Engaging new international students: An update of the 3C Model

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This paper ask whether communication barriers between newly arrived international students and host institutions in New Zealand and Australia are likely to persist, despite the development of the international student support profession in both countries. The problem is that robust measures for gauging efficient orientation procedures and tailored pastoral care practice continue to be lacking. Exemplary student support is dependent on research that investigates the international student experience. However, the absence of a dedicated academic discipline reduces the constancy and focus of research in international education, particularly in the area of student experience. The sector focus in both New Zealand and Australia also appears to be the economic value of international students, and there are indications generic marketing attracts the lion's share of industry funding (*Tertiary Education Union*, 2011; Pejic, 2012, p.4). Added to the paucity of student welfare research are the limited vocational pathways for coalface practitioners which permit a settled workforce.

Until international education disciplines are established in New Zealand and Australia, determining what is best practice in terms of supporting and advising new foreign students will remain problematic. This situation is not unique to Australasia. Pakoa, in Dunstan (2007, p.4), concluded after investigating international student programmes in nine countries that there was an "absence of key performance indicators and other formal performance evaluation processes or procedures" and "no effective mechanisms by which existing best practice are presented in the public domain". In order to address challenges of cross-cultural communication, frameworks of practice can help provide guidance to front line practitioners in the meantime. This paper presents an update on the 3C Model; a theoretical framework used by Victoria University of Wellington of Foundation Studies to engage and inform its new international students.

The problem

The International Education Agenda 2007-2012 outlines four primary goals for supporting the New Zealand's government's international education priorities. In Goal 2 the following key outcome is sought: "International students are welcomed, receive effective orientation guidance, and exemplary pastoral care and learning support" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007a). The difficulty for education providers is determining whether they are meeting these goals because the definition for pastoral care in an international education context remains ambiguous, and there are no established industry conventions for testing effective and exemplary practice.

The provision of clear information is integral to tailored support, and yet few studies have investigated the extent to which students comprehend the information presented to them. For English as Additional Language (EAL) students with entry level English (IELTS 6), tailored support is contingent on tailored language support, but my own informal software-based critique of New Zealand and Australian universities' web pages for international students indicated that readers with entry-level English are being overlooked. The use of dense lexical texts on information pages for international students, particularly information detailing health and safety services, suggests English proficiency is presumed. It is possible that the language

used on web pages reflects broader communication practice, since a background in dealing with EAL students is not a standard prerequisite for international student support work.

In terms of reader comprehension, the problem is that at least 98% text coverage (1 unknown word in 50) is considered necessary for EAL readers to satisfactorily comprehend a written text (Nation, 2006). Readers rely on a high proportion of high frequency words in any given text. The first 2000 word list (*Edict*, 2012a) identifies the English language's most frequently used words in everyday use. 80% of running words in most English tests belong to the first 2000 word list. Further, the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 1998) identifies the most commonly used words across academic disciplines which are not in the first 2000 words. In terms of producing information texts for new international students, respected linguist Paul Nation (personal communication, July 1, 2008) believes the minimum standard for the percentage of high frequency words, i.e. words belonging to either of the two lists, should be 95%. Yet my own informal appraisal of New Zealand and Australian university web pages using word frequency text profiling software in 2008 showed that online texts that presented student welfare information were often not reaching this level. In fact some pages contained up to 13% of the words that were low frequency and so were unlikely to be comprehended by learners with entry-level English. The percentage of high frequency words in texts can be quickly appraised by pasting excerpts of the text into the Edict website's text word frequency analyser page (*Edict*, 2012b).

New international students are not only disadvantaged by language but also by cultural wiring and instinct. An orientation which clearly communicates "the important stuff" is critical simply because there is evidence that tertiary students are either dissatisfied with services or are disinclined to access them (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2006, p67; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.78-79). A high proportion of international students enrolling in Australasian universities are Asian, and the number of Arab students has steadily risen in recent years. What is significant about Asian and Middle Eastern regions is that they are home to 'large power distance' (LPD) cultures. Anthropologist Geert Hofstede (2005) developed the Power Distance Index (PDI) to establish a distinction between LPD and small power distance (SPD) cultures. According to Hofstede (2005, p46), power distance is 'the extent to which the less powerful members of the institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.' Young people from LPD countries are more likely to seek supervision and defer to their seniors. Unlike the majority of New Zealand and Australian students raised in SPD cultures, they are not brought up to be independent, initiative-taking individualists.

Not surprisingly, support services at New Zealand universities appear tailored for students with SPD instincts. This is evident, for instance, in the findings of the 2007 national survey of international students in New Zealand: 'There appears to be evidence of an overall lack of awareness about the actual services on offer' (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p.77). These campus services, which range from office-based student advisors to clinic-based health care, depend primarily on individual initiative, without which support does not occur. In other words, if students do not take initiative and approach the services 'in waiting' themselves, they do not receive assistance.

Introducing the 3C model

The 3C Model is based on the following principles: (i) multi-disciplinary intelligence that culturally tailors the content and focus of student welfare information; (ii) text and speech that provides comprehensible input for students, particularly EAL students, and (iii) the use of mentors or significant others who reinforce the host institution's message and values. The Model addresses needs that students themselves have previously identified: "Asked what were the three greatest needs of students in their institutions, respondents reported support for cultural and academic adjustment, accommodation and language skills respectively" (Dunstan, 2007, p.8)

Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Foundation Studies incorporates the 3Cs into a lecture/workshops series over a ten-eleven week period (see Appendix A). These sessions are forty five to fifty minutes long and are incorporated into a core paper (FNDN001 Academic Writing). The presentations are delivered by individuals representing New Zealand Police, Wellington City Council, Tenancy Services (New Zealand Building and Housing) and a number of student support services, including Student Health. The principle of spreading out information delivery is based on findings in memory studies, which show that distributed learning over time is more effective than "a marathon session of highly concentrated learning" (Passer & Smith, 2001, p.293). Marathon sessions reflect the approach typically employed by universities that conduct intensive two-to-three day orientation programmes for newly arrived international students prior to the commencement of their studies.

1. **Cross-sector intelligence**

Appropriating expertise across sectors is indispensible to successfully delivering tailored support and advice to foreign students. The critical tenet of the first C is to look beyond the host institution for information on student experience. The observations of support professionals on campus are invariably limited and the students' experiences in the host country extend considerably beyond their student identities. They are sons/daughters, friends, consumers, employees and cross-cultural sojourners, and these multiple identities influence and mitigate their success or non-success as scholars.

Cross-sector intelligence helps to answer the question: 'What do new international students most need to know?' or 'Which information is currently a priority?' Orientations might be code-compliant in content but fail to address the live issues, which can either entrench or change from year to year. One student safety issue, for instance, is how international student perception of police and government authorities is influenced by their cultural instincts. It has been noted that many foreign students bring with them a cultural guardedness toward Police and government officials that is prevalent in their home countries:

> The disinclination of international students to report incidents is exacerbated by their reluctance to get involved with official authority. Many of the students come from countries where officialdom in general and law enforcement agencies in particular are not completely trusted by their citizens. In their new life abroad this wariness persists, although probably at a less intense level. This is not surprising because there is a lot at stake in how well international students manage their interactions with the local authorities (Bochner, 2005, p.64).

Jessica Phuang, the Asian Liaison Officer for Auckland City Police, advises that regular coordination with Police helps education providers in Auckland to determine the extent of this problem (personal communication, 26 October, 2012).

At the beginning of the Police presentation on the VUW Foundation programme, students are asked to fill in a short question sheet and then asked to repeat the exercise following the presentation. These sheets were administered to 120 students in four different trimesters over a three year period and the data produced some interesting results. For example, 20% of students believed they had to pay a police officer in New Zealand in order to receive help, and some of these students had been in the country for six months or more. Further, 68.3% believed that if they approached the Police *for any reason*, the Police would check their student visas. Almost all the students who believed they had to pay Police for help also believed the Police would check their visas if they approached them for any reason. When combined, these preconceptions imported from the students' home countries arguably present a compelling disincentive for seeking Police assistance.

The questionnaire results suggest that further research is necessary to shed light on student beliefs, so that student welfare sessions can be tailored accordingly. The preconceptions of international students on arrival are largely under-researched and until further studies are undertaken, individual institutions will need to regularly gather information from a range of on campus student services and government agencies in order to present timely and targeted student welfare advice. Multi-disciplinary committees within institutions, such as Victoria University of Wellington's Risk Advisory Assessment Committee, also offer a point of reference.

In order to achieve more strategic, coherent and consistent collaboration, a cross-sector body is needed. Since 2009, ISANA NZ has proposed the formation of an International Student Support Advisory Group (ISSAG) to provide a national, cross-sector perspective. This proposal (see Appendix B) recommends a cross-sector group that convenes twice a year to develop 'broadband connectivity' between stakeholders within export education. Members would include representatives from the Ministry of Education, education providers, police, relevant government agencies and ethnic communities. ISSAC updates would provide up-to-date, cross-sector information on current issues twice a year for student support professionals and orientation planners across New Zealand. This proposal was commented on by Minister of Tertiary Education Hon Steven Joyce, in a speech delivered by List MP Dr Jacqui Blue, at ISANA NZ's 2011 (June 17) conference in Auckland. The Minister welcomed the proposal and invited further information and discussion. ISSAC is based on the recommendations of the National Safety Advisory Group (NSAG) which explored a cross-sector approach to addressing student support/safety issues among international students in 2006. Michael Cullen, the then Minister for Tertiary Education, described the group's work as important and invited further sector comment (*Speech to International Education Association Conference*, 2006). NSAG investigations revealed gaps in the exchange of information between government agencies and education providers.

The type of collaboration recommended in the proposal would help to minimise potential silo effects that international student support teams are inevitably vulnerable to. The ISSAC initiative proposes the following (see Appendix B):

> To form International Student Support Advisory Council (ISSAC) for the purposes of: (i)
> collating, critiquing and disseminating data that is relevant to the welfare and safety of

international students undertaking study in New Zealand; (ii) providing succinct, practical guidelines for addressing emergent pastoral care issues, principally to international student (IS) support staff on the front line; (iii) and developing a national, cross-sector approach which forges closer, strategic collaboration between education providers, police and government agencies.

There are a number of regional cross-sector groups that currently address complex socio-cultural issues in New Zealand. Such groups recognise the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing problems that emerge from profound language and ethnic differences. In response to the needs of international students, Auckland City Police has established the Asian International Student Safety Issues Focus Group (*Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students newsletter,* 2012, May), the Nelson City Council sponsors the Nelson/Tasman *Speak out* initiative (*Speak out: There are no strangers here*, 2012), and the University of Canterbury, the Christchurch City Council and Christchurch Police jointly established the Safer Students Campaign/Report-It Website (*Report-it*, 2012). Other organisations have initiated cross-sector action in response to broader community needs, such as the Asian Mental Health Service managed by the Auckland District Health Board and the Rotorua Safe Families Action Plan led by the Rotorua City Council.

Various cross-sector initiatives in Australian states have sought to address international student welfare concerns. For example, in 2006 the University of South Australia led a co-ordinated approach to addressing a pattern of offending against a specific cohort of international students in Adelaide (Seow & Ashok, 2007). The cooperation and assistance of on campus services and external stake holders such as State government officials and local councils enabled the University's student support team to diffuse the crisis. Additionally, the New South Wales Premier's Council on International Education investigation recommended strategies for closer cooperation between Police, the education sector and student organisations (Pejic, 2012, p.9). The Australian Human Rights Commission also led local partnerships between education providers, Police and other agencies to raise awareness about violence and discrimination against international students (Pejic, 2012, p.9). A national, collaborative strategy has been called for by authors of the *Crimes against international students in Australia 2005-2009* report who recommended the facilitation of "enhanced links" between student groups and Australian Police (*Crimes against international students in Australia 2005-2009, 2011, p.169*).

Cross-sector intelligence facilitates a closer interface between researcher and practitioner. Both the student voice and the practitioner voice are notably lacking in international education literature in New Zealand (Leenheer, 2011), and this is an impediment to attaining a balanced view of the sector. Indeed, there are rafts of issues observed by practitioners that have yet to be tapped by researchers. For example, the type of data gathered by student advisors during academic monitoring (following up failing students) is largely unpublished. A closer liaison between practitioner and researcher would give rise to a greater output of rich, detailed data which in turn would provide impetus for evidence-based practice. An international education discipline is ultimately needed to achieve this as researchers who periodically investigate features of international education are usually pre-committed to other disciplines.

2. **Comprehensible Input**: using English text and speech within students' vocabulary ranges.

The second C provides the delivery of comprehensible input (CI). This is language that does not exceed the students' vocabulary ranges and shown to be accessible to new students. There are three methods for aiding appropriate vocabulary use: submitting texts to online word frequency text profilers such as *Edict*; using clarification questions and tasks during presentations and gauging student comprehension by administering exit quizzes.

Word frequency profiling

Dense texts need to be simplified to aid communication. Nation's observation that readers who are not familiar with 98% of the words in a text are unlikely to negotiate it with ease is highly relevant to international student support literature. In 2008, Foundation Studies worked with Victoria International to review the comprehensibility of Victoria University of Wellington's information material for new foreign students. Vocabulary scanning software (*Edict*, 2012b) was used to identify the proportion of high-frequency words in a range of texts. As a result of this collaboration, post arrival brochures for new international students were edited and simplified, and a number of online texts were reworded.

Figure 1

Gambling: Some students gamble in an attempt to "win the jackpot" and increase their annual budget - however, most of the time they LOSE, LOSE, LOSE! Never gamble with the money you have brought to New Zealand to pay for your study or living. When people cannot control their urge to gamble, it is called ""Problem"" or ""Compulsive"" Gambling. The Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand offer professional psychologists and social workers to help people with gambling issues. They are located on Level 3, Community House, 84 Willis, phone 0800 664262.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse: Drug and alcohol abuse can jeopardise your health and your future. Possession of drugs carries penalties that include large fines and imprisonment.

For example, an excerpt from an (old) online page (see Figure 1) with 1763 words was scanned to determine the percentage of first 2000 and AWL words. 79.81% were first 2000 (in black); 6.64% were AWL and 13.56% were outside both lists. The percentage of high frequency words is too low (86%): falling almost 10% below Nation's preferred 95% for new international students (personal communication, July 1, 2008). In other words, new international students with IELTS 5.5/6 will have difficulties negotiating this text. Fortunately, the comprehensibility of such texts can be raised relatively easily by reducing the proportion of low frequency words (in blue). For example, the phrase "drug and alcohol abuse" (following the sub-heading) could be replaced by the expression 'Taking drugs and drinking too much alcohol', and 'harm' could be used to express 'jeopardise'. The principle of the second C is minimising paths of least resistance for students negotiating essential health and personal safety information. And a drag-net approach is eminently possible, with subtle adjustments to language being added without 'dumbing down' the texts.

In addition to *Edict,* other word frequency profilers are available online such as *Frequency level checker* (2012) and *Lextutor* (2012).

Clarification questions and tasks

In the Foundation Studies weekly sessions, carefully timed clarification questions are asked of the presenter by a programme teacher to help students comprehend the flow of speech 'mid-flight' i.e. the teacher acts as an interpreter/moderator to raise the CI level. The merits of clarification questions are highlighted by findings in negotiation studies. Nation (2001, p. 65) believes that 'if [second] language learners are engaged in a task, then observing others negotiating is just as effective as doing the negotiation.'

During the lectures, students are also invited to discuss questions or scenarios that involve a problem solving element. For example, following the Building and Housing sessions students are given tenancy scenarios and asked to determine whether the described actions are lawful or unlawful. Bochner suggests this adds to the cognitive information students are given:

> It is not enough to issue students with a booklet, or nowadays a CD, no matter how much useful information they contain, or how well they are produced. This is not to belittle the excellent guides to living, studying and gaining access to health resources in New Zealand, produced by the Ministry of Education (2004c, d). This material has to be supplemented by behavioural exercises that usually take the form of supervised role playing and other action-based methods … . (Bochner, pp63-64, 2005).

The above techniques allow for depth of processing, which is considered critical for long term memory retention (Passer & Smith, 2001, p.293).

Comprehension checking

Unlike focus groups, quizzes are not vulnerable to the cultural inclinations of LPD students to offer respectful comments rather than honest appraisals. The focus on exit quizzes is to determine whether students have comprehended the presented material, rather than elicit student opinion. In select lecture/workshops, the Foundation students' overall comprehension is determined by administering exit quizzes (restricted to a limited number of multi-choice, true-false and short answer questions). Quiz results from multiple trimesters since 2009 indicate that student uptake from the lecture/workshops is generally high. The two questions below are examples of questions presented to students on the morning of the Police visit:

1. What do you need to pay a Police officer for their help?
a. Depends on the police officer
b. Depends on the problem
c. Nothing
d. Depends on your income
e. A minimum charge of $10

2. If you contact the Police for *any reason*, they will check your student visa to make sure it is valid (legal/up-to-date).

True / False

The post-presentation quiz results gathered from 120 students over four trimesters indicated high uptake from the Police sessions. Before the presentation, 20% of students believed they had to make some kind of payment to Police for their help, while only 1% maintained this

view following the presentation. 68.3% believed the Police would check their student visas *for any reason* if they approached them, but only 5% held onto this view after the universities constable endeavoured to explain otherwise.

Of course, processing an item of information immediately after it had been presented is not the same as residual learning. The lecture/workshop series has begun to implement a more formal questionnaire at the mid-point of the trimester. Early results indicate that student uptake from sessions presented two to three weeks earlier is still encouragingly high for the majority of students.

3. **Campus coaches**

Peers and co-nationals constitute a formative influence whose support and interpretation of services influence new students' readiness to access the host institution's support networks (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p.81). Chang (2007), speaking at the ISANA International Education 2007 conference in Adelaide, argued that "Gen Y" international students are influenced by what their friends and Internet friends say when assessing the efficacy of student services. The third C recognises the importance of significant others who mediate, translate and reinforce message. Students themselves appear to be seeking more assistance and supervision from mentors. The 2007 survey which investigated student experience in New Zealand found that students were dissatisfied with lack of mentor support, which is not altogether surprising for students arriving from LPD countries (New Zealand Education Ministry, 2007, p.76). Indeed, it appears that these students intuitively seek support not only from host institutions but also from the state. For example, the Chinese "maintain a strong belief in state intervention for the purpose of social protection" (Forbes-Mewett, 2005, p.5).

Recognising the importance of structured assistance, Foundation Studies at Victoria University of Wellington employs a social activities coordinator who organises recreational events for students to attend. While this is principally social, the coordinator forms relationships with individual students, and informally acts as an advocate for the Foundation Studies student support regime. Student leaders are also recruited to assist the social activities coordinator. They are rewarded with Vic Plus points, a certificate programme that recognises the work of students who engage in voluntary work on and off campus. If participants accrue a certain number of points, the Vic Plus certificate is added to their academic transcript upon graduation (*Vic Careers: Career development and employment*, 2012). This extra-curricular scheme appeals to international students from LPD cultures more accustomed to extrinsic motivators and provides incentives for students to "side" with the University and reinforce its message.

Another mentoring option for Victoria University of Wellington students is the Campus Coach initiative pioneered by Student Support Services (*Campus coaches*, 2012). This programme matches senior students with new students and the former mentor the latter in the first four weeks. This is helpful for newly arrived students from LPD cultures who intuitively seek a level of supervision. Advice from the mentor potentially helps to offset the reluctance of some students to access campus services. Structured interventions in the first weeks of a student's sojourn are considered important for fostering constructive friendships.

The invited speakers who present on Foundation Studies weekly series can perform a limited coach role by presenting a friendly face on behalf of their support service or agency. This is demonstrated by questions asked during the presentation and students approaching the speaker afterwards. For example, when the Universities Constable raises the issue of students lending money to peers during the Police presentation, students regularly demonstrate a connection by offering comments and sharing personal anecdotes. In one case, when students were advised not to bring parcels containing illegal substances into the country, a newly arrived Vietnamese student immediately asked to share his recent experience. He recounted how he had been approached by a stranger at Singapore airport to take a parcel to New Zealand for him. It seems that the Police officer's presentation was winsome and relevant enough to elicit this student's testimony. The problem of bringing illegal substances into New Zealand has been highlighted in Study Auckland's student safety DVD (*Safety in the city*, 2010).

Student support personnel can fulfil the role of coach to some extent if they are perceived to be accessible and caring. Early engagement can help achieve a degree of engagement and trust between the student and the host institution. This was underscored by a study that identified strategies that international student support professionals successfully utilised to help Chinese students access essential support services (Pickering and Morgan, 2004, p.7). International student advisors who showed a 'warm heart' and communicated clearly were themselves bridges for students who were disengaged.

Notwithstanding the important mediator function that student support professionals and invited speakers can fulfil, it appears that students' peers remain the most likely formative influence for new students. Information provided by education providers can either be reinforced by significant others or reduced to irrelevancy, since 'help from other international students continues to be the first port of call for international students' (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p.81). This appears to apply also to students who are at risk or experiencing difficulties:

> Research has shown that troubled international students are more likely to confide in informal rather than formal contexts. They will be more comfortable with other students, both co-national or sympathetic host-national peers; with support groups such as national student organisations, student union societies; and special interest groups that are based on religion, sexual orientation, affirmative action or political preferences (Bochner, p64, 2005)

Co-nationals or domestic students, according to Bochner, represent important allies. If institutions can recruit existing students to mentor or coach new students, then communication barriers between the new students and the host institution are likely to be reduced.

Conclusion

Due to the demand-side focus of the export education industry and the absence of established academic disciplines in New Zealand and Australia, the capacity for host institutions to effectively provide tailored support and advice to international students is reduced. It appears that the dual challenges of language and culture that student sojourners face have not been fully understood or addressed. The information intake of newly arrived international students remains a relative unknown, and the best options currently available to student support teams

and orientation planners are theoretical frameworks such as the 3C Model. The importance of clear, relevant advice for new international students is underscored by research that indicates that international students are disinclined to access services.

In response to the linguistic and socio-cultural challenges, the 3C model offers practical, collaborative steps for effective interventions that engage and advise new international students. The model provides a reflexive mechanism for identifying emergent issues that demand a tailored approach to communication. Tailored language is provided to increase the prospect of comprehension. And coaches are promoted as allies to reinforce important information to 'service-shy' students post-enrolment. The 3C Model is versatile in that the 3Cs are easily transferred to various educational settings, such as institutes of technology, PTEs and schools. In short, the model identifies a chronic communication problem within the international education sector in Australasia and seeks to address it by introducing a framework of practice informed by cumulative experience and research.

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Victoria University of Wellington FNDN001 Friday Lecture Series Lth 1

Trimester 1 2012

W1 **Introduction to Powhiri**   Peihana Ruhe
Peihana will explain the process for the powhiri
(welcome) at Ako Pai Marae, Karori Campus.

W2 **Powhiri**   Ako Pai Marae
Welcome onto Ako Pai Marae

W3 **VUW Student Learning Support Service**   Karen Commons
Karen introduces SLSS and demonstrates   Senior Learning Advisor
useful note-taking techniques.

W4 **NZ Police**   Jane Gowans
Jane Gowans presents current personal safety Universities Constable
issues which are most relevant to international
students in New Zealand.

Easter break

W6 **VUW Student Health**   Catherine Nelson, Practice
Catherine recaps services provided by Student Nurse
Health, as well as touches on important health
issues that are relevant to students.

W7 **Trimester 2 Subjects**   Trimester 2 teachers
Trimester 2 teachers outline the key aspects
of their courses to help you choose subjects
for the next Trimester.

W8 **Mid-trimester Review**   Chris Beard
The key points of two presentations
are reviewed and recapped. A quiz is administered.

W9 **VUW Financial Support and Advice**   Nicky Roesink, Student
Nicky outlines financial support services   Finance Advisor
available to students at VUW and discuss
common financial problems students face.

W10 **VUW Counselling Service**   Magdalen Ser, Counsellor
Marion Kirker introduces the Counselling Service
and describes common issues she deals with,
particularly in relation to international students.

W11 **Building & Housing Group**   Gaynor Loryman
Gaynor introduces the BHG and   Tenancy Services Advisor
discusses flatting issues that are relevant
to tenants who are new to Wellington/
New Zealand.

Appendix B

ISANA NZ ISSAC Proposal

To form International Student Support Advisory Council (ISSAC) for the purposes of: (i) collating, critiquing and disseminating data that is relevant to the welfare and safety of international students undertaking study in New Zealand; (ii) providing succinct, practical guidelines for addressing emergent pastoral care issues, principally to international student (IS) support staff on the front line; (iii) and developing a national, cross-sector approach which forges closer, strategic collaboration between education providers, police and government agencies.

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1) Executive Summary of Proposal

In brief this proposal seeks the establishment of the International Student Support Council (ISSAC) in order to:

Identify areas of shared concern in relation to the welfare of international students in New Zealand, with an initial focus on student health and personal safety.

Provide a mechanism by which education providers, police and government agencies develop a co-ordinated cross-sector approach to international student (IS) support, taking in regional and national perspectives.

Circulate cross-sector updates on emergent international student (IS) issues to student support personnel on the frontline.

Provide recommendations to education providers and government agencies which focus on broadening the scope of cross-sector collaboration beyond front-line support.

2) Background to the proposal

ISSAC is a proposal that originated from grassroots experience and provides a mechanism for offering practical, co-ordinated support for international students beginning their studies in New Zealand. The outline for the proposal was included in an ISANA briefing paper to the Minister of Education in May, 2009.

The following cross-sector groups provide templates for action at a national level:

Asian International Student Safety Issues Focus Group (Auckland City)
Safer Students Campaign/Report-It Website, Canterbury
Nelson Safer Community Council
Asian Mental Health Service, Auckland District Health Board
Rotorua Safe Families Action Plan
Risk Advisory Assessment Committee, Victoria University Wellington

3) The need for a national, cross-sector advisory group

(i)   Education New Zealand began promoting a *NZinc.* approach in 2009.

(ii)   In 2006, ISANA's (cross-sector) National Safety Advisory Group for international students (NSAG) recommended a nationally co-ordinated, cross-sector approach to IS support.

(iii)   The *Universities Australia Action Plan for Student Safety* is being implemented to provide a national, collaborative approach to IS support in Australia. This was in response to negative publicity and high level concerns expressed by the Indian and Chinese governments about the safety of their students in Australia.

(iv)   According to the Colmar Brunton report *Why New Zealand?* presented to the Education New Zealand conference in 2007, New Zealand's unique strength is the international perception that it is a safe study destination. This perception has been compromised in the past, with significant consequences for the sector, according to Mingsheng Li's paper *The impact of the media on the New Zealand export education industry* published in 2007. The effect of media reports on perceptions of Asian students in New Zealand is also noted by Butcher, McGrath, & Stock in their paper *Once returned, twice forgotten? Asian students returning home after studying in New Zealand* (2008).

(v)   Evidence-based models for effectively informing and supporting new international students are lacking, and little research is being undertaken to remedy this. This appears to be the immediate challenge for IS support personnel, given the cultural and linguistic challenges facing the majority of incoming students, particularly long stay students.

(vi)   Increasingly complex pastoral care cases are testing individual institutions' capacity for providing an optimal level of care for their international students.

4) Support for the proposal

ISANA NZ began circulating the proposal in 2010. The concept was first endorsed by the ISANA NZ executive and ISANA members at ISANA NZ's annual AGM in August 2009. To date, individual international programme heads in the university sector, the ITP International Directors group and NZUSA have expressed support for ISSAC. A member of Universities Medical Directors describes ISSAC as 'a very sensible proposal' and a recently retired secondary school principal suggested ISSAC was a proactive student support mechanism that was overdue.

5) Proposed functions of ISSAC

1.   Exploit the strategic advantage of New Zealand's small size by kick-starting a national cross-sector approach to IS support.

2.   Assist education providers in delivering clear, pertinent information to incoming students, with an initial focus on personal safety and health.

3.   Generate 'broadband' efficiency in terms of connectivity between education providers and across sectors, with the two-fold purpose of (i) circulating fresh cross-sector reports on IS support issues, and (ii) mitigating historical, institutional and logistical barriers to collaboration.

4.   In conjunction with the initial focus on health and safety, develop holistic, cross-sector perspectives on areas of on-going concern such as: IS mental health, unwanted pregnancies and restricted access to sexual health care, prostitution, gambling, and culturally-specific harassment such as pressure to lend or give money or import illegal drugs.

5.   Provide assistance to IS support professionals who work in isolation.

6.   Support the Code Office's work by helping to identify and promote best practice frameworks relevant to front-line IS support.

7.   Develop the sector's capacity for responding quickly and efficiently to 'live' IS welfare issues.

8.   Provide a regular source of qualitative data for education providers, government departments and research centres, such as the Centre of Applied Cross Cultural Research.

The above functions include proposals outlined in the NSAG recommendation to the Minister of Tertiary Education in 2006. The Universities Australia position paper *Enhancing the Student Experiences & Student Safety* (June 2009) noted the work of NSAG in its discussion of the care of international students in New Zealand.

6) Meetings

Initial Consultation

The intent is to consult representatives within the university, ITP, PTE and secondary sector, representatives of student health care and counselling, Police, Compliance Operations (Department of Labour), international student groups and ethnic community representatives.

Their views on (i) live IS welfare issues and (ii) the merits of the ISSAC proposal will be canvassed, along with recommendations for Council members.

These views will be used to fine-tune the objectives of the group, provide context to various pastoral issues, and shape the structure and intended goals of the Council's meetings.

Meetings

Two meetings a year are proposed. At the meetings representatives for each sector group present a summary of key trends or concerns (circulated prior to the meeting) which are then addressed in a roundtable discussion. A report containing a bullet-point summary of key concerns and recommendations is subsequently prepared and reviewed by Council members following the meeting. This is then disseminated to IS support teams within educational institutions and relevant government agencies. Importantly, international student advisors are provided not only with updates on live issues concerning international students, but also with strategies for addressing emergent issues in terms of delivering appropriate advice to students.

Following the first year, a report will be prepared for stake holders including Education New Zealand, MOE International Division, Police and heads of IS support teams. This will help clarify the function of ISSAC, identify shared points of concern and establish best practice strategies for addressing them. This report will give include particular attention to feedback from front line IS support teams, particularly their views on the value of ISSAC assistance.

7) Members on the Council

It is recommended that the need for representation on the Council is balanced with the need for functionality during the first 24 months. An initial focus on the tertiary sector is proposed, given the smaller number of institutions to liaise with, the pastoral challenges brought about by high student advisor-student ratios and the advantages of establishing operating procedures with a smaller group. For the first meetings, therefore, it is proposed that members represent the following:

Universities (student support manager)
ITP (international programme head)
Universities Medical Directors
Student Counselling
Police (senior detective and/or liaison officer with an ethnic community portfolio)
Compliance Operations (Department of Labour)
Asian Mental Health (Coordinator)
Asian community group and/or Arab community group
MOE
Convener (ISANA executive member)

PTE/ language school & secondary representative to be added
Secretariat

8) Author of proposal

Chris Beard is a member of the ISANA New Zealand Branch Executive and is a senior teacher/student advisor on Victoria University's Foundation Studies programme. Chris began teaching ESOL in 1992, English for Academic Purposes in 1995, and Academic Writing and NZ Literature at foundation level in 2001 and 2007 respectively. He holds a Masters in Arts (Humanities), a postgraduate diploma in Second Language Teaching, a diploma in pastoral care, and is an accredited ExcelL Intercultural Skills trainer. He has experience teaching in private English language schools and in the tertiary sector, principally at three institutions: International Pacific College, University of Canterbury and Victoria University. Chris first began supporting students in a pastoral capacity in 2001, and in this embedded advising role he gained first-hand experience assisting at-risk students while liaising with student health providers, police, and government agencies. He has presented papers at ISANA conferences, lead specialist IS support workshops and convened the National Safety Advisory Group for international students (NSAG) in 2006. From 2006 to 2010 Chris sat on the Risk Advisory Assessment Committee at Victoria University of Wellington In 2008 he developed the 3C Model; a framework that provides orientation planners with practical guidelines for informing and supporting new international students. Victoria University has won multiple best practice awards at Education New Zealand conferences.

9) Limitations of proposal

The recommendation is for the Council to be small in size (see page 5) for the first 12-24 months with an initial focus on tertiary to allow for smooth start up. This will limit representation to some extent, although education providers will remain informed through Council reports and broader representation is anticipated beyond the first twelve months. Further, a co-ordinated approach to IS support is contingent on institutional support and cooperation, so care will need to be taken in canvassing stakeholders. There appear to be few reasons, however, why Council reports and advice would not be welcomed by education providers and government agencies, and response to the concept so far has been overwhelmingly positive.

10) Features of this proposal

1. Practical, cost effective and timely – with a clear focus on front-line service.

2. Identifies and addresses gaps in the provision of clear information and support for new international students, particularly English as Additional Language students who lack confidence in accessing services.

3. Provides a mechanism by which to promote Goal 2 in *The International Education Agenda*:

       International students are welcomed, receive effective orientation

       guidance, and exemplary pastoral care and learning support.

4. Signals a proactive approach to international student support which is likely to be viewed favourably by the students' parents and embassies.

For communication relating to this proposal please contact Chris Beard in the first instance.

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