Making the Most of Your International Student Barometer Data:
A Guide to Good Practice

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Contents

Executive Summary

Making the Most of Your International Student Barometer Data: A Guide to Good Practice (the Guide) is an initiative of UA and AEI. The Guide is intended to assist university staff involved with international students to interpret and make good use of the results of their annual ISB results.

The Guide offers practical advice, particularly for those who deal directly with international students, on how they can make changes and improvements that will increase satisfaction with the many aspects of international student experiences in specific universities.

The Guide focuses on the four ISB areas most directly related to the on-campus student experience: Arrival, Learning, Living and Support. The presentation of a variety of good practice case studies shows how different universities have, over a period of several years of using their ISB results, improved student satisfaction levels in one or more of the four areas. These case studies are interspersed with discussion of the significance and challenges of different aspects of provision of services with reference to national and international ISB results.

In the Arrival section there are case studies on strategies for ensuring a positive experience as well as studies of Arrival experiences such as airport pickup, helping new students make friends, and providing internet access. The Learning section includes case studies covering marking, assessment and feedback; supporting research students; English language strategy; integrating technology in teaching and learning; and improving employability. The Living section includes case studies on pastoral care, on-campus living, and transport and safety. The fourth ISB area highlighted is Support. This section includes good practice case studies covering building relationships with students, health services and career development services.

The Guide also includes case studies on how to use ISB data to make improvements. These studies illustrate how important it is to be strategic when handling institutional ISB results and cover areas such as gaining support from colleagues for taking action, the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) as motivators, packaging results for different audiences, ensuring good response rates, and strategies for benchmarking internally and externally.

Another section of the Guide provides advice from the literature about how to ensure success in bringing changes to an institution. This section stresses the need to link into existing organisational processes, to work to a well-structured action plan and to be prepared for the improvement process to be an ongoing and sometimes bumpy ride.

The final section draws together some common threads in the case studies to demonstrate a range of strategies for success and improving student satisfaction. The lessons from these case studies fall into several categories:

The engagement theme came through strongly. Mobilising key players at all levels of the university and the use of KPIs based on ISB results influenced improvements. It was also clear that any processes or projects designed to achieve improvements were most effective when integrated with existing university planning, review or quality assurance cycles, thus ensuring the ongoing monitoring of actions.

The case studies also showed the impact of the way ISB results were handled within universities. Involving a range of university staff in annual i-graduate presentations, and timing the consideration of results to dovetail with annual planning and budgetary cycles were effective strategies. The institutional research office, by whatever name, provided essential support by re-packaging ISB data for different groups, such as faculties or campuses that were then able to target action for their unique circumstances.

Successful implementation of improvements in the universities contributing case studies relied on strategies such as the use of teams working across the institution and recognising that resources are needed to drive improvement projects. It is important to recognise and allow for different levels of

enthusiasm for change. Strategies need to be molded to work around obstacles as projects proceed. Careful targeting of areas for action, rather than trying to make general improvements, was a fruitful strategy for a number of universities.

Finally, the role of benchmarking for achieving improvements in the international student experience came through in the case studies. Universities that share ISB data and experiences with other universities report success in lifting performance. Internal benchmarking, for example, between faculties and different campuses, also has an impact.

A set of appendices is at the end of the Guide. The appendices include a summary of the national 2012 ISB survey results, the methodology for identifying universities to be approached for case studies, and a list of the universities that agreed to the inclusion of case study material.

Introduction

Making the Most of Your International Student Barometer Data: A Guide to Good Practice (the Guide) is an initiative of UA and AEI. The Guide demonstrates a national commitment to the improvement of the international and domestic student experience on Australian university campuses.

In response to requests from universities participating in the annual ISB and the domestic Student Barometer (SB) conducted by i-graduate, we have prepared the Guide as a practical source of advice for staff wishing to use their own university's results.

The Guide draws primarily on the results of the April 2012 survey of 36 Australian universities and the experience of the i-graduate team in working with higher education providers to interpret data and identify change strategies. While the emphasis of the Guide is on international students, the discussion and findings presented through case studies from the participating ISB universities are also relevant to the domestic student experience on Australian university campuses.

The purpose of the Guide is to offer practical advice, particularly for those who deal directly with international students, on how they can make changes and improvements that will increase satisfaction with the multiple aspects of international student experiences in individual universities[1]. Our underlying assumption is that directors and staff of international offices need the support of their university colleagues to bring institution-wide changes. Hence it is intended that the Guide be of value at all levels in the institution. The Guide presents ideas in non-technical language and gives suggestions on how to make the most of the tailored data provided to each university at the end of the ISB survey period. The Guide also includes strategies to ensure this information is disseminated and used throughout the organisation.

The examples of good practice demonstrated through the case studies show creativity and ingenuity in dealing with the challenges of supporting international students to ensure they have a good experience and maintain a positive impression and willingness to recommend their university to others.

You might also wish to look at the documentation of demonstration projects on enhancing the student experience that AEI has published[2].

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[1] The Guide uses the term 'universities'. The information and ideas are relevant to other education sectors and providers.

[2] Australian Education International. (2012). *Enhancing the International Student Experience.* Canberra. Retrieved from https://aei.gov.au/research/Publications/Pages/Default.aspx

Aims of the Guide

The aims of the Guide are to:

- highlight the areas where Australian universities do well, compared to their international peers, and identify where there is room for improvement in the quality of the experiences of international students attending Australian universities
- demonstrate, through case studies, examples of good practice in areas of Arrival, Learning, Living, and Support that have built on the use, to a greater or lesser extent, of ISB survey results
- demonstrate, through case studies, good practice for ensuring robust ISB data and using those data to facilitate change through improved project planning, setting priorities, and benchmarking
- discuss organisational strategies that universities may use to make improvements, taking account of different university structures and cultures

The Guide is not intended to be a summary of all results from the 2012 ISB survey. A summary of these findings is at Appendix A. The Guide covers results only where these are relevant to the substance of the case studies and discussion of themes emerging through them.

The case studies are intended to stimulate discussion about what might work in a specific university. They are not intended as definitive statements about all that is happening in a given institution on the aspect of service provision that forms the subject of the case study. The case studies are snapshots that illustrate a successful strategy based on the ISB, rather than full descriptions of what institutions are doing. Our emphasis is on presenting a variety of examples of how universities approach the effective use of their ISB data. The case studies come from universities that have been using the ISB for some years and where a cycle of evidence gathering, intervention and subsequent evaluation is evident.

Our invitations to individual universities to provide case study material were based on an analysis of patterns of results in the national and international ISB data. Where it was clear that an Australian university's results on an aspect of the international student experience had improved over the years they have used the ISB, there was a request from us to discuss the reasons why and how their ISB data informed actions leading to improvements. This type of information formed the basis of many of the case studies.

Some additional case studies were compiled from universities where survey results showed a consistently high satisfaction rating in an ISB area over a number of years, particularly where the rating placed them among internationally highly-ranked universities. Our intent in these situations was to identify the practices that the particular university considered were driving high satisfaction ratings.

Fourteen universities contributed material that resulted in the many good practice case studies included in the Guide. The Innovative Research Universities, some of which provided individual case studies, also contributed combined information for a case study on benchmarking.

What is the International Student Barometer™?

The ISB is designed to be an independent and confidential feedback process for education providers to track the decision-making, perceptions, expectations and experiences of international students through an annual survey cycle. The ISB has been refined through 14 cycles and is the industry standard for understanding the international student experience.

Participating institutions use the ISB as a risk management tool, identifying the key drivers of international student satisfaction and establishing the relative importance of each. The ISB is also used as a comparative measure to track, year-on-year, how expectations and perceptions change within an institution and against established local regional, national and international benchmarks as well as within informal groupings of like institutions that have agreed to share their ISB results.

A number of universities also use the ISB for basic institution-wide quality assurance activities. In the early years of the ISB in Australia, the universities used ISB data within institutional audit portfolios to demonstrate attention to the international student experience. Australian universities then began to use the data as real-time, compelling evidence to present to internal or external quality auditors as an integral part of their overall quality assurance strategy. With this precedent established, it is likely that universities will continue to use ISB and SB data as evidence in submissions and applications prepared for the national higher education regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Australian universities also use ISB and SB data with offshore campuses and international partners. Examples include the University of Queensland, the University of Melbourne and the University of New South Wales that have shared good practice with international universities through the Universitas21 best practice event held in 2013. Adelaide University and James Cook University include their Singapore campuses in the ISB to provide consistent student satisfaction data for each university. From a global perspective, international cooperation to identify and promote good practice in managing the student experience is positive for both students and providers.

The ISB is the largest annual study of international students in the world and is the flagship research service of i-graduate, an independent benchmarking and research service that delivers comparative insights for the education sector worldwide. Since the ISB's inception in 2005, i-graduate has gathered feedback from more than 1.5 million students in 24 countries. To date, more than 1,200 education providers worldwide have engaged with i-graduate's research initiatives.

Thirty-six Australian universities participated in the April 2012 survey in a project supported by UA with funding support from AEI through the (then) Australian Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.

Structure of the Guide

The emphasis in the Guide is on demonstrating how ISB data can be used to improve the experience of international students and on providing practical examples of strategies and success stories from the university sector.

The first part of the chapter, Strategies for Using ISB Data to Make Improvements, is built around case studies from universities that have had success in integrating their ISB results in organisational processes leading to demonstrable improvements in the provision of services for international students. Examples given include ways of gaining the support of colleagues, using ISB data to inform the setting of KPIs, and ensuring good response rates that are essential for robust results.

The second part of Strategies for Using ISB Data to Make Improvements draws on the extensive literature on organisations and how to bring about lasting changes and improvements. It is primarily based on the perspectives of experienced university staff members, particularly those who were interviewed for the Guide and shared their observations and strategies for bringing about improvements in the international student experience. Our aim is to give a broad perspective on how organisations work, with some pointers and examples to help with implementing a successful improvement project. The purpose is to encourage linkages into existing organisational frameworks and processes such as quality assurance, planning and review.

Case Studies: Good Practice for Improving the Student Experience presents material based on highlights from ISB results where Australia does well in providing services for international students. There is also discussion on areas where there is room for improvement. The case studies relate to the four ISB survey areas we considered most relevant to the experiences of international students on campus: Arrival, Learning, Living, and Support. These case studies tell some remarkable stories of how Australian universities have grappled with the challenges of responding to the expectations of international students on campus. The studies generally placed Australia in a very strong position in ISB international rankings for international student support. We stress that, in order to advance the national competitive position, Australian universities will need to keep improving practice, often in areas outside their direct control.

How to use the Guide

The Guide is a resource for stimulating discussion and action in your university. Improvements in international student support should be built on collegial effort and, as much as possible, on the use of existing institutional processes and frameworks. We suggest you look for ideas about management of the survey processes, in particular those sections relating to maximising response rates and engagement of the university community. You will recognise some ideas that are already being used at your university but you are likely also to find new ideas and approaches. When you are thinking about ways to make improvements in the student experience after your annual ISB data is received, the material in the chapter, Case Studies: Good Practice for Improving the Student Experience will also give you some fresh ideas on which to build. Talk over your ideas with your colleagues and from there devise strategies that will engage key people in making the changes you want to see introduced. It will also be important to ensure that you link any intended actions with existing university processes, committees and any other relevant activities.

When you are searching the Guide for ideas, you should also look at your own university's most recent ISB results. Apart from straightforward summaries with percentages, you will find results for Australia as a whole and also international ISB results. A sense of how your university is performing, compared to others, can be useful for developing an argument for change. The ISB tables, that show the trend in results over the period you have been using the ISB, are also very valuable. As well as seeing improvements, you can benchmark your own performance internally and spot areas where you might be slipping.

A feature of the results that can be very useful is the 'matrix' that is developed for each of the three main student experiences: Living. Learning and Support using the data from your university. Each year i-graduate analyses your results to obtain a picture of what are termed areas of high and low 'derived importance'. Derived importance is calculated through a correlation of satisfaction ratings on the ISB questions concerned with Living, Learning and Support with answers to the question probing the likelihood of your students 'to recommend the university to other students thinking of applying here'. For example, if 'access to sports facilities' attracts a low satisfaction rating from your students, but they are prepared to highly recommend the university, then the importance of 'access to the sports facilities' receives a low derived importance score. The three matrices for your university will show you, in graphic form, the areas of high and low derived importance so you can readily identify which factors have the greatest impact on students' likelihood to recommend your university to others. It will make sense for you to work on areas identified as high derived importance, although you should not ignore the areas of low derived importance, particularly if these are easy to fix.

Strategies for Using ISB Data to Make Improvements

This chapter is about ways to make improvements in areas identified as needing attention in your ISB annual survey results. The hardest part of any quality assurance exercise is implementing actions that you can see are necessary from the ISB data delivered to your university at the end of the survey cycle. When your university's ISB data arrives, it is exciting to see what international students say about it and how they judge your efforts, although there are, inevitably, disappointments if some of your efforts do not seem to have hit the spot. Then, after the excitement, comes the hard slog of galvanising action and making improvements where they are needed.

The first section of this chapter is based on examples from Australian universities that have tackled the challenges of improving aspects of provision and support as a result of feedback from students. Here the intention is to share case studies about how your peers in other universities deal with the survey results, how they are able to make changes, and improvements in ISB student satisfaction scores for their university. There is no 'best' way to deal with survey data as circumstances differ so much from institution to institution. The good practice examples in the case studies are launch pads for developing your own strategies.

The second section of the chapter is intended as a reference to give you some frameworks within which you might take action. It locates activities for improving aspects of service provision for international students within organisational quality assurance frameworks, planning and review processes. The chapter also discusses some ideas about change management that suggest why sometimes the task of making improvements can be so difficult. There is an extensive literature on organisational change, innovation and quality assurance available to extend your reading if you choose to do so.

Case Studies: Good Practice in Organisational Strategies

Introduction

The cultures, scale and structures of Australian universities vary substantially. These factors influence how an institution goes about obtaining results with its ISB data and ensuring that any identified weaknesses are followed with action that will improve performance and student satisfaction. This section of the chapter gives examples of strategies used at different universities to ensure effective action and is intended to give a flavour of what will invariably be a multi-faceted and institution-wide approach.

Mustering support

When ISB results come in, there is typically great interest in the findings but the follow-through and the task of galvanising action outside the office is often a challenge.

Griffith University, an early adopter of the ISB survey, worked over several years to fine-tune a strategy that engages key personnel in committing to act on ISB data.

Case Study: Targeting key players

Griffith University places emphasis on involving different levels of staff to ensure that agreed actions percolate through the university. They do this, firstly, by working closely with academic and other personnel embedded in academic groups, particularly staff with specific responsibility for international matters. These individuals are instrumental in taking 'big picture' messages back to group-level boards thus ensuring the emergence of a university-wide perspective and integrated effort to improve the university's achievements.

A second way Griffith engages staff to bring about change is by recruiting key administrators with oversight of areas the university considers fundamental to resolving shortcomings or issues. For example, one head of an administrative area worked creatively over a number of years to change the culture of a service area so it became more aware and attentive to students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This effort paid handsomely so that the area now attracts high student satisfaction ratings.

One way used to ensure that university personnel understand the importance of ISB results is used at Southern Cross University, where the i-graduate team makes an annual presentation of ISB results.

One university that disseminates its ISB data widely is James Cook University.

At Charles Darwin University the Vice-Chancellor frequently refers to the ISB in formal and informal arenas.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

ISB data are frequently used to set KPIs for different units and departments, as well as for universities as a whole, to track progress towards achievement of goals set in Strategic Plans. It is also now quite common for Australian universities to use ISB data as a basis for setting KPIs for senior university leaders.

Queensland University of Technology incorporates ISB data as a basis for setting KPIs. The ISB data trickle down the institution for discussion between managers and supervisors about development of improvement strategies.

The Australian Catholic University: Since the introduction of the ISB and the Domestic Student barometer (DSB) in 2010, the university has three years' experience with ISB results and has been using the data to set KPIs for organisational units as well as for senior university leaders. The presentation of SB results by the i-graduate team to senior staff is seen as very helpful for highlighting areas where there are achievements but also areas for improvement. It is expected that organisational units include relevant actions in their Action Plans on the basis of the ISB information supplied to their unit.

Southern Cross University has integrated its annual ISB data into the university's progress metrics. In other words, ISB data are used for measuring progress towards the achievement of goals incorporated in the university's KPIs. One of the strong points of ISB data from this university's perspective is that it is externally validated and allows benchmarking, unlike home-grown surveys.

James Cook University: At the direction of its Council, ISB/SB data are incorporated in institutional KPIs and are included in the university's annual performance portfolio. Also each faculty is required to submit a short annual summary of their achievements and improvements compared to the results of the ISB/SB and this summary is included in the portfolio.

Dealing with the data

At the end of the annual i-graduate team's ISB presentation, an audience can feel overwhelmed by the volume of data. Regardless of the impact of the results on the presentation day, how the results are handled and used after that will mean success or failure for making improvements students have suggested are needed. As might be expected, there are various ways that universities go about this task. Some examples follow.

Griffith University's approach to improvement philosophy is 'look at the data and then do things'. The ISB does not always provide clear-cut answers on all matters that Griffith staff intuitively know need improvement, even where the ISB questionnaire has coverage. But the data strengthen the understanding of issues and build on other data sources including anecdotal information, to give some confidence for moving ahead with action plans. Essentially, ISB data help set priorities for action in situations where there are many competing options.

James Cook University (JCU): For JCU an important feature of ISB/SB surveys is the short turn-around on results. This allows the university to track student feedback very quickly and to take immediate action that will benefit students who have expressed concerns through the ISB/SB. The university's quality enhancement office works with the results and produces tailored packages that are provided to each faculty and campus as a basis for specific, considered actions.

University of Southern Queensland (USQ): The timing of ISB results allows findings to be dovetailed into the university's strategic planning cycle that begins in September. USQ also uses the SB and is continuing to work on ensuring that the data are structured and rigorous enough to allow comparisons between international and domestic students.

Action plans are essential if there is an intention to make changes in any aspect of an organisation. Some examples follow of how priorities are set and actions initiated.

Case Studies: Identifying priorities and actions

University of Wollongong (UoW): Each August at UoW, the Student Experience Subcommittee of the International Committee of Academic Senate begins the task of setting its forward action plan based directly on ISB results from the April survey. The subcommittee nominates only five or six issues identified through the ISB results. An important criterion for deciding areas to target for improvement is the extent to which a change may also affect domestic students. The subcommittee takes into account the potential impact of potential improvements and changes on the university as a whole. This way the committee greatly increases the likelihood of gaining support and ensuring successful implementation of their strategies.

Queensland University of Technology: ISB data inform discussions about international student matters in two important areas. Firstly, the senior leadership group responsible for international matters takes account of results when planning. Secondly, the informal grouping of heads and staff from different university units, that meets every few months primarily to troubleshoot issues as they emerge, also monitors hot spots identified through ISB results.

Australian Catholic University: Following the sharing of results through the annual i-graduate presentation, the data go to the university's institutional research and planning office and from there to Deans and Directors in packages relevant to their responsibilities. The ISB data are seen as crucial input for ensuring student retention. The data are also valued as contributing to student engagement and success areas that are prioritised in the Strategic Plan.

The Tricky Problem of Response Rates

One of the challenges of obtaining useful results from the ISB is achieving enough responses from students from which to extract reliable data.

There seems to be a positive relationship between the extent to which a university engages with student feedback (including through the ISB) and the rate of response to data collection exercises in general. Student fatigue from constant surveys can turn off their enthusiasm for genuine engagement with feedback. Internationally, universities have tried many approaches to minimise survey fatigue including non-release of results until a student has completed a subject evaluation questionnaire, but no amount of coercion seems to guarantee good response rates. A few examples of strategies Australian universities use to achieve good response rates and reliable data are given below.

Griffith University: When communicating with students on actions taken as a result of their feedback through surveys, Griffith staff use the slogan 'we listen/we do something/we tell you about it'. This strategy involves using regular emails to acknowledge problems that have arisen and following with updates on what is being done to fix things. Where the problems are deep-seated and not amenable to a quick fix, this also has to be acknowledged to the students.

The University of Newcastle (UoN) based its approach to increasing response rates to ISB questionnaires on the belief that when students see that the university takes their comments seriously, and makes changes, not only do satisfaction ratings for service provision go up, but survey response rates usually also go up. This underpins the fact that the national average ISB response rate in 2012 was 23% but UoN had a 41% response in 2012 thus adding rigour and credibility to the Newcastle ISB data.

To achieve this high response rate, the university decided that it would increase communication with students about opinions they provide through surveys and other information. A key element in the approach was communicating with students in advance of surveys and impressing on them that they could expect to see results from their input. On UoN's website, there is a message: 'this is what you told us … this is what we did'. The key to UoN's success in raising response rates was communication generally but also communication focused on telling students what had been changed, or not changed and why, as a result of their considered feedback.

University of Southern Queensland (USQ): One of the first steps in dealing with ISB results at USQ is to collate a summary that is sent out to students indicating intentions about changes that are planned as a result of their feedback.

Flinders University (Flinders): Staff members responsible for the Flinders Living program participate in the annual presentation and discussion of ISB results and in follow-up action. This includes efforts to feed back to students the outcomes of their contribution to the annual ISB survey. It is also part of the Flinders' strategy that ensures students know they are being heard, and is also used to stave off potential 'survey fatigue'

Other strategies universities use, such as incentives, encourage students to complete the ISB survey. Universities that work with student unions and international student networks report success in improving survey response rates. For multi-campus universities, encouraging campus-based support and internal competition (campus to campus) can also improve response rates.

When communicating with students, it is important to stress that an independent external agency conducts surveys that are also part of a world-wide benchmarking process. Universities sometimes struggle with making the cultural shift from a 'survey mentality' to framing the process as an activity to engage students through regular feedback on results and actions. Students are generally proud of their university, and know that they will carry their qualification, and the university's logo, through life. They understand that it is in their interest to assist the institution to make improvements and enhance its reputation.

Benchmarking

Increasingly there is pressure on universities to benchmark their performance against local, regional, national and international norms as appropriate. It is important to distinguish between 'benchmarking' and 'comparison'. Comparison is the informal sharing of ideas and this can be very useful and productive. Benchmarking is about formal, structured sharing of evidence and good practice to identify

if, or how much, an institution is leading or lagging in performance. With an understanding of strengths and weaknesses compared to other institutions, it is possible to develop action plans that can ensure continuation of success and bring improvement in the areas needing attention.

The ISB is an essential source of data for benchmarking international student satisfaction given the substantial data sources these surveys provide across the world. Australian universities participating in ISB surveys automatically have access to Australian university results and to international data. Your university can use these data to judge how it stands on meeting international student expectations within Australia and/or against ISB participants generally.

Case Study: External benchmarking

Griffith University was one of the earliest adopters of the ISB from 2005. Their aim then was to obtain clear, objective advice for improving performance in areas the ISB covered. The university particularly liked the anonymity and the potential for benchmarking with similar Australian universities within the IRU group, and beyond this with universities in Queensland, Australia, and internationally with other ISB participants.

Another example of benchmarking from James Cook University shows how results from the ISB and the SB can be used for internal benchmarking.

Case Study: internal benchmarking

James Cook University (JCU) uses the ISB and the SB and sees the main value of using both instruments as the capacity these give for benchmarking internally as well as nationally and internationally. The data are used to underpin an integrated university-wide student experience strategy for international and domestic students alike. The way the data are used at JCU means that the institutional research and quality unit is required to drill down past the institution's general statistics and produce a number of tailored reports.

The ISB/SB are used with the Balanced Scorecard approach which allows comparisons to be made between the views of international and domestic students. Another use of the data is to draw profiles of particular kinds of students say, 25-year-olds with specified characteristics, and then to compare the results for domestic and international students in this category. This can be very illuminating, highlighting useful information for marketing to particular demographic groups. The satisfaction ratings can give a sense of what is important to different kinds of students.

This university also uses ISB/SB data to compile Student Report Cards, one for each faculty and one for each campus. This allows leaders to see how they are performing internally compared to their peers. The net result of drilling down into the data is the production of finely-tuned improvement strategies.

An emerging trend is for clusters of universities to share their data and exchange operational and strategic ideas based on ISB data. This sharing of success data and data on weaknesses provides a valuable discussion forum and examples of good practice on which to model action in a home university. The way that universities choose to cluster for general or benchmarking is varied. Some clusters, such as the Australian Technology Network, are based on common elements in the missions of the member universities, while others are based on geography. In 2010 and in 2013, i-graduate has worked with the appropriate Queensland Government authority to provide comparative data for the state, and also on intrastate, regional comparisons. Other geographical benchmarking activity, for

greater Sydney and for Perth universities, has helped them to identify common problems that involve local government and other agencies.

The Innovative Research Universities is one of the groups with long experience of sharing ISB data for benchmarking.

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Benchmarking: Innovative Research Universities (IRU)

In Australia, the most active benchmarking group using the ISB is the IRU network which has seven members: Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and the University of Newcastle.

One of the goals of the IRU is 'to share … knowledge and experience' so it made sense to set up a networking group for benchmarking international student activities in 2008.

Activities include:

- regular meetings of DVC/PVCs international and International Directors
- annual international office staff dinner
- workshops to share best practice
- professional development workshops around aspects of service provision such as admissions, student mobility/compliance, and
- international delegations with academic staff to promote, for example, research delegations.

The group shares results from the ISB and each university nominates issues of concern from their own data as well as actions they are taking to resolve issues and improve results. The main benefits from IRU benchmarking are that the program gives:

- a baseline for subsequent analysis of ISB data showing improvement or otherwise
- positive reinforcement of successful initiatives and strategies
- emphasis on areas needing improvement
- formulation of plans and initiatives for change
- a basis for evidence-based planning and resource allocation, and a
- a mechanism for engaging academic and administrative staff in university-wide improvement projects.

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What the Experts Say: Strategies for Using ISB Data Successfully

Introduction

Before you begin a project to improve an area of weakness identified by the ISB, it is essential that you have a broad understanding of the dynamics and processes in your own university and in organisations generally.

Even if your project is small, it is unlikely to be successful if it does not take into account the range of organisational processes that drive your university's actions and decision making. Firstly, you will need to understand, and link into, the university frameworks that underpin quality assurance, planning and review. You will also need to understand the roles of key organisational units and committees available to support your efforts and perhaps be co-opted to assist your work. Your senior colleagues will be excellent sources of advice on how the university functions as well as on the nuts and bolts aspects such as who are the important influencers, or where you might anticipate blockages on achieving your aims.

A second perspective on how organisations work can be found in the extensive literature on organisations and how changes and improvements can be achieved. The intention of this chapter is to give you a perspective, as well as some pointers and strategies from the literature, to help you implement a successful improvement project. While referring to the literature, the majority of the text is based on the experience of university staff who have lengthy use of survey and other feedback mechanisms to improve student experiences.

The Big Picture

It is important that you have a general frame of reference when embarking on any project. To guide you we have selected some ideas that will supplement your understanding of your own university and will be helpful as reference points as you contemplate an improvement project.

An interesting insight into factors affecting the way change projects evolve comes from Geoffrey Moore[3]. His work was initially developed for the marketing field and drew on understandings from research into how innovation happens and how some people are more inclined than others to adopt emerging technologies and embrace new ideas. Moore[3] emphasises the need for project organisers to recognise two groups likely to be encountered in the course of any project. Firstly, there are the 'early adopters' who are enthusiastic and accept the direction of change from the outset. They are great supporters and help broadcast the message and make things happen. The second group are the 'pragmatists' who represent the majority of a community. They are more conservative about change and need to be encouraged to commit. The pragmatists in the group will throw up all the reasons why not to change current university practices and are likely to argue 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'.

The pragmatists are often unimpressed by evidence such as the ISB provides and will be among the first to point out any weaknesses in data collection such as low response rates.

The relevance of understanding these differences is that your plans need to accommodate both kinds of people as well as colleagues who fall somewhere in the middle. The early adopters will be excited by the prospect of making improvements but the pragmatists will need encouragement to join in even if their rational side realises change is necessary.

Apart from paying attention to the people involved, you will need to anticipate that the processes you set up to follow will be far from smooth. There will inevitably be stalling, and even stopping, at various points or in different parts of the organisation, which means that a careful timetable will, at best, need

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[3] Moore, G. A. (2002) Crossing the Chasm. New York: Harper.

adaptation or, at worst, be shot down in flames. You should anticipate that the 'one step forward, two steps back' rule will apply at some stage or another. Using Moore's term, the project will reach a 'crack' or a 'chasm' that opens up so specific rescue strategies will be needed to get to the other side and continue the improvement project processes. (See the Action Plan below.)

Driving an Improvement Project

This section gives an overview of areas to consider when you are setting up a change or improvement project.

Locating the project

Your improvement project needs to take on board the existing structures and processes in the university. It is also very beneficial to tap into expertise when exploring data provided through the university's research office.

The job of making improvements is a university-wide task and improvement projects are much more likely to be successful if they are embedded in the broader institutional framework for quality assurance and handling data.

Experienced university leaders generally hold that ISB results, or other data of this type, should be rolled in with an institution's cyclical quality assurance, planning and review processes. If the data are mainstreamed and become part of these processes, they are more likely to result in actions and not simply drift away as may happen with student feedback results. Where the ISB indicates there is room for improvement in the handling of student fee enquiries and payments, the KPIs of the unit responsible should reflect a goal for improving student satisfaction by, for example, 10 per cent. Also the KPIs of the staff in charge of the area should incorporate achievable improvement targets in their work plans and KPIs. These KPIs will automatically be meshed into frameworks for monitoring progress against divisional or institutional goals so that the ISB data will not be buried by the sheer volume of routine.

The drivers of the planning, monitoring and review processes are usually located in university-wide data handling offices such as an Institutional Research Office, University Research and Planning Office, Quality Unit or similar. These units usually take the lead in analysing and re-formatting ISB data just as they do with other data generated internally and externally. It is crucial that this unit is involved in handling ISB results as they can include these in other university performance data and can also do breakdowns of results by faculty, location or other headings where this is needed as a basis for action plans.

When analysis is complete, the data typically go to university Student Experience Committees, International Advisory Groups, Faculty Committees and other governance and/or management committees at various levels. These units will look at what the data say and most likely will set priorities for action as part of general planning and quality assurance processes. Some universities base their annual international student action plans on the results of their ISB surveys.

Setting Priorities

There are many ways of setting priorities for action on improvement goals. Some universities take a comprehensive view of the ISB data they receive and seek to remedy as many of the problems as they can, all at once. This can involve many individuals. Others take a pragmatic approach and highlight just a few key, achievable goals. Some factors taken into account in deciding what to do are:

What does the trend data say for the period the university has used ISB? Are there any downward trends, or even sudden blips, that suggest a problem area? These may be caused by the departure of a key staff member, or a breakdown in IT before the survey period, so they may be one-off issues.

Are there outliers in the data? In these cases, are they areas where the university has influence or not? Do these outliers refer to matters that are important relative to other core issues, or to a problem

being resolved? An example would be where a new library building is under construction and a resolution to the problem of low student satisfaction with library services is therefore in sight.

Do these problems intersect with problems that affect domestic students also? In these cases, improvements may bring benefits not only for international students but will flow to domestic students and have a multiplier effect. This was the experience of the University of Wollongong when it negotiated a free shuttle bus between the campus and surrounding areas. The domestic students and staff also benefit now from this service.

Following exploration of the data and options available, there should be a conclusion with priorities for action. These may be simply a few priorities for attention or a comprehensive program for improvement.

Laying the groundwork

Before launching into remedial action based on ISB results, it is important to acknowledge progress made, even small improvements, and particularly when these are seen as part of an upward trend. In the ISB data showing 'wave on wave comparison' you can see results on a particular area such as satisfaction with 'assessment' or how the students were 'welcomed' into the university from the first year the ISB was used in your institution, to the most recent year. Improvements need to be acknowledged and celebrated in the university before moving on to dealing with areas needing attention.

It is important that students also are aware of your strengths and accomplishments as a university, as well as those areas yet to be addressed or difficult to address. Your university should have a webpage that reports on ISB results for students as well as staff. When students are informed that the university has heard their voices on a particular issue, but cannot act for one reason or another, students respond favourably. The benefit of responding to student feedback is that even if nothing can be changed, students will be motivated to respond to future surveys and thereby help maintain response rates.

The following example from the University of Wollongong illustrates this idea. This is an extract from the university's website.

Linking with existing processes

As mentioned above it is crucial to link with existing university processes and structures. Universities are complex with a mix of collegial and bureaucratic operations. Beginning improvement projects, based on even the most unambiguous data, can be very daunting. Your task in using ISB data, and indeed any data to achieve improvement is part of the broad quality assurance and risk management processes that are commonplace in contemporary higher education. These processes are, in turn, part of any university's planning, monitoring and review framework. It is difficult to think of these processes and frameworks as being separate because they are so interdependent. Most Australian universities embed their 'quality assurance cycle' in their annual planning and review cycle.

Quality assurance (QA) processes are described by what sometimes seem like slogans such as Plan/Do/Review/Improve, or the well-known ADRI (Approach, Deployment, Review, Improvement) that the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has used as the framework for quality assurance audits over many years. A TEQSA version is Approaches, Implementation, Outcomes and Improvement. These all amount to the same idea, that quality assurance is a perpetual, repetitive cycle. Your challenge is to ensure the ISB data and follow-through actions you seek are included in the university-wide QA cycle and are not viewed as marginal and of interest only to the international office. The case studies in the earlier part of this chapter show some ways this can be achieved. The potential for ISB results to be used as evidence for TEQSA purposes is discussed in the first chapter.

An important feature of the varied formulations of QA is that genuine quality improvement occurs only when the 'loop is closed'. That is, the data collected at the Review stage are used and there are

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[4] University of Wollongong. International Student Survey. Retrieved from
http://www.uow.edu.au/student/international/Survey/UOW147743.html

changes in institutional practices that can be deemed to be Improvements. Then, of necessity, the Plan/Do/Review/Improve loop process begins again.

Regardless of the words used, you can conceptualise the use of ISB data for change and improvement projects as part of the Improve phase of the QA cycle, the data having been generated through the Review activity. Your task is to find and use strategies to take you from the situation indicated by your ISB data to a situation that will, over time, be shown through improved ISB scores.

The Action Plan

Structure of the Plan

There are many ways to structure an action plan. University planning protocols will be in place for putting together annual plans and setting KPIs. The institutional research unit responsible for driving institutional planning and review, and for providing data to support target-setting processes, will have ideas and strategies to suggest. It is reasonable to expect that this unit will be available to help you in your efforts to use ISB data for improvement projects and to link you into wider institutional frameworks.

The plans developed will be based on realistic timelines for achieving improvements. While some changes can be achieved rapidly, it is more usual and effective to frame any plan within a timeframe of several years. For example, the first year might be for planning, the second for implementation and the third year for evaluating the impact of changes. Plans also need to acknowledge the resource implications of the project with reference to the university's budgetary cycle.

Engaging the Community

It is important to ensure that you gain the attention of the university community so that the improvements you are striving to implement do not get overlooked or slide away in day-to-day operations. There are many ways to achieve this goal, but some institutions have had success with setting up small task-oriented improvement teams to work with colleagues on identified high priority areas. Teams are a way of sharing good practice across the university as they can take examples of success from one situation to another. Similarly, they can pass along reports on how high performers operate and can relay their tips to others. Essentially, teams provide ongoing, active intervention in the improvement process and be more effective than simply providing information to a passive target group and expecting action to flow from that.

While it is essential to engage colleagues in actions towards improvements, sometimes the broader community is the key to making changes. This is especially the case for matters outside the direct control of the university. For instance, many universities involve police in orientation and other functions to assist students to understand the role of the police force in Australia. It may also be necessary to work with public transport personnel to ensure appropriate training so that employees understand the needs of international students and give them every assistance possible.

Staging Implementation

There are many ways to conceive the sequence of project stages. Timelines and targets are fairly simple to set but keeping to those is the challenge. When people and committees are involved activities become complicated. David Capocci[5] has identified some of the factors to consider and are as follows:

Organisations move through a series of stages when improvements are being introduced.

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[5] Capocci, D. Quality Assurance and Quality Control – A Model for Managing Change. (n.d.).
Retrieved from http://www.sasqag.org/pastmeetings/ChangeManagement_Strategy6.pdf

The transition between stages is not smooth and gradual; instead the potential for stalling or even stopping can occur between any of the stages. These points are called 'chasms' or 'cracks' (Moore).

Specific strategies and approaches will be needed not only to address stages, but also to navigate chasms and cracks.

Any improvement project has to be seen as a multi-staged process, with or without chasms or cracks. Some universities have used the staging process successfully.

Stage 1

The first step is ensuring the data are clean and robust so that sceptics do not knock them down. If the data can be challenged, for example because of low sample size, arguments will be advanced against the usefulness of the data. The university's institutional research office will have ensured that the data with which you are working are sound and defensible. They will also ensure that interpretations of results are reasonable within your university's operational context and that they acknowledge particular circumstances such as lack of proximity to particular facilities, opportunities for work placements, or other hindrances, where these might have impinged negatively on ISB results.

Stage 2

This stage involves preparing meaningful reports that different groups of readers easily understand. ISB results are well presented and comprehensive but in some cases they are technical and broader than an individual university unit or committees might need. It is likely that a series of tailored reports will need to be prepared to support your project with interpretation of the results, recommendations for action and timeframes focused on different university areas. Staff at i-graduate are working with several universities to simplify the integration of the ISB data set into the institution's data warehouse for further manipulation.

Stage 3

This stage involves transmitting ISB data to where they are most effectively considered, with a high likelihood of follow-through on agreed actions. Individual university practices and culture will determine the best way forward, but the place to start is with existing committees or subcommittees. One strategy for improving engagement and action on ISB results is to organise teams to work across the university with academic units such as schools, faculties and institution-wide units such as IT and facilities management. The role of the teams is to explain the results and recommendations and to help develop starting points for projects or even single actions towards making improvements.

Stage 4

Finally, there is a stage in which all stakeholders report back on actions taken and thereby the quality assurance loop is closed. This is often the most difficult stage to complete with any consistency if multiple university stakeholders are involved. Some units will meet deadlines, others will be slow. It is essential for the institution to establish whether or not agreed changes have been made so there can be confirmation that action towards improvement has been implemented.

Most institutions manage to progress through the first three stages successfully, but the fourth closing-the-loop stage can often be difficult and frustrating. This is the case not just for ISB data, but for all sources of quality assurance data such as teaching and learning surveys, employer surveys and other data. Difficult as it may be, it is essential to make sure that your ISB data are considered. This information is unique to each university and ISB results also include benchmarking data that allow the institution to gauge the effectiveness of its efforts against national and international competitors. The fourth stage also focuses efforts on students' views of the areas that are most important to them and demonstrably need improvement. When closing the loop, don't forget to put a communications plan in place for the major stakeholder group – your current students.

Starting over

At the conclusion of an improvement project say, to upgrade Arrival processes or career development services for international students, you can feel proud when the ISB data in subsequent years show your work has made a positive difference. Life in the competitive international student market is such that you cannot assume your job is done even for the medium term. If you succeed in making more improvements the following year, you can be sure that your competitors will be working hard to catch up and even surpass you to attract higher satisfaction ratings against national and international benchmarks. This is particularly the case when scores are in the lower ranges.

You cannot be complacent in areas where you gain high scores. Student expectations are constantly rising so you have to work to keep ahead of that curve. The message is that just as you make progress or finish a number of improvement projects, you can expect to have to begin more improvement cycles. Improvement and quality assurance is often described as a process rather than a destination. Hence it is a constant in organisational life.

Case Studies: Good Practice for Improving the Student Experience

Introduction

This chapter presents good practice case studies and commentary on the performance of Australian universities in three main areas the ISB questionnaire covers relating to the student experience.

It is not unusual to think about 'academic' and 'non-academic' aspects of the student experience. As the non-academic aspects of university life affect academic achievements so much, it is more useful to think of them as a continuum. An international student who is having difficulty with adjusting to a new culture but is assisted through support from the counselling service is likely to improve their capacity for adapting and learning. It is not helpful to isolate different aspects of a student's life and passage through a program of study at a particular university.

This section of the Guide is based on the data from the 2012 Australian annual survey and provides a commentary on the significance and implications of findings. We deal with the four areas that are central to the student experience: Arrival and Orientation, Learning, Living, and Support and examine student satisfaction rates as measured through the ISB questionnaire. Students respond on a four-point scale from 'Very Dissatisfied' to 'Very Satisfied' and there is also a general question on students' satisfaction (also on a four-point scale) asking: 'Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience?' in each of the four areas.

The most important sections of this chapter are the many university good practice case studies. As indicated in the Introduction, we invited 14 universities to submit ideas for case studies based on success stories with using ISB data to improve ISB performance, or deal with tricky, or even intractable, problems in supporting international students. (The first section of Strategies for Using ISB Data to Make Improvements contains case studies also but these are for illustrating successful organisational strategies to ensure effective use of ISB results in improvement projects). These case studies are intended to give you inspiration and ideas for actions you might initiate in your own university.

Arrival and Orientation

> **Student Voice (verbatim):**
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> 'The arrival welcome I received was very wonderful. I was indeed surprised with the friendliness and support given to me by the university staff. In fact, I am suggesting my family members to further their education in my university.' (Student, Malaysia)
>
> 'There should be a strategy of integration of international students into the Australia communities around the university and some introduction into the indigenous people for us that come from other indigenous cultures for the cultural diplomacy. When we are residing on their ancestral land.' (Student, Papua New Guinea)
>
> 'I was not offered any help at all! I have to find my own way.' (Student, Indonesia)
>
> 'The conditions with respect to the above aspects are much better today but was not the case six years earlier when I had arrived into this university. Lots of initiatives has been taken by the university in these past years and am hopeful that we will be there on the top very soon ... Keep up the good work. Thank you.' (Student, India)

Anyone who has travelled to a new country knows it can be a daunting experience. For a young person, who may be on their first trip outside their home town, let alone outside their country, there

will be many mixed emotions. There are feelings of excitement at the prospect of what is to come, exhaustion after family farewells and a long journey, and probably nervousness about whether they will readily find their way to their chosen university and lodgings. Students may be worried about their ability to speak English and fit into the Australian milieu.

First impressions count. The experience of arrival on campus will build on the ease, or otherwise, with which students have negotiated visas, finances, travel bookings, immigration formalities and so on. This might have been positive or fraught with anxiety (probably a bit of both) but either way it is crucial for initial contacts and welcome at the new university to be very positive and encouraging. If the university messes up this early stage of in-country/on-campus interaction then it will take a lot to make up lost ground from a less-than-encouraging start. Who among us has not initially judged a whole country by the perceived helpfulness of immigration officials, the ease of our journey to our accommodation and our first experience of the locals?

The national results for students arriving in Australia up to four months prior to the 2012 ISB are, as a whole, encouraging. The average of our scores is higher than our international peers, as is the Australian result for the question: 'Overall, how satisfied were you with the arrival experience?' which attracted an 89 per cent rating. This score increased quite substantially from 2011 to 2012.

Leaving aside the strong and improved result on the 'Overall' question, marked differences within the pattern of scores from individual universities are evident. The sector performs well when it comes to setting up a bank account (93%); the welcome/pick-up at airport/railway, bus station (84%); dealing with the accommodation office (86%); the condition of accommodation on arrival (82%); and getting to where I would stay on the first night after arrival (87%).

One of the Australian universities determined to improve how it greets and picks up students on arrival is Charles Darwin University. The University, through trial and error, has arrived at a system that now works very well for arriving students.

Case Study: Arrival and Pick-up

Geography is not on the side of Charles Darwin University (CDU) when it comes to the arrival times of international flights bearing its new international students into Darwin. These flights typically arrive at between 2.00 and 4.00am so greeting students and transporting them to their accommodation has been challenging.

One strategy was to instruct arriving students to take a taxi from the airport to their accommodation and keep the receipt for reimbursement. But the first CDU ISB survey data suggested the need for a different approach to improve satisfaction rates for welcoming students. The second approach to pick-ups at the airport was to engage a commercial agent service to meet international students and deliver them to their accommodation. This was very expensive for the university and unreliable as flights were often delayed, students missed their connections so that in a number of cases there was nobody at the airport to greet and assist them on arrival.

Following the 2011 ISB survey data, a new strategy was introduced. This involves members of the university security staff who are rostered to meet new students on arrival at Darwin international airport. In-coming students submit an Arrival Information Form, 48 hours before arrival in Darwin with information on flights, accommodation address and other contact details. The staff who are at the airport to greet students wear CDU uniforms and take students in a university vehicle to their accommodation which is often on campus. At the accommodation there is a welcome pack with information and some food that they can use until they get to a café or university facility to eat. The 2012 ISB survey data reflected significant increased student satisfaction with their arrival and welcome experience.

On the other hand, areas of weakness in Australian scores show up in areas where it is sometimes hard to understand why there is a poor result. Compared to our international benchmarking partners, we do poorly on a number of Arrival aspects including organised social activities. These are areas of weak performance for the sector as a whole. It is not clear what the expectations of international students are with regard to organised social activities but expectations are not being met. It may be that in circumstances where there are few or no students, from the student's home country already enrolled at the university there is no ready-made network for new students. Or it may be that the cultural background and life experience of some students is such that they do not realise the onus is largely on them to make their way and find friends unless they are in a residential hall or other hostel accommodation. Many students move into a university and community environment where they have no existing connections.

One university that places strong emphasis on Arrival is the Australian Catholic University (ACU). ACU has attracted high satisfaction ratings on aspects of the Arrival experience and achieved some pleasing improvements in results on different Arrival aspects, some as high as 14 per cent, over a few years. This has come partly from an initial strategy of identifying changes considered 'easy' and not very difficult to achieve particularly when the support of senior leaders of the university is evident. The ACU approach is shown in the case study below.

Case Study: Making Friends

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) operates on three main campuses (North Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane) with additional campuses at Strathfield and Canberra. Services for students are coordinated from the Sydney campus but each campus has its own team including International Student Advisers who drive the efforts in response to local needs. The Advisers work in collaboration with the admissions team to support a seamless transition into the university.

There are no in-country pre-departure briefings so information is provided through a comprehensive ACU brochure covering many aspects of arrival, orientation and practical aspects of living in Australia such as mobile phones, public transport and expenses. Orientation programs are specific to each campus.

Several years ago, ISB data identified areas where new ACU international students were reporting they were not very satisfied. The university went through these results and identified about half a dozen areas where improvements should not be very difficult to achieve.

At least some of the university's success in provision of a good Arrival experience appears to be directly connected to the process of linking international students into the general campus community. In the early days after a new student arrives there are many organised social activities. This initiative has contributed to ACU substantially lifting student satisfaction ratings of their initial experiences of university life. Students give high ratings for opportunities to make friends among Australians, as well as link with new friends from their home country.

Another of the contributors to the strength of Arrival results at ACU is the ACUmates social program aimed at linking international and local students through a variety of fun and inclusive events and activities. Welcome events are held involving a range of funded 'getting to know you' activities. The Office of Student Success launched ACUmates in partnership with the International Education Office and the Student Associations.

An interesting case that demonstrates the effective use of ISB results comes from the University of Southern Queensland, which identified challenges from its initial ISB Arrival results and decided to take immediate action.

Case Study: the Arrival Experience

In the first year of its use of the ISB, the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) was surprised to find from its results that the international student arrival experience was not as highly rated as USQ had anticipated.

Given the university's strategic emphasis on ensuring the best possible student experience, the USQ response was to set up a project and draw together a team that would analyse the process, from arrival in Brisbane to settling in to the Toowoomba campus, to see where there might be improvements.

The team spoke to all players in the arrival and welcome phases, including those in the front line of initial contact such as Residential Colleges and Student Services, and even the bus driver who meets students at the airport. The project team also applied the Continuous Improvement model used at USQ and did some detailed process mapping to identify where the disconnects were in the system of greeting and welcoming students. Having identified the changes that needed to be made, the university took action.

USQ also moved away from an open collaborative model for organising the student welcome and orientation. Instead one individual became solely responsible for leading the program to deliver a quality experience, while ensuring full participation by all players.

The outcome of this work was a fast and very significant upswing in student satisfaction levels putting USQ among the leaders in this aspect of student services provision.

Generally there is a good story to tell about Arrival, but in some areas of the Arrival experience Australia is weak compared to our international peers. One of the areas where Australia does quite poorly is 'access to the internet on arrival' (77% or an average of 3% below the ISB world average). Newly-arriving students are particularly anxious to establish contact with home through Skype and email and they want to do that almost instantly on arrival. The ISB measure refers to 'access to the internet in student accommodation', although it seems from student comments, that the problem includes access more generally and, to some extent, on campus. To understand this issue requires university-specific inquiry. From the national perspective, two explanations have been suggested. Firstly, a relatively small proportion of arriving students stay in university residential facilities. The low rating for Australia, therefore, is mainly based on internet access facilities at private accommodation. A second reason, perhaps compounding the first, is that universities may require students to have formally enrolled before providing internet access. In the period between arrival and enrolment the new students are left to their own devices to find ways to access email and social media. In common with other universities, ACU attracted poor satisfaction rates on this aspect of Arrival but has now found a way to overcome the issue. Satisfaction rates for internet access are now among the highest in Australia and are substantially above the average score for international universities.

Case Study: Internet Access on Arrival

Like many other universities, the Australian Catholic University (ACU) provided internet access to incoming students after they had enrolled which often meant after orientation and other activities. But realising the inevitable delay was an issue and with the collaboration of IT staff, the university introduced a mechanism whereby international students are now provided with internet access as soon as they arrive on campus. The result of this change was an immediate improvement in satisfaction rates on internet access so that ACU has become one of the highest-ranked universities in Australia on this aspect of support on arrival.

In summary, Australian universities do well on many aspects of the Arrival experience. Students are positive about their initial arrival in Australia and the welcome and pick-up arrangements. There is room for improvement in facilitating immediate internet access and social activities for arriving students. The Arrival experiences for each university will be different, so it is important to benchmark your university against the performance of others as a prelude to taking action on areas of weakness.

Learning

The Student Voice: (verbatim)

'The quality of learning and education at [my Australian University] is all that I hoped it would be, and I really enjoy that there are so many opportunities for me to get work experience/placements as well as engage in seminars by guest speakers/adjunct professors. I am very impressed with the high quality of the professors and their level of knowledge and real world experience.' (Student, USA)

'There are professors who really cares to their students and there are professors who doesn't really care about their students. Those who will talk for three hours of reading the lecture slides and don't even care if the students understand what they are saying. In addition, professors too should not discriminate students from where they come from. Sometimes they are too harsh talking to some of the students who came from specific country.' (Student, Philippines)

'Some lecturers are outstanding in their teaching and are very helpful. However, not all tutors have good teaching abilities. Some students seem to be given more opportunities for work placements as a part of studies. We would like to have more of such opportunities to become better prepared for the world of work.' (Student, Mauritius)

Australian universities have a well-deserved reputation for turning out graduates who are independent, critical thinkers. As part of this process, students need to acquire the skills of analysis, critique and evaluation so they can internalise and appropriately apply knowledge in real-world situations.

The students' expectations are not simply about the quality of what goes on in the classroom. Students are also bound up in the experience of what it is to study at a university campus and their expectations of what university life will entail. These perceptions are likely to be made up of some preconceptions about their university of choice, as well as images and romantic ideas of university life inspired by popular culture. Students will also come with expectations of a place with access to modern conveniences and service, and a positive attitude to them as consumers who are paying for their education. Opportunities to remedy gaps in study skills, get careers advice, have access to a physical library and so on, are expected and are by no means optional extras from the student point of view.

The support provided outside the classroom to facilitate the achievement of formal learning objectives is fundamental and a major source of satisfaction, or otherwise, for international students.

Of primary importance to international students in their choice of institution is their perception of the quality of teaching. Some 96 per cent of the 2012 wave of students nominated 'quality of teaching' as the most important factor driving their choice. This high figure also suggests that when students arrive with very high expectations about the quality of teaching there is little room for forgiveness if the university does not get this right.

Australian universities generally perform well in the provision of learning and learning support services with a rating of in 2012 of 85% for students' 'overall learning experience'. This result was almost identical to the average satisfaction rate calculated for the 25 aspects of Learning listed in the questionnaire. But it was clear from the data that these 25 aspects were not all of equal importance for the students.

Each year after the annual survey cycle, i-graduate analyses the data to obtain a national overview of what are termed areas of high and low 'derived importance'. The method of calculating and interpreting measures of derived importance is given in the section How to Use the Guide in the Introduction. A number of areas emerged as being of high derived importance when it comes to students' inclination to recommend their universities to others. The data show the significance of factors involving 'the academic content of my program/studies' (89%), 'the subject area expertise of lecturers/supervisors' (92%), 'the quality of lectures' (87%) and 'the teaching ability of lecturers/supervisors' (86%).

'Assessment' is another area of high derived importance/high satisfaction for students with a rating of 86% for 'fair and transparent assessment of my work'. On the other hand, Australian scores were less positive for 'feedback on coursework/formal written submissions' (82%) and 'explanation of marking/assessment criteria' (82%). This demonstrates that there is a need to improve these aspects of Learning provision in some universities.

Central Queensland University (CQU) emerges from the ISB data as one of the leaders in good Learning practice, attracting strong, positive feedback from students on 'marking criteria', 'assessment' and 'performance feedback'. Why CQU attracts high satisfaction scores is an interesting story to explore as shown in the following case study.

Case Study: Marking assessment and performance feedback

Central Queensland University (CQU) has, over a number of years, attracted consistently high satisfaction ratings for the ISB questions on marking criteria, assessment, and performance.

Discussion of these ratings opens up the possibility of several explanations for the strong results. It is possible that the results reflect the 'simple' fact that CQU does an excellent job with assessment, marking and performance feedback. But the university believes that the Monitoring Academic Progress (MAP) program that has been operating for about five years for all students is also contributing to the very positive responses in the ISB survey, building on high quality in assessment, marking and performance feedback.

MAP is a three-stage program that is focused on supporting students who are identified as being at risk. The general principles on which MAP operate are the same for all CQU students, but there are different processes for international students studying in Australia on student visas.

At Stage 1, students with unsatisfactory academic progress, (failing more than 50 per cent of their courses in a term, or failing the same course twice), are directed to a face-to-face or phone interview. The aim of the interview is to provide individual support, to identify the factors that are contributing to unsatisfactory academic progress, and to help the student to develop strategies to overcome these obstacles. The strategies are recorded in a MAP 1 Action Plan.

Stage 2 revolves around Show Cause procedures. Stage 3 is about the intention to cancel enrolment with opportunities for students, who have had enrolment cancelled through the MAP process, becoming eligible to return to study a year after their enrolment has been cancelled.

The on-the-ground view of MAP is that the personal contact between the student and the staff member in the Student Support area makes the crucial difference to a student recovering from being at risk of failing to successfully completing their studies. In the MAP process, reasons for poor performance are uncovered including difficult personal circumstances and barriers to spending time on study. The Action Plan the student compiles provides a mechanism through which support staff believe that they can 'save' students from failure.

In summary, the required MAP personal interactions with staff, and the appreciation of students of the support they receive, appear to contribute to at least some of the strong satisfaction rates on assessment, marking and performance.

An important lesson from the CQU case study is that the reasons for good, and poor, results do not always relate to what the ISB question appears to be directly measuring. It is instructive to look beyond the quantitative data and explore why particular results have been achieved before reaching a conclusion on the implications of the data. The students' comments, invited at each stage of the questionnaire, can afford useful insights. In most cases, the story will be relatively straightforward but, in others, there will be more subtle factors that can only be uncovered through exploration with colleagues, results of other surveys, looking at the composition of the cohort, focus groups and other qualitative evidence. It is important to be aware that action on one area measured by the ISB may well impact on another and this could be in a positive or negative direction. The University of Wollongong case study in the section on Living (below) is another example of action in one ISB area impacting indirectly on responses in another area.

In other areas of Learning of high derived importance where Australia performs well, the ISB data show that for postgraduate research students the areas covered by the questionnaire are well provided in our universities: 'guidance in thesis topic selection and refinement by my supervisor' (88%), and giving 'confidence about managing a research project as a result of my experience so far' (90%). It is interesting to note that quite a few of the universities contributing to these positive results are from the newer Australian universities. It is clear from the ISB data that universities with modest research outputs can, with the right infrastructure and individual supervisor expertise, match or exceed the performance of universities describing themselves as research-intensive.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) has introduced some innovative and very successful programs that operate on the university's two metro campuses and to a lesser extent on their regional campus where there are fewer higher research degree students. ECU not only performs very well nationally, but is also a leader in supporting research students when benchmarked against the full range of ISB international results.

Case Study: Supporting Research Students

Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Graduate Research School provides an integrated program of support for all higher degree by research students, including international students, that students have rated at the highest level.

The Graduate Research School (GRS) provides a wide range of services including: the seminar series Forum of Postgraduate Students with guest presenters, a fully-funded annual writers retreat, access to an inter-university research training summer school, online events calendar and discussion forum, research skills and career workshops. ECU identifies the following five elements of the program as the most positively received and used by research students:

- the English as an Additional Language workshop tailored specifically for research students is provided at no cost in an informal setting
- the Support, Opportunities, Advice, Resources (SOAR) Centres based at each campus
- the Graduate Research Induction Program and Orientation program
- social networking events, including coffee mornings, sundowners and an annual family barbeque, and
- the cross-discipline research training workshop program.

The SOAR program is, however, considered to be the foundation stone for the high levels of student success. The GRS set up the first SOAR Centre in 2009 as a peer mentor service to enrich the academic and social lives of ECU's honours and higher degree by research students.

SOAR's popularity among the students, who visited a SOAR Centre some 640 times in 2012, is attributed to the unique peer-to-peer approach to support and research training and to breaking

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down the isolation often associated with undertaking a research degree. The SOAR Centres provide a meeting point for one-to-one or group discussions, support and collaboration. The lounge atmosphere is informal with refreshments available. The centres connect research students from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, ages and academic disciplines. International students who have used SOAR since its inception come from more than 50 countries. SOAR Ambassadors support the program. The Ambassadors are higher degree by research students themselves and offer one-to-one appointments and group workshops on a variety of topics to support students throughout their research journeys. They are chosen as Ambassadors on the basis of their skill sets, such as expertise in statistics, and have their profiles on the SOAR webpage. Many have experienced arriving in a new country to study. The scope of the work of the Ambassadors covers:

- exploring life as a research student, e.g. adjusting to cultural change, work-life balance
- helping with research software, e.g. SPSS, Endnote, NVivo
- academic writing and formatting, e.g. literature reviews, research proposals
- understanding research methodologies
- assisting with use of Microsoft Office suite, e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint
- IT troubleshooting
- data collection and analysis
- developing presentation skills and communicating research
- assistance for ethics application process, and
- provision of career planning assistance. including help with career guidance software and building career development plans.

Each faculty also has dedicated research and writing consultants who can work one-on-one with research students to provide specialist advice tailored to different disciplines and research topics.

Behind the encouraging story of improvement in Learning is a story of considerable effort in developing support outside the classroom so students can expand their learning skills. Types of support range from providing self-service access to a language laboratory, to provision of a comprehensive program of induction to university study with ongoing, systematic support to students as they move through the phases of their studies.

Australia is now a leader in assisting students how to learn in a number of areas. In providing access to online libraries, including journals, Australia scores 91%. For assistance in improving English language, Australia scores 87% student satisfaction. What is very encouraging is that the 2012 data show some significant improvements on the 2011 data. Language support improved by 6 per cent for Australian universities as a whole and learning support generally improved more than 3 per cent. While such scores and improvements are encouraging, Australia's competitors are also improving on their ISB results.

Experience with students suggests that the more successful approaches to support actively engage students, give incentives and reward achievements. It is not enough to inform students of the existence of services. They must be actively encouraged to participate. An example of an effective strategy for engaging students comes from Griffith University.

Case study: Language Strategy

Griffith University decided it would give priority to the complex matter of improving English language and developed and implemented a multi-faceted strategy for English language enhancement, called the Griffith English Enhancement Strategy (GELES), which drew on data and insights from ISB results.

GELES comprises five strands:

1. UniPrep is an intensive three-week program delivered just before each semester to provide the language skills essential for successful university studies in English at Griffith University.

2. English Language Enhancement Course is a compulsory course taken as part of an international student's undergraduate degree in their first semester of enrolment. The course is discipline-specific and also caters for students who have come through pathway providers e.g. QIBT who enter on the basis of 'medium of instruction' rather than on the basis of IELTS.

3. English HELP available at no cost to enrolled students. Provides individual consultations, as well as group workshops.

4. Student LINX is a program developed to engineer greater interaction between international and domestic students at Griffith University through a range of cultural, social, community and sporting events and programs conducted each semester. Student Linx events are run by students for students. Its aim is to promote social and intellectual interaction and encourage the establishment of useful ties across languages, cultures and countries.

5. IELTS4grads provides a 50 per cent discount on the IELTS fee for international students when they have completed their full degree at Griffith University.

Over five years, a 12 per cent improvement, in student satisfaction with help in improving English language skills, has been achieved at Griffith.

Other learning-related areas where Australian universities perform well with above the 85 per cent satisfaction average are areas based on intensive use of technology: online library access, virtual learning, and access to IT. Learning spaces and physical libraries are also rated highly. The University of Technology (UTS) initiative in which physical spaces were redesigned to allow teaching staff flexibility to integrate face-to-face teaching with online learning strategies is allowing UTS to pursue its institutional teaching and learning philosophy.

Case Study: Integrating Technology in the Learning Process

In 2008 the University of Technology (UTS) was concerned that its various sources of student feedback were showing dissatisfaction with the quality of learning spaces and informal meeting places at the university. At the same time, students were indicating that good spaces for working independently and in small groups were very important to them and their capacity to interact and prepare for professional practice. This feedback was the trigger for a project to redesign the physical spaces at the City campus.

UTS believes that human interaction with fellow students and lecturers and access to technology, are the keys to effective learning. They are also the keys to developing the capacity to work in teams, developing communication skills and being able to work critically.

The new UTS learning spaces, which are part of its 2014 Learning strategy, are designed to take students seamlessly through the stages of learning, from accessing content and ideas, questioning, testing and making sense, to interpretation and reflection on what has been absorbed. To achieve this, the new learning spaces and furnishings allow lecturers and students the flexibility to move around

room spaces easily, to participate in a short lecture, then perhaps a small group discussion, or to share ideas via technology and wireless networks.

Bright colours and 'funky' design with innovative lighting, places the emphasis on informality and flexibility with the capacity to easily and spontaneously form small discussion groups guided by the lecturer. UTS is converting most of its traditional raked lecture rooms to this style of learning space.

The areas outside the classroom are designed for students to continue working, book rooms and also relax between work and study. The campus is accessible 24/7 with spaces in which to relax, or even sleep, and there are reports that at midnight it can be difficult to find a seat at a computer, TV or power point. Microwave ovens have been provided in many of the informal spaces and these have proved popular. Security is tight to ensure a safe environment.

A Student Spaces Committee, led by an academic, but based primarily on student membership, evaluates each new space when it opens and compiles a photo diary of how students are using the area to inform the design of the next learning space to be constructed. An important feature is the desire to make the campus a 'sticky campus,' that is, a place where students forego the many distractions of a downtown campus in a vibrant part of the city and stay on campus to interact and learn.

The evidence is that international students are the heaviest users of the informal spaces. Internal feedback from all students rates the new facilities very highly. The new facilities have resulted in only modest gains in ISB scores for Learning Spaces but a substantial improvement over three years for Social Facilities, suggesting that at least some international students do not make the connection between their classroom and out-of-classroom learning activities in the new seamless environment.

Moving to the less positive results from the 2012 ISB, two aspects of the way Learning is provided, that are of high importance when students recommend their university to others, emerge as areas of concern. Firstly, 'organisation and smooth running' of study courses attracts a satisfaction score just below the average overall performance level for Learning (84%).

The second area for comment is a cluster of factors for high derived importance where Australian results are nationally low. These relate to future career prospects where generally our universities are not meeting expectations. More attention is needed to 'advice and guidance by lecturers on long-term job opportunities and careers' (68% satisfaction). Also 'opportunities for work experience/work placements as part of studies' (63%) and 'learning that will assist in getting a good job' (75%) rate poorly. These results suggest that in addition to assisting students with entering the workforce, there is room to draw out better the connections between classroom learning and its application in the workplace. These linkages are certainly made in the classroom and through assessment tasks, but ISB results suggest there is also room to reconfigure the curriculum to demonstrate the relevance of theoretical learning to its application in the 'real world'. A successful program at Bond University focuses heavily on integrating career development activities (see the case study in Support below). Southern Cross University also aims to improve opportunities for work experience as part of students' studies as outlined below.

Case Study: Employability

International students have high expectations relating to opportunities for work experience and/work placements as a part of studies. There is some indication of improvement nationally in relation to these factors over recent years. In common with other universities, Southern Cross University (SCU) is working to increase student satisfaction in this area, although it has noted this is a stubborn problem that is affected by local economic circumstances.

SCU aims to introduce a Training and Employability program into each of its schools and to include an

In the work context, research degree students' satisfaction with 'Opportunities to teach' is also relatively low (67%). Research students frequently undertake advanced studies as part of their preparation to become academics in Australia or their home countries and so a number will have expectations of opportunities to lead tutorials, laboratory sessions and participate in teaching. These opportunities may be more readily available in other study destinations, such as the US, where pedagogical approaches involve research students as teaching assistants and research assistants. This aspect of research students' experience needs attention either by providing opportunities or, more likely, managing student expectations.

In summary, our universities do well in supporting international students to learn, resulting in high satisfaction ratings. There is, however, room for improvement in areas related to employability, careers advice and work experience, all of which students consider areas of high importance. Likewise, there is need for Australian universities to look at the matter of providing higher research degree students with opportunities to teach. The importance students place on these factors is an indication of competitive international employment markets.

Living

Student Voice: (verbatim)

'Living here in Australia has made me become more independent and brave. It has also boost my confidence to mix around with people of different walks of life.' (Student, Malaysia)

'Transportation cost are very high. We international students can only work for 20 hrs/week and we have to pay lots and lots in rent transport etc. There should be some discount for international student in transportation.' (Student, Nepal)

'I do not feel safe always because of some nuisance and teasing of young adolescent guys in the street and public spaces and public transport particularly at night.' (Student, Bangladesh)

'It's hard to find healthy food on campus and it's still expensive.' (Student, France)

International students have choices when it comes to acquiring higher education qualifications. The options include studying at public or private home institutions, enrolling at overseas institutions in their own countries, or completing programs 100 per cent online from respected universities or colleges. Or students can opt for the experience of attending a higher education institution outside their home country. These students see the benefits of immersion in another culture and learning how to negotiate their way through challenging and diverse environments – higher education is not just about acquiring a qualification.

Moving to another country is the most expensive option available to a student but it can have the most dramatic impact on individuals and the passage of their lives. As families and the individuals themselves invest financially and in their hopes and aspirations for their Australian university experience, it is not surprising that new students have high expectations when they arrive at their institution of choice.

The Chaney Report *Australia – Educating Globally*[6] highlighted the importance of providing positive living experiences for international students including access to affordable housing, integration with the local community and equal treatment when accessing concessions for local transport. There are numerous examples of senior leaders in our region who have been educated in Australia and carry with them an understanding of the country. It is beneficial not just to the student, but to Australia, when an individual feels they are an important part of our institutions and their input into Australia's diversity is valued.

When it comes to satisfaction with the Living aspects measured through the ISB, Australia is slightly ahead of the international benchmark on satisfaction with Living. In response to the question: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with the living experience at this stage of the year?' Australia is rated slightly higher (88%) than our international peers (86%). Likewise, the average score for Living as a whole, calculated on the basis of 24 questions, shows the differences are not substantial. However, an examination of the ratings on the 24 individual questions shows some stark differences between Australia and the sector internationally.

Australia does well, above the international benchmark, in some finance-related areas: 'opportunity to earn money' (62%) and 'availability of financial support/bursaries' (65%) but these are hardly stellar scores. There is room to improve these scores by expanding opportunities for international students to earn money while studying at university, while acknowledging this varies with location.

Another Australian area of strength in the Living category is the 'provision of facilities for religious worship such as quiet rooms and prayer rooms'. Here we score an 86% satisfaction rate as against 82% internationally. We also perform well in 'making friends from my home country' (87%) and in 'the surroundings outside the university' campus (90%) suggesting that students consider their university is a good place to be.

An example of a successful Living program is based at Charles Darwin University (CDU), where a cluster of scores connected with everyday student life suggest that innovations designed to enhance the quality of their day-to-day lives have had an impact. It is hoped that in addition to iGrow Academic Development, another new program introduced at CDU in 2012, will improve ISB scores further.

Case Study: Pastoral Care

Charles Darwin University (CDU) conceptualises its Living programs as being essentially about pastoral care and has had improved satisfaction scores on ISB aspects such as 'opportunities to experience the culture of this country, social facilities, the surroundings outside the university and 'making friends from their home country host country/other countries'.

CDU's international students mostly live on campus, focused around International House Darwin. International House has introduced a program, iGrow, which has five areas of activity: professional experience, academic development, personal wellbeing, location and cultural experiences. International students and others who are interested are invited to join the program.

The drivers of iGrow are young energetic staff who work closely with students organising activities, suggesting strategies and generally encouraging participation.

CDU has noted improvements over several years in ISB scores on 'opportunities to experience the culture of this country' and believe that iGrow is a contributor, while also acknowledging that there is some impact from the scale of Darwin city and the fact that some students already have connections to friends and relatives in the local community.

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[6] International Education Advisory Council. (2013). *Australia – Educating Globally: Advice from the International Education Advisory Council*. Canberra. Retrieved from https://aei.gov.au/IEAC2/theCouncilsReport/Documents/Australia%20–%20Educating%20Globally%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf

As mentioned earlier, there are areas in which Australia falls below international ISB averages as demonstrated in the pattern of the 24 Living satisfaction results. Also some weak spots are evident through the annual analyses of ISB areas of high derived importance and those of lesser importance to students when considering whether they would recommend their university to potential students. The method of calculating and interpreting measures of derived importance is given in the Introduction. From the pattern of results and calculations of derived importance factors, several problem areas for improvement are highlighted.

Firstly there is a range of weak results on the social aspects of the student experience, notwithstanding the success of some universities in this regard. The social aspects that attract lower satisfaction ratings for Australia include 'social facilities', 'organised social activities', 'opportunities to experience the host culture', 'making friends from host country' and 'making friends from other countries'.

'Internet access at my accommodation' echoes discussion in the Arrival chapter around the concerns of students, who rate 'internet access on arrival' as being relatively poor. As the majority of students live in private accommodation off campus, this situation is not likely to improve until there is more widespread broadband in Australia. The issue of internet access at accommodation is not a consideration when students are making recommendations to potential students.

The third area with weak results for Australia is 'immigration and visa advice' that Australian universities are not authorised to provide. Universities here that rank well on this aspect manage student expectations and make competent referrals involving licensed migration agents and Department of Immigration and Citizenship representatives.

The areas where Australia ranks below international benchmarks are: 'the cost of accommodation' and 'the cost of living (food, drink, transport and social life)'. These items impact on initial decisions about Australia as a destination and on students while they are living here, particularly in metropolitan areas. The recent high exchange rate of the Australian dollar on international markets has made study in Australia less price competitive than previously. We cannot influence the value of our dollar, and have to rely on other attributes and strengths of our education system to demonstrate that investment in an Australian education pays dividends over a lifetime. It is important to attend to those aspects of the Living experience that need improvements and demonstrate to current students that there is something special, if not unique, about our universities. Our graduates and students are our best advocates.

Another area of poor satisfaction ratings for Australia, compared to international universities, is 'sports facilities', a result that seems counter-intuitive for a country so obsessed with sport. It is hard to pinpoint why students are not satisfied with sports provisions in Australian universities but it has been suggested that students come with high expectations and then face the fact that many facilities are quite expensive to use. There is also a broader issue here about managing student expectations of the cost of living in Australia. Students much prefer to be advised of all-inclusive prices and find difficulty in budgeting for 'extras' which they thought were included. The fees for occasional use of, say, the university swimming pool, unexpected deposits on keys, or even the cost of linen hire in student accommodation can add up and discourage students on tight budgets. One University that has 'got it right' is Flinders University which attracts very strong satisfaction scores for a range of Living factors such as sports facilities and the social aspects of campus life.

> **Case Study: Flinders Living**
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> Being slightly outside a metro area, Flinders University has always placed a high priority on creating a sense of community that encourages students to stay on campus and participate in a range of activities including sporting and social activities. A broad program operated by Flinders Living (an internal organisation owned by the university) encourages these goals. Unlike many other universities in Australia, Flinders attracts high satisfaction ratings for access to sporting facilities and the scores have been climbing each year since 2008 when the university first used the ISB.
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> The foundation of that improvement is considered to be, firstly, that the university has extensive grounds with playing fields visible all around the hilly campus. The physical environment creates a sense of sports facilities being accessible.
>
> A second factor in the explanation for high satisfaction with sports facilities is the Flinders gym. An old and unattractive facility was marked for an upgrade in the university's strategic plan but when early ISB results showed poor scores on sports facility questions a higher priority was given to the upgrade. The net result is an extensive, modern gym built on three levels that could, with its specialised equipment and support, compete with any commercial gym. It is very popular with international students. Fees are kept at a very modest level so the whole Flinders community use the facility and the university promotes the gym energetically.
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> Organised social activities are focused on residential halls and broadly follow the US model of community development for students living on campus. Non-residents leave the campus around 5.00pm so the activities mainly occur in the evening.
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> The Deirdre Jordan Village includes a community centre with meeting rooms and activities such as barbeques, quiz nights and karaoke, and an annual ball organised by students. These activities draw students into a community that is described as warm and engaged. There are live-in tutors who provide academic support and also encourage students to organise social activities.

Finally, there is the question of 'feeling safe and secure', which ties in closely with 'transport links to other places' and 'transport between university locations'.

The satisfaction ratings for 'feeling safe and secure' at Australian universities range widely from a low of 63% at one metro campus to a high of 98% at a regional campus, contributing to an overall score of 84%. This score is below the 90% mean score for ISB universities worldwide. The overall pattern of results for this element of the ISB is not clear-cut. While it might be easy to argue that students at a regional university campus would feel safe and secure this is not always the case. Students at some metro universities consider themselves to be more secure than some regionally-based students, which highlights the disconnect between actual safety and perceptions of safety. These ratings may also reflect on the local community. While a university campus may be safe, if the surrounding suburbs experience a rise in the crime rate that does impact on students' feelings of safety. Other factors include the built environment, the natural environment, and lighting and transportation corridors. 'Feeling safe and secure' is very subjective so that universities may, through conversations with students, learn of practical issues that must be addressed as well as ease the feelings of insecurity that may be media driven on the basis of isolated incidents. Serious crimes have been committed against international students. The statistics on such incidents show these are infrequent and opportunistic with no evidence to suggest that the numbers of incidents are increasing. Security messages need to be conveyed to students in order to change their perceptions of danger, while ensuring they take reasonable precautions.

One of the major contributors to feelings of safety and security is the ease of access to transport, a concern that is shared with domestic students and staff. This is particularly the case with the regional universities where often there is minimal public transport linking the campus to where people live and work. This has been a contentious area between universities and transport authorities for many years

but there are signs of improvement with some State governments now recognising the contribution of international students to local economies and to the social and cultural life of wider communities. The granting of fare concessions to international students is a step forward in encouraging international students to study in a given State.

Australian satisfaction scores for transport links are below ISB international benchmarks. The University of Wollongong, however, stands out in Australian rankings of transport links to other places and transport links between university locations. This success has come as a result of the university's strenuous efforts to resolve transport issues for international students. Not only has the university been able to resolve the transport dilemmas for the academic community, but it has also improved perceptions of personal safety on campus, which was the driving motivation for improvement of transport to and from the Wollongong and Shoalhaven campuses.

Case Study: Transport and Safety

An interesting example of lateral thinking about a campus issue at the University of Wollongong (UoW) led to a solution that brought a range of benefits not only to the international student community but also to the university as a whole and to the wider community.

ISB data indicated to the UoW that some international students held concerns about their safety off campus and about a general lack of transport services even though there were no actual incidents that might have given cause for that concern. As a result, the university, with local State Government support, introduced a shuttle service between the campus, local business centres and all university student accommodation sites.

The International Student Experience Subcommittee also knew that local transport was an issue for students so made safety and transport an area for attention through its action plan. As a result, the university itself now funds a series of connecting shuttle buses that take students further into the surrounding areas from the State Government shuttle terminus points. The university's goal is to extend the reach of transport to within half a kilometre of where students live.

A direct result of the shuttle services is an increased sense of security off campus among all the university community. A key issue has been resolved and some 2,500 journeys are undertaken every day the shuttle is in operation.

Focus groups conducted by the International Student Experience Subcommittee support ISB data with a very positive response to the shuttle services. Students who previously reported themselves as feeling unsafe off campus and in the city now say they feel quite the opposite.

Other benefits have also flowed from the introduction of the linked shuttle services:

- Domestic students and staff as well as international students use the service.
- International students can now easily access a range of accommodation particularly where it is further from the city and hence less expensive.
- As their accommodation is more dispersed geographically, international students are more embedded within the local community thus providing students with greatly enhanced opportunities for making friends in the wider Australian community.
- UoW's carbon footprint is reduced which contributes to the achievement of environmental goals within the university's strategic plan.

The 'town and gown' connection has been strengthened also as students and staff are more inclined to visit the city or town centre thus benefiting local businesses. This interaction is also encouraged through a Welcome to Wollongong that the Lord Mayor hosts in the City Hall.

In conclusion, of the four main areas of the on-campus experience of international students, Living is perhaps the area most in need of improvement throughout Australia. We do relatively well on certain elements such as opportunities to earn money. Some other areas such as the cost of living cannot be changed through action of the universities, and require community and regional government engagement. There is the potential for universities to better manage expectations of students about the level of expenses. Universities also have opportunities to work with providers of private accommodation, including homestay, to ensure that students are placed in appropriate accommodation. There are examples of universities working with the local real estate sector to ensure fair treatment of international students and, by sharing enrolment growth plans, to encourage investment in student accommodation. Finally, there are many aspects of Living where universities can influence student satisfaction by improvements in provision of services. These include: 'access (financial as well as physical) to sports facilities', 'feelings of safety and security', and 'access to transport between campus locations and other places'.

Support

> **Student Voice (verbatim)**
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> 'Academic skill units are a wonderful place to seek for academic help. Whenever I stuck in assignment writing or presentation, the first thing I do is to make appointment with academic skill unit staffs, they always help me to get out of troubles.' (Student, China)
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> 'The staff from the Accommodation Office was very friendly and supportive but no results were seen from their support since I spent more than a month trying to find accommodation.' (Student, Mexico)
>
> 'The [student services office] is terrible! They treat you like a number. They look tired and depressed. The IT is fine, they are helpful. I am in counselling right now, but you only get a limited number of sessions. That's not right. The cafeteria is very average.' (Student, Canada)
>
> 'The individual personal support person services are a very excellent achievement …that I have not experienced before in a university. This service is good.' (Student, UK)

In earlier times students entering university had few expectations beyond being exposed to knowledgeable lecturers and having access to a good library. The expression 'reading for a degree' was the phrase used (and still is in some places) as shorthand for what is now synonymous with what we call the 'student experience'. Students went to lectures, were given some basic information and advice on reading in the subject. They were then expected to tackle this reading and present themselves for exams at the end of the academic year. This was a system catering for a high achieving elite, supported by one-on-one tutors in some cases. When higher education for the general population opened up, particularly from the 1970s, the whole concept of what constituted a university education was questioned. One of the key changes was the introduction of 'learning support', based on developing understanding of how individuals learn and how learning tasks and assessment can be structured to achieve desired learning outcomes.

Another change in thinking came from consideration of the purpose of completing a qualification. This led to a more overt linking of university studies and careers and to the idea that the purpose of universities was to turn out mature, self-confident graduates who are 'job-ready' on graduation. The implications of these changes in direction were extensive and drove the development of university services designed to develop the non-academic side of students' capacity and support them as individuals, subject to the ups and downs of life while they were studying. Counselling, medical services, career advice and other personal services were added to the existing mix of student associations, clubs and catering services.

Student rankings on satisfaction with Support services in Australian universities are on a par with rankings for all ISB universities internationally. When asked: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with the Support Services at this stage in the year?' the rating result is 88% with the average on the 15 elements making up Support at 89%. The differences between Australian and other international universities is evident not in these average scores but in a small number of individual areas. On the positive side, the services from the accommodation office (84%), the student advisory service (92%), and counselling (91%) rank well.

An area that stands out as poorly rated compared to benchmark institutions is 'Campus eating places' (76%). Catering is not a decisive factor when current students are considering whether or not to recommend their university to potential students. While other factors are more important in the propensity to recommend, this is not to suggest that the quality of catering is unimportant. Food services are part of daily student life and as such, contribute to general feelings about an institution and perceptions of the value a university places on its students.

Other areas that are identified in the ISB data analyses as important, and where Australia attracts strong satisfaction ratings, include: services from the international office, the graduate school, the student advisory service and the health centre.

One institution that attracts high satisfaction ratings across the range of support services is the University of Southern Queensland.

Case Study: Relationships Officers

Students rank the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) very highly across the full range of support services, including an area that other universities find hard to come to grips with: campus eating places.

While USQ is proud of the quality of Support services, it considers that student satisfaction levels are also positively influenced by the system of Student Relationship Officers (SROs) that ensures students avail themselves of the benefits provided by the services.

At the point of first enquiry, potential students are linked with the Student Relationship Officer Network via the USQ International Office and then, on enrolment, they are assigned an SRO, who remains the primary contact person while the student is enrolled until graduation. Advice and support is provided with practical tasks such as navigating the online student system and referral to the relevant person or support unit as necessary.

Relationship Officers (ROs) are drawn from among administrative staff in the central areas and in the faculties. ROs meet regularly to exchange ideas and discuss issues.

A good example of a highly-ranked Australian university health service is provided at Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

Case Study: Health Services

Two units provide health services at QUT: the Medical Centre and the Health Clinics, which the Faculty of Health operates to provide clinical education.

The Medical Centre places a high priority on pastoral care and caters not only for QUT students but those from other universities with, or without, their own campus medical services. Selection of medical staff is conducted carefully to ensure a good match between centre expectations and the style of medical practice appropriate for a student clientele. Appointments times are generously spaced to allow doctors to build relationships with students and turnover of medical staff is low. The

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Centre includes staff to provide complementary medicine activities, such as massage therapy, acupuncture, physiotherapy and psychological services. The centre also places an emphasis on maintaining a calm and unhurried environment in the facility, a 'Zen space' with no clutter, for example, from out-of-date pamphlets.

The Health Clinics provide a very wide range of services reflecting the profile of the programs offered through the Health Faculty. These programs include nutrition and dietetics, optometry, exercise, podiatry, wound healing, psychology and counselling. The clinics also provide free workshops such as the Healthy Lunchbox, free foot clinics and so on. Each clinic operates independently for its clients, that is, the students interact directly with each of the six clinics open to them to make appointments. The clinics are all located in one highly visible state-of-the-art building. Students may self-refer to a clinic service.

In assessing the reasons why students rate QUT Health Services highly, above and beyond the range of services they can access, some features stand out:

- The clinics and medical centre are co-located on the Kelvin Grove campus with a shuttle bus service between campuses. There is also a gym on campus.
- The medical centre places the highest priority possible on ensuring no, or minimum, costs for services provided and when making referrals. The clinics also provide free or low-cost care.
- The services have flexible opening hours to cater for students doing practice placements, for example in teaching and nursing.

'Support' areas that are not generally well ranked in Australia compared to international benchmarks include careers advisory services where results are mixed. Some services are clearly excellent while others could improve. This result may be confused in students' minds with their responses to the Learning questions on employability to show a more generalised concern about their career prospects (see the discussion on this topic in the Learning section above).

There is a gap between student expectations and institutional practice in relation to careers and employability. Australian universities are not employment agencies, but the evidence suggests students have very high expectations about the role of a university in student transition to the workforce. Universities are grappling with processes to manage student expectations, clarifying their institutional responsibilities and enabling access to the careers and employment sector. Other direct interventions include strategies to encourage students to gain leadership, work experience and intercultural skills while studying for their degree, and encouraging students to document this skill set in their résumés'.

There is an improvement trend, since 2008, in student satisfaction ratings for careers advisory services. In 2012 there was a 85% rating, an increase of 6% since 2008. One of the most successful career advisory services is provided at Bond University. The service includes a Career Development Centre, augmented by programs operating across the academic environment.

Case Study: Support and Career Development

Bond University (Bond) attracts very high satisfaction ratings in a number of areas of Support including student learning support with a substantial increase in results over just a few years. Bond attributes these results to the high priority it attaches to providing the best possible student experience. Another area where Bond rates very highly, both nationally and internationally, is in careers development.

The pace of study at Bond can be very demanding as students are fast-tracked to complete their programs and hence solid student support is essential. The strategy for providing quality support has a

number of aspects, which are seen as interlocked.

Firstly, a system of tutors, chosen from a highly competitive market, supports the academic work of the approximately 600 students living in residential halls. A second component is the Student Support Unit which is small scale but moved recently to a highly visible location on campus. This unit, while primarily devoted to the provision of medical and counselling services, also provides time management, examination techniques and other skills development activities.

A third contributor to student support, which is strongly focused on English language and particularly English writing skills, is the Student Learning Services unit. While this group comprises less than three FTE, it is heavily used by domestic and international students and by some postgraduate research students who believe that they need advice on how to develop their thesis chapters.

Finally, Bond has an approach to its teaching which pegs academic staff teaching contact hours at 8 to 10 each semester, to allow time, not only for research, but also to ensure that students have easy access to their lecturers. It is a Bond expectation that academic staff will be readily availability to advise students.

For careers support Bond has a Career Development Centre (CDC) that tailors its services around short-term and long-term career goals of students and alumni. It also provides services to employers seeking to hire students and graduates, such as through a Bond Careers Fair. The CDC works alongside Faculty Advisors who provide specific guidance to students for internships and graduate placements.

The Career Development Centre Team work throughout the year with students undertaking the Bond University Professional Practice Program. This is a non-traditional subject designed to provide a learning framework around employability experiences and to enhance Graduate Employment Outcomes. The subject comprises 12 modules based on learning activities and portfolio tasks for a range of activities that employers say they value in prospective graduates. These learning activities and a completed portfolio integrate students' academic learning, employability experiences and career goals transforming them into employability skills.

Australian universities are standing still on annual satisfaction scores for a number of Support areas even though some of the student ratings are actually quite high and indeed in some Australian universities are excellent in the areas of: 'graduate school, IT support', 'counseling', 'faith provision,' 'student advisory services' 'the finance office', 'accommodation office', 'halls of residence', 'welfare support', 'health centre', and 'clubs and societies'. While the spread of scores for Australian universities is wide, the average satisfaction rating is not encouraging. Some universities are lagging and pulling national scores down. The pattern of 'wave on wave' suggests the overseas competition is also engaged in continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The Guide contains a selection of good practice case studies that demonstrate the commitment of our universities to ensuring a very positive experience for international students who come to study at Australian campuses.

We note that there are many areas of excellence in the provision of services for international students but also areas in need of attention. Some of these results are outside university control, but others are amenable to improvement through actions of universities themselves. We point out also that universities have to maintain continuous improvement as competitors are also improving on a number of the aspects of provision where Australia currently excels.

Australian university student populations are made up of approximately 22 per cent international students. This percentage is considerably higher than in the UK, North America, Europe, New Zealand and other student destinations. Australia has been quick to respond to the needs of this significant international student cohort, not only by mainstreaming support for domestic and international students but also by identifying the specific needs of the international student group.

Case studies of Arrival and Orientation, Learning, Living and Support cover various initiatives but there are threads that show some commonality in approaches successful in improving aspects of the student experience. Likewise we found that there is common ground in the strategies university colleagues use to promote their ISB results.

These are some of the patterns we observed in the case studies overall:

Engagement

Mobilising wide engagement and support in the university community about using ISB results is a common and effective route to success. Improvements needed are more likely to happen when key players at different levels in a university share ownership of results and do not leave it to the international office (or other unit) to deal with an issue.

- Rolling ISB results into the KPIs of university units and heads of units has a powerful impact on commitment to making improvements, particularly as the targets embodied in the KPIs feed back to the achievement of the Strategic Plan.
- Integrating improvement projects in existing university processes of quality assurance, planning and review ensures that the ISB results do not get lost in the day-to-day pressures of running an institution.

Handling the Data

Involving a spectrum of university staff in the annual i-graduate presentation of results builds interest and commitment to action.

- Student response rates tend to be higher where there is regular feedback to students about the ISB, thanking them for participation and telling them that actions being taken are as a result of their input.
- The institutional research office, by whatever name, can greatly improve the impact of ISB information by re-packaging results for specific target audiences such as faculties or different campuses or even different groups of students. We also point out that with the number and variety of surveys in any semester, it is important to manage the total survey process, including departmental and institutional level survey activity with institutional and national surveys.

- Emphasis on the currency of the data is useful for persuading colleagues to take action; with the fast turnaround on ISB results it is feasible to make changes that will be experienced by the students who completed the survey.
- The timing of presentation of ISB results is such that they can be taken account of in institutional planning cycles that typically begin about half way through the calendar year.

Implementation of Improvements

- Carefully constructed teams, dedicated to making specific improvements, can build levels of engagement of the university staff through exploring options and carrying good ideas from location to location.
- Recognising that people differ in their willingness to agree with change, it is important to accommodate not just the enthusiasts, but those who are more difficult to convince.
- Selecting the improvement actions to be taken helps achieve focus; trying to improve everything will dissipate energies. Some universities select areas that are amenable to improvement without major effort and resources. Others look for areas where the benefits will flow to the whole university community, not just international students.
- Most improvements of any significance need an allocation of resources and staff to drive the action.
- Progress on action plans needs to be monitored very regularly with adjustments to original strategies to take account of bumps in the road. Obstacles and setbacks are normal.

Benchmarking

- Universities that meet regularly to share ISB data and experiences report success with convincing individual staff to become involved for mutually beneficial action.
- Internal benchmarking, for example, between faculties and the range of academic and administrative staff on different campuses is very helpful for improving performance.

In conclusion, we wish you every success with using the good practices outlined in this Guide, so you can understand how to make the most of your ISB data to improve the student experience and keep Australian universities at the leading edge as hosts of international students.

Appendices

Appendix A: Australia ISB Summary 2012

For additional information please refer to: Australian Education International. (2013).

International Student Survey 2012 Overview Report. Canberra. Retrieved from https://aei.gov.au/research/Publications/Pages/Default.aspx

Background

The Universities Australia (UA) International Student Barometer (ISB) ran from 16 April to 15 June 2012. The survey, analysis and reporting is independently administered for UA by i-graduate. Findings are compared against the Global ISB, consisting of 198,717 international students enrolled in universities in 15 countries. Comparisons are also made between the 2010 and 2012 Australian ISB results. This summary includes key findings from the report and information supplied to UA, and is intended to supplement that comprehensive data set.

Profile and response

Thirty-six Australian universities participated, with a yield of 37,060 respondents from a population of 160,999 students: a response rate of 23%. The two top nationalities represented are the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) (25%) and Malaysia (9%). Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam are each at 5%, followed by Hong Kong (3%), the United States of America (3%) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), (2%). Although the exposure to the PRC is consistent with the Global ISB (22%), this may represent a commercial risk, particularly for those universities with a much higher percentage of students from the PRC than the national average.

Fifty-four per cent of students surveyed enrolled in undergraduate programs, 31 per cent in postgraduate coursework, and 12 per cent in higher degree research (HDR). Respondents mostly funded their studies through a combination of family funds (particularly undergraduates) and own funds. HDR students are more reliant on scholarships.

Decision making

Teaching quality (96%), personal safety (92%); and the perceived reputation of the qualification (93%), institution (93%) and education system (92%) are the five most important factors influencing decisions on where to study. Education agents affect choice of institution, a trend particularly noticeable in the 2012 ISB. Other factors include university websites and an informal network of friends and parents, current students and alumni. The influence of league tables in decision making is also apparent this year, especially for HDR students. The league tables are an emerging influence on decision making, particularly for postgraduate students.

Arrival

Students rated their arrival experience as positive, with an overall score of 89%. This compares with 85% for the Global ISB. Australia scored above the Global ISB in 13 of 17 arrival measures. Areas that invite attention include social activities to facilitate making new friends from Australia, and improved internet access on arrival. Comparing 2010 with 2012, internet access shows a 9 per cent decline in satisfaction. While Australia improved its performance over time on most indicators, so has the global group. That is, competitors are working to improve the student arrival experience, an area where Australian universities have consistently performed very well in previous ISB surveys.

Learning

Satisfaction scores in 14 of 16 learning elements improved from 2010, with a slight negative shift for performance feedback. 'Opportunities to teach', a question answered only by HDR students, shows a 4 per cent decline. Australian Learning scores 85.2% overall compared with 85.9% for the Global ISB.

The international student experience

Students in Australian universities

The ISB uses derived importance to indicate which factors have the greatest impact on recommending a university to others. This perspective shows work experience, careers advice and the perception that a program of study will lead to employment are the most important areas to focus on. Together they indicate the nexus between education and securing employment that is a feature of the current student cohort, both domestic and international. Other domains within the universities' control that warrant attention include course organisation, marking criteria and performance feedback, factors that may assist a student towards high grades in a competitive employment market.

Living

Living (87.5%) overall compares favourably with the global score (85.7%). However this masks marked differences on separate indicators. The Australian ISB is below the Global ISB for 17 of 23 indicators. Satisfaction with living costs at 51% is 13% lower than the Global ISB, and accommodation costs reflect a similar picture (51% compared with 59% in the Global ISB). One in two international students expresses dissatisfaction with the cost of living and accommodation in Australia. Australia falls behind comparable groups in safety, sport facilities, internet access, transport links and social activities. Where 2010 is compared with 2012, safety shows a 3 per cent decline, accommodation costs an 8 per cent decline and living costs a 9 per cent decline. Australia has lost its competitive advantage in the cost of education, and expectations about safety are not always being met.

Support

There is negligible difference in the overall score for support between the Australian ISB (87.6%) and the Global ISB (87.5%). Satisfaction with Support is predicated on use of support services. Fourteen of 15 Support measures score above 84%, with 10 over 90%. Support satisfaction in Australia (2010 to 2012) shows improvement on 14 measures with the 15th neutral. The Support Matrix is a positive picture for the universities. The majority of elements demonstrate high satisfaction.

Recommendation of Australian universities to other students

Respondents were asked whether they would recommend their Australian university to other students. Twenty-nine per cent would actively encourage people to apply and 49 per cent would encourage people to apply. Seventy-eight per cent of enrolled students, presumably active in social media, are prepared to recommend their Australian experience to friends and family. The higher research degree group is particularly positive about their experience here, suggesting an underutilised marketing asset in this most competitive recruitment environment.

Summary

The results from the 2012 UA ISB show improvement from the 2010 data set. Australian universities perform well in comparison with the Global ISB results. At all reference points – Arrival, Learning, Living and Support – there is a trend of continuous improvement in Australia and elsewhere. International students' decision processes are sophisticated. Students are seeking a university experience that will lead to employment, while conscious of the investment required to complete a program. Factors outside the control of the universities, specifically the cost of living and accommodation, have had a negative effect on the student experience. As indicated in the Guide,

Australian universities are active in understanding the student experience and addressing institutional weaknesses. For the sector as a whole, the willingness to share good practice through an initiative supported by UA and AEI is an outstanding example of national collaboration to ensure continuous improvement in the international student experience.

Appendix B: List of Participating Universities

The following universities provided material and information on which the case studies included above were based:

Australian Catholic University: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Canberra

Bond University, Gold Coast.

Central Queensland University: Rockhampton, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne

Charles Darwin University, Darwin

Edith Cowan University, Perth

Flinders University, Adelaide

Griffith University, Brisbane

James Cook University: Townsville, Cairns, Singapore

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

Southern Cross University: Lismore, Tweed and Coolangatta

The University of Newcastle, Newcastle

University of Technology Sydney, Sydney

The University of Wollongong, Wollongong

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba

Innovative Research Universities (IRU)

Appendix C: Methodology

The compilation of this Guide was based on these steps:

- Analysis of national results for four aspects of the student experience: Arrival, Learning, Living, and Support, to identify strengths and shortcomings in the Australian provision of services for international students.
- Identification of individual universities using the ISB and demonstrating areas of high student satisfaction in particular areas of operation especially where there was evidence of improvement in satisfaction rates over the period since first participation in the ISB survey.
- Inviting universities that attracted high satisfaction rates on particular aspects of service provision to discuss how they use ISB data and the organisational strategies they employ for gaining colleague support.

Telephone interviews were conducted with one or more representatives of the participating universities – a total of 16 interviews held over late 2012 and February–March 2013. The material collected in interviews was augmented with review of web-based material and documents forwarded by interviewees. Drafts of case studies were forwarded for checking by the individual universities and agreement for inclusion in the Guide confirmed. The student quotes (Student Voice) were taken from actual student responses to the ISB.

It may be noticed that not all Australian universities that participated in the 2012 ISB survey are represented in the Guide. The reasons are firstly, that some universities do not yet have adequate numbers of international students to provide a robust foundation of reliable data and so were not approached to participate. A second group not included are the universities who have begun to use the ISB in the past few years only and hence it was not possible to gauge trends in their results. A third group not included in the Guide declined to participate for various reasons. In total 14 universities provided case studies for the Guide, while several other universities are mentioned using publicly available information.

Several of the universities featured are based in regional Australia and most States and Territories are represented in the Guide. This distribution reflects the take-up of the ISB that initially included many newer and regional universities. Most Australian universities now use the ISB regularly. While acknowledging the self-defined groupings within the sector, our experience with the ISB underlines the differentiation apparent between Australian universities. The IRU group, that includes some universities that provided case studies is, however, included as the members have used the ISB for purposeful benchmarking, including sharing data and institutional practice, for some years.