

International Student Health and Wellbeing: A Health Lens Project

Supporting South Australian Vocational Education & Training Sector International Students

A collaboration between the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, Multicultural SA and the Department for Health and Ageing

Final Report

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Government
of South Australia

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¹ Please note in January 2012 a number of Government departments changed their names including the Department of Health to the Department for Health and Ageing. During the course of this project Multicultural SA moved from the Attorney Generals Department to Department for Communities and Social Inclusion

DEFINITIONS

Social determinants of health

It is now well recognised that the health of individuals and populations is shaped by broad societal factors that lie outside the policy mandate of the health sector. The determinants of health and wellbeing include the social, economic and physical environment, as well as individual behaviours and characteristics. Addressing the social determinants of health (SDH) can achieve multiple public policy outcomes. In our present government structures, sectors other than health are responsible for policy decisions that shape the impact these determinants have on health and wellbeing. Major gains in population health, reduction in health service cost as well as impact in other areas of public policy, will be achieved through influencing the SDH.

Health in All Policies

Health in All Policies (HiAP) is an approach to 'joined up government' to address complex public policy issues. By incorporating a focus on population health into the policy development process of sectors and agencies, it allows governments to address the social determinants of health in a systematic manner. By considering health impacts across all policy domains such as agriculture, education, the environment, fiscal policies, housing and transport, population health can be improved. HiAP seeks to highlight the connections and interactions between health and policies from other sectors and identify the gains for both policy agendas.

Health and Wellbeing

Individual health is 'the state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease'.² Individual wellbeing is the condition of being well, contented, and satisfied with life. It typically includes physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of life. Wellbeing also refers to the inter-related social, economic and community issues affecting people within the community. It may also refer to how well a society satisfies people's wants and needs.

Health Lens Analysis

The HiAP Unit within the DHA works collaboratively with representatives of other government agencies (partner agencies) on Health Lens Analysis (HLA) projects. The projects are based around targets in South Australia's Strategic Plan, the seven strategic priorities or other key government priorities which have been identified as having strong links to health and wellbeing. A specific focus for the HLA project is agreed between agencies before a project commences. Briefly, a HLA project involves five stages:

- > **Engage**—establishing and maintaining strong collaborative relationships with partner agencies, including understanding of organisational culture and language variations.
- > **Gather evidence**—establishing impacts between health and the policy area under focus, and identifying evidence-based solutions or policy options.
- > **Generate**—producing a set of policy recommendations and a final report that are jointly owned by all agencies with responsibility for the target/policy area.
- > **Navigate**—helping to steer the recommendations through the decision-making process
- > **Evaluate**—determining the effectiveness of the HLA.

² Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19 June - 22 July 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
DFEEST	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
DHA	South Australian Department for Health and Ageing
ExComm CEG	Executive Committee of Cabinet Chief Executives Group
HiAP	Health in All Policies
HLA	Health Lens Analysis
JESG	Joint Expert Steering Group
MSA	Multicultural SA
OSHC	Overseas Student Health Cover
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SA	South Australia/South Australian
SASP	South Australia's Strategic Plan
SACHRU	South Australian Community Health Research Unit
SDH	Social determinants of health
SSP	South Australian Government's Seven Strategic Priorities
WHO	World Health Organization
VET	Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

This HiAP project was led in partnership by the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST), the Department for Health and Ageing (DHA), and Multicultural SA (MSA). The project focused on the health and wellbeing of international Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector students (572 visa holders) and identified the health and wellbeing needs, the structures and services available to address these needs, and the barriers to access and opportunities to improve student information, support and access.

The project focused on VET sector international students because these students, particularly in the private sector, may not benefit from the same level of support as those studying in the University Sector, due largely to many private VET sector educational providers being small organisations with limited resources.

Ultimately the project identified and made recommendations about what could be done better with respect to the provision of support services, strategies and resources for VET sector international students in South Australia in order to support their health and wellbeing and hence their overall study experience and performance.

Methodology

This project followed the Health Lens Analysis (HLA) process of engagement, undertaking both quantitative and qualitative evidence gathering, generating recommendations, navigating these through the various governance structures of the lead agencies, and evaluation.

Engagement

The engagement phase of this project identified those government and non-government agencies with an interest in and obligation towards the health and wellbeing of international students. From this a Joint Expert Steering Group (JESG) was established, which provided expert advice on the international education sector and the health and wellbeing issues facing international students in South Australia. A research proposal was then developed and agreed to by this JESG. This research proposal was approved by the Chief Executives of the lead agencies and by then Executive Committee of Cabinet Chief Executives Group (ExComm CEG), which at the time was responsible for overseeing the implementation of HiAP projects.

Evidence Gathering

The evidence gathering phase of this project went through a number of stages, with each step of the research process providing a more detailed understanding of the health and wellbeing issues faced by VET sector international students. Some of the evidence gathering stages also functioned as supporting engagement and consultation with interested stakeholders. The research stages were:

- A Literature Review of existing grey and academic literature on the health and wellbeing of international students - to identify any gaps in the existing research, report what health and wellbeing issues had been identified, and to identify what types of supports were being provided at a state and national level
- An Education Provider Workshop - to identify issues specific to the South Australian context from the perspective of Education Providers and to establish a profile for the project amongst these providers
- A Student Contact Officer Survey - which established how front line student support officers understood the health and wellbeing issues faced by international students and ensured that the Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) remained engaged in the project
- Student Contact Officer Telephone Interviews - which followed up on the survey so as to add a deeper qualitative element to the findings from the survey
- International Student Focus Groups - which ensured that an international student perspective was understood and was consistent with the findings from the previous stages of the research.

Generating Recommendations

The JESG drew on the findings from the evidence gathering stage to develop recommendations to address the health and wellbeing needs of VET sector international students. These are summarised below and provided in the body of the report.

Navigate

The recommendations developed by the JESG have been endorsed by the Chief Executives of DHA and DFEST and provided to the Ministers of each of these agencies for information. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs endorsed the recommendations for MSA.

Evaluate

This project will be evaluated as part of the Flinders University Health in All Policies National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Grant, as part of the process evaluation of all HiAP projects. The findings will inform any future HiAP projects.

Summary of Findings

The evidence gathering stage of this project found that international students, like domestic students, face a number of challenges associated with starting a new phase of their life, such as looking for accommodation, dealing with financial pressures, seeking employment, getting themselves around, dealing with physical and mental health issues and adjusting to their study requirements. However, unlike domestic students, it was identified that international students lack the social networks and support systems most domestic students enjoy. In addition, international students are faced with a new environment and cultural context very different to the one they are used to, and with interacting in this environment in a language other than their own. Lastly, international students may face unfair or discriminatory treatment in some of these areas. All or any of these factors can negatively affect their health and wellbeing, which in turn may reduce their academic performance. The social and living experiences of international students are important as they have the potential of influencing academic achievement and because word of mouth has a significant impact on the

international student market. It is important that VET sector international students receive appropriate support whilst studying in South Australia not only because all individuals deserve to have the opportunity to maximise their educational potential but also because VET sector international students make a significant contribution to the state's economy.

Summary of recommendations

The recommendations were developed by the JESG in response to the findings from the evidence gathering stage of the project. Please note, since the finalisation of the recommendations, it has been decided that some of them will not be progressed at this point due to organisational changes. Further details are elaborated in the body of the report.

Summarised below are the recommendations which will be progressed in the implementation phase of this Health Lens Project (the original recommendations are provided at Appendix 8).

Student Support Services

1. It is recommended that the role of the Office of the Training Advocate, in providing student support on a range of issues that arise for international students, be recognised as an important resource for international students. It is also recommended that the Office of the Training Advocate review its communication strategy so that more education providers and students are aware of its role, particularly those from the VET sector.

Health System Information Resource

2. It is recommended that the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology coordinate the development of an information resource summarising the health system and how to access appropriate services when needed to support VET sector international students and their education providers to be able to navigate the health system.
 - 2.1 It is recommended that a coordinated communication strategy be developed to support the distribution and application of this information resource, with a particular focus on engaging the VET sector.

Community and Social Engagement

3. It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, through the International Education Roundtable, develop a range of additional strategies to increase community and social engagement for international students, taking into account the specific needs of VET sector students.
 - 3.1 It is recommended that Education Adelaide continues to work with Volunteering SA and the Office for Volunteers to develop volunteering opportunities for international students.
 - 3.2 It is recommended that Multicultural SA continue to distribute information about the Multicultural Grants Scheme to a range of groups including ethnic communities and other non-government organisations.

3.3 It is recommended that the role of Education Adelaide in providing social activities for international students is recognised and that their existing successful community support program for international students in South Australia continues.

Insurance for Pregnancy-related Services

4. It is recommended that the Minister for Health and Ageing writes to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing expressing concern regarding recent changes to the Overseas Students Health Cover, which imposes a 12-month waiting period for pregnancy-related services.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education established a Taskforce led by Mr Bill Spurr to examine the experience of international students in South Australia which included a focus on the area of international student health and welfare. The *Enhancing the Overseas Student Experience in Adelaide* (Spurr) Report found that international students have a very limited understanding of the Australian health care system, the role of the general practitioner or how to access health services and recommended that the level of health information and awareness among international students needs to be increased.

The South Australian Government's response to the Spurr Report: *South Australia International Education Initiatives 2010: the Key Findings and State Government Response to the Taskforce on Enhancing the Overseas Student Experience in Adelaide* (the Government's Response) stated that the HiAP initiative will conduct a project to identify what actions can be taken to improve the state's health planning for international students. In 2009 the then Executive Committee of Cabinet Chief Executives Group (ExComm CEG)³ had endorsed Overseas Student's Health and Wellbeing as one of the priority areas for HiAP.

The project proposal for this project was approved by the Chief Executives of DFEEST, MSA and DHA in December 2010. A distinctive characteristic of this HiAP project is that it involved a whole-of-society approach, inviting both Government and non-government participants onto the Joint Expert Steering Group recognising that both Government and non-government sectors have an interest in and obligation to support the study and living experience of international students.

The project sought to support the health and wellbeing⁴ of our international student population whilst also contributing to the achievement of the SASP target to *double South Australia's share of overseas students by 2014*, for which DFEEST had responsibility (Target 1.16 *Share of overseas student*)⁵. It also sought to support DFEESTs, and the International Education Sectors' interest in maintaining student attendance and performance based on the recognition that the better a student's health and wellbeing, the better their attendance and performance in their studies, the better their overall experience of Adelaide as a study destination, the more they recommend Adelaide to future markets of international students.

The project focused on international students studying in the VET sector, acknowledging that students attending smaller VET providers may not have the same level of support due to limited infrastructure and access to support services compared to student services provided by the state's three major universities (University of Adelaide, Flinders University of South Australia and University of South Australia) which are well established and include access to health information and services, student counselling and a range of other support services.

³ Since the initiation of this project central government governance structures have altered. HiAP used to report to ExComm CEG, which was a committee made up of Chief Executive Officers from Departments shadowing the Executive Committee of Cabinet, which composed the Premier, the Treasurer, and three other Cabinet Ministers. HiAP projects are now reported to one of the seven Cabinet Strategic Priority Taskforces or to Senior Management Council (SMC), depending on the nature of the project.

⁴ Health and wellbeing were defined in broad terms whereby an individuals' health is more than the absence of disease but also encompasses physical, mental and social wellbeing. Individual wellbeing is the condition of being well, contented, and satisfied with life. It typically includes physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of life.

⁵ Note: this refers to the previous iteration of the SASP. SASP was updated in late 2011.

Current Requirements for Education Providers and Students

There are a number of measures in place to ensure international students have access to a range of support services and the health coverage required during their stay in Australia. As a condition of their student visa there are also requirements for students to maintain full-time enrolment in their course and maintain satisfactory attendance and course progress for each study period.

Under Standard 6 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* (The National Code), registered education providers are required to support students to adjust to study and life in Australia including through the provision of an age and culturally appropriate orientation program which includes information about support services and emergency and health services. Providers must also give students the opportunity to access welfare-related support services to assist with issues that may arise during their study. However, the project found that the level of welfare related support provided to students varied considerably. Furthermore, there is some lack of clarity around the exact requirements in practice under Standard 6.

From 1 July 2010 international students must obtain Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) for the proposed duration of their student visit. OSHC can assist international students to meet the costs of medical and hospital care if needed when in Australia. OSHC also pays limited benefits for pharmaceuticals and ambulance services. This requirement is necessary given that international students do not qualify for the Medicare safety net and hence would otherwise be liable for quite substantial medical bills when faced with health or wellbeing issues during their time in Australia. This measure also reduces the financial burden on the public healthcare system.

Despite these measures being in place, the findings of the Spurr report indicated that there were opportunities for improving both the level of information and access to health services for international students studying in South Australia. Specifically, the project sought to identify the health and wellbeing needs of VET sector international students, the structures and services available to address these needs, and the barriers to access and opportunities to improve student information, support and access.

Governance

Lead Agencies

- Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST)
- Department for Health and Ageing (DHA)
- Multicultural SA (MSA)

Supporting Agencies

- Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) is the national industry association for independent providers of post-compulsory education and training for Australian and international students
- Education Adelaide - Education Adelaide is a government funded but independent agency to market South Australia as Australia's leading international education destination and provide dedicated support to international students who choose to study here.

Joint Expert Steering Group

This project was overseen by a Joint Expert Steering Group which comprised membership from the Office of the Training Advocate, DFEEST, ACPET, communicable disease experts from SA Health, and members from the DHA HiAP unit. Corresponding members included Education Adelaide and MSA.

The day to day activities of this project were undertaken by a small working group with representatives from DFEEST and DHA.

Policy Drivers

The main policy drivers for this project were the SASP target⁶ to increase the number of international students studying in South Australia (SASP Target 1.16 *Share of overseas students: double South Australia's share of overseas students by 2014*) and the Spurr reports findings that there were opportunities to improve the level of information and access to health services for international students.

The project also intersected with other SASP Targets, including the following:

- *1.22 Total population: increase South Australia's total population to 2 million by 2050, with an interim target of 1.64 million by 2014.*
- *1.24 Overseas migration: increase net overseas migration gain to 8500 per annum by 2014.*
- *4.3 Cultural engagement – institutions: increase the number of attendances at South Australia's cultural institutions by 20% by 2014.*
- *5.8 Multiculturalism: increase the percentage of South Australians who accept cultural diversity as a positive influence in the community.*

⁶ Note that since the commencement of this project SASP has been updated to a 2011 version. The targets referred to in this report are the targets of the previous iteration of SASP.

PROJECT DESIGN

Project scope

The vision of this HiAP project was to increase the number of international VET students who successfully complete their studies while maintaining or improving their personal health and wellbeing. It aimed to do this through the following objectives:

- identifying the scope and range of health and wellbeing issues experienced by international students and determine the impact they have on education outcomes.
- identifying strategies to improve international students' ability to look after their health and wellbeing.
- improving the access of VET sector students to effective support services designed to assist them to resolve health and wellbeing issues.
- supporting VET sector education providers to understand and respond effectively to the range and complexity of health and wellbeing issues faced by international students.

The articulated key project outcomes for this project were to:

- increase the number of international VET students successfully completing their studies while reporting an overall positive experience.
- ensure that all VET providers are able to successfully meet their obligations under Standard 6 of the National Code to provide information and support services to international students.

Summary of Process

This project followed the traditional health lens analysis process from engagement, evidence gathering, generating recommendations, navigating these through the governance structures, to evaluation. Each of these stages is elaborated below.

Engagement

The engagement stage of the project aimed to identify those agencies with an interest in and obligation towards international student health and wellbeing, to draw on their expertise and knowledge about international students studying in South Australia and to understand their core business in regards to these students. The JESG was established comprising membership reflecting those identified agencies.

Project Proposal

The project proposal was developed through consultation with the JESG. This involved the articulation of shared goals, the identification of shared responsibilities, a project vision and governance structure. The project proposal was approved by the lead agency's Chief Executives and then Executive Committee of Cabinet Chief Executives Group, which at the time was responsible for overseeing the implementation of HiAP projects.

Evidence Gathering

This project underwent a number of evidence gathering stages. Each step of the research process has provided a more detailed understanding of the health and wellbeing issues faced by VET sector international students. These stages are outlined below.

1. Literature Review

A broad literature review was completed. The purpose of the literature review was:

- To undertake a broad analysis of the available literature around the experiences of international students.
- To identify what has been happening within the state and nationally regarding international students.
- To report what health and wellbeing issues are identified for international students in the literature.
- To identify any gaps in the literature.

The literature review identified gaps in the research, such as an understanding of the specific health and well-being needs of VET sector international students in the South Australian context. Nevertheless, it also identified a broadly consistent picture of what factors impact on international students. In brief, the literature review found that international students can experience difficulties through (1) the context in which they live and study – such as their work, accommodation, transport, education, language skills, physical and mental health, risk-taking behaviours, and use of support services – and through (2) their social interactions, networks and personal relationships or lack thereof.

A summary of the literature review is provided at Appendix 2.

Education Provider Workshops

On 29 March 2011 the HiAP team ran a workshop with international education providers. This was done through DFEEEST's Education Provider Forum and was opened by the Hon Jack Snelling, Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education. The purpose of the workshop was to identify issues specific to the South Australian context from the perspective of Education Providers and to establish a profile for the project amongst these providers. The education providers were asked to identify:

- the issues international students face in terms of their health and wellbeing,
- potential solutions to address these, and
- who is best placed to contribute to international student health and wellbeing.

The responses identified major issues faced by international students and broadly confirmed the literature review, with a few notable additions. Specifically, the workshops indicated that fatigue and nutritional issues were other life factors affecting student health and wellbeing not captured by the literature. This stage offered a more detailed picture of the situation for South Australian VET Sector international students.

A summary of the results from the Education Provider Workshop is provided at Appendix 3.

Student Contact Officer Survey

The next stage of the research process involved an online survey of Student Contact Officers (SCO). On 8 July 2011 an electronic (*Zoomerang*) survey was emailed by DFEEST to registered training organisations (RTOs) in the VET sector in South Australia. There are approximately 53 VET RTOs in South Australia. Each organisation is required to have an identified Student Contact Officer (SCO). The email requested that the SCO complete the survey. The survey aimed to:

- Gain an understanding of the issues faced by international students from the perspective of frontline service providers.
- Start to capture any issues that may be specific to the South Australian VET sector.
- Ensure Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) remained engaged in the project.

The survey included 6 questions around the issues students face in terms of their health and wellbeing, what is currently in place to address these and potential gaps. The survey remained open for a period of four weeks in July/August 2011.

Fifty-three emails were sent, with approximately 6 bouncing back. A total of 33 responses were received. While there are 53 RTOs and 33 responses is a positive result, an actual response rate from RTOs could not be calculated as some organisations may have invited more than one officer to complete the survey. In addition, some RTOs may have forwarded the survey to private counsellors they contract with.

The survey results confirmed the findings from the literature review and the Education Provider Workshop that there are a broad range of living and studying conditions that affect international students health and wellbeing in South Australia. These included English language difficulties, issues with family back home, fatigue, homesickness, mental health issues, and financial difficulties. The results also indicated that in South Australia there was a degree of variability across the VET sector regarding the degree of student support provided. Notably, some RTOs relied more heavily on a referral process rather than providing support services themselves, indicating that they need guidance both on how best to support students and on how to access various support services.

A copy of the online survey is provided at Appendix 4. The detailed results from the survey are provided at Appendix 5.

Student Contact Officer Telephone Interviews

As a follow-up to the SCO survey one-on-one telephone interviews were conducted with a number of SCOs. As part of the SCO survey, respondents were offered a movie voucher if they agreed to participate in a telephone interview following the survey.

The purpose of the interviews was to:

- Provide an opportunity to add a deeper qualitative element to the findings from the survey
- To ask SCOs to further clarify their answers to the survey

- To ask SCOs whether they had anything more to add, especially anything they felt they could not include in the survey.

Nineteen of the 33 survey respondents agreed to a follow-up telephone interview. Eleven telephone interviews were conducted due to some respondents being difficult to contact or unavailable.

The telephone interviews confirmed that there is a degree of variability between the types of supports offered to students. The best practice providers tended to attempt to create opportunities, an environment and a curriculum that supported student wellbeing whilst others focused on providing services or referrals when students faced difficulties. Furthermore, some student supports tended to rely on individual champions, making them vulnerable to changes in personnel. All respondents felt that a students' health and well-being impacts on their study. They tended to believe that female and male international students experience different life challenges. Notably, women were understood as facing issues around balancing their numerous family and childcare responsibilities with study and sexual health issues. Men, on the other hand, tended to have problems with gambling, alcohol abuse, and challenges to self-esteem as a result of performing jobs below their abilities and qualifications.

A summary of the responses from the telephone interviews is provided at Appendix 6.

International Student Focus Groups

In the final stage of the research academics from the University of Adelaide's Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender were contracted to conduct focus groups with VET sector international students. This stage was to ensure that the findings from the previous research stages were consistent with the experiences of international students themselves.

The aims of this component of the research were:

- To identify the broad range of health and wellbeing issues faced by VET sector international students.
- To identify what support services, strategies and resources students are currently utilising (or are familiar with).
- To identify what international students think could be done better with respect to the provision of support services, strategies and resources in South Australia.

The research project was designed to address 6 specific questions:

- What do international students in South Australia understand by 'health and wellbeing'?
- What issues do international students in South Australia face in terms of maintaining their health and wellbeing?
- How do international students in South Australia currently deal with health and wellbeing issues?
- What, if any, health and wellbeing support services and programmes are international students aware of and which of these, if any, do they use?
- What do international students in South Australia think of the current support services, strategies and resources available to them?

- How can existing health and wellbeing support services and programmes be improved?

Four focus groups consisting of 22 students overall were conducted. These consisted of 1 all male, 2 all female and 1 mixed groups. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The Faye Gale Centre produced a report identifying the major concerns and perceptions of students. These generally confirmed the findings from the previous research stages but provided a textualised understanding. In particular, the international students:

- Expressed uncertainty and anxiety about the health care system in Australia and in particular how to access affordable medical services.
- Acknowledged the central importance of psychological and social factors in determining their overall health and well-being.
- Expressed a desire to meet more locals
- Identified English language proficiency as a barrier to many aspects of life
- Identified the first few months of arrival as particularly challenging
- Identified unfair treatment and difficulties around accommodation and employment as impacting on their health and wellbeing
- Identified the Study Adelaide website, produced by Education Adelaide, as an excellent resource

A summary of the Faye Gale Centre's report is provided at Appendix 7.

Generating Recommendations

A short discussion paper summarising the main themes in the research was produced and circulated to the JESG. The JESG formulated recommendations in response to the main issues facing international students in the VET sector in South Australia.

Navigate

The recommendations developed by the JESG have been endorsed by the Chief Executives of DHA and DFEEST and provided to the Ministers of each of these agencies for information. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs endorsed the recommendations for MSA.

Evaluate

This project will be evaluated as part of the Flinders University Health in All Policies National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Grant, as part of the process evaluation of all HiAP projects. The findings will inform any future HiAP projects.

FINDINGS

The following is a summary of the main health and wellbeing issues facing VET sector international students in South Australia. It is drawn from the different research stages in the project, namely the literature review, the education provider workshops, the student contact officer surveys and telephone interviews, and the student focus groups. More detailed findings from each stage of the evidence gathering process are provided in Appendices 2-7.

It is well established that people's ability to study and learn are affected by their health and wellbeing. Health and wellbeing in this project are defined broadly to include feeling happy, confident, part of a community as well as being physically fit and well. People's health and wellbeing are affected by:

1. Living, working and studying

The everyday circumstances of international students can cause health and wellbeing issues. In particular, they face:

- Financial difficulties
- Accommodation issues
- Employment issues
- Lack of transport options
- Educational issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class)
- English language difficulties
- Health-related risk taking behaviours (unsafe-sex, drugs, alcohol, gambling, self-harm and suicide)
- For women, issues around balancing their numerous family and childcare responsibilities with study and perceived and experienced violence.
- For men, challenges to self-esteem as a result of performing jobs below their abilities and qualifications

International students may experience discrimination, particularly in regards to employment and accommodation (abuse, harassment and exclusion). It is important that they are aware of their rights and where to seek support when these rights are not being met. Indeed, international students need to be able to access support services when facing issues in any of these areas.

The research indicated a number of issues regarding support services:

- Lack of knowledge by students and education providers regarding the full range of support services available
- Issues around the coordination of support services
- Reduced organisational capacity of private VET education providers to provide student support
- Many organisations rely on referral pathways to support their students. This reliance indicates the importance of education providers remaining up to date about the support services available outside of the institution itself.

Recommendation 1 (Student Support Services) is directed at recognising the role of the Office of the Training Advocate as an important resource for international students.

2. Physical and Mental Health Issues

The research has indicated that international students face the following physical and mental health issues:

- Lack of understanding of the health system (including role of and when to go to the General Practitioner (GP), and when to go to the Accident and Emergency Department)
- How to find an appropriate GP (speaks own language, right gender, and those who provide a bulk billing service)
- Lack of understanding regarding Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) – and what is covered by this (especially in relation to medication, counselling and dental work)
- Risk of self-medicating due to cost of medication
- Financial difficulty by having to pay a “Gap” payment to General Practitioners
- Waiting times – especially at Accident and Emergency Departments
- Mental health issues – psychological/emotional stress, depression, anxiety combined with lack of clarity around whether counselling, psychologists and other mental health services are covered by OSHC
- Fatigue
- Lack of nutrition
- Health related risk-taking behaviours (unplanned pregnancies for women – which suggests unsafe sex – and alcohol abuse and gambling for men, also suicide)

Note: The last three issues have been reported by the education providers rather than the students themselves.

Recommendation 2 (Health System Information Resource) is intended to address international student’s mental and physical health needs through ensuring that both international students and their education providers are aware of how to navigate the South Australian health care system.

3. Social Connections, Networks, Friendships, Relationships, and Intimacy

International students can often lack the social connections and networks that can assist them in understanding the new culture in which they have arrived and can provide support – or information about accessing support – when dealing with any problems that arise. It can also add to their sense of loneliness.

It is important that international students have the opportunity to interact with and make friends with the Australian community.

Recommendation 3 (Community and Social Engagement) is directed at addressing this issue at an industry wide level.

4. Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC)

A recent change to the OSHC insurance deed, which outlines what conditions OSHC insurance providers can set on their insurance, will impact negatively on international students as it allows the providers to set a 12 month waiting period for pregnancy related care. However, unlike Australian residents, international students do not have the Medicare system to fall back on when they are not covered by private insurance. This will create an unfair burden on female international students and female partners of male international students if they fall pregnant in their first year of being in Australia. It will also have the effect of shifting the cost of pregnancy related services to the State, as these women will turn up to public hospitals unable to pay and will most commonly not be refused treatment.

Recommendation 4 (Insurance for Pregnancy-related Services) proposes that the Minister for Health and Ageing write to the Federal Minister for Health addressing this concern, which is under Federal jurisdiction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, international students, like domestic students, face a number of challenges associated with starting a new phase of their life – looking for accommodation, dealing with financial pressures, seeking employment, getting themselves around, dealing with physical and mental health issues and adjusting to their study requirements. However, unlike domestic students, international students lack the social networks and support systems most domestic students' experience. In addition, international students are faced with a new environment and cultural context very different to the one they are used to, and with interacting in this environment in a language other than their own. Lastly, international students may face unfair or discriminatory treatment in some of these areas. All or any of these factors can negatively affect their health and wellbeing, which in turn may reduce their academic performance. The social and living experiences of international students are important as they have the potential of influencing academic achievement and because word of mouth has a significant impact on the international student market. It is important that VET sector international students receive appropriate support whilst studying in South Australia both because all individuals deserve to have the opportunity to maximise their educational potential and because VET sector international students make a significant contribution to the state's economy.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were developed by the JESG in response to the findings from the evidence gathering stage of the project.

Please note, since the finalisation of the recommendations, it has been decided that some of them will not be progressed at this point due to organisational changes. The re-focused recommendations outlined below ensure the currency of the response in the context of the Health in All Policies findings and alignment with agency core business activities (refer to Appendix 8 for the original set of recommendations).

1. Student Support Services

It is recommended that the role of the Office of the Training Advocate, in providing student support on a range of issues that arise for international students, be recognised as an important resource for international students.

It is recommended, however, that the Office of the Training Advocate review its communication strategy so that more education providers and students are aware of its role, particularly those from the VET sector.

Until very recently South Australia was unique in Australia in providing international students with a public point of contact concerning any issues they face whilst studying in South Australia. This service, which complements existing student support services, is provided through the Office of the Training Advocate. A similar model is being established within the Australian Government in establishing the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO). The Commonwealth's OSO's role specifically addresses study related issues relating to private education providers. In contrast, the Office of the Training Advocate supports all international students facing any number of issues – related to study, life or work.

It is noted that more international students, particularly those from the VET sector, would benefit from this service if the number of education providers and international students who were aware of the service was increased.

2. Health System Information Resource

It is recommended that the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology coordinate the development of an information resource summarising the health system and how to access appropriate services when needed to support VET sector international students and their education providers to be able to navigate the health system.

The international student health lens project found that many education providers and international students do not know how to navigate the health system. The system is made even more complicated for international students than Australian nationals, because they are not covered by the Medicare safety net and are legally required to have Overseas Student Health Cover insurance. In addition, for many international students,

English is their second language. Therefore, it is important that the information resource is an easily understood plain English guide for navigating the health system.

The Public Health and Clinical Systems Division has committed funding to support the development of this resource.

The information resource will be developed through consultation with various sections of the Department for Health and Ageing, the University Sector and TAFE, and Education Adelaide.

Following endorsement of this recommendation the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology will also seek engagement with the five OSHC providers, as they provide insurance to every international student and have an obligation to support international students in navigating the health system. We will explore with these providers whether they are prepared to provide any financial contribution to the development of this resource, to support its ongoing publication, and to provide professional development to Education Providers on how to best navigate the health system for international students.

2.1 It is recommended that a coordinated communication strategy be developed to support the distribution and application of this information resource, with a particular focus on engaging the VET sector.

A coordinated communication strategy will ensure that the information resource is distributed and utilised widely across the international education sector, particularly the VET sector. The strategy will consider the best method of publication, consistency with already existing health information such as that on the Study Adelaide website, and accessibility to the resource for students and Education Providers.

The development and implementation of the communication strategy will be led by the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, through consultation with Education Adelaide, Australian Council for Private Education and Training and ISANA.

3. Community and Social Engagement

It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, through the International Education Roundtable, develop a range of additional strategies to increase community and social engagement for international students, taking into account the specific needs of VET sector students.

International students face similar health and wellbeing issues as domestic students, including financial difficulties, accommodation and employment issues, and health issues. However, unlike domestic students, international students often lack the social support networks to assist them when facing these challenges. The research in this project emphasised the importance of international students' community and social engagement, particularly with the local Australian community, for positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

The international student health lens project found that the VET sector and in particular private providers are less well positioned than the University sector to support their international students through any health and wellbeing issues. This includes providing opportunities and systems for supporting community and social engagement for their students.

The international student health lens project found that community and social engagement can be supported through numerous means, including creating opportunities in student timetables for social contact, incorporating inter-student contact into the curriculum, establishing buddy systems for students, organising and ensuring students know about social activities, volunteering, and joining sporting, community groups or social clubs. Hence, such community and social engagement needs to be supported through a multi-pronged approach.

The International Education Roundtable is chaired by the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education and its membership includes several international students and representatives from key government agencies. It provides a forum for discussing issues relating to international student education, safety, and community and social engagement and provides advice to the South Australian Government on key issues of concern relating to international students. The International Education Roundtable has been identified as an appropriate forum for exploring additional strategies to increase the level of community and social engagement for international students.

3.1 It is recommended that Education Adelaide continues to work with Volunteering SA and the Office for Volunteers to develop volunteering opportunities for international students.

Providing opportunities for international students to volunteer in South Australia gives students the ability to meet and engage with the broader Australian community. Volunteering Organisations, the Local Government Association, Church Groups and Non-Government Organisations offer many opportunities for volunteering activities.

3.2 It is recommended that Multicultural SA continue to distribute information about the Multicultural Grants Scheme to a range of groups including ethnic communities and other non-government organisations.

It is important that organisations that could support the community and social engagement of multicultural students within the Australian community are aware of the Multicultural Grants Scheme.

The international student health lens project found that social contact with the local Australian community supported international student health and wellbeing.

3.3 It is recommended that the role of Education Adelaide in providing social activities for international students is recognised and that their existing successful community support program for international students in South Australia continues.

Education Adelaide's mandate is to market South Australia as Australia's leading international education destination. Education Adelaide has strong and established networks with students, local educational institutions, arts, sports and community groups and businesses. Their existing community support includes an extensive activity program which last year saw the organisation deliver nearly 60 events and activities for international students. More than 7,000 students were engaged through the program and Education Adelaide is committed to continuing this successful engagement strategy. The international student health lens project found that many education providers and students identified this fundamental role played by Education Adelaide.

4. Insurance for Pregnancy-related Services

It is recommended that the Minister for Health and Ageing writes to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing expressing concern regarding recent changes to the Overseas Students Health Cover, which imposes a 12-month waiting period for pregnancy-related services.

The deed for the provision of Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) is a legal document which sets out the conditions that registered Australian health funds must comply with in order to provide OSHC policies. Recent changes to this deed have meant that since July 2011 OSHC providers are able to impose a 12-month waiting period for pregnancy-related services. On last check – December 2011 – four of the five OSHC providers had implemented this 12-month waiting period.

This recent change is of particular concern because international students do not have the Medicare safety net to fall back on, unlike their Australian student counterparts. This means that technically the cost of pregnancy-related services, whether the pregnancy was planned or not, must be borne by the students themselves. When financial issues are such a huge concern for international students, and have a far reaching effect on their health and wellbeing and their ability to engage in their studies, this is an unfair burden to place on international students. In addition, it may well induce these students to avoid as much antenatal care as possible, which is of real concern in an era when we know that the level of antenatal care provided for a woman and her child has long term effects on the child's development and long term health and wellbeing.

In practice, State public hospitals may well provide antenatal care at no cost to these international students. However, this places an unfair burden on State public hospitals when this cost is covered for Australian citizens by the Commonwealth government and was previously covered by OSHC providers for international students.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

The international student health and wellbeing project found that VET sector students in South Australia experience many of the same challenges as their domestic counterparts when facing a new phase of life – looking for accommodation, dealing with financial pressures, seeking employment, getting themselves around, dealing with physical and mental health issues and adjusting to their study requirements. However, unlike domestic students international students lack the social networks and support systems most domestic students experience. In addition, international students are faced with a new environment and cultural context very different to the one they are used to, and with interacting in this environment in a language other than their own. Lastly, international students may face unfair or discriminatory treatment in some of these areas. All or any of these factors can negatively affect their health and wellbeing, which in turn may reduce their academic attendance and performance.

Importantly, many VET sector students may not experience the same level of support as their University counterparts due to the small nature of many private VET sector providers. Yet, student support is fundamental in maintaining a student's health and wellbeing. This project has made a number of recommendations directed at supporting the community and social engagement of international students, writing to the Federal government regarding recent and unfair changes to international student health insurance requirements and facilitating the navigation of the South Australian health care system by international students and their education providers.

The development of these recommendations was informed by in-depth qualitative and quantitative research, which engaged with all levels of the international education sector – peak bodies, government agencies, education providers, student support officers and students. Notably, this project adopted a whole-of-society approach, incorporating non-government membership on the JESG and the recommendations were developed and agreed to by all represented agencies on the JESG. This was a recognition that responsibility for and obligations towards international students lies partly with government and partly with the private international education sector.

The recommendations were then endorsed by the Chief Executives of DHA and DFEEST. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs endorsed the recommendations for MSA. Distinctively, these recommendations were also then sent to the Ministers of each department. Whilst this was necessary for the Minister for Health and Ageing, due to the recommendation for him to write to his Federal counterpart (Recommendation 4), they were sent to the other Ministers upon request by the partner agencies perhaps demonstrating the importance of the project for the Government.

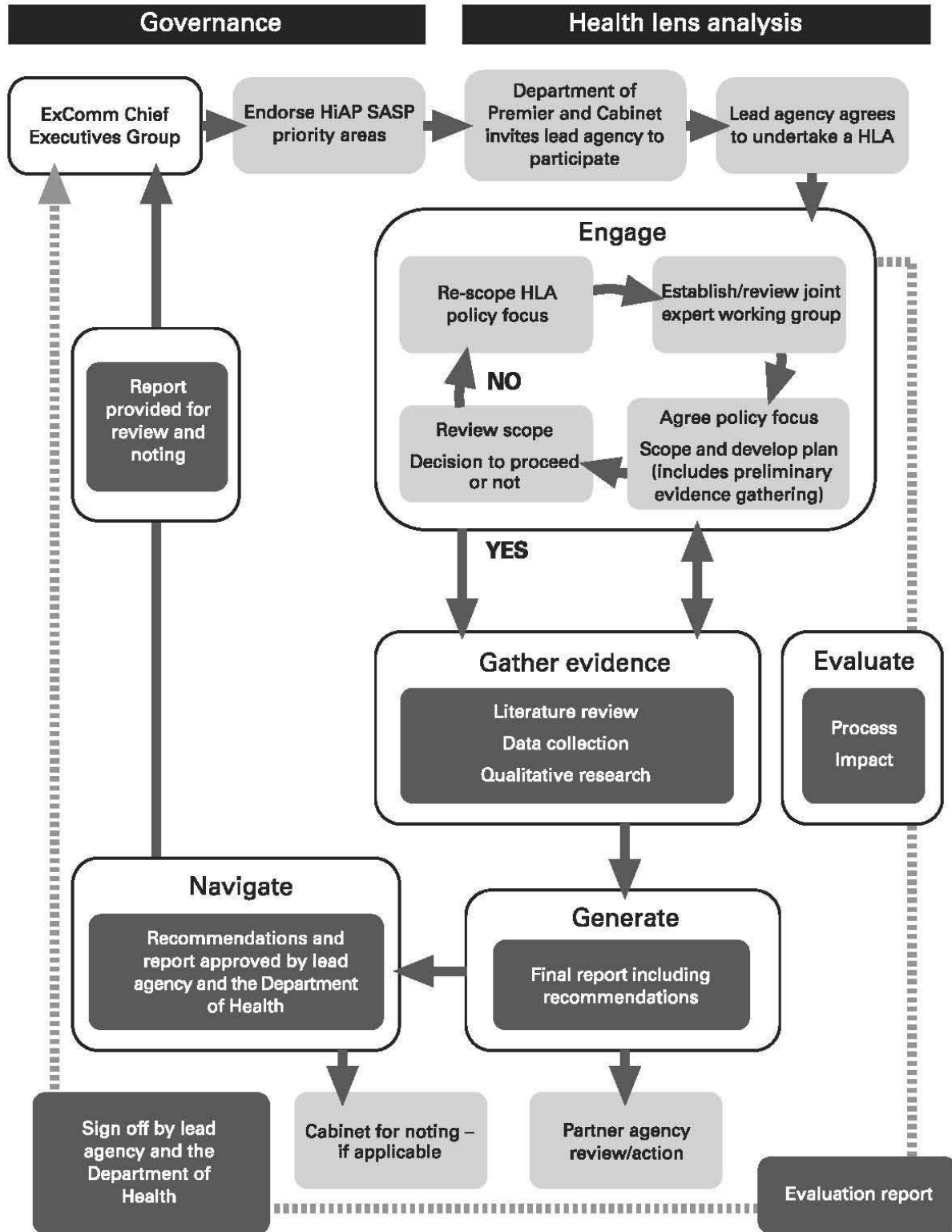
This project has a distinctive implementation stage. The partner agency, DFEEST, required an implementation plan before the recommendations could be endorsed. Also, all of the JESG agencies committed to action to support the recommendations. With respect to implementation, this project is also notable for the fact that the HiAP unit itself has committed to overseeing, with DFEEST, the implementation of the development of the health system resource for students and education providers. Traditionally, HiAP projects facilitate the development of policies and actions for other Government agencies on their core

business agenda. However, this project identified the need for a health specific role in the implementation stage.

Whilst there is a distinctive implementation stage to this project, many of the findings have been acted upon throughout the life of the project. For example, ACPET started discussing community and social engagement with its members around the same time as the literature review highlighted the importance of this for student health and wellbeing. Further, through its membership on the International Education Roundtable, DFEEST has been acting on and sharing the findings of the project on an ongoing basis. DFEEST has also shared the findings with the international education sector at the national level.

APPENDIX 1

Summary of South Australia's Health Lens process*



*Since the initiation of this project central government governance structures have altered. The governance arrangements outlined in the diagram were current at the time this HiAP project was endorsed.

APPENDIX 2

The Health and Wellbeing of International Students

Literature Review – Summary

SA Health's Health in All Policies unit is undertaking a project focusing on improving the health and wellbeing of VET sector international students in South Australia. As part of this project a literature review was undertaken. This is a summary of the main findings of the review of the literature on the health and wellbeing of international students.

It is well established that people's ability to study and learn are affected by their health and wellbeing. Health and wellbeing in this project are defined broadly to include feeling happy, confident, part of a community as well as being physically fit and well. People's health and wellbeing are affected by their social circumstances, including their level of community and social engagement, their living situation, their financial situation, and their employment. Importantly, international students will not be able to maximise their educational engagement if they are not healthy and well.

The international student market is important to the South Australian economy. In 2009/10 the international education industry contributed \$1.05 billion into the South Australian economy.⁷ In 2009, the international education market accounted for almost 10% of South Australia's total export income (ABS, SA Stats, June 2010). The social and living experiences of students are important as they have the potential of influencing academic achievement (Sawir et al, undated) and because word of mouth has a significant impact on the international student market (OECD, 2004). Thus it is important to understand the health and wellbeing issues faced by international students in South Australia.

Growth in international education in South Australia from 2002 to 2009 has been driven by growth in the Vocational Education Training (VET) sector. In 2002 there were 1377 VET international student enrolments in South Australia. This increased to 2961 in 2007 and then jumped dramatically to 8919 in 2009. The increase in international student enrolments in the VET sector since 2007 has been concentrated in the private VET sector with 1338 students enrolled in the government sector compared to 7581 students enrolled in non-government Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in 2009 (ABS, SA Stats, Jun 2010). This rapid increase in student numbers at private RTOs raises questions about the organisational capacity to support VET sector international students.

Much of the literature focuses on the University sector. The lack of studies into the VET sector is a significant gap in the literature, particularly in the context of the reduced organisational capacity of private VET education providers as compared to Universities. It is also important to understand the issues faced by international students in the VET sector because of the different profile of the students in each sector. The country of origin of international students in the VET sector differs significantly to that of higher education international students and to the broad international student population, both in South Australia and

⁷ Data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' publication *International Trade in Services, by Country, by State and by Detailed Services Category, Financial Year, 2009-10* (ABS Catalogue no. 5368.0.55.003).

nationally. In South Australia the VET sector is heavily dominated by Indian and Chinese students (5126 and 1124 respectively in 2010).⁸ This is in contrast to the University sector, which is dominated by Chinese students (7239 Chinese students compared to 2155 Malaysian and 1255 Indian students enrolled in 2010). Chinese and Indian students may well have very different experiences of living and studying in Australia. The literature indicates that wellbeing issues took a particular hue depending on the student's cultural background (Deurmert et al, 2005, p.343; Rosenthal et al, 2006, p.7). It is important to understand the particular issues faced by the main cultural groups in the South Australian VET sector. Any South Australian study of VET sector students needs to take account of the nationality of international students in that sector.

In addition, little of the current research has focussed on the South Australian context, focusing predominantly on the national or east coast contexts. Given both that health and wellbeing are intricately shaped by the context in which we live and that South Australia differs significantly to New South Wales and Victoria, it is important to understand the experience of international students who study in South Australia. Accordingly, this project will focus on the experience of VET sector international students studying in Adelaide.

Despite these gaps in the literature, in broad terms, a fairly consistent picture of the international student experience was depicted in the literature, and is a good starting point for the project. In brief, international students can experience difficulties through:

- 1. the context in which they live and study, and**
- 2. their social interactions, networks and personal relationships.**

Environmental – Living and Studying in South Australia

Much of the literature emphasises the difficulties international students face in their everyday life experiences, from:

- Financial difficulties
- Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation
- Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment
- Lack of transport options
- Educational issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class etc)
- English language difficulties
- Physical and mental health issues
- Health-related risk taking behaviours (unsafe-sex, drugs, alcohol, gambling, self-harm and suicide)
- Underutilisation of support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)

⁸ AEI student data: http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2010/2010Dec_0712_pdf.pdf

These difficulties with everyday experiences can have a detrimental impact on a student's wellbeing, which can impact on their educational outcomes. However, in one sense these areas of difficulties are the symptoms of deeper problems about lack of social connections and supports. Of course, these symptoms need to be addressed through providing adequate support services and ensuring students are aware of and access these services.

Social Connections, Networks, Friendships, Relationships, and Intimacy

While international students may encounter similar difficulties to domestic students when finding jobs, accommodation, means of transport, and adjusting to the freedoms of post-school life there are three emerging themes in the literature that would appear to distinguish the experience of international students:

- International students arrive in a different culture and place and hence have a limited understanding of available support services and how to access these.
- International students may experience discrimination, particularly in regards to employment and accommodation.
- International students can often lack the social connections and networks that can assist international students in understanding the new culture in which they have arrived and can provide support when dealing with any problems that arise.

The interactions international students have with other international students, domestic students, the broader South Australian community, and their educational institution all impact on their health and wellbeing. The extent to which an individual feels they "fit in" or belong to a community is fundamental. This sense of belonging not only impacts on health and wellbeing but also on one's knowledge of and access to resources available within the community. A number of factors affect this sense of belonging, including culture shock, social and personal interactions and friendships, family relationships, as well as positive and negative treatment by the broader community.

The literature indicates that a person's sense of connectedness is central to their wellbeing (Rosenthal et al, 2006, p.5). Indeed, Rosenthal et al's (2006) study found that international student's level of connectedness was a strong predictor of their "satisfaction with aspects of daily life and health, such as living arrangements, financial support, lifestyle balance, and with their levels of self-esteem and depression" (Rosenthal et al, 2006, p.5). This suggests that social connectedness offers more than mere company – it may also offer a deeper understanding of the cultural setting in which one is located, as well as a deeper understanding of housing and work rights and responsibilities.

There is increasing emphasis in the literature on what types of social engagement are important for international students. In particular, there is some discussion about whether any social interactions are sufficient or whether these need to be with the domestic community, and in particular domestic students. Rosenthal et al suggest that whilst interactions with co-culturals is important, it is also important that international students have an opportunity to engage with domestic students (Rosenthal et al, 2006, p.9). Offering a nuanced account of loneliness, Sawyer et al (undated) argue that the type of social contact

international students experience is important to unlocking their loneliness. Significantly, they note the importance of deep and meaningful social contact with the local community.

While there is much research on social networks, loneliness, and connections, there is much less on intimacy. Rosenthal et al's (2006) study found that students struggled to find deeper meaningful relationships with people who know them intimately, cared about them and with whom they wished to discuss their problems. There is even less research on international students' domestic relationships, including their need and use of child care services and any incidences of domestic violence.

The way in which international students are treated by the wider community also affects their health and wellbeing. Abuse, harassment, and exclusion were consistent themes within the international student literature. The ramifications of abuse and harassment are significant (Greyca, 2010). Furthermore, whether the abuse and harassment is part of a broader picture of racism, which could be instantiated in other forms of treatment at work or in the housing sector, is unknown. The Deurmert et al's (2005) study found that 50% of international students felt they had experienced racism. Predominantly this was experienced in the areas of work or accommodation. Babacan et al's (2010) Melbourne study found that when international students had concerns about safety, racism was the cause most commonly identified. It is acknowledged in the literature that not enough is known about the relationship between racism and experiences of abuse and harassment for international students (Grayca, 2010; Rosenthal et al, 2006, p.3)

In conclusion, international students, like domestic students, face a number of challenges associated with starting a new phase of their life – looking for accommodation, dealing with financial pressures, seeking employment, getting themselves around, dealing with physical and mental health issues and adjusting to their study requirements. However, unlike domestic students international students lack the social networks and support systems most domestic students enjoy. In addition, international students are faced with a new environment and cultural context very different to the one they are used to, and with interacting in this environment in a language other than their own. Lastly, international students may face unfair or discriminatory treatment in some of these areas. All or any of these factors can negatively affect their health and wellbeing, which in turn may reduce their academic performance.

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APPENDIX 3

International Student Health and Well-being Health Lens – Education Provider Forum

Summary of feedback

Purpose of the Education Provider Forum

- To initiate contact with the Registered Training Officers (RTOs) and, in doing so,
 - to inform them of the project, its focus and intent
 - to begin building relationships, which will be critical in the qualitative research stages of the evidence gathering phase, particularly in terms of connecting with student services officers.
- To inform the project team of the broad range of health and wellbeing issues facing students, from an education provider's perspective.
- To inform the project team of what types of solutions service providers envisage as useful and of who they think is responsible/best-placed to contribute to students' health and wellbeing.

Description of the Education Provider Forum

The International Student Forum was planned and run by DFEEST and Education Adelaide. The Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education opened the forum and was available to respond to questions from education service providers through a facilitated panel discussion.

As part of the forum the HiAP working group conducted a workshop, asking the education providers to consider the health and wellbeing issues faced by international students. Following a brief overview of the project, participants worked through the following three questions (which had been circulated prior to the workshop) and discussions at tables were facilitated by a member of the project's working group.

- I. Based on your experience of working with overseas students, what are the top 5 health and wellbeing (in its broadest sense) issues they face?*
- II. Given the reality of the current economic climate in South Australia, what ideas, solutions, or changes to existing programs do you think could realistically address these issues?*
- III. In your opinion, who is best placed to contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of overseas students, and why?*

Fifteen written responses were received from the various groups. Some of these represent group responses while others represent individual responses. Given that the workshop is only intended to be indicative of the issues facing international students and is in no way intended to be a representative study, it is not necessary to weight these different responses.

The forum was attended by a broad range of education service providers including representatives from the private VET sector, TAFESA, DECS, private schools and other key NGOs (e.g. Anglicare). Hence, future

elements of the project need to explore whether all the issues raised in the responses arise in the VET sector.

Responses to Workshop Questions

1. Based on your experience of working with overseas students, what are the top 5 health and wellbeing (in its broadest sense) issues they face?

Many of the responses to this question reflected and confirmed the findings of the literature review. Hence the responses are divided under similar categories to the issues identified in the literature review. Additional points of note are discussed below.

Global Context

The written responses identified the Australian education market and visa conditions as impacting on the health and well-being of international students. Namely, the responses identified the impact of:

- Visa requirements, advice and implications – impacts on class attendance and academic performance
- Uncertainty in the international education environment – flux in the information and legislation – impacts on mental health

Environmental – Living and Studying in South Australia

In terms of living and studying conditions that raised health and well-being issues for international students, the following areas were frequently listed in the written feedback:

- Financial stress – rental stress, inability to find work
- Employment difficulties – needing to find work (students increasingly coming from poorer countries), inability to find work
- Access to services (which types unspecified)
- Scared to access services
- Lack of multi-lingual support
- Accommodation issues – overcrowding, hygiene/housing/rental stress, reliable and affordable, non-permanent= poor studying, students get depressed, especially hard for postgraduates with families.
- Nutritional issues – inability to cook healthy food, access to Halal food, access to dietary staples, bad food choices, fast food, budget constraints
- Fatigue – contacting family/friends from home late at night (time difference) linked to isolation, work/study balance (often work late at night), computer games, school starts earlier here than other countries, mental and physical fatigue, sloppy practice – internet – lonely,
- Healthy lifestyle – Work/study balance (often work at night, e.g. taxi drivers)

Of particular note in these responses is the identification of fatigue and poor nutrition as impacting on the health and well-being of international students. These did not appear as areas of concern in the literature review. In addition, the responses in this workshop usually connected financial and employment issues, which was not always the case within the literature. Notable absences in the responses, in the context of the literature review, are the lack of any mention of educational issues impacting on health and well-being, and the small emphasis on language difficulties.

Physical and Mental Health

In terms of physical and mental health issues impacting on international students' health and wellbeing, the following areas were listed:

- Insurance limitations and lack of understanding of these – sometimes have to pay a gap, extent of coverage for medicines, coverage for dental work
- Health costs and waiting times
- Understanding and accessing health care (e.g. going to hospital rather than GP, physical illness/mental illness)
- Mental health issues – psychological/emotional stress, depression, anxiety
- Sexual health, awareness, behaviours, acceptance and education – included unplanned pregnancies
- Accessing counselling services – due to cultural issues
- Risk of self-medicating – cost of medicines and familiarity with medicines from home country

Social Connections, Networks, Friendships, Relationships, and Intimacy

The following social and relationship areas were reported as health and well-being issues for international students:

- Cultural differences – not understanding cultural norms, adjustment to new culture
- Multicultural issues – understanding and working with mixed cultures (*unclear whether this is an observation regarding education providers or regarding students*)
- Social isolation/social connections/social integration
- Difficult for RTOs to support social integration as pressure from parents for students not to mix with particular social groups
- Difficulties connecting with local community
- Difficulties connecting with people from a similar culture
- Stay within own cultural group (don't interact with others)
- Homesickness – missing family and missing culture
- Concern about being a burden to family
- Family pressures – unrealistic expectations for success

- Religious/spiritual needs not met – lack of Muslim cultural awareness (faith, food, lifestyle, adequate toilets), access to religious venues, prayer areas
- Security and Safety – such as, for Indian taxi drivers
- Honeymoon period – high risk of going off course
- Separation from family – lack of guidance

As with the literature, some responses emphasised social contact and networking with specific cultural groups, while others emphasised the importance of interacting with people from the broader Australian community. Some of the responses linked lack of social connections to homesickness, feelings of isolation and depression.

Consistently with the literature, some of the responses noted the way in which students from different cultural backgrounds had different needs and health and well-being issues. One response also suggested that life experience and/or age were key factors in health and well-being issues.

One issue raised in the responses that was not identified in the literature review is the impact on health and well-being that religious/spiritual issues have for international students.

Other isolated references in the responses referred to:

- Preventative health check
- Lack of screening for mental health in Visa process

II. Given the reality of the current economic climate in South Australia, what ideas, solutions, or changes to existing programs do you think could realistically address these issues?

Many of the responses to this question made suggestions directed at, first, improving services directly provided for students, second, providing professional development and support for staff in registered training organisations, and, third, improving system wide supports.

Student supports and resources

Regarding services and resources directly provided to students, the answers covered a number of areas, including the provision of helpful information, support in living and working in South Australia, support in establishing social connections and supports, and support in addressing cultural issues. The specific responses are summarised below under these themes:

1. provision of information
 - Improve pre-departure information provided to students

- Provide effective orientation/ Improve induction process – engage students early
- More education on services across health matters, including specialist health services such as Shine SA
- Ensure Shine SA is a compulsory part of induction
- Provide a health or mental health contact number on the student contact cards
- Use social media to communicate events, etc to international students
- Develop resource outlining venues and shops for specific dietary requirements, religious needs, and social opportunities

2. living and working in South Australia

- Provide training for living skills – cooking, buying a car etc
- Assist students with lifestyle issues, self care and self image: including through providing culturally appropriate resources, contacts and links (for example to Shine SA and DASSA), and through establishing alumni networks so that passed students can assist current students with these areas.
- Health authorities run seminars and workshops at colleges
- Require annual medical check-ups
- Provide support for insurance
- Assist with financial support
- Provide training for employability/soft skills to assist students to integrate into the Australian workforce
- Provide greater work experience/work placements for students and ensure sites have a level of cultural awareness
- Establish a career guidance provider who can also ensure employment protection
- Facilitate access to support services external to RTOs – lack of clarity as to how this is funded

3. social connections and supports

- Support social integration – international students meeting local community
- Establish buddy systems with domestic students and/or with alumni
- Facilitate student social groups
- Facilitate student links with community organisations, networks and volunteer organisations

4. addressing cultural issues

- Cultural awareness training for all students
- Establish Alumni networks so that passed students can support current students with appropriate interactions
- International student fair/barbeque/music festival once a year
- Greater access to free activities for students – such as sporting teams etc

Regarding services and resources to assist Providers/Trainers, the answers to question two included:

- Provide professional development on:
 - how to identify problems with students
 - identifying mental health issues
 - identifying health problems
 - referral processes
 - cultural awareness programs for staff about cultures of all students (current and alumni)
- Written resources on:
 - available services and how to access them
 - visa advice (more accessible than that provided on DIAC website)
- Establish a student contact officer (student service officer) network from a range of providers so that providers can share ideas and identify common issues
- DFEEST/RTO/VET workshops for student service officers
- Health authorities run seminars and workshops at colleges
- VET providers establish links with health professionals (counsellors etc) so they can access these professionals for immediate assistance

Improving system wide supports

Some of the solutions suggested in response to question two were directed at improving system wide mechanisms directed at supporting students. The answers included:

- Strengthen the compliance requirement in the Standards with respect to RTOs supporting the health and wellbeing of international students
- Appoint a health advocate, similar to the training advocate, to oversee international student health issues
- Establish a central database of multi-lingual GPs (i.e. publish a list of GPs with language skills) – also identify gender of GP
- Establish a quality SA Health student hotline
- Establish a quality SA Health website on health and wellbeing, with a FAQs section (Housing SA has a specific site for international students)
- Ensure industrial protection and advocacy for students – such as through unions, employment ombudsman, and/or training advocate
- Provide for an avenue for complaints about employment and/or accommodation (perhaps the training advocate)
- Seek industry support for international students, particularly in regards to work placements (e.g. Edinburgh Uni – meeting social needs)
- Ensure cultural awareness within work place sites

- Address the lack of suitable pay structures in some industries so as to support students to get the work experience they require for permanent residency
- Ensure appropriate affordable housing for families
- Better regulation of home stay accommodation – unclear who to complain to [may only apply to school students]
- Dedicated hotline number for SAPOL, not just the 000 number
- Community engagement strategy
- Proactive contribution from the media – success stories
- Better co-ordination of existing services for students (different service providers in country of origin, visa process, Study Adelaide, RTO etc) – all stakeholders need to be clearer of their roles and what information has been provided to students

Again these suggestions covered many of the living and working areas covered in the literature review, including the areas of health, employment, accommodation, safety, and community relations.

Some of the suggestions are very helpful in terms of indicating ways in which students can be better supported, such as the common call for professional development for education providers. Other suggestions indicate a lack of knowledge about what services already exist. For example, the call for a health ombudsman indicates a lack of understanding of the role of the training advocate, which is to address all issues, including health issues, regarding international students. Similarly, there is already an employment ombudsman who can address any workplace issues. This gap in knowledge about existing services needs to be addressed, perhaps through professional development and student support officer networks. It is also important that service providers fully understand the role of the training advocate in supporting students.

Other solutions raised by the participants included:

- improve relations with police – but it was unclear whether this meant student's relationship or education providers or cultural groups relationship
- Support Alumni – for students who remain in Australia

III. In your opinion, who is best placed to contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of overseas students, and why?

In response to this third question, most participants identified the shared responsibility for the health and wellbeing of international students. More specifically, the following bodies were identified as being well placed to support international students' health and wellbeing:

- Education providers
 - Need to be trained in identifying and addressing health issues, need to provide information to students
 - Need to take a holistic approach and focus on students' health and wellbeing, not just their academic achievement.

- Welfare and counselling services from within the organisation (must be culturally appropriate)
- Need to develop specific strategies to support student integration, work opportunities, social events, and English language skills
- Establish buddy systems and integrated domestic and international student classes
- International education agents – shaping student expectations through induction and recruitment processes
- State government
 - through DFEEST and SA Health – to support and provide regulatory framework to assist providers in their role
 - Should provide funding to support better coordination of existing services, especially since it receives \$16 billion in income from the international student market
 - More funding for specific programs and existing services (e.g. Shine SA, DASSA and other health services)
 - SA Health – multi-lingual GPs
 - To support RTOs by providing information about potential stakeholders and services (e.g. student card but there is a need for health contact link)
- Federal government – support better coordination of existing services
- Local government – to monitor environmental and planning issues as they relate to health (for example, cost of living expenses are making it difficult for all students, including international students, and some are forgoing their health to support their education)
- ACPET
 - for example, the safety and wellbeing workshops they currently offer (however, these could be offered in-house at the colleges, making it easier for the students to attend)
 - could support the RTOs in their role of supporting students
- Study Adelaide
- Health providers – GPs need to understand the international student perspective
- All students – such as through providing a mentoring role
- Alumni
- Cultural associations and ethnic communities – to educate students
- Local groups around the area students live
- Churches
- Sports clubs
- Universities
- Unions – need to provide information regarding workplace rights and responsibilities
- Ombudsman for international students – as a avenue for complaints
- Accommodation Officers, home stay providers, accommodation providers

Many of the answers identified the need for better coordination of existing services, which was seen as a collective responsibility.

One response suggested an online directory for international students, which could be accessed through the RTO/student site. This could include information about activities, churches, sports clubs, events and cultural associations. There could also be links to larger providers, such as Universities. Much of this information appears on the Study Adelaide website, indicating perhaps that education providers need a degree of professional development regarding the availability of services to students.

APPENDIX 4

International Student Health and Wellbeing health lens – SCO Survey Questions

Improving the health and well-being of VET sector international students

Slide 1

The South Australian Government's *International Students Health Lens Project* wants to know more about the health and well-being issues facing international students in the VET sector.

Maintaining students' health and well-being helps them to successfully engage in their studies. A successful student experience is good for the student, the education provider, and the international education market and hence good for the South Australian economy.

We are interested in the international student experience as a whole, rather than at any one institution.

More information about this project can be found at Health in All Policies website: **insert link to website**

Slide 2

So what are the barriers and facilitators to international students' health and well-being?

As a frontline service provider you know best the issues students face and how to address these.

Your insights will be used to inform the State Government on how to implement strategies to better support the VET sector in maintaining the health and well-being of their international students.

At the end of this survey you will be asked whether you are happy to participate in a telephone interview. And as a sign of our appreciation for your time for an interview we will offer you a movie voucher.

The survey takes approximately **minutes to complete**

The information you provide in this survey, and in any follow-up interview, is confidential and private. Information about individuals and their institutions will not be reported on. Any contact details you provide will not be provided to any third party.

Slide 3

International Student Health and Well-being Student Contact Officer Survey

Slide 4

Health and Well-being of international students

The following two questions are directed at understanding the main health and well-being issues facing VET sector international students.

When we use the expression health and well-being we mean more than just illness and treatment. It is a broad concept including both physical and mental health and social well-being. People's well-being is affected by how they live, work, study and socialise. It encompasses how they feel about their lives and the support networks they have around them.

1. Based on your experience of working with international students which of the following issues affect their health and well-being? Please tick all that apply

Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation

Unfair treatment by accommodation providers

Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment

Unfair treatment by employers

Financial difficulties

Lack of transport options

Educational Issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class etc)

English language difficulties

Not being aware of support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)

Not accessing and/or using support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)

Fatigue

Food and nutritional issues (such as, not knowing how to cook or where to access preferred foods, attempting to save money at the cost of eating nutritionally)

Issues with family back home (such as, death, financial pressures, family expectations etc)

Homesickness

Difficulties with family fitting into life in Australia

Childcare/school related issues

Difficulties making friends with other international students

Difficulties making friends with local Australian students

Difficulties making friends outside of the student community

Difficulties in establishing connections with cultural groups

Difficulties in meeting religious/spiritual needs

Difficulties in establishing connections with the local Australian community

Lacking social supports

Difficulties with personal relationships

Discrimination

Racism

Victims of violence
Domestic violence
Sexual health issues
Physical health issues (such as, colds, accessing medical treatment)
Health related risk-taking behaviours (Such as, gambling, drinking alcohol, drug-use, unsafe sexual activity)
Mental health issues (such as, depression, loneliness, anxiety)
Visa issues

Others

Slide 5

2. Of the issues you identified above, tick the five you think have the most impact on health and well-being

Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation
Unfair treatment by accommodation providers
Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment
Unfair treatment by employers
Financial difficulties
Lack of transport options
Educational Issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class etc)
English language difficulties
Not being aware of support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)
Not accessing and/or using support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)
Fatigue
Food and nutritional issues (such as, not knowing how to cook or where to access preferred foods, attempting to save money at the cost of eating nutritionally)
Issues with family back home (such as, death, financial pressures, family expectations etc)
Homesickness
Difficulties with family fitting into life in Australia
Childcare/school related issues
Difficulties making friends with other international students
Difficulties making friends with local Australian students
Difficulties making friends outside of the student community
Difficulties in establishing connections with cultural groups
Difficulties in meeting religious/spiritual needs
Difficulties in establishing connections with the local Australian community
Lacking social supports
Difficulties with personal relationships
Discrimination
Racism

Victims of violence

Domestic violence

Sexual health issues

Physical health issues (such as, colds, accessing medical treatment)

Health related risk-taking behaviours (Such as, gambling, drinking alcohol, drug-use, unsafe sexual activity)

Mental health issues (such as, depression, loneliness, anxiety)

Visa issues

Others

Slide 6

The VET Sector

The following questions are directed at understanding what types of student support are currently offered and whether there are any areas that can be improved upon.

Slide 7

3. What do you feel your organisation does well in terms of supporting international students' health and well-being? Please describe below

Slide 8

4. Does your organisation provide direct support to students or referral to support services in the following areas? Please tick all boxes that apply (if you provide direct services and referral services in a particular area tick both boxes) (**provide direct services or provides referral services**)

Accommodation and Housing

Employment advice

Health services

Advice on accessing health services

Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle

Emergency services

Transport advice

Safety advice

Fostering social supports and connections

Making friends with the broader Australian community

Counselling services

Educational support

English Language Support
Advice on food and nutritional needs
Support for partners/spouses and children of students
Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling
Legal services
Visa support
Translation services

Other

Slide 9

5. In your opinion, how well do the current support services in the VET sector meet the health and well-being needs of international students? Please select one rating for each service area below **Add Liechart scale**

Accommodation and Housing
Employment advice
Health services
Advice on accessing health services
Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle
Emergency services
Transport advice
Safety advice
Fostering social supports and connections
Making friends with the broader Australian community
Counselling services
Educational support
English Language Support
Advice on food and nutritional needs
Support for partners/spouses and children of students
Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling
Legal services
Visa support
Translation services

Other

Slide 10

6. In your opinion, what else could be done to support the health and well-being of overseas students?
Please describe below

Slide 11

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire

To assist us in making the most relevant recommendations about the health and well-being needs of VET sector international students would you be prepared to provide more detail in a telephone interview?

If so please provide your name, number, and preferred time of the week to be contacted below.

Any information provided through these interviews will not be linked to your personal details or to your institution, both of which will be destroyed after making contact with you.

As a sign of our appreciation for your time and commitment to an interview we will be offering you a movie voucher.

Name

Telephone

Preferred time of week to be contacted

Slide 13

Thank you

APPENDIX 5

International Student Health and Wellbeing – Student Contact Officer Survey

Summary of Results

Purpose of Student Contact Officer Survey

The International Student Health and Well-being Student Contact Officers Survey aimed to:

- Gain an understanding of the issues faced by OS students from the perspective of frontline service providers.
- Start to capture any issues that may be specific to the South Australian VET sector.
- Ensure Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) remain engaged in the project.

Description

There are approximately 53 VET registered service organisations in South Australia. Each organisation is required to have an identified student contact officer (SCO). The electronic (*Zoomerang*) survey was distributed via email to RTOs in the VET Sector in South Australia, with a request that it be forwarded to the SCOs. The email was sent out through DFEEST. Fifty-three emails were sent, with approximately 6 bouncing back. The survey remained open for a period of four weeks in July/August 2011. The survey was comprised of six questions. As part of this survey, SCOs were asked if they were happy to be contacted on an individual basis for a more in-depth telephone interview.

The information provided will remain private and confidential and no institution or individual will be identified. Respondents were not provided any incentive to complete the survey, however they were offered a movie voucher if they agreed to participate in a telephone interview following the survey.

A total of 33 responses were received. While, as indicated above, there are 53 RTOs and 33 responses is a positive result, an actual response rate from RTOs can not be calculated as some organisations may have invited more than one officer to complete the survey. In addition, some RTOs may have forwarded on the survey to private counsellors they contract with. 19 respondents agreed to a follow-up telephone interview.

The following is a summary of the survey results. The telephone interviews are currently underway and will be reported on in a separate document.

Q1 – Based on your experience of working with international students, which of the following issues affect their health and well-being? Please select all that apply.

The survey provided a long list of areas that were identified through the literature and the Registered Training Provider workshop as affecting international student health and well-being.

(32 responses were received for this question)

1. Based on your experience of working with international students which of the following issues affect their health and well-being? Please select all that apply.		
	Number of Responses	Percentage of responses
Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation	13	41%
Unfair treatment by accommodation providers	10	31%
Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment	18	56%
Unfair treatment by employers	11	34%
Financial difficulties	19	59%
Lack of transport options	8	25%
Educational Issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class etc)	10	31%
English language difficulties	24	75%
Not being aware of support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)	14	44%
Fatigue	16	50%
Food and nutritional issues (such as, not knowing how to cook or where to access preferred foods, attempting to save money at the cost of eating nutritionally)	10	31%
Issues with family back home (such as, death, financial pressures, family expectations etc)	23	72%
Homesickness	17	53%
Difficulties with family fitting into life in Australia	9	28%
Childcare/school related issues	7	22%
Difficulties making friends with other international students	5	16%
Difficulties making friends with local Australian students	14	44%
Difficulties making friends outside of the student community	11	34%
Difficulties in establishing connections with cultural groups	3	9%
Difficulties in meeting religious/spiritual needs	5	16%
Difficulties in establishing connections with the local Australian community	8	25%
Lacking social supports	8	25%
Difficulties with personal relationships	12	38%
Discrimination	11	34%
Racism	11	34%
Victims of violence	6	19%
Domestic violence	6	19%
Sexual health issues	9	28%
Experiencing sickness, illness or injury	16	50%
Access to appropriate medical/health services	6	19%
Health related risk-taking behaviours (Such as, gambling, drinking alcohol, drug-use, unsafe sexual activity)	8	25%
Mental health issues (such as, depression, loneliness, anxiety)	14	44%
Visa issues	13	41%
Other, please specify	3	9%

The respondents were given an “other” option. Three respondents selected this option, with two filling out a response:

- Unplanned pregnancies, pressure from spouse (male) to succeed and find a good job and study at the same time
- suicidal/ despair in the face of poor academic performance / carrying trauma from past in home country

These responses suggest that the health and wellbeing of international students are affected by a broad range of factors. Some results are worth commenting on specifically.

70% or more of respondents to this question thought that the following issues affected students' health and wellbeing:

- English language difficulties (24 responses; 75%)
- Issues with family back home (23 responses; 72%)

50% to 69% of respondents to this question thought that the following issues affected students' health and wellbeing:

- Financial difficulties (19 responses; 59%)
- Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment (18 responses; 56%)
- Homesickness (17 responses; 53%)
- Fatigue (16 responses; 50%)
- Experiencing sickness, illness or injury (16 responses; 50%)

40% to 49% of survey respondents thought that the following issues affected students' health and wellbeing:

- Not being aware of support services (14 responses; 44%)
- Difficulties making friends with local Australian students (14 responses; 44%)
- Mental health issues (14 responses; 44%)
- Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation (13 responses; 41%)
- Visa issues (13 responses; 41%)

Key points and points for further discussion

- Transport (8 responses; 25%) – suggests not a pressing issue in SA (unlike literature review)
 - *May get a different picture from students themselves (literature review would have captured various perspectives – this is only one)*
 - *Could be that the majority of respondents are CBD-based, therefore students would find it easier to commute to the city by public transport than within/between suburban areas*
 - *Also, SA provides student discount to international students, unlike some other states in Australia*
- There was some indication that educational issues could contribute to health and well-being (10 responses; 31%). This reconfirms the findings in the literature review but captures something that was missing in the Workshop
- Fatigue (16 responses; 50%) (reflecting forum but not captured in lit review)

- *Could be because the literature predominantly focuses on university students who, in general, may not face the same financial pressures as VET students?*
- Food and nutrition (10 responses; 31%) (not rated as highly but still a potential issue, which was not captured in the literature review)
- Family back home (23 responses; 72%) and homesickness (17 responses; 53%) – perhaps bigger issues than lit review and forum suggested)
- Visa issues (13 responses; 41%) – again perhaps a bigger issue than literature suggested
- Most of the areas relating to social connections and relationships rated fairly lowly (below 30%), except for difficulty with making friends with local Australian students (14; 44%), difficulties with personal relationships (12; 38%), and difficulties making friends outside of the student community (11; 34%).
- Discrimination/racism rated lower (both 11; 34%). Perhaps reflecting SA situation?
- Lower levels of concern in areas of high risk/impact on health and wellbeing (DV (6; 19%), violence (6; 19%), sexual health (9; 28%), health-related risk taking behaviours (8; 25%)). The literature suggests that while these areas may be reported at lower rates the extent of the effect on health and well-being makes them areas of concern.
- Physical (16; 50%) and mental health (14; 44%) was rated by a fair number of respondents as affecting health and well-being. However, fewer felt that there was an issue with accessing appropriate medical/health services (6; 19%). This suggests that students physical and mental health needs are generally being met by the health system.

Q2 – Of the following issues (which are the same as those given in Question 1) select the five you think have the greatest impact on health and well-being. Please select 5 only.

(32 responses were received for this question)

(Responses listed in order of response rate)

2. Of the following issues (which are the same as those given in Question 1) select the five you think have the greatest impact on health and well-being. Please select 5 only.		
	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
English language difficulties	18	55%
Issues with family back home (such as, death, financial pressures, family expectations etc)	13	39%
Fatigue	12	36%
Homesickness	12	36%
Mental health issues (such as, depression, loneliness, anxiety)	12	36%
Financial difficulties	11	33%
Difficulties finding and/or retaining employment	9	27%
Educational Issues (such as, difficulties with teachers, with completing assignments, with participating in class etc)	7	21%
Physical health issues (such as, colds, accessing medical treatment)	7	21%
Difficulties finding and/or retaining suitable accommodation	6	18%
Discrimination	6	18%
Visa issues	6	18%

Not being aware of support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)	5	15%
Food and nutritional issues (such as, not knowing how to cook or where to access preferred foods, attempting to save money at the cost of eating nutritionally)	5	15%
Difficulties in establishing connections with the local Australian community	5	15%
Unfair treatment by employers	4	12%
Not accessing and/or using support services (including health, legal, accommodation and financial services)	4	12%
Difficulties making friends with local Australian students	4	12%
Health related risk-taking behaviours (Such as, gambling, drinking alcohol, drug-use, unsafe sexual activity)	4	12%
Unfair treatment by accommodation providers	2	6%
Difficulties with family fitting into life in Australia	2	6%
Difficulties with personal relationships	2	6%
Lack of transport options	1	3%
Difficulties making friends with other international students	1	3%
Difficulties making friends outside of the student community	1	3%
Difficulties in meeting religious/spiritual needs	1	3%
Lacking social supports	1	3%
Racism	1	3%
Victims of violence	1	3%
Childcare/school related issues	0	0%
Difficulties in establishing connections with cultural groups	0	0%
Domestic violence	0	0%
Sexual health issues	0	0%
Other, please specify	2	6%

Two respondents selected “other”, with one opting to expand:

- Lack of familiarity in all areas and not being able to easily access anything because everything is new and it is all too hard. No one stop shop approach to anything so sometimes it is all too hard to bother trying to find anything because everything is in different places.

When asked to identify the five factors that have the greatest impact on international students’ health and well-being six to seven issues stand out:

- English language difficulties clearly stands out as an issue that the majority of respondents think has a significant impact on health and wellbeing (55%).
- Issues with family back home also rated quite highly (39%), as well as fatigue (36%), homesickness (36%), mental health issues (36%), and financial difficulties (33%).

Conversely, no respondents thought that difficulties in establishing connections with cultural groups, domestic violence or sexual health issues have a significant impact on students’ health and wellbeing. However, as suggested in the literature, it is possible that while these latter two areas of concern do not affect students as frequently as other areas the extent of their effect on students still renders them an area of concern.

Q3 – Does your organisation provide direct support to students or referral to support services in the following areas? Please select the applicable box for each service below.

Below is a summary of the responses obtained, showing the percentage of respondents whose answer could be placed into the 3 categories given. The service is provided either through referral, direct delivery or both.

Note – the ‘Service Provided’ category includes the sum of responses given for ‘direct support’, ‘referral’ and ‘both’ in the actual survey.

3. Does your organisation provide direct support to students or referral to support services in the following areas? Please select the applicable box for each service below.			
	Service Provided	Not provided	N/A
Accommodation & housing	81%	6%	13%
Employment advice	77%	6%	16%
Health services	86%	3%	10%
Advice on accessing health services	97%	0%	3%
Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle	90%	6%	3%
Emergency services	90%	3%	6%
Transport advice	90%	3%	7%
Safety advice	97%	0%	3%
Fostering social supports and connections	87%	10%	3%
Making friends with the broader Australian community	73%	10%	17%
Counselling services	96%	0%	3%
Educational support	97%	0%	3%
English language support	96%	0%	3%
Advice on food and nutritional needs	70%	20%	10%
Support for partners/spouses and children of students	48%	17%	34%
Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling	63%	10%	27%
Legal services	86%	3%	10%
Visa support	94%	3%	3%
Translation services	73%	7%	20%

Note – Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

Perhaps the most significant results here are the areas where services are not provided. The most notable areas where support is not offered in some organisations are:

- Advice on food and nutritional needs (20% of respondents’ RTOs indicating that the service is not offered, 10% selecting not applicable)
- Support for partners/spouses and children of students (17%, with 34% selecting not applicable)
- Fostering social supports and connections (10%, with 3% selecting not applicable)
- Making friends with the broader Australian community (10%, with 17% selecting not applicable)
- Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling (10%, 27% selecting not applicable)

Nevertheless, the responses suggest that support services are provided across a large range of areas – this is different to the literature, which suggested that the VET sector does not provide as many services across the broad range of potential options. However, it is worth disaggregating the data according to whether the service is offered by direct provision or referral. This is provided in the table below:

(Not all respondents answered each element of this question, hence percentages vary)

Service Provided	percentage of overall respondents who indicated their organisation provided this support (number)	Direct Support	Referral	Both
Accommodation & housing	81% (25)	12	9	4
Employment advice	77% (24)	8	6	10
Health services	86% (27)	6	11	10
Advice on accessing health services	97% (30)	6	16	8
Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle	90% (28)	10	7	11
Emergency services	90% (28)	9	10	9
Transport advice	90% (27)	8	10	9
Safety advice	97% (30)	12	8	10
Fostering social supports and connections	87% (27)	6	12	9
Making friends with the broader Australian community	73% (22)	5	10	7
Counselling services	96% (30)	15	5	10
Educational support	97% (29)	19	2	8
English language support	96% (29)	16	4	9
Advice on food and nutritional needs	70% (21)	3	10	8
Support for partners/spouses and children of students	48% (14)	2	11	1
Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling	63% (19)	1	15	3
Legal services	86% (26)	0	19	7
Visa support	94% (28)	5	17	6
Translation services	73% (22)	3	12	7

There are a few areas where most organisations provide direct support for students, including:

- Accommodation and housing
- Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Safety advice
- Counselling services
- Educational support
- English language support

With the remaining areas, many organisations rely on referral pathways to support their students. This reliance indicates the importance of education providers remaining up to date about the support services available outside of the institution itself.

Q4 – What do you feel your organisation does well in terms of supporting international students' health and well-being? Please describe below.

(22 responses were received for this question)

The responses to this question are quoted verbatim:

- A comprehensive induction incorporating most of the above areas
- Making them feel like home
- We are mainly involved with Sponsored students whose airlines cover all costs. Educational support
- Counselling support according to our capacity and referral to appropriate authority
- Offering a wide range of services and advice
- Yes, we feel that our college provides good support for our students
- 24/7 emergency contact provided – learning support centre (tutoring) – open door policy for students with emotional problems to discuss basic issues, anything more serious is referred on. Constant monitoring of accommodation placements – close monitoring of all students welfare (students at risk meetings)
- Our organisation provides accommodation, meals and 24 hour support. We have a dedicated welfare manager and accommodation support staff available after hours to deal with any issues that arise, including complaints, internet issues etc. We also make available information on health services and will intervene with students if necessary to refer them to the appropriate professionals.
- Access to onsite counsellors, an atmosphere that promotes open supportive environments. An information hub for students. An open door policy for students seeking advice on all matters
- Orientation program encompasses a range of issues to introduce students to health and well-being they might encounter. Our organisation offers regular social outings and monthly reviews with students regarding all issues not just educational, this assists in building a support network above educational issues
- Strong professional counselling
- Dedicated counsellor and student advisor
- Education support
- Scholarships
- Fee payment arrangement. Alternative training and assessment arrangements
- Confidential counselling and educational support
- We provide EAP counselling services for some international colleges
- Dedicated skilled staff available to assist students in aspects of well-being in a professional friendly environment
- Preparing them for the Australian workplace
- Network and support
- Our organisation supports students well with advising where to go to see a doctor. I find a lot of the international students seem to go to the accident and emergency at the royal Adelaide for say a cold. I think there needs to be more understanding in this area
- Counselling, referral and educational. I think that we are prepared to offer more than we do but students don't want to come along e.g. healthy cooking group etc. The students appear to prefer to access services when they need them rather than have the information and advice in advance

Q5 – In your opinion, how well do the current support services available to international students in the VET sector meet their health and well-being needs? Please select one rating for each service area below.

Note – The very well/well category is the sum of the positive responses. The not so well/poorly category is the sum of the negative responses.

	Very well/Well	Unsure	Not so Well/Poorly	N/A
Accommodation & housing	55%	19%	13%	13%
Employment advice	33%	23%	29%	16%
Health services	54%	23%	16%	6%
Advice on accessing health services	61%	23%	13%	3%
Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle	33%	39%	22%	6%
Emergency services	68%	16%	13%	3%
Transport advice	73%	17%	7%	3%
Safety advice	70%	20%	3%	7%
Fostering social supports and connections	29%	32%	26%	13%
Making friends with the broader Australian community	19%	29%	38%	13%
Counselling services	64%	19%	9%	6%
Educational support	78%	10%	6%	6%
English language support	77%	13%	3%	6%
Advice on food and nutritional needs	33%	26%	32%	10%
Support for partners/spouses and children of students	16%	33%	26%	23%
Supporting in finding childcare and/or schooling	19%	35%	25%	19%
Legal services	50%	30%	7%	13%
Visa support	51%	16%	23%	10%
Translation services	37%	40%	13%	10%

Predominantly, the respondents indicated that the broad range of services provided to students met their health and well-being needs well or very well. There are a few notable areas that a larger number of respondents rated as meeting the student's needs not so well or poorly. These were:

- Employment advice (29%),
- Advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle (22%)
- Advice on food and nutritional needs (32%),
- Fostering social supports (26%)
- Making friends with the broader Australian community (38%)
- Support for partners/spouses and children of students (26%)
- Supporting in finding childcare and or schooling (25%), and
- Visa support (23%) – except 51% felt that the support on Visa issues met students needs well or very well.

Q6 – In your opinion, what else could be done to support the health and well-being of international students in the VET sector? Please describe below.

(21 responses were received for this question)

The responses to this question are quoted verbatim:

- Free seminars and workshops for International Students.
- More consultation with Government re current status of education in Australia for overseas students.
- I feel that the VET sector overall needs to consult and find ways to improve support services for international students. Many providers have good support policies in place however it would be good to see these issues more regularly discussed as an industry so that options and support pathways could be uncovered and created for existing and future students. The support of international students is something that has been largely managed by the individual providers, and we believe there is merit in industry wide consultation on meeting the needs of this vulnerable group.
- Counselling support according to our capacity and referral to appropriate authority.
- Many services for international students are focussed on university students rather than those in the VET sector. Many VET schools/colleges are small enterprises and do not have the means to address issues any better than they are already.
- A better understanding of THEIR culture, beliefs and lifestyle would help to the adjustment to their new environment.
- More international support groups. More information sessions in colleges regarding health and safety.
- I believe it would be up to the organisation to provide information on such issues. However, a simplified interactive website. Workshops on nutrition and cooking on a budget. How to access Australian doctors and what to say. I personally found it difficult to locate the appropriate support for a student who has suffered a traumatic experience, has impacted on health, stress levels and study.
- A different approach by DIAC.
- When students arrive to Australia they should be attending some kin[d] of training to learn about Australian culture, law and way of living.
- Truly understand diversity and the meaning on quality in relation to meeting the needs of students.
- Find out about individual circumstances with an individual health check. One student I know has extremely painful gingivitis with constantly bleeding gums. He thinks it's a cultural issue but needs medical assistance. He does not believe it is medical as his father has the same issue in China.
- A body to look after problems employment of international students.
- Continue and increase the TAFESA ambassadors program. Ensure the students have adequate English levels before they come. Provide more funding for educational support.
- Including a mandatory percentage of all fees collected by the RTO to be utilised for external confidential counselling and referral services for all international services.

- Providing opportunities for students to work in the commercial sector as a gateway to getting employment in the fields they are trained in – even if part time and at a low level, but they need a foot in the door.
- International Students seem to use the Accident and Emergency Departments at our hospitals (especially the Royal Adelaide as most live in or close to the city). More explanation of how to use our health system needs to be explained.
- We don't have many VET students and they are with the HE students so I imagine I will complete this in the HE section if there is one coming.
- Childcare services at a reasonable cost.
- To have continuing health and moral support campaign for the international students.

Summary

There are a few preliminary observations that can be drawn from this survey:

- There are a broad range of issues and areas affecting international students health and wellbeing in South Australia
- English language difficulties clearly stands out as an issue that the majority of respondents think has a significant impact on health and wellbeing
- Issues with family back home also rated quite highly, as well as fatigue, homesickness, mental health issues, and financial difficulties.
- South Australia's VET sector does provide student support services across a broad range of areas, with many noting their counselling services and open access for students
- Some student supports services rely on knowledge of referral pathways, indicating ways in which RTOs can be supported.
- Suggestions for further improving student supports include establishing industry wide discussions and support on this issue, providing seminars and workshops for both students and staff, and providing one point of reference for information.

APPENDIX 6

International Student Health and Well-being – Student Contact Officers Telephone Interviews

Summary of findings

As a follow up to the SCO survey, telephone interviews were carried out with those respondents who indicated they were happy to be contacted in this way. Some clear patterns emerged from their responses:

- All respondents considered that a students' health and well-being impacts on their study.
- Respondents tended to vary widely as to their opinion on the numbers of students who face health and well-being issues, although all indicated they view it as an area of concern.
- Many of the respondents indicated that female and male international students can face different issues in terms of health and well-being. Notably, it has been suggested that women face issues around balancing their numerous family and childcare responsibilities with study, sexual assault, and unwanted pregnancies. Men, on the other hand, tend to have problems with gambling, alcohol abuse, and challenges to self-esteem as a result of performing jobs below their abilities and qualifications.
- Much is happening in terms of support services for international students, and respondents mostly view these as effective and being utilised by students. However, most consider that more students could be accessing services and that improvements can be made. Also, some supports rely on individual champions, making them vulnerable to changes in personnel.
- More RTOs are assisting students who need help than ensuring that students stay healthy, happy and feeling good in the first place.
- Nevertheless there have been some notable responses that emphasise the benefits of nurturing students' well-being – these include ensuring social events and inclusion of students. In practical terms some RTOs ensure that their actual curriculum incorporates opportunities that facilitate inclusively (for example, ensuring a large part of the course work is based on group participation). Others have incorporated a compulsory component of their course on issues around health and well-being (including discussions of nutrition, running a house, stress management).
- Many have indicated that further professional development would assist in improving student support services, although they have emphasised that any professional development must be relevant (some complained of the irrelevance of some recent courses they attended)
- Some respondents thought that an industry wide network on this issue would be useful but indicated that it will not be effective if providers are expected to host events, organise mailing lists etc.

APPENDIX 7

International Student Health and Wellbeing – International Student Focus Groups

Faye Gale Report

Executive Summary

The research reported here is part of a larger project being undertaken by the Health in All Policies (HiAP) Unit at SA Health examining the health and wellbeing of international students in the VET Sector. Health and wellbeing is broadly defined and includes physical, psychological and social well-being.

International students face multiple challenges in adjusting and adapting to life in Australia. Previous research has identified the following issues as being especially salient: English language proficiency, difficulties with housing and accommodation, poor and insecure employment conditions, social isolation from the host community, loneliness, homesickness, racism and discrimination. Despite high levels of distress, many studies report that international students are less likely to use available health services than domestic students, with some suggesting this group under-utilises such services. With this in mind, the current study was designed to:

- Identify the broad range of health and well-being issues faced by international students in the VET Sector.
- Identify what support services, strategies and resources students are currently utilising (or are familiar with).
- Identify what international students think could be done to improve the provision of support services, strategies and resources in South Australia.

As such, this study aims to provide benefits concerning the health and well-being of international students – particularly in relation to providing evidence concerning the support services that are most beneficial to and most likely to be used by, international students.

The current study utilises a focus group methodology to elicit the views and perceptions of international VET students. Four focus groups consisting of between 5-7 students each who had volunteered to participate in the study were conducted. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The major concerns and perceptions of students are summarised below and provide an evidence base for shaping policy recommendations to improve international students' knowledge of and access to health and social services, and to improve their overall quality of life and well-being while studying in Adelaide.

Maintaining good health: Accessing medical and health services in Adelaide

Almost all international students in the focus groups expressed uncertainty and anxiety about the health care system in Australia and in particular how to access affordable medical services. Many students perceived the system as complex and difficult to negotiate, with many expressing confusion over the distinction between private and public medical care. Specific difficulties included:

- finding a local General Practitioner (GP), preferably one who bulk bills
- the nature of their entitlements under the Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) scheme
- the role of Accident and Emergency Departments in public hospitals, and
- the opaque nature of GP's gap fees

Maintaining psychological health and wellbeing

Participants in all four focus groups acknowledged the central importance of psychological and social factors in determining their overall health and well-being. English language competency and proficiency was identified as perhaps the most significant barrier in adapting to life in Adelaide and developing and establishing friendships beyond the International student community. Although most students reported having good friendship networks, many lamented the fact that this network did not include Australian friends. Indeed, forming friendships with local Australians was identified as especially difficult. This was attributed in part to English language proficiency, cultural differences and the lack of opportunities in meeting and befriending locals. The *Study Adelaide* website was identified as an excellent resource for information about social clubs and activities that provided such opportunities. However, not all students were familiar with this resource. Students also expressed the need for a dedicated psychological/social worker support service for the International student cohort and the establishment of an International student social centre within the city where students can meet and socialise after-hours.

Participants also identified the important role that initial arrival experiences played in their adaptation. Despite significant hardships and periods of social isolation and loneliness, most students described a gradual improvement over time of their social and psychological wellbeing. Indeed, several students expressed high levels of satisfaction living and studying in Adelaide following early difficulties and setbacks.

Perceptions of Discrimination or Unfair Treatment by Service Providers

There was a discernible difference in the psychological wellbeing of students who had found stable and suitable accommodation in Adelaide compared to those who had experienced considerable difficulties in securing suitable accommodation. Although it would be unfair to extrapolate given the small number of students we interviewed, students studying at *TAFESA* reported less difficulty in finding suitable accommodation compared to students studying at private colleges. Students identified suitable and appropriate accommodation upon arrival as central to their overall health and wellbeing.

Of significant concern were reports of potentially illegal practices by education agents who were charging students fees for dubious services. We heard stories of students entering into dispute with their agents and experiencing threatening phone calls. These kinds of experiences allude to a serious issue for a proportion of International students who have engaged an agent to help them arrange their study in Adelaide. Further research is recommended to examine the extent and significance of unscrupulous practices by international student agents. International students should be provided with clear and accessible information regarding the legitimate and illegitimate fees that agents can charge for purported services.

One of the most prevalent and clearly articulated concerns by students across all focus groups was their difficulty in finding suitable employment. Many students felt that fairly remunerated work, with reasonable conditions, was difficult to come by. Work in Chinese restaurants, with remuneration as low as \$7 per hour, was frequently referred to by Chinese students who felt they had limited options and opportunities. On the whole, international students perceived themselves as especially vulnerable to exploitation by employers given their limited English language skills.

Indeed, a pervasive response from students across focus groups was of rude, unfair, or harsh treatment on the basis of their perceived poor English proficiency.

Examples of these experiences ranged across contexts, from work environments, to coffee shops, and calls to phone companies. Significantly, international students viewed English language proficiency as both a cause and solution to discrimination. Students' perception of their English proficiency and its contingent relationship with social and employment status, was pivotal to how they viewed their health and well-being. Language proficiency was often depicted as the key to opening important social and cultural doors for International students.

APPENDIX 8

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were developed by the JESG in response to the findings from the evidence gathering stage of the project.

1. Student Support Services

It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, in consultation with key agencies, peak bodies, and representatives from education providers, develop a Best Practice Guide for the provision of international student support services, which would take account of the broad range of international students' health and wellbeing needs.

These guidelines will take account of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's best practice guidelines that are currently being developed.

The international student health lens project found that there is a degree of variability between the student support services provided to international students by education providers within the South Australian VET sector. In addition, while currently there is a legal requirement for education providers to provide student support services under Standard 6 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007*, this Standard outlines minimum legal requirements but do not clearly outline how they should be adopted or interpreted. The Best Practice Guide will outline a higher standard of care and identify best practice in both maintaining international student health and wellbeing and addressing any health and wellbeing issues that did arise for students.

1.1 It is recommended that the Best Practice Guide be presented to the Joint Committee on International Education as an opportunity to develop national guidelines and to provide more clarity around the interpretation of Standard 6 in the the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007*.

There is limited guidance at the national level regarding best practice for student support services. In addition there is a lack of clarity around education provider's minimum legal obligations under Standard 6 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007*. The Best Practice Guide can serve as a vehicle through which to raise these issues at a national level.

The Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, as a member of the Joint Committee on International Education, will present the Best Practice Guide to this committee as a potential way of strengthening the regulatory framework around student support services at a national level.

1.2 It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology launch the Best Practice Guide.

The launch of the Best Practice Guide will assist in raising awareness of its existence and will provide education providers and their student support officers with the opportunity to establish a network of practitioners aware of and concerned about the health and wellbeing of international students. Such a network provides opportunities for collaboration, information sharing, and mentoring.

The launch will be organised in collaboration with the Australian Council for Private Education and Training and ISANA, which are the professional bodies associated with international education.

1.3 It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, as part of their education provider professional development program, deliver professional development on the Best Practice Guidelines to Student Contact Officers⁹ from across the International Education Sector, with a particular focus on the VET sector.

Providing professional development on the Guide will support the application of the Guide in practice. Again, the professional development will be conducted in collaboration with the Australian Council for Private Education and Training and ISANA.

1.4 It is recommended that the role of the Office of the Training Advocate, in providing student support on a range of issues that arise for international students, be recognised as an important resource for international students.

It is recommended, however, that the Office of the Training Advocate review its communication strategy so that more education providers and students are aware of its role, particularly those from the VET sector.

Until very recently South Australia was unique in Australia in providing international students with a public point of contact concerning any issues they face whilst studying in South Australia. This service, which complements existing student support services, is provided through the Office of the Training Advocate. A similar model is being established within the Australian Government in establishing the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO). The Commonwealth's OSO's role specifically addresses study related issues relating to private education providers. In contrast, the Office of the Training Advocate supports all international students facing any number of issues – related to study, life or work.

It is noted that more international students, particularly those from the VET sector, would benefit from this service if the number of education providers and international students who were aware of the service was increased.

⁹ Standard 6 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* require Registered Training Organisations to have a Student Contact Officer. These are often referred to in practice as Student Service Officers.

2. Health System Information Resource

It is recommended that the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology coordinate the development of an information resource summarising the health system and how to access appropriate services when needed to support VET sector international students and their education providers to be able to navigate the health system.

The international student health lens project found that many education providers and international students do not know how to navigate the health system. The system is made even more complicated for international students than Australian nationals, because they are not covered by the Medicare safety net and are legally required to have Overseas Student Health Cover insurance. In addition, for many international students, English is their second language. Therefore, it is important that the information resource is an easily understood plain English guide for navigating the health system.

The Public Health and Clinical Systems Division has committed funding to support the development of this resource.

The information resource will be developed through consultation with various sections of the Department of Health, the University Sector and TAFE, and Education Adelaide.

Following endorsement of this recommendation the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology will also seek engagement with the five OSHC providers, as they provide insurance to every international student and have an obligation to support international students in navigating the health system. We will explore with these providers whether they are prepared to provide any financial contribution to the development of this resource, to support its ongoing publication, and to provide professional development to Education Providers on how to best navigate the health system for international students.

2.1 It is recommended that a coordinated communication strategy be developed to support the distribution and application of this information resource, with a particular focus on engaging the VET sector.

A coordinated communication strategy will ensure that the information resource is distributed and utilised widely across the international education sector, particularly the VET sector. The strategy will consider the best method of publication, consistency with already existing health information such as that on the Study Adelaide website, and accessibility to the resource for students and Education Providers.

The development and implementation of the communication strategy will be led by the Department for Health and Ageing and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, through consultation with Education Adelaide, Australian Council for Private Education and Training and ISANA.

3. Community and Social Engagement

It is recommended that the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, through the International Education Roundtable, develop a range of additional strategies to increase community and social engagement for international students, taking into account the specific needs of VET sector students.

International students face similar health and wellbeing issues as domestic students, including financial difficulties, accommodation and employment issues, and health issues. However, unlike domestic students, international students often lack the social support networks to assist them when facing these challenges. The research in this project emphasised the importance of international students' community and social engagement, particularly with the local Australian community, for positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

The international student health lens project found that the VET sector and in particular private providers are less well positioned than the University sector to support their international students through any health and wellbeing issues. This includes providing opportunities and systems for supporting community and social engagement for their students.

The international student health lens project found that community and social engagement can be supported through numerous means, including creating opportunities in student timetables for social contact, incorporating inter-student contact into the curriculum, establishing buddy systems for students, organising and ensuring students know about social activities, volunteering, and joining sporting, community groups or social clubs. Hence, such community and social engagement needs to be supported through a multi-pronged approach.

The International Education Roundtable is chaired by the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education and its membership includes several international students and representatives from key government agencies. It provides a forum for discussing issues relating to international student education, safety, and community and social engagement and provides advice to the South Australian Government on key issues of concern relating to international students. The International Education Roundtable has been identified as an appropriate forum for exploring additional strategies to increase the level of community and social engagement for international students.

3.1 It is recommended that in the first instance, and as part of the exploration of further community and social engagement strategies, the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology work with Volunteering SA and the Office for Volunteers to develop a specific volunteering strategy for international students.

Providing opportunities for international students to volunteer in South Australia gives students the ability to meet and engage with the broader Australian community. Volunteering Organisations, the Local Government Association, Church Groups and Non-Government Organisations offer many opportunities for volunteering activities. In addition, opportunities to support international student volunteering where the South Australian Government is a key sponsor or funder of events, such as WOMADelaide, will be explored.

3.2 It is recommended that the Best Practice Guide for student support services and the professional development, referred to in Recommendation 1, addresses the importance of community and social engagement for international students, the ways in which Education Providers can support this, and encourages them to connect with community sector agencies such as local councils, church groups and Non-Government Organisations.

Ensuring that community and social engagement is incorporated into the student support services Best Practice Guide and the associated professional development ensures that Education Providers are aware of the importance of community and social engagement for international students, how this can support ongoing health and wellbeing and hence educational performance, and the ways in which education providers can support such community and social engagement for their students.

In addition, local councils, church groups and Non-Government Organisations are well positioned to offer support to the community and social engagement of international students. Education providers, either individually or as a collective, could be encouraged to utilise this resource.

3.3 It is recommended that Multicultural SA continue to distribute information about the Multicultural Grants Scheme to a range of groups including ethnic communities and other non-government organisations.

It is important that organisations that could support the community and social engagement of multicultural students within the Australian community are aware of the Multicultural Grants Scheme.

The international student health lens project found that social contact with the local Australian community supported international student health and wellbeing.

3.4 It is recommended that the fundamental role of Education Adelaide in providing social activities for international students is recognised and that they be supported in maintaining their existing successful community support program for international students in South Australia.

Education Adelaide's mandate is to market South Australia as Australia's leading international education destination and provide dedicated support to the thousands of international students who choose to study here. Education Adelaide has strong and established networks with students, local educational institutions, arts, sports and community groups and businesses. Their existing program includes an extensive activity program which last year saw the organisation deliver nearly 60 events and activities for international students. More than 7,000 students were engaged through the program and Education Adelaide is committed to continuing this successful engagement strategy. The international student health lens project found that many education providers and students identified this fundamental role played by Education Adelaide.

4. Insurance for Pregnancy-related Services

It is recommended that the Minister for Health and Ageing writes to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing expressing concern regarding recent changes to the Overseas Students Health Cover, which imposes a 12-month waiting period for pregnancy-related services.

The deed for the provision of Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) is a legal document which sets out the conditions that registered Australian health funds must comply with in order to provide OSHC policies. Recent changes to this deed have meant that since July 2011 OSHC providers are able to impose a 12-month waiting period for pregnancy-related services. On last check – December 2011 – four of the five OSHC providers had implemented this 12-month waiting period.

This recent change is of particular concern because international students do not have the Medicare safety net to fall back on, unlike their Australian student counterparts. This means that technically the cost of pregnancy-related services, whether the pregnancy was planned or not, must be borne by the students themselves. When financial issues are such a huge concern for international students, and have a far reaching effect on their health and wellbeing and their ability to engage in their studies, this is an unfair burden to place on international students. In addition, it may well induce these students to avoid as much antenatal care as possible, which is of real concern in an era when we know that the level of antenatal care provided for a woman and her child has long term effects on the child's development and long term health and wellbeing.

In practice, State public hospitals may well provide antenatal care at no cost to these international students. However, this places an unfair burden on State public hospitals when this cost is covered for Australian citizens by the Commonwealth government and was previously covered by OSHC providers for international students.