

Title: *Student Experience (International) Working Group 2nd interim report*
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Issue

To provide an interim report on the work of the Student Experience (International) Working Group

Recommendation

Recipients are invited to:

- receive the author's interim report;
- note the timetable for work.

Resource Implications

None yet formally identified

Risk Implications

The Working Group's aim is to identify activities and actions that will improve the experiences and satisfaction of UEA International students and thus reduce any risks to achieving recruitment targets, student satisfaction rates and achievement and retention.

Equality and Diversity

The focus of the work outlined is to improve the UEA provision for an identified group of students (International students) who may risk being disadvantaged in comparison to their UK peers if their particular needs and challenges are not fully understood and addressed.

Timing of decisions

n/a

Further Information

Contact Jane Amos, (x 3701; e-mail J.Amos@uea.ac.uk) for enquiries about the content of the paper.

Background

The Working Group was established in response to concerns brought to light by the *i-graduate Student Barometer*. Further background information is given in the report.

Attachments

n/a

Student Experience (International) Working Group 2nd Interim Report

Summary

The Student Experience (International) Working Group was set up in October 2014. Its purpose is to look at feedback from international students regarding non-academic issues and to address key concerns.

The membership of the group includes colleagues from BIU, DOS, LTS, UUEAS, Careers, EST, SportsPark, Partnerships, LIB, ITCS and INTO.

The aim is to improve international (non-UK) student satisfaction, and enhance integration and retention of all students.

This interim report provides:

- a brief outline of the areas of dissatisfaction reported in the findings of the NSS and SES, together with anecdotal feedback received through local surveying
- a summary of current projects that have been set up to address some of the key concerns and which aim to improve international students' experiences
- a summary of how these initiatives have been communicated to students
- an outline of plans for future work
- feedback from students.

Background

In 2013, the Internationalisation Executive asked Mark Hitchcock to undertake a short review of activity in the light of some concerning results regarding international student experience in the *i-graduate Student Barometer* survey.

As part of this review, two workshops were held in March and April 2013 and included input from colleagues in DOS, INTO, Planning, UUEAS, Partnerships, ARM, LTS, SSF and HUM. A brief report (SEC13DO4 Document D) was submitted to the Student Experience Committee last year.

In September 2014, the **Student Experience (International) Working Group** was set up by Jane Amos, Deputy Dean of Students, to continue this work and to address dissatisfaction concerning non-academic issues reported by the University's international student population. The group comprises colleagues from DOS, BIU, ITCS, LIB, Careers, EST, SportsPark, LTS, Partnerships, UUEAS and INTO.

The purpose of the group is to improve international (non-UK) student satisfaction, enhance integration and develop an improved communication strategy.

The first meeting took place in October of this year and focused on the following areas of dissatisfaction reported in the findings of the NSS and SES, together with anecdotal feedback received through local surveying:

1. Insufficient opportunities to socialise and meet other students on arrival
2. Lack of quantity and quality of opportunities to meet British students
3. Insufficient language support for students who want to practice English with peers
4. Insufficient integration between international and home students in residences
5. Campus catering not meeting expectations with regards to price, range and availability of food
6. Insufficient support and information for INTO students progressing to UEA with regard to academic expectations, social opportunities and student support services available
7. Lack of established and effective social media presence targeted specifically at international students and little to no use of international social media platforms
8. Inaccurate Campus map which was not perceived as in user friendly from both a visual and text (acronyms) perspective
9. Access to sports facilities inhibited due to cost
10. Inadequate transport links with the national network.

Established and New Initiatives

The group identified the following initiatives that were either well-established or recently introduced to address some of the key concerns.

- A cross divisional working group, chaired by ARM, was established to look at the **Arrivals** experience for new students. As a result of recommendations by the group a number of changes were made in September 2014. Foremost among these changes was using Congregation Hall as a 'one-stop shop', rather than having students sent to a variety of locations on campus. Here new international students were welcomed to UEA and various administrative requirements were addressed, such as those relating to: University accommodation; course registration; and scanning of visas and passports for immigration purposes.
- A **new student web page** is evolving and improving, thus enabling prospective/new students to access information more easily. However, more cross divisional collaboration, would be welcomed to develop the platform further.
- DOS further developed the **Orientation Programme** for new international students. A new 5-day Discovery and Orientation Programme was introduced in September 2014 offering students greater depth and improved opportunities for exploring UEA life. It now includes over 60 events for students to choose from to help them adjust to living and studying in their new environment. Many of the social activities were student led giving a peer-to-peer introduction to the University and local area.

Recent student feedback from a survey of new international students, carried out by DOS, identified that approximately 80% of respondents received information about Arrivals and Orientation in advance of coming to the University. Over 70% of students indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the Discovery and Orientation Programme. This demonstrates that a majority agree that the introduction of the new model has been beneficial, but that there is room for further improvement.

- **Orientation** activities for INTO students were revised this year. The activities included more social opportunities, shorter information talks, further sporting events and food and meal time activities.

Despite INTO specific communications by email and face-to-face regarding the importance of attending the Discovery and Orientation Programme, observed numbers were still relatively low in September; more work needs to be done to encourage students to participate and help them understand the benefits of attending the programme.

- The DOS **UEA Friends** ‘Buddy Scheme’ has recently undergone a number of changes to enhance the opportunities for students to meet others by being matched with a small group of other new international students as well as an experienced Student Rep.

UEA Friends Buddy Scheme is now resourced by trained Student Reps who offer bespoke support for new students. Over 100 new students requested a UEA Friend in September 2014. An improved on-line presence and a clearer application process has enhanced the scheme this year and helped to manage students’ expectations of the buddy provision.

- The **Language Café** is a new initiative that was introduced in September 2014. It is an international language sharing club where students of all nationalities can mix and learn from each other. Bi- or multi-lingual student volunteers take a lead in introducing their language to students interested in learning.
- **Language Support Buddies** is a new scheme aimed at meeting the growing demand for non-academic English language support. This peer-to-peer support helps students develop confidence in speaking English. Over 120 new students have requested and been matched with a Language Support Buddy this academic year.
- **Conversation Club** is a weekly club that has been running since 2010 and has been extremely successful. In 2014, DOS increased the number of paid Club Coordinators in order to meet the increase in membership and provide more engaging support for international students. The additional resource aims to provide a greater variety of activities for participants.

The number of students participating in the weekly Conversation Club this semester has been higher than ever before. This may have been in part a result of enhanced web presence, an increase in resources and social media promotion.

- **Accommodation** has improved the communication to students pre-arrival by sending key information at relevant times through weekly e-bulletins and email messages.

Non-Guaranteed PG students were given the option to share with UG students in Colman House this year to enhance the mix of home and international students. Staff will seek feedback from these students with a view to creating a new accommodation option which will give PG students the option to choose to live with UG students.

- Funding has been obtained for the development and promotion of **sports** amongst the international student population to increase engagement.

Communication

The Group has also identified effective communication of student opportunities as an important issue to address. The communication channels currently used to inform prospective and current students of the opportunities available to them include:

- An on-line Pre-Departure Guide
- The International Students' Handbook
- CRM emails to offer-holders via the International Office mailing list
- The New Student web page
- Departmental web pages
- The Campus Life and Accommodation Guide
- The Accommodation Survival Guide
- Student e-bulletins
- Promotion of activities via School newsletters
- Accommodation Facebook and Twitter posts including news and key messages that also facilitate group 'meetings' prior to arrivals
- Presentations to all INTO pre-sessional groups in the summer to raise awareness of and promote the new Arrivals and Orientation structure.

Summary and Future plans

The Student Experience (International) Working Group aims to meet regularly throughout the year to look at the feedback from international students and to address key concerns raised. The *i-graduate Student Barometer* has provided the most detailed data in terms of the non-academic experience. However, there are no plans for UEA to take part in the near future.

BIU has been working, where possible, to include questions regarding non-academic elements in surveys and will continue to do so. Verbatim comments and qualitative projects also provide insight; BIU carry out full analysis of these. Internal qualitative research into the experience of new students pre-arrival and during the first month at UEA started in 2013 and is now an annual project with internal qualitative research into student experience of undergraduates due to be launched in Spring 2015. BIU will report the findings from these projects to the Working Group.

During this academic year it is anticipated that the work of the group will include:

- managing student expectation with regard to integrating home and international students in residences
- improving the transition for INTO students progressing to UEA and raising their awareness of the support that is available to them during their studies
- organising a bespoke Orientation Programme for these students and ensuring that improved and more robust processes are introduced to enhance the experience for those moving from INTO to UEA residences
- establishing opportunities for integration projects for home and international students where the integration element can be an additional by-product of the activity
- developing an enhanced social media presence aimed at international students using relevant social media channels and content. The use of Weibo and other international social media sites will be included
- collaboration with ARM to develop an enhanced communication strategy which will build on existing work regarding linguistic and cultural consideration.

Examples of verbatim feedback from students is given in the next section.

Student Feedback

Arrivals and Orientation 2014

“Besides the useful information (although it was quite a lot) I was mostly thankful for the very warm welcome we were given, all the help that we were offered and the confirmation that UEA is a good university. That made me feel nice and complete. I was also very glad for the given opportunities for meeting new people. I was never more excited since my arrival than when I had made new friends!”

“It was really great that I could arrive at Congregation Hall (where the registry was taking place) without any worried or getting lost, specially after the tiring long flight. And it was also great that they offered it for free of charge (from Norwich airport). Staff were friendly and wonderful.”

“It was lovely to be greeted by such friendly faces after my long trip from the States, it really made me feel welcomed and less nervous.”

Language Buddy Scheme

“Yeah, language buddy is one of the backbones to experience UEA life in Norwich for international students, in terms of giving international students prestigious chances to experience British culture in our daily life.” **UEA International Student**

“The most important is I am now being brave enough to talk to people which is out of my expectation before participating in language buddies programme”

UEA International Student

“I am from Mongolia and still have not met any Mongolian in Norwich. However, my language buddy, Helen, our conversation in English, our relationship and exchange of friendship, culture and language make my life complete in England. The language buddy programme is the best contributing activity besides my main course study. Thank you all for your effort and professionalism.” **UEA International Student**

“We have started a vocab book – whenever she hears or reads something new, I explain it and we make a note of it”

UEA Home Student

“It actually turned out better than I could have imagined, not only am I able to assist another student but we have become very good friends so I am extremely happy to have assisted in this volunteering programme”

UEA Home Student

“It doesn’t even feel like volunteering. I’ve found a good friend in my language buddy”

UEA Home Student