One of the ways we are planning to do this is by running a pilot using money from the PMI to start our own buddy scheme with the current students that are part of our airport Meet & Greet scheme. This will ensure that there is continuity for new students from when they first arrive through to their first weeks at the University of Surrey. We involve international student societies when recruiting helpers for our Meet & Greet scheme and would like to further involve them in the proposed buddy scheme. If the scheme is successful we would then like to extend the recruitment of buddies to all students at the university, not just international students. This would aid integration between international and home students. We would seek to have increased involvement with the international student societies beyond what is already in place. Currently we provide support to the Students' Union i-festival, our two-week festival which celebrates the cultures and nationalities we have at the university. The i-festival held events both on and off-campus taking events such as international dance and henna painting to the wider community.

We would like to run cultural awareness workshops for international students during orientation. It would also be of great benefit if cultural awareness workshops were available to all students as in the universities

I visited in the Netherlands.

We are also planning an event for international students with families to introduce them to some British traditions by holding a summer fete. In addition we are planning to hold receptions for Postgraduate Research students from both home and overseas when they arrive to give them a chance to mix. Our postgraduate students arrive at four times throughout the year and do not have the opportunity to participate in the main orientation event.

Issues for the future

The Problem Based Learning system which is common to many Dutch universities (where students often do not choose the group that they work in), gives Dutch and international students the opportunity to integrate in the classroom and outside it for the purposes of their study. It would be interesting to see whether students at the 35 or so institutions in the UK which use the PBL system felt differently regarding integration than those that do not learn using this method.

At some of the institutions visited students are awarded study credits for taking part in buddy/host schemes, student organisations and extracurricular activities. This ensures a high level of participation in the student experience for both Dutch and international students. Current students have an incentive through earning study credits to take part in activities designed to improve integration for new students; it helps to remove some of the problems that may surround participation in university activities. It is not enough, however, for the students to just turn up; they are trained and assessed on the work that they do. Many universities in the UK rely on (paid or unpaid) volunteers to take part in activities such as buddy schemes or airport meet and greet rather than using study credits. Having more incentives such as study credits may increase participation in international student integration but it would have to be carefully managed in order to maintain quality. More research would need to be done in to this area to find out.

As more international institutions take part in the International Student Barometer it would be useful to make comparisons between the individual countries that take part rather than the UK versus international. This would give a clearer picture of areas of difference or similarity and make exchanging best practice with our overseas counterparts more straightforward.

Looking at on-going programmes offered to develop intercultural awareness and communication, which help students get the most out of their time at university

(University of Melbourne and University of Minnesota)

By Rosemary Gibson, Senior International Officer, University of Nottingham

Objective of the visits

Orientation and Welcome programmes are now firmly embedded in good practice for most UK institutions, but we do not necessarily offer continued support in helping students adjust both from a cultural perspective and in a new academic environment. A recent report from the International Student Barometer suggests that this is potentially one area where we are behind our competitors in the support we offer. The purpose of the visits was to look at the support programmes offered to help students adapt and adjust to a new environment in order to make the most out of their time at University.

Destination of the visits

**University of Minnesota;
February 2008**

The University of Minnesota is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in the USA, ranked sixth among the top public research universities. The university has an international population of more than 4,500 students and scholars from 127 countries. The University's goal is for 50% of its students to have a learning experience abroad before they graduate.

My visit was hosted by International Student and Scholar Services. ISSS is part of the Office of International Programmes which also includes the Learning Abroad Centre (for outgoing study abroad programmes only) the Centre for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) and the China Centre.

University of Melbourne; March 2008

The University of Melbourne is firmly established as a leading teaching and research university: ranked Number

27 in the world by the Times Higher Education Supplement and Number 79 in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking. Melbourne remains one of Australia's largest universities, both in terms of research income and expenditure. International student numbers have steadily increased with numbers exceeding 10,000 (around 25% of the student population) from more than 100 different countries.

My visit was hosted by Academic Enrichment Services. AES is part of the Office of the Provost and includes the Director's Office, (which is responsible for overseeing programmes to enhance the 'Melbourne Experience'), International Student Services and Transition and Orientation as well as other support services.

Summary of outcomes

Support programmes encouraging students to engage with the University, their studies, fellow students and staff are clearly successful. In taking a proactive approach to support, at an early stage, we can minimise feelings of disorientation and isolation, potentially reducing the need for additional support and the demand on other services.

Such programmes enable students to adapt and adjust more quickly and maximise their international study experience. These programmes add value to students' time and studies abroad, encouraging it to be seen as a complete, life-changing, life-enhancing experience.

As we have seen in the UK, international students often do not see the importance or relevance of free-standing workshops on cultural awareness, and attendance is often poor. A key factor in the success of the

programmes at both Minnesota and Melbourne is that attendance is either compulsory or sessions are part of the academic timetable; this gives weight to the programmes and ensures maximum participation.

The use of online packages maximises participation and encourages students to engage with the University before they arrive. Use of real-life scenarios enables institutions to present information about a wide range of support services in a proactive, user-friendly format before difficulties arise.

Main findings

Maximising Study Abroad Programme (Minnesota)

This a compulsory one-credit module taken by all students going out on exchange/study abroad programmes. Research carried out by CARLA indicated that:

'...students intending to study abroad receive limited if any preparation to be language and culture learners/users beyond how they would normally learn in a classroom setting. Clearly, there is a compelling need to better prepare this large group of learners prior to their departure, so that the learners themselves and their sending institutions can fully realize the learning benefits of the Sojourn experience' (Paige and Kappler, 1999).

In 1999 CARLA received funding to develop a set of interactive user-friendly materials to help students get the most out of their study abroad experience. Two guides were produced: 'Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning' and 'Use and Maximizing Study Abroad: A Program Coordinators' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use'.



This programme was piloted in 2005/06 and launched for all study abroad students in autumn 2006. The aim is to help students adjust to a new culture by reflecting on their own experiences raising cultural awareness and helping them to understand their own cultural values and perspectives. It provides strategies to recognise and understand cultural differences in order to build confidence in interacting with their host culture. The same structure is reflected in the section on Language Learning Strategies.

The module is delivered in two sections: the first part is taken one month before students leave Minnesota; the second is taken while the students are 'in country' and concludes with preparations for returning home.

I looked at the Culture Learning sections in more detail. The pre-departure section of the module gives a basic understanding of what is meant by culture and uses the iceberg model to highlight the seen and unseen aspects of culture. The in-country section gives some clear strategies for coping in a new culture, including understanding culture shock (the 'W' curve) and interpreting different styles of communication. Students are given examples of different communication styles and asked to comment/reflect on these in relation to their experiences abroad. The students' course book

makes use of many examples from students' experiences and real-life scenarios to ensure the exercises are meaningful. The section concludes with preparations for returning home and reverse culture shock.

The module is delivered online using small interactive email study groups. It is made as relevant as possible to the students' own experiences, so they can interpret what they are learning as it happens and use it in real-life situations. Facilitators for the study groups are either members of staff or postgraduate students undertaking internships as part of their studies.

As it is a credit-bearing module it does need academic approval and some theoretical content. If it were not credit bearing it would not need to be so academically challenging.

The module is an excellent way of getting students to engage with the whole study abroad experience and to see it not just in terms of a visit to a particular country but as a complete learning experience which can have wide-ranging benefits for personal and professional development.

Much of the information used in this module is relevant for international students arriving in the UK, to raise cultural awareness and understanding of how learning and behaviour can be influenced by an individual's culture. It encourages students to engage with

their studies in a new environment and provides support and strategies for them to cope.

We hope to incorporate some of the ideas for activities and exercises into our online support package and ultimately a series of workshops offered during the first term to help newly arrived international students adapt and adjust to their new environment.

In addition we hope to use the model as a framework to develop a programme for both incoming and outgoing students between our overseas campuses and UK campuses. The aim is to eventually expand the programme to provide sessions for all exchange/study abroad students.

Online orientation programme (Minnesota)

Attendance at orientation is compulsory; students are not able to complete their registration with the University until they have completed an orientation programme. This is in part linked to immigration regulations and the requirement for the University to report/confirm students' enrolment. If students are not able to attend a full orientation programme they can complete an online, interactive session. This enables students to receive some basic information about the support services and facilities offered by the University and to understand their responsibilities regarding their visas. It



also allows the University to comply with reporting requirements. The programme is available on the University's website at <http://www.iss.umn.edu/new/ISOPBreeze/index.htm>

Having the option of an online orientation programme is an excellent way of providing basic information for students who are unable to attend events in person, such as students who arrive late or at different times in the year. Completion of such programmes could potentially be a very useful mechanism for UK institutions to ensure students have understood their rights and responsibilities with regard to their visas and immigration conditions in light of the reporting requirements soon to be in place here.

Transition programmes (Melbourne)

These are specifically designed to support all new undergraduate students as they adapt and adjust to University life. They were introduced as a direct response to the need to support an increasingly diverse student body, including international students and those from a non-traditional background. The programme was piloted in 2000 with the Faculty of Science, since then other faculties and departments have developed their own programmes to suit the needs of their courses and their students. Transition programmes are now seen as established institutional practice. They are viewed as a resource provided by the University to help Deans meet their targets in terms of retention. Each faculty has a specific budget for transition programmes.

From research carried out at Centre for the Study of Higher Education at Melbourne the transition team identified four major adjustments that new students need to make in order to succeed in their studies:

1. Academic adjustment: to more independent and demanding learning and assessment structures
2. Geographic adjustment: to a new larger campus, new travel and accommodation arrangements
3. Administrative adjustment: being responsible for their own administration arrangements in terms of enrolment, progress, identifying their own needs and seeking suitable assistance.
4. Personal adjustment: to issues which can include feelings of isolation, loss of support networks and the need to make new friends, the need to be more financially independent and the responsibility for managing their own study and other commitments.

The transition programmes were initiated to respond to these needs. The aims of the programmes are for students to meet fellow students and members of staff (both admin and teaching staff) in their faculty; to raise awareness of the new skills needed for studying at University and to introduce the support services available.

The programmes are promoted and supported by the Transition team within AES but are delivered by individual faculties. The content and format of the programmes vary but the general principle is the same. The Transition team provides a resource kit which provides guidelines and strategies for those implementing the programme.

Programmes are not credit bearing. A typical programme consists of two or three one-hour seminars with an emphasis on student participation. In larger faculties these sessions are repeated enough times so the maximum number of students attending is not more than 100. From these sessions study groups are formed and supported throughout the remainder of the semester. Attendance at these sessions is maximised by having them specifically timetabled into the first weeks of a student's programme. The first seminars include senior/experienced members of staff from the faculty to add weight to the importance of the programme. Attendance is recorded at both the seminars and study groups.

As the focus is more on study skills and academic support, these programmes benefit from being delivered by academic staff so they can be tailored to suit the needs of different departments. Study groups are facilitated by current students, often postgraduates. They are not expected to be tutors or advisers, but to 'co-ordinate' the groups.

Alongside the Transition programmes, faculties are encouraged to run academic skills seminars which cover topics such as time management, essay writing, report writing, note taking etc.

Although clearly provided for all students at Melbourne the content and structure of the programmes is extremely relevant for support programmes provided for international students in the UK.

At the same time awareness of the need to support all students making the move to Higher Education is increasing in the UK. The STAR project, funded by HEFCE, is undertaking research and gathering resources in this area. In the UK, UCL have initiated transition programmes based upon the Melbourne

model as part of their Access Agreement. Further information can be found at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/transition/>

To attempt to change institutional policy or for one small team to deliver transition programmes for all School/Departments is too big a task. At UCL the process started with an audit of current provision within departments and schools, to identify examples of good practice happening already. The next step was a pilot programme with a department already undertaking similar activities with the expectation that other departments will want to take part as the programme is shown to be beneficial.

'AIRport': the Academic Interactive Resources portal (Melbourne)

This package provides a range of online materials to develop and support academic/study skills. Although it is aimed at undergraduate students any student can access the site. Gate 1 is specifically for students to access before they arrive at the University and again is aimed at helping transition. The activities are interactive, with suggested answers/outcomes. Much use is made of 'real-life' situations and scenarios to provide information in a user-friendly, accessible format.

The 'AIRport' team stressed the need for as many students as possible to be able to access the site so it is available to watch, to listen to, or to read. They also stressed the importance of using real photographs/videos clips as this can convey so much general information that is often overlooked. Gate 1 is available on the University website at <https://airport.unimelb.edu.au/gate1/>

Gate 2 provides short courses designed to assist all undergraduate students with academic writing. There is a self-access essay writing course and a four-week academic writing course where students are linked to tutors in the Language and Learning Services Unit. This part of the site is only available to students at Melbourne.

Gate 3 has faculty specific resources. A new resource called the 'International Terminal' specifically for international students is currently being produced.

AIRport has been very successful. Research carried out by the AIRport team focussing on Science students showed that those who had completed the faculty-specific exercises performed better in their exams.

Analysis of students accessing AIRport showed a growing number of postgraduate students using the programme (particularly the short course sections) even though it was





intended for first year undergrads. This led to the development of a new package called 'CourseWorks' covering study skills/ academic support specifically for postgraduate students. This went 'live' in February 2007, see <http://www.courseworks.unimelb.edu.au/>

This is an excellent resource for all students. At Nottingham we are already working on an online package to provide information and advice for students as they prepare to come to Nottingham. A second project also underway is looking at academic support for all students in developing the skills needed for studying at University.

The information gained from both the 'Maximising Study Abroad' module

and 'AIRport' will be invaluable in developing this.

General conclusions

Transition support is institutionalised practice in most universities in the USA and Australia. Programmes are successful because of this. They are seen as an integral part of the university's teaching and learning strategy, within the academic framework and supported by academic staff. Programmes cover both aspects of adapting to a new lifestyle within a new culture alongside study skills and academic support.

Presenting workshops in this way overcomes the problem of participation but requires support and co operation from academic and administrative staff.

Both Minnesota and Melbourne offer leadership and volunteering programmes for international students. These enable students to develop personal leadership skills; build confidence in intercultural communications and develop a sense of global citizenship.

At Nottingham we should make more use of current students as facilitators. These are an under-used resource. International students and study abroad students are often keen to 'give something back' to the institution and to work to help fellow students. It also helps to build a sense of global community and give meaning to their international experience.

A comparative study of the processes of social integration

(University of Melbourne, Monash University and University of Auckland)

*By Jennifer Raper, Manager,
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Objectives

My objectives were to explore the processes involved in the social integration of international students at University of Melbourne and Monash University in Australia and Auckland University in New Zealand, through the following key areas of policy and service delivery:

- Preparatory and ongoing mechanisms for the support of international students
- Organised activities designed to promote international student social interaction
- The housing of international students

Outcomes from study visit

Each of the three universities I visited demonstrated examples of creative, energetic and innovative support for international students along with measures to facilitate their transition and integration into University life and culture. Examples included friendship programmes, family support and mentoring programmes, residential college cross-cultural inductions, overseas students' society activities, intercultural communication workshops, civic engagement and many other initiatives. All three universities could be seen to value and actively invest in social, cultural and sporting activities for their students, while acknowledging the challenges of encouraging and supporting sustained social interaction between international and domestic student communities. A contrasting infrastructure of full support, residential colleges, combined with an overall lower capacity for accommodating students on campus in universities in Australia and

New Zealand, in contrast to the UK, highlighted interesting advantages and disadvantages of current housing policy.

Key findings – University of Melbourne (MU)

Strategy and policy at the University of Melbourne (MU) in teaching, learning and managing the student experience is firmly underpinned by a very clear and focused commitment to internationalisation and respect for diversity as the University aims to secure its position as a leading international university. The promotion of cultural diversity, tolerance and intercultural communication are embedded in university literature and web pages as well as stated missions and service delivery objectives.

Pre and post arrival

Commitment to ensuring new international students integrate into University life starts prior to arrival with MU staff running pre-departure briefings for international students and their families in a number of key sending countries. Current MU students volunteer at the briefings held in their own countries, to share information and tips with prospective students.

Post arrival, the University makes available to students all the usual, vital services to facilitate the first stage of their transition into life at the University of Melbourne, including airport collections, a compulsory international student briefing, followed by an institutional orientation. Current students are encouraged to be actively involved in helping new international students make the transition into MU life. Each semester, International

Student Services (ISS) seek and train both local and international student mentors and volunteers to assist with various programmes and events. These kinds of mentoring and volunteering programmes are intended to explicitly provide opportunities for Australian and international students to meet and work together, for developing interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills and for personal satisfaction. Examples of these include helping to run the 'Getting to know Australians' Orientation workshop, assisting in the staffing of the International Welcome Centre, and running Twilight Student Cultural Tours. ISS also run a programme of language support and professional development for the spouses of international students, from the outset and throughout their stay at MU.

I noticed, during my visit, lots of notices posted up advertising 'Compatriot Lunches'. Intrigued, I learnt that in a bid to connect those new international students who have a relatively small representation at the University, ISS organise a series of free lunches, in order to help students meet each other and to develop social networks with later year students from their home country. Through this activity and many other activities, it was clear that overall, much importance was placed on ensuring new students were able to make social connections, right from the start, and that forethought, energy, students' input and university resources were dedicated to this vital aspect of new-student transition.

Ongoing initiatives

Apart from orientation activities,

MU has in place many practical, easy-to-access and fun measures to encourage all students to get involved and experience University and Australian life throughout their stay at the University. This approach fosters the sense of equal access for all students and encourages acceptance into the community, regardless of which country students come from.

What was particularly impressive was how integrated this philosophy seemed to be across many different parts of the University: MU Sports organise lunchtime sports competitions; the Postgraduate Association run day trips to local places of interest; the Faculty of Education, in collaboration with the International Student Services, run the MU International Students Outdoor Programme – organising a range of wonderful, day and weekend trips to Australian tourist and cultural sites. In addition to volunteering opportunities such as for ISS, all students have the chance to apply to be MU Student Ambassadors – mentoring new students, through a 14-month long Student Ambassador Leadership Programme, which provides opportunities for students to create networks and develop their qualities and skills via active engagement within the University and volunteering within the wider community.

Melbourne University Overseas Service (MUOSS)

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, I wanted to give a particular mention to the MUOSS. MUOSS is a department of the Student Union and is the official representative body for all overseas students at MU, including postgraduate, undergraduate, study abroad and exchange students. MUOSS aims to promote international students' welfare and enrich their experience in Melbourne University. It has 18 office bearers who have voting rights in committee meetings and are elected into the positions as international student representatives during elections. MUOSS also has several co-opted Activities Officers and various sub-committees, as well as a wide network of volunteers.

I was extremely impressed with the scope of this service for international students, as well as with the dedication and energy of the committee to their roles in representing students and organising and running a very wide range of social activities. Some of these include: MUOSS Night market (part of International Week – where students from around the world share their



food, crafts and traditions), the MUOSS Amazing Race (Orientation Week event to get to know Melbourne), Bush Dance, Book Fest, Around the World in one Day and the MUOSS Central Australia 11-day trip. Also an important part of MUOSS work is their Buddy Programme – linked to their peer support work and a range of publications for international students, such as: Arrival Survival Handbook, Voice, the MUOSS bi-annual magazine, MUOSS general brochure and fortnightly email newsletters – Accent & MUOSS classifieds.

Visiting MUOSS premises, in the MU Student Union, I was left in no doubt as to the success of their work. A MUOSS Officer told me that he felt that empowering international students and giving them a sense of belonging was extremely important to him and his officers. Judging from the fact that their Overseas Students' Lounge was bustling with students, elected staff and volunteers, brimming over with energy, good ideas, commitment and confidence, I would say that they have clearly contributed a great deal to that end.

On campus accommodation and International House

In common with other universities in Australia, many domestic students at Melbourne University are from the local area and therefore continue to live at home for the duration of their studies. For this reason, it has not been necessary historically to have large-scale student accommodation on-campus. As a result of this, many students, including first years and international students, who aren't able to secure

accommodation on-campus, have to find accommodation off-campus independently.

On-campus accommodation at MU is offered at one of 12 residential colleges. Students who are successful in obtaining one of the much sought-after college places can expect to benefit hugely from a highly supportive and academically enriched experience. The University colleges, based on Oxbridge model, provide substantial welfare and pastoral support, as well as academic support, in the form of a comprehensive tutorial programme run by resident and non-resident tutors. Full (communal) dining facilities are provided in all colleges, as are a wide range of social, cultural and sporting activities for all college members.

Many international students seeking to live in residential accommodation on campus apply to International House. This college, which provides a highly attractive package of benefits to its residents, is heavily over-subscribed. It actively seeks to achieve a balance of cultural diversity, recruiting Australian students as well as international students and works hard to provide an inclusive environment, which explicitly promotes international understanding. As above, students who manage to gain a place in International House can be assured of considerable advantages over students living independently, off-campus. International House are proud to offer their own orientation for their residents, including cross-cultural communication workshops, to foster the best possible mutual understanding. Social and cultural integration is an important focus of the college, and its

many social activities to promote cross-cultural interaction allow students to make friendships across the national divides. It's a recipe which seems to succeed and in so doing, constitutes a best practice model in cross-cultural integration.

Key findings – Monash University

Monash University has the largest international student population of any university in Australia, with more than 15,500 international students from over 100 countries. In addition, Monash has campuses outside of Australia including Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and South Africa. A highly multi-cultural university, Monash takes very seriously the advocacy of cultural diversity and the promotion of international and cross-cultural literacy within the institution, as well as its commitment to continually improving the international student experience. To this end, Monash University has an impressive range of designated support for international students as well as activities aimed at all students which promote inclusiveness and a sense of belonging.

Pre and post-arrival

Extensive, specialised, support services for international students are available on each of the Monash campuses, which are in turn coordinated by central university services. Students are guided through the Monash experience, with advice and information beginning with off-shore, pre-departure briefings, pre-arrival DVDs, booklets and podcasts. Once students have arrived at Monash, they will of course find an airport reception service, temporary accommodation assistance, as well as a comprehensive orientation. Orientation – 'O'Week – takes place over five days and includes essential information for international and domestic students, sessions uncovering 'secrets to a successful life at Monash', fun days out, social events and a city tour, and the Orientation Carnival.

International Student Support sends all students a 'welcome email' and given them access to their 'E-planner' for the orientation period. Each campus has its own orientation programme. As Monash has two intakes of students each year, 'O'Week runs twice a year!

The Monash Transition Programme aims to support students and staff to understand the issues new students face in adjusting to university life and study. Extensive resources are provided via the Transition Programme website for students. During the first six weeks of



their course, new students can also be matched up with senior students, as part of the Peer Mentor Scheme, giving them extra support to ensure they settle in as quickly and well as possible.

Ongoing initiatives

Monash has an incredibly well-organised and well-structured package of ongoing support, friendship and social activities for its international students, all of which are expressly designed to facilitate social integration, a sense of belonging to the University and to the wider, Melbourne community. Some of these initiatives are outlined below:

International Student Friendship Programme – an initiative to help students make friendly contacts with a local family or individual and to learn about local community and broaden their cultural experience of Australia. *Family Support Programme* – available to international students at Monash with their families. *Language Exchange Programme* – an opportunity for international students to help local students who are studying

a foreign language

Social events of all types are actively encouraged and organised through many different sources: *The Monash University International Students' Service (MUISS)* who represent the interests of international students, run a number of affordable social activities throughout the year with the star event being the Multicultural Festival in August. Other events include cellar nights, lunchtime bands, BBQs, trivia nights, Oktoberfest, Comedy Week, Campus Games and the Green Week.

Health, Wellbeing and Development facilitate the running of weekly Global Friendship Night, where international and local students can get to know each other, over themed socials with food, music and dancing.

Residential colleges on each of the different campuses will organise their own programme of social and recreational activities, which might include day trips out, college balls, cultural days, cooking classes and inter-residence sport competitions.

In addition to all of the above, each campus also has its own *International*

Students' Association, which also offers a wide range of social activities, including ski trips, go-karting, horse-back riding and farm stays.

The majority of social and recreational events are intended for a mixed student group. This is in part undoubtedly intended to informally embed the reality of social integration of international and domestic students, but also reflects a core objective and brand promise of Monash University to its students and staff of delivering a global experience.

Residential Colleges at Monash

In the same way as outlined above, with reference to University of Melbourne, the collegiate system of residential accommodation at Monash University offers students a superior and 'enriched' University experience. Places are over-subscribed and tend to be allocated to the brightest and most dedicated of students.

The college environment recognises and values diversity and as such creates personal, academic, cultural and recreational opportunities to encourage this. A number, though not all, of Monash's colleges provide academic assistance programmes and pastoral support and full service meals. It might be expected however that students – both home and international – are better adjusted and supported in this environment.

The majority of students at Monash do not live in colleges, but either live at home or must find their own accommodation off-campus. The latter category of students have fewer opportunities to get to know and to live amongst Australian students who, still living at home, often retain their school friends, part-time jobs and aspects of their pre-university life. International students would be more than likely to live with other international students or in same nationality groups. Some work on Unit level 1 (first year undergraduate) pass rates by Monash Residential Services indicate that students living in a fully-supported college environment achieve higher marks.

Key findings – Auckland University

The University of Auckland was established in 1883 and currently has around 34,000 students, of which over 5,300 are international. The University is internationally recognised for its research excellence. The Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (International) at the University of Auckland is part of the Vice-Chancellor's office and is responsible for the development and implementation of the University's internationalisation policy and coordinates the International Committee. Auckland International, which coordinates international student admission and all pre-arrival information and international student

support, is part of this office.

Pre-and post arrival

Comprehensive preparatory and induction material is made available to prospective and new students. Orientation is of course a big focus of initial transition and students are invited to a general University orientation lasting four days, followed by a six-day international student orientation, providing essential information, access to Uni Guides (see below), walking tours, workshops and presentations exploring learning support, academic skills and many others. Social activities during the week are described by students as the 'highlight of the week', typically a trip to a nearby beach in Auckland Bay for a BBQ!

The International Student Advice Centre constitutes the focal point for international students – a sort of one-stop shop – comprising comprehensive student information and advice as well as specialist international student support, International Student Advisers and a visa advice and renewal service.

Auckland also has a system of Uni-Guides, who are appointed and trained from the student community to orientate first-year University of Auckland students, to team up first year students with other like-minded students, to provide friendship and support for first year students beginning their University career.



Ongoing initiatives

In addition to the centrally-based International Student Advisers, the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences have additionally invested in their own International Student Adviser, who I was very happy to be able to meet up with. Dealing with a relatively small number of international students, she is able to offer an enviously personal service and spend time building up trust and confidence with her lucky cohort. At the time of my visit, the Science Faculty had also just appointed their own designated International Student Adviser.

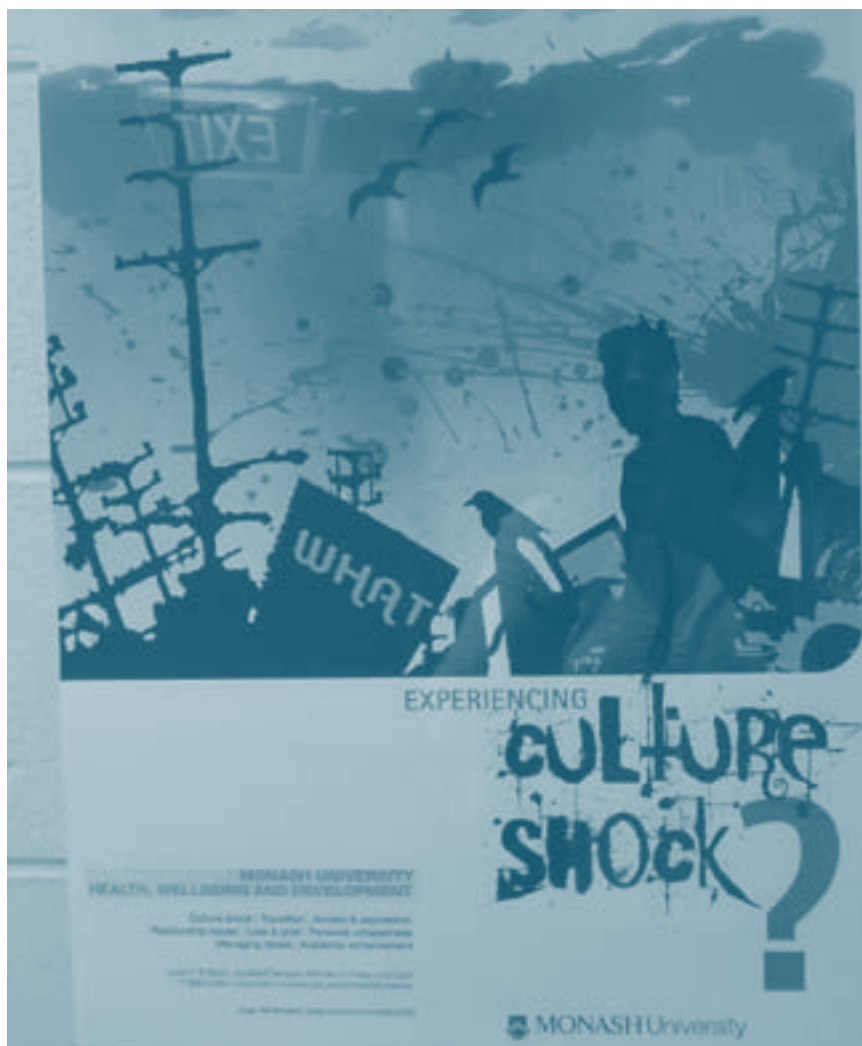
A wonderful and very successful initiative created and run by staff at Auckland International is *I-Space*. I-Space aims to promote internationalisation on campus and in so doing, provides premises for international students to relax in and take part in informational workshops, and lots and lots of social events! While I was visiting, a Kiwi lunch was being held with food and drinks (non-alcoholic of course!!) which many students fell upon with remarkable relish! A full-time member of staff runs I-Space, and aims to get students out and about, meeting each other and discovering the pleasures of New Zealand as much as their studies allow. Activities during the year would typically include, BBQs, fish 'n' chips lunch, Kiwi kai coffee time, henna tattooing, ethnic food evenings, fashion shows, and cultural festivals (different nationalities take their turns).

The *International Student Liaison Committee* was set up in 2004 to give a voice to international students studying at the University of Auckland and thus increase their sense of belonging and representation. The committee meets regularly to discuss the needs of international students from academic, welfare and social perspectives and advises the International Office on a number of areas from the success of activities and events, through to assessments of informational materials.

Other interesting initiatives I came across during my visit were *International Student Diaries* – kept by students for one month and sessions runs by Student Counselling on 'Tips for better cultural Adjustment'.

All in all, it was evident that the University of Auckland invests very seriously in the well-being and social integration of its students, both in terms of the allocation of staff resources and harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of its students.

Accommodation issues



At Auckland, there are three fully-catered colleges providing residential options for undergraduate students. For the lucky students who manage to gain a place in a college, as seen at the Melbourne and Monash universities, the emphasis is placed on integrating students as much as possible. Small touches such as national flags for all students' countries make all the difference. Many social activities are organised, although alcohol is discouraged. Activities might typically include harbour cruises, table tennis and volleyball matches and other sporting events. Postgraduate students are accommodated in self-catered flats, or may live in flats in the private, commercial sector.

Apart from the colleges, self-catered University-managed flats and other residences are provided, although in total there are only around 1600 places available to students. Colleges are naturally over-subscribed.

Social integration measures by the City of Auckland

The very multi-cultural nature of the city has a positive impact on the integration of the international

students. Food, services and city events reflect the very broad base of the permanent and temporary Auckland population. Even the Citizens Advice Bureaux have a special International Students Service!

Two events which I attended during my visit and which impressed me greatly were the Civic Welcome and a Safe in the City Expo. Both were organised by Auckland City Council in conjunction with the University of Auckland and all local schools. As a consequence of the very high numbers of new immigrant families and cohorts of international students in Auckland, the City Council has identified and addressed a need to both welcome and protect this disparate group. The scale of the Civic Welcome and the energy, resources and commitment which went into the event was truly commendable. Cultural performances by professionals and school pupils to the 1000+ audience, presentations by key members of the city as well as school and university students as well as extremely generous prizes donated for the event, made for the best and most genuine welcome any new resident could possibly hope for.

Following on from the Civic

Welcome, the Safe in the City Expo was even more mind-blowing. Packed with students, the event was attended by organisations including Citizens Advice Bureaux, NZ Police, Mental Health Foundation, Chinese Lifeline, the Ministry of Education, Rape Prevention Education and many more. Students were given incentives to visit each stall and thus learn about possible sources of help and support. The local police liaison officer, in tandem with a young Kiwi TV personality and group of international students, then facilitated and commented on a number of role plays performed by students, to educate new students as to the dangers and pitfalls of big city and university life. I nodded knowingly, acted shocked and laughed loudly at the serious, yet necessarily comic performances along with the other 500+ people in the exhibition hall.

There is no doubt in my mind that equipping students to be informed about cultural, social and legal boundaries, so as to limit or avoid unpleasant experiences which could have been avoided, is a hugely valuable contribution towards better social integration. Well done Auckland!

Reflections on implementing learning points at own institution and other UK institutions

- The capacity for implementing the kinds of policies and practices at institutions such as the ones I visited is of course very much an issue which depends on institutional priorities and resources. Some support measures may well prove to be beyond the reach of smaller, or less-well resourced institutions.
- It was clear that designated roles monitoring/evaluating the international student experience is a key area for development.
- I remain more convinced than ever of the importance of providing interesting and varied, non-alcohol-related, social activities – both fun and interactive ones and ones where students can learn more about their host country and gain added value to the investment made to their studies.
- I was very impressed with Auckland's Safe in the City Expo and would like to explore possibilities for either city-based or regional versions of the kind I saw in Auckland. Perhaps it might be possible for some institutions to adopt/adapt elements of examples of good practice as befits level of staff and budgetary resource, or to pool resources, contacts and ideas for shared events.

- My visit was extremely useful in allowing me to explore other models of support, which highlight how relevant expertise may develop outside traditional areas associated with international student support. For example, Monash University has a member of the Counselling Service, who has expertise and competency in cross-cultural communication and as such, delivers a cross-cultural workshop during Orientation.
- My visits to the colleges at my host institutions left me in no doubt of the obvious added value of a programme of personal, social and cultural support in residential colleges, as provided by all three universities. Perhaps this ethos might usefully be adopted or adapted into UK institutions, or at least those which don't already provide this. Outside of life within their academic department, the situation in which a student lives is often the most important of their overall experience of life in their institution and potentially where they have most to gain from cross-cultural interaction.

Reflections on national policy issues raised

One area of obvious relevance to the UK further and higher education market is the compulsory regulation through the Department of Education, by the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act of all Australian educational institutions, who recruit international students.

The Act provides for the delivery of nationally-consistent, quality education services within academic institutions, by registering education providers, setting minimum standards, ensuring tuition and financial assurances which, in so doing, protects the interests of international students studying in Australia. The integrity of the education providers is further strengthened by the ESOS legislation's interface with immigration law. This imposes visa-related reporting requirements on both students and providers.

Some aspects of ESOS have either already been implemented here in the UK, such as the DfES (DIUS) Register of training providers or will come into effect under the Points Based System. However, ESOS goes further than this, with legislation governing, amongst other things, the obligations of providers and tuition fees assurance and consumer protection mechanisms. New Zealand is similarly regulated by legislation under the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care

of International Students which provides a mandatory framework for minimum standards, good practice procedures and a complaints procedure for all education providers, enrolling international students.

Conclusions

Each of the three universities I visited generously shared with me some of the many ways in which they have impressively engaged with policy and practical measures for providing quality support for orientation, transition and the social integration of their international students to institutional life.

It is clear that social integration into institutional life takes place through different routes. For some it is through engagement with student representation, or volunteering. For others, taking part in social and sporting activities may allow them to feel connected to their institution and surroundings, not as an international student – but more simply, as a student. In order for international students to feel able to join in, transcend their own social and national boundaries, and integrate with groups other than their own, they need to feel secure, confident and welcomed. Several international students spoke to me of their own personal philosophies governing successful integration and satisfaction with life as an international student. They talked about needing to have a sense of belonging and the capacity to have some control over their lives, while at the same time knowing that the University was behind them, providing support whenever needed. One student confessed that he and other international students have experienced a sense of conflict when faced with having to move out of their comfort zone and meet local students and members of the community – a rewarding thing to do, but somewhat scary!

I wish to thank UKCISA, through the PMI for granting me the funds to make my study visit. I found the experience truly exhilarating and energising and I very much enjoyed discovering examples of excellent practice at each of the three host universities and getting excited – and not a little envious – at the resources, energy and commitment to the support of their international students.

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