

**Maria Kelo, Tim Rogers**  
with Laura E. Rumbley

# **International Student Support in European Higher Education**

Needs, Solutions, and Challenges

**ACA Papers on  
International Cooperation in Education**

Lemmens





Maria Kelo, Tim Rogers  
with Laura E. Rumbley

**International Student Support  
in European Higher Education**

**Needs, Solutions, and Challenges**



*ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education*

**Maria Kelo, Tim Rogers  
with Laura E. Rumbley**

# **International Student Support in European Higher Education**

**Needs, Solutions, and Challenges**

**Lemmens**



## **Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme**

International Student Support in European Higher Education – Needs, Solutions, and Challenges/Maria Kelo, Tim Rogers with Laura E. Rumbley – Bonn: Lemmens Medien GmbH, 2010 (ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education)

ISBN 978-3-932306-99-0

NE: ACA Papers

© Copyright 2010 Lemmens Medien GmbH, Bonn  
Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Anschrift des Verlages  
Matthias-Grünewald-Straße 1-3  
D-53175 Bonn  
Telefon: +49 228 42 13 70  
Telefax: +49 228 42 13 729  
E-Mail: [info@lemmens.de](mailto:info@lemmens.de)  
Internet: [www.lemmens.de](http://www.lemmens.de)

Gesamtherstellung: Courir Print Media GmbH, Bonn



Education and Culture DG

**ERASMUS MUNDUS**

This project has been funded with the support of the European Commission. The publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	7
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	9
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	17
1.1 Background and aims .....	17
1.2 Methodology and scope .....	19
1.3 Terminology and definitions .....	23
<b>2 The national perspective:</b>	
<b>Official organisations and other advisory bodies</b> .....	24
2.1 The national context .....	24
2.2 National organisations and services offered to students .....	25
2.3 National organisations and services offered to institutions .....	26
2.4 National organisation profiles .....	28
2.5 Conclusion .....	40
<b>3 The institutional perspective:</b>	
<b>Service delivery approaches and challenges</b> .....	41
3.1 Motivating student support .....	42
3.2 Strategic approaches to services .....	44
3.3 Practical organisation and sharing of responsibilities .....	47
3.4 Conclusion .....	49
<b>4 The student perspective: Needs and expectations for services</b> ..	51
4.1 What services do full-degree non-European students want? .....	51
4.2 What do universities offer students? .....	64
4.3 The impact of support services on student decision-making .....	70
4.4 Conclusion .....	72
<b>5 Bringing it all together:</b>	
<b>Problems, solutions, and examples of good practice</b> .....	73
5.1 Information and orientation .....	73
5.2 Support for integration and intercultural learning .....	82
5.3 Language support .....	90
5.4 Taking care of practical arrangements .....	96
5.5 Conclusion .....	102

<b>6 What have we learned? Main findings of the ENATIS project . . . .</b>	<b>103</b>
6.1 Student behaviour and expectations . . . . .	103
6.2 National organisations and advisory body activities and approaches. . . . .	106
6.3 Institutional activities and approaches . . . . .	108
6.4 Conclusion . . . . .	112
<b>7 Recommendations: Towards a European code of good practice. .</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Annexes . . . . .</b>	<b>116</b>
Annex 1. Site visits: higher education institutions . . . . .	116
Annex 2. Interviews: national-level organisations and advisory bodies. .	117
What is ACA? . . . . .	119
ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education . . . . .	120

## List of Tables

Table 1: Pre-arrival, were you provided information on...? . . . . .	65
Table 2: On arrival, were the following services offered to you? . . . . .	66
Table 3: Are the following academic services available to you? . . . . .	67
Table 4: Are the following general services available to you? . . . . .	69

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Of the services offered pre-arrival, which do you regard as the most important? . . . . .	53
Figure 2: Of the services offered pre-arrival, which do you regard as the least important? . . . . .	56
Figure 3: Of the services offered on arrival, which do you regard as the most important? . . . . .	58
Figure 4: Of the services offered on arrival, which do you regard as the least important? . . . . .	59
Figure 5: Of the services offered during your studies, which do you regard as the most important? . . . . .	61
Figure 6: Of the services offered during your studies, which do you regard as the least important? . . . . .	63
Figure 7: How important was the availability of services at your university in your final decision about where to study? . . . . .	70



## Acknowledgements

In October 2008 the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), together with International Education Consultants UK and CIRIUS-Danish Agency for International Education, embarked on a project entitled ENATIS - 'Enhancing Attractiveness through International Student Services'. The aim was to discover, through an extensive student survey, the real support needs of international students, and to provide European institutions with a host of good practice examples of how to address those needs adequately and efficiently.

The study would not have been possible without the support and contribution of a number of individuals and institutions. The authors of the report are particularly indebted to Line Verbik from CIRIUS, who, among other things, carried out the site visits in Poland and Denmark. Thanks are also due to the Director of ACA, Bernd Wächter, for his interest and support for the project and to Isabelle Deneyer, the Office Manager of ACA, for her support with logistics and coordination throughout the project.

Throughout its lifetime the project relied significantly on the experience and support of an international Advisory Board. We would like to thank the Board's members—Patricia Pol (Paris Est), Dario Consoli (QS Network), Bianca Siwinska (Perspektywy Foundation), Michael Gaebel (EUA), Per Christian Andersen (University of Southern Denmark), and Birgit Roser (Trier University)—for advice on all aspects of the project, and in particular for their contribution to the design of the methodology, the identification of case study institutions, the contextualisation of the findings, and the drafting of the guidelines of good practice.

Of course, the report would not have been possible without the willing participation of a large number of higher education institutions across Europe. Heartfelt thanks go to all the institutional leaders, administrators, and academics who helped to organise the site visits, and who made themselves available for extensive interviews. We have highly appreciated the openness and honesty with which they participated in the project. Thanks go also to all of the international students who replied to the on-line survey, as well as to those who participated in the student focus group meetings during the site visits.

We also extend our appreciation to the speakers and trainers who played key roles in the March 2010 ACA seminar related to this project, as well as to the participants at this event. All of these individuals contributed substantively to the advancement of our work, particularly in terms of the refinement of this final report, and to our gaining an even better understanding of the nuances and particular challenges of different national contexts.

Last but not least, this publication would not have been possible without the financial support of the European Commission through its Erasmus Mundus Programme: we are grateful to this body for having made the project possible, and for having recognised the importance of student support to the further internationalisation and increased attractiveness of European higher education.

Maria Kelo  
Brussels  
June 2010

## Executive Summary

This book is a culminating component of a project called ENATIS - 'Enhancing Attractiveness through International Student Services'. Launched in 2008, ENATIS was made possible by funding from the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Programme. The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) served as the coordinator of the project, in collaboration with CIRIUS Denmark and International Education Consultants UK.

### *Why student services, why now?*

Support services for international students in Europe is a subject whose time has come. To a significant degree, Europe has staked its future on a robust level of student mobility as well as the global competitiveness of its higher education systems. This is true at both the level of the European Union and within the framework of the Bologna Process. There are also policy objectives articulated within various national and institutional contexts across Europe that speak of a firm commitment to both mobility and international competitiveness. Attracting a steady (or even growing) stream of talented international students from beyond the borders of Europe is thus both an overt policy goal and a natural result of the current efforts to raise the profile of European higher education more globally. And while students from outside the region clearly seek out academic excellence when considering options for study in Europe, they are also sensitive to what institutions are willing to do to enhance the overall quality of the international student experience. Student services, therefore, have a potentially important role to play in terms of attracting and retaining international students, as well as building momentum for future recruitment of high-quality students. These elements, in turn, feed directly into any strategic discussion of meaningful and sustainable internationalisation in the European higher education context.

Despite the growing sense that student services matter, very little research has been done to shed light on exactly what non-European degree-seeking students desire and expect in the way of support services. Similarly, there has been little to no systematic examination of institutional or national-level approaches to this issue. The ENATIS project represents an important attempt to address the dearth of information in this area. Specifically, the study aimed to shed light on all three levels of analysis—student, institution, and country—as a means to achieving three fundamental goals:

1. Making sense of non-European degree-seeking students' needs for, and perspectives on, support services;
2. Providing highly current information on the approaches being taken at the institutional and national level in various European countries;

3. Articulating a set of guidelines for good practice that may be useful for consideration by a variety of relevant stakeholders.

The guiding principle for the study is that non-European degree-seeking students have real and often unique needs that European higher education has both a duty to meet as well as a vested interest in satisfying on some level.

*Mapping the landscape: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives*

This project focused on the experiences of six European countries with regard to support services provision for non-European international students pursuing full degrees. The countries were chosen in order to provide a reasonable range of different profiles—in terms of size, geographic location, historical and cultural characteristics, among other factors—but all having a sizable enough international student population to be able to provide relevant practical examples of student services activity. Aspiring to expand international student recruitment from beyond Europe was also a notable feature of the countries and/or institutions involved in the study.

Data for the project were collected through three primary methods:

1. Site visits (at 3-5 institutions in each country), which allowed for interviews with key institutional actors and student focus group sessions (typically involving 3-10 students at each institution).
2. A quantitative student survey, which garnered responses from 1278 international students from the six countries involved in the study. This 27-question survey was administered online and allowed students to provide feedback on their experiences and satisfaction levels with student services at their host institution during the pre-arrival, arrival, and ongoing stages of their study experience.
3. Desk research and telephone interviews with national-level agencies in each of the six study countries, which provided insight into how (if at all) student services play a part in the agendas of these organisations.

An advisory board, comprised of six international experts in various aspects of international higher education and student mobility, provided an important sounding board for methodological questions, contextualisation of data and overall project guidance.

*Main findings: Needs, solutions, challenges*

In keeping with the focus of the research on three levels—students, institutions, and national organisations—the study registered interesting results in all three areas.

From the **student perspective**, the need for support extends across various stages of the student experience, beginning with the pre-arrival phase and extending to arrival in-country or on-campus, the formal period of study itself, and in some cases through to planning for next steps after graduation. However, the specific focus on support services shifts depending on the specific moment in the student cycle. Overall, the most important support services areas identified by the students had to do with:

- information and orientation
- integration activities with local students, the institution, and/or surrounding community
- language support
- other practical considerations, including assistance with visas and other administrative procedures; housing; support for families; and career and internship guidance

More explicitly, the most important and least important services indicated by students per phase are as follows:

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Most important service</b>	<b>Least important service</b>
Pre-arrival	Finding somewhere to live	Information about area
Upon arrival	Finding somewhere to live	Formal welcome
During period of study	Support for academic problems	Language support

Finally, 80 percent of students indicated that the availability of services at the host institution was either “very important” or “partly important” in the final decision about where to study, as compared with 20 percent of students who indicated the availability of services was “not important” at the decision-making stage.

At the **institutional level**, this study revealed that there is a great deal currently being done to meet students’ support service needs, particularly in the crucial areas identified by students—that is, information and orientation, integration, language support, and key practical issues (such as housing, support for families, and visa and immigration processes, among others).

Some of the more notable characteristics of the student services landscape include:

- **The widespread and evolving deployment of technology to share information with and among students.** Here, the University of Notting-

ham in the UK provides a nice good practice example, with its ‘Pathway 2 Nottingham’ initiative, a web-based scheme that provides comprehensive information on all manner of subjects relevant to international students. Other institutions, such as Science Po in France and the University of Trento in Italy, have also used social networking tools such as Facebook and Yahoo Groups to facilitate valuable engagement among students. These kinds of tools are enabling new, ever more flexible and highly tailored opportunities to communicate with students before and during the study experience.

- **The use of fellow students—domestic and international—to assist the incoming international student population through various kinds of buddy schemes and other mentoring mechanisms.** Buddy programmes are found quite widely, but some are taking this basic concept a step further. In Germany, for example, Humboldt University’s FAMOS mentoring programme is a new initiative aimed specifically at international degree-seeking students. Incoming foreign students receive valuable support from peer mentors, while the mentors themselves benefit from payment for their involvement and earn five to six ECTS credits towards their degrees. Formalisation of the role of mentors is also apparent in places like the International Business Academy at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, which also pays its student mentors assisting international students. These efforts speak to an increasing appreciation for what mentors do for the international student population and the host institution, as well as the academic and professional skill-building that the mentors themselves experience through these activities.
- **Innovative approaches to help ease the burden of administrative red tape and legal complexities.** Visas and residence permits are critically important components of the international student experience, but the complexities (and, frequently, the processing delays for these items) are commonly cited as areas of concern for foreign students and university officials alike. Several universities in Italy offer nice examples of creative support for this part of the international student experience. For example, the University of Rome La Sapienza has managed to arrange for a branch of the local registration office to be opened within the university, to deal exclusively with international student permits. And the University of Trento, for its part, has created a working group with other institutions in the same province to fund a specific desk at the registration office to deal with residence permits for students.

This is just a tiny fraction of the many different ways that European universities are responding to the unique needs of international students, specifically those coming from outside Europe to do full-degree programmes.

Challenges remain in many areas, however. The most prominent of these appear to be:

- **The need to pace information appropriately** in ways that make sense for students and institutions;
- **The importance of not ‘losing through the cracks’ some international students**—such as those who have ostensibly met all of the same admission requirements as domestic students—who appear to require little or no specialised support, but who in reality face significant challenges when it comes social integration and academic performance;
- **The responsibility of institutions offering English-taught programmes in non-English speaking countries to develop communication strategies that effectively meet the needs of students who are not proficient in the host country language**—or at the very least set appropriate expectations among these students about the limitations of English-only usage outside the classroom.

**National-level organisations and advisory bodies** also represent a key piece of the international student services puzzle. National organisations—or national-level activity of some type—is evident in all six study countries examined by the ENATIS project. These entities share some key characteristics but also present rather unique mandates, configurations, areas of responsibility, and levels of involvement. For example, in both Germany and the UK, national bodies play an important role in internationalisation and student and institutional support, while in Denmark, France and Poland the relevant agencies are increasingly involved in what might be termed ‘agenda building’ in relation to the internationalisation of universities and the student population. Only in Italy, where the recruitment of non-European full-degree international students is a relatively recent phenomenon, is there an absence of a national organisation whose responsibility includes the provision and/or coordination of support services for international students, although a consortium does exist to ensure international students are provided with information on study opportunities in Italy.

In the broadest terms, all of the national organisations endeavour to provide some support directly to students, and typically in three main areas:

- **general information** about the host country and its higher education systems and/or institutions;
- **funding information**, particularly in terms of tuition fees (where applicable), cost of living details, and possible scholarship opportunities;
- **information on the requirements and procedures for legal entry into the country** (i.e. visa issues).

The national-level bodies in the six study countries examined for this study are also active, to various degrees, in support of their country's universities and higher education sector more broadly, through five key action lines:

- **providing general information**, particularly in terms of the broader market for higher education services and international student recruitment;
- **contextualising legislative information**, especially in the areas of immigration regulations and social benefits, which may have a direct impact on international student recruitment and the student experience;
- **supporting capacity building**, which may include staff training in areas most relevant to international student recruitment and support (such as marketing, visa counselling, and academic advising);
- **providing funding**, for example in cases where national bodies are able to support the development of institutional initiatives aimed specifically at improving the international student experience; the provision of international support services; or integration activities;
- **coordinating advocacy efforts**, which can involve anything from working broadly to advance the national conversation on internationalisation in higher education to more specific agenda items, such as helping to craft a nationally agreed-upon set of standards, often in the form of an officially recognised 'code of conduct', indicating an expected level of service for the treatment of international students.

Legal status and funding of the national bodies also vary. For example, across the six different country contexts, there are organisations and advisory bodies with funding models that are private, public or a combination of both. In Poland, for example, the national-level advisory body is partially funded via private means, through the Perspektywy Education Foundation, but also partially funded through public contributions made by higher education institutions in Poland, in addition to grants from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In Denmark, the national agency CIRIUS, is fully funded by the Danish state, with additional contributions derived from European Commission funds. In Germany, France and Italy, national organisations and advisory bodies are almost completely funded by the state, while in the UK funding is derived from a variety of sources.

#### *Making sense of it all: Implications for policy and practice*

The findings from the ENATIS project provide some important markers for policy and practice moving forward. First, it is crucially important for institutional and national stakeholders with interests in internationalisation—and specifically with aspirations of greater full-degree student recruitment from beyond Europe—to understand the student perspective. Students appear to



be primarily focused on the academic experience a host institution can offer, but are also aware of the broader context of their need for some support both inside and outside the classroom. Students are resourceful and—often independent of the host institution—find innovative ways to satisfy their need for information and guidance. Still, international students largely expect at least a minimal level of support from the host institution, and may expect more where there are longer national traditions of student support and/or in contexts where they are paying sizable tuition fees.

At the national level, official organisations or other advisory bodies may take responsibility for a host of important functions—from helping to frame the national discussion on the recruitment and support of international students, to administering specific programmes and initiatives in these areas. Whatever role these agencies play, the specific activities or approaches taken must fit meaningfully into the higher education tradition in each national context. At a minimum, national organisations and advisory bodies can serve as a helpful and attractive first point of contact for international students beginning to get acquainted with the higher education offer in a specific country.

It is at the institutional level, however, where many of the most important considerations about international student services come together most tangibly. European higher education institutions and their staff are on the ‘front lines’ of the campaign to raise the level of attractiveness of the educational offer of Europe to international students from around the world, and obviously enjoy more direct and sustained contact with students than any other key stakeholders. Their responsibilities extend from recruiting and admitting students, to receiving them on campus and ideally ushering them through to successful completion of their degree programmes. The ENATIS research shows that European higher education institutions are already actively, and in many cases very creatively, addressing the needs of full-degree international students in a wide variety of ways. What is arguably lacking at this stage is a more clearly defined ‘European approach’ to this work. To this end, this project puts forth a ‘European code of good practice’ for the support of non-European full-degree students. This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive or forcibly prescriptive list of requirements, but rather is conceived as a constructive first step towards galvanising the student services movement in support of the growing—and increasingly diversifying—population of full-degree international students coming from beyond Europe.

Why is this important? Ultimately, this study argues that European higher education must recognise that student services represent a powerful tool for enhancing the quality and sustainability of the internationalisation agenda, not to mention the overall competitiveness of the sector. At the same time, providing meaningful support services for international students increasingly

stands out as the 'right thing to do'. Moving across national, cultural, and linguistic borders is a complex human experience, as is integrating oneself into a new and potentially very different academic culture. The investment made by students to come to Europe needs to be matched by a meaningful response on the part of host countries and institutions to provide useful guidance for the 'whole student'. As more and more European institutions draw in larger numbers of students from across the globe, the issue of support services for this population is becoming more widely salient. European higher education should continue to respond with creative, responsible, and sustainable solutions to the service needs of its diversifying international student population.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and aims

### *Attracting the best in a competitive environment—new challenges for European higher education*

European higher education has always been international. But there are many reasons why student services for international students have become particularly topical in the past few years. Indeed, the world in which European higher education institutions operate has been, and still is, rapidly changing. In a similar fashion, students also find themselves in a very different environment than that of their predecessors ten or more years ago. Expectations on both sides have evolved—and increased.

European higher education has for decades been marked by a relatively high degree of international mobility, with the number of international students steadily increasing and their origins also changing over time. Although the latest statistics may show that almost half of all foreign students in Europe are (still) Europeans, the share of students from other continents, and especially from Asia, is progressively rising. This is surely a result, at least in part, of a significant unmet demand for quality higher education in a number of developing and emerging countries. But the successful promotion of European universities in other parts of the world has also played a role in these developments. Such promotional activities are, for most European countries, relatively new, and European-level promotion under a unified European ‘brand’ is only slowly taking shape. Such promotional activities have become necessary, however, in order to draw high numbers of some of the best students in the world into European higher education. Global competition for students—especially top academic talent—is expected to stimulate rapid further growth in European recruitment activities over the next decade. Enrolling larger numbers of international students from highly diverse backgrounds makes a personalised and ‘ad hoc’ approach to student support less efficient, if not outright impossible. The importance of a strategic approach to student services as an integral part of institutional or national internationalisation efforts has become apparent.

To facilitate mobility within Europe, but also with the precise goal of enhancing our higher education systems’ attractiveness for students from other continents, well over 40 countries joined in the Bologna Process between 1999 and 2010. In addition to harmonising European degree structures, increasing recognition, and facilitating transfer of study credits, the ‘Bologna reforms’ have created in many countries a new point of entry into European higher education with the introduction of masters programmes. Consequently, more and more students enter European higher education for the first time with a

first degree gained elsewhere. This has proven to be an important factor for consideration when welcoming international students to Europe, and has a direct impact on student service needs. In addition to the Bologna process reforms, other factors, such as the introduction of tuition fees and enhanced provision of full-degree programmes in English or other foreign languages have created a totally different environment for internationalisation and student recruitment.

It is not an exaggeration to say that in the global competition for the best students, the attractiveness of an institution no longer depends entirely on its academic, teaching and research standards—although perhaps this is still mainly true. Services to students have come to play an important role in the quality assessment—and thus competitiveness—of institutions. Recent findings by the International Graduate Insight Group (through its International Student Barometer) and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (*Foreign Students in Sweden*) confirm that ‘word of mouth’ is one of the strongest influencing factors on students’ choice of study destination. It is therefore important to ensure that students’ experiences in European higher education are positive on all fronts, and that the message they pass on to potential students in their home countries is a favourable one.

Compared to some of their main competitors, such as universities in Australia or the United States, continental European institutions seem to be lagging behind in the development of international student services, which could jeopardise the long-term success of their marketing efforts. Indeed, the lack of an overarching internationalisation strategy, and the failure to include student services as an integral part in the internationalisation effort, often results in institutional inconsistency: enhanced overseas recruitment or the creation of programmes in foreign languages is not always accompanied by adequate student services or facilities. Not all institutions need to compete and recruit internationally, of course, but those who do aspire to some level of international competitiveness need to think of a strategic approach to services and consider a comprehensive services package to offer to their international students.

European higher education institutions need to be made more aware of the crucial role that student support plays in achieving their internationalisation objectives and in becoming competitive in the global ‘market’. In order to attract increasing numbers of students and some of the ‘best brains’ from other parts of the world, European institutions need to be aware of the specific practical and academic needs of these students; indeed, services should match the needs and expectations of students, not be designed on assumptions of what these might be. Ideally, a coherent European approach to international student support should be adopted, as a form of ‘consumer protection’ or guarantee for international students.

### *Aim of the study*

Despite the importance of international student services and the links between students' satisfaction and institutional attractiveness, little work has been carried out at the European level in the area of student support. In fact, the project team is not aware of any substantial survey of international students in Europe on their service needs. In 2006, the Academic Cooperation Association carried out a study<sup>1</sup> that can be regarded as a predecessor of the ENATIS initiative. The findings of the study—the first of its kind in Europe—made it clear that much can be improved at the European level in terms of student support, and indicated a need for more research in the area.

Taking the 2006 ACA report a step forward, the present project has three main aims:

- 1) to discover and analyse the support needs of international **full-degree** students, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and especially those coming from significantly different cultural and religious backgrounds;
- 2) to provide updated information on institutional practice and the state of the art at European institutions in this area, as well as highlight good practice examples of addressing students' needs in specific areas;
- 3) to provide recommendations or 'guidelines of good practice' on international student support at the European level in order to support future developments in this key area relevant to higher education internationalisation.

Our wish is that through the analysis of students' support needs, and the formulation of good practice in strategic and practical approaches to students support, European institutions will be better able to draw on each others' experience, and will be inspired to seek out creative solutions to further develop their own services and internationalisation strategies.

## **1.2 Methodology and scope**

This book is a culminating component of a project called ENATIS - 'Enhancing Attractiveness through International Student Services'. The project received funding from the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Programme, which also supported two additional project outputs: the elaboration of a set of guidelines of good practice in student support, and a one-day international

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Kelo, *Support for International Students in Higher Education*, ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education, Bonn: Lemmens 2006.

event on student services held in Brussels on 19 March 2010. ACA was the coordinator of the project partnership, which also included CIRIUS Denmark and International Education Consultants UK.

In order to provide both breadth and depth to this important topic, this book focuses on several levels of analysis. First, there is an attempt to provide an overview of various national contexts, specifically through a consideration of the role of national-level agencies in the provision of international student services. The study also aims to shed light on specific institutional policies and practices in this area. And finally, the perspectives of the international students themselves are presented and analysed in an effort to make sense of the needs, expectations and satisfaction levels at the most fundamental level of the 'end user'. The goal is then to draw meaningful lines between these levels of analysis in order to provide both clear insight into the current state of affairs and relevant suggestions for improving and enhancing international student services in a variety of European higher education contexts.

In terms of specific areas of student service and support, the book places primary emphasis on the following elements:

- information and orientation;
- activities to support the integration of international students;
- language support;
- a range of practical considerations, such as support for visas and other administrative procedures; housing; support for families; career and internship support.

These themes were identified by the student survey respondents as the most important support areas. Furthermore, the study concentrates in particular on services for non-EU international degree students. Specific services directed at exchange students have been touched on only marginally, and mostly insofar as they have served as a meaningful point of comparison. Likewise, services provided to other (non-international) students—that is, general services to all students—are also considered only for comparative purposes.

### *Country choice*

The study focused on the experiences of **six core countries**, which were selected based on a number of criteria.

The first three countries, namely the **UK**, **France** and **Germany**, were included because they are the three European countries with the largest absolute numbers of international students, and each hosts a relatively high percent-

age of non-European students. Furthermore, these countries are all active in international student recruitment both at national as well as institutional levels. The long tradition in receiving international students enabled the identification of a number of good practice cases across the countries.

The second group of countries adds to the geographic spread across Europe and helps to identify specific features related to international student support in culturally and historically different higher education contexts. **Denmark, Poland and Italy** were chosen as representatives of their wider geographical regions based on the total number of international students and the proportion of non-Europeans within those cohorts. An additional important criterion was the availability of good practice examples in international student support.

It should be noted that, while the country context has in some cases a significant impact on the possibilities to offer student services, or the financial resources available for such activities (as seen in the difference between countries which can charge tuition fees and those which cannot, for example), the purpose of this report was not to create 'country profiles', or comparisons between countries. Rather, the goal was to offer readers a collection of good practice examples that could be applied widely in different national contexts.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Information for the study was collected through a number of means:

1. **Site visits** were carried out at 3-5 institutions in each of the six target countries. The institutions were selected so as to create a mix based on criteria such as the size of the institution and its international student body, location (capital city versus remoter areas), and institutional character (i.e. private versus public, where relevant for the national context). All institutions selected also had to have a large enough number of international degree students such that specific services for this group might be provided or at least considered, and be interested in exploring the international student market. In many cases, the participating institutions were already providing good or innovative services to international degree students. The full list of case study institutions can be found in Annex 1.

The **institutional interviews** generally involved at least two people: a managerial level staff member (e.g. a dean, vice-president, or rector, depending on the country, institution, and individual interest and responsibilities), as well as directors/key staff of the international office or student support office. In most cases, however, many more people were interviewed. The issues addressed in the structured interviews included the following: 1) perceptions of international students' support needs from the institutional perspective; 2) the importance and

position of student support in the institutional strategy and the extent to which it is linked to recruitment objectives and internationalisation priorities; 3) the availability and organisation of international student support at the institution (i.e. concrete examples of good practice).

The site visits also included **a student focus group** involving 3-10 students at each case study institution. This allowed for the collection of qualitative data and information on students' needs that could not have been easily collected via questionnaires, such as more personal perceptions about service provision, comparisons with institutions in other world regions where appropriate (e.g. among post-graduate students), and so on. The focus group meetings followed a pre-determined format and addressed similar questions in each case, while at the same time leaving space for topical local issues to be raised by the students themselves. The qualitative data collected through the focus groups was used to interpret and support the findings of the survey, and to give a wider perspective to the institutional case examples.

2. **A large scale quantitative student survey on support needs** and their role in the choice by students of an institution or country for study provided key information. The student questionnaires were distributed by institutional contacts at each of the case study institutions to all non-European degree-seeking students. The questionnaire was web-based, and thus circulated to the students via e-mail. The survey aimed at collecting substantial quantitative data on student support needs and the use (or awareness of) available services. Some 1278 students across the six study countries responded to the survey. Some institutions were not able to differentiate between European and non-European students, or between degree and exchange students, as their mailing or student classification system did not allow for this distinction. Consequently, some responses from students not in the main target group of the study are included in the data. However, the impact of their responses is considered to be negligible for the overall analysis.
3. **Desk research and phone interviews with national-level agencies** in the six study countries were also conducted in order to investigate the role of such agencies in the provision of information and support to international students at the national level. The phone interviews followed a semi-structured format, which served to complete and clarify information collected previously through print and web-based sources.
4. **An international group of experts** (the project's 'Advisory Board') was consulted regularly throughout the project to help define the scope of



the study, refine the questions to be asked, support the interpretation of national data, and advise on the drafting of the recommendations.

### 1.3 Terminology and definitions

The terms **‘student support’** and **‘student services’** may have significantly different connotations in different European countries, and in different academic contexts. In this study, the two terms are considered to be highly equivalent, and refer to a wide variety of services that may be on offer to students. Student services can thus range from practical amenities such as accommodation and dining halls, to information provision and welcome activities, and even to academic or language support.

**‘International students’** refers, unless mentioned otherwise, to non-European students. Indeed, as the main purpose of the report is to look at the services provided for students coming—for the purposes of full-degree study—to Europe, international students are those who have gained their previous qualification from a country outside of Europe<sup>2</sup>. It is precisely these full degree-seeking students that are likely to have additional support needs compared to all other foreign students. It should be mentioned, however, that the distinction is not always entirely clear, as institutions classify their own students—and thus the services provided to them—using categories other than those used in this report. For example, they may differentiate between EU (rather than European) versus other international students, or those needing a student visa versus those who do not, and so on.”

The term **‘university’** is used in its wider meaning and refers to higher education institutions in general, unless otherwise specified.

A final clarification relates to the status of the students for whom the issue of support services is considered. This study focuses specifically on students who have enrolled in a degree programme, i.e. who attempt to gain their full degree in the host country. These students are called **‘degree students’**, as opposed to exchange students, who spend only a short period of time away from their degree-granting institution located in another country. This report takes the position that the highest unmet support needs are likely to be found among the international degree students, since mobility of students in Europe has been so dominated in recent decades by exchange programmes, whose students have long received the primary attention in terms of student support.

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘Outside of Europe’ in this context is understood to be anyplace beyond the commonly understood geographic and cultural boundaries of contemporary Europe, ranging from the British Isles and Nordic countries in the North and Northwest, south to the Iberian Peninsula, to the Balkans in the East, the countries of Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states in the Northeast.

## **2 The national perspective: Official organisations and other advisory bodies**

The role national organisations and advisory bodies play in both enhancing the attractiveness of a study destination for non-European full-degree international students and supporting them before and after their arrival can be significant. Among the various national organisations examined in the context of this project, a wide range exists in terms of mandates, specific roles in providing support for international students, the range of services offered, available budgets for investment in student support and development activities, and the involvement of these national bodies with universities and colleges to ensure international students are supported appropriately during their programme of studies.

In countries where national organisations and advisory bodies are well developed, the extent to which they are involved in the development of the internationalisation agenda generally is clear. In both Germany and the UK, national bodies play an important role in internationalisation and student and institutional support, while in Denmark, France and Poland the relevant agencies are increasingly involved in what might be termed 'agenda building' in relation to the internationalisation of universities and the student population. Only in Italy, where the recruitment of non-European full-degree international students is a relatively recent phenomenon, is there an absence of a national organisation whose responsibility includes the provision and/or coordination of support services for international students, although a consortium does exist to ensure international students are provided with information on study opportunities in Italy.

Countries are motivated by a variety of factors to establish national level bodies with responsibilities for internationalisation and/or international student support. And while some aspects of the decision to provide such support services may be heavily influenced by the implementation of market-rate tuition fees, the establishment of a national organisation or an advisory body active in this area appears not to be contingent on simple economics. The revenue derived from international student tuition fees undoubtedly facilitates the founding of, and investment in, such organisations, but the overarching intention to establish such bodies appears to be more of a philosophical decision made by countries irrespective of their tuition fee regimes to ensure that students are appropriately supported throughout their programme of studies.

### **2.1 The national context**

National organisations and advisory bodies are active in all six study countries, although the mandates, areas of responsibility and levels of involvement are very different in each case. Overall, there is a division in roles between the provision of information for non-European full-degree international students,

the support such bodies give to their own universities, and the advocacy and lobbying position such organisations take on behalf of international students within their own jurisdictions—for example, negotiating improved visa procedures with their own immigration authorities. Such different roles often reflect the stage of development a country has reached in terms of its relationship and familiarity with full-degree international students.

Across the six different country contexts, there are examples of organisations and advisory bodies that are private, public and a combination of both in their funding models. In Poland, for example, the national-level advisory body is partially funded via private means, through the Perspektywy Education Foundation, but also partially funded through public contributions made by higher education institutions in Poland, in addition to grants from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In Denmark, the national agency CIRIUS, is fully funded by the Danish state, with additional contributions derived from European Commission funds. In Germany, France and Italy, national organisations and advisory bodies are almost completely funded by the state, while in the UK funding is derived from a variety of sources.

## **2.2 National organisations and services offered to students**

The range of services offered to non-European full-degree international students by national organisations falls into remarkably similar categories across the six study countries, with all fulfilling an essential information provision role on behalf of the universities and other institutions of higher education located in the country. In broad terms, these might be categorised as follows:

- **General information:** This support is generally for new incoming students, delivered almost exclusively online through fully branded national websites. The range of information varies enormously, but most commonly includes an explanation of the education system, a programme index, advice on living and studying in the country and opportunities to work or further study after graduation. Some printed material and attendance at international events offers additional information dissemination to prospective students.
- **Funding information:** A separate element of information provision national organisations offer international students is centred on tuition fees (if relevant), cost of living details, scholarships and other funding opportunities related to study in the host country.
- **Visa support:** A specific information function offered by the majority of the national organisations present in the study countries relates to helping non-European international students navigate the visa and immigration processes.

The provision of information is considered an essential service to non-European full-degree international students and augments the activities and actions of individual universities or institutions of higher education. The quality of the information provided varies from country to country although it must be noted that the content and presentation of such material is improving rapidly, particularly as new information technologies are more widely adopted.

A recent development in line with the increased focus on the internationalisation of European higher education is the role domestically-focused organisations and advisory bodies are now performing with respect to international students. Organisations such as CNOUS/CROUS in France, Deutsches Studentenwerk in Germany, and Diritto allo studio in Italy are adding an international dimension to their work in order to support the increasing demands of new international students. While such organisations have already developed a portfolio of services for national students, often over decades, many now have to quickly adapt their existing service offer to an entirely new clientele, not least in offering services in English to a far more diverse audience. Such organisations compliment the activities of other bodies more closely associated with the central government and endeavour to work in tandem to ensure that the basic services for non-European full-degree international students are offered appropriately. In years to come, such organisations are likely to not only adapt further but also develop specifically tailored services to their international clients.

### **2.3 National organisations and services offered to institutions**

The menu of services offered to institutions in terms of their internationalisation and the specific recruitment of non-European full-degree international students is somewhat inconsistent across the study countries. This inconsistency appears to match the stage of each country's development with regard to the recruitment of international students. For example, the UK has perhaps the most developed and sophisticated international recruitment operation of the six countries reviewed and possesses a large range of services offered to institutions through national organisations to develop relevant skills and professional standards. In Italy and Poland, however, where the experience with international student recruitment is much newer, the role national bodies play in the development of institutional capacity for student support services is far more limited. In broad terms, the services offered to institutions can be categorised as follows:

- Information provision: This is aimed at ensuring institutions are aware of the latest market and education developments so that staff can target new opportunities.
- Legislative information: This function is intended to keep institutions aware of the latest legislative developments and how they affect stu-

dent recruitment and student support, particularly in terms of immigration regulations and access to social benefits.

- **Capacity building:** An explicit activity of many organisations is to offer programmes in staff development and training in areas most relevant to international students, for example, counselling, advising, visa support, housing issues and cross cultural issues.
- **Funding:** In a number of cases, national bodies offer funding for the development of institutional initiatives aimed specifically at improving the international student experience or the provision of international support services or integration activities. Such funding is often for time-limited periods on the understanding that universities will then continue the project with their own internal funds.

In addition to these key areas, national organisations provide the essential service of representing the interests of non-European full-degree international students in discussions with other stakeholders involved at the national level in internationalisation of higher education and the higher education student population. Whether such advocacy is in the area of immigration, student financial support, the right to work during and after study programmes or access to a country's social security system, the national organisations are typically well-positioned to affect positive change and improve the environment international students will encounter upon arrival in the host country. This kind of advocacy is often beyond the scope of what individual universities can achieve, although all stakeholders ultimately benefit from such developments.

Moreover, the lobbying role national organisations adopt in supporting international students can have a direct impact on the formulation of nationally agreed-upon standards, often in the form of an officially recognised 'code of conduct', indicating an expected level of service for the treatment of international students. These kinds of practices are widespread in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, where such codes of conduct are legally binding for institutions, and students have access to formal recourse should such standards not be upheld. Across Europe, plans are underway in many countries for the development of codes of conduct, or at the very least a suggestion of minimum standards for the service and support given to international students. For example, the Netherlands has implemented a formal code of conduct since 2006 and similar policy documents are being considered in France, Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland. Only in the UK, where the development of highly competitive universities has already encouraged a service-led approach to international student recruitment and support, is the environment less conducive to the formulation of a single national policy.

## 2.4 National organisation profiles

The following section outlines the roles and responsibilities of national organisations and advisory bodies in each of the six study countries, from driving national policy and/or brand building to student advocacy and legislative change. The information that follows has been derived from face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, desk research and feedback received from current non-European full-degree international students.

### *Denmark*

The implementation of internationalisation in Danish institutions of higher education is highly developed and the role of student services in the support of all international students is well established. Denmark has benefitted from the foundation of a national agency, CIRIUS, with an explicit role in enhancing the attractiveness of Danish education to international students, with support services playing a central role in this agenda. No other organisation provides systematic support for international students in Denmark. However, the actual provision of international student services is the responsibility of individual institutions of higher education.

A national policy exists for the internationalisation of Denmark and Danish society, with education forming an important aspect of this strategy. Education is intended to support the two main aims of the national strategy; firstly, in attracting highly qualified foreigners to internationalise Denmark and secondly, to recruit skilled employees for the Danish labour market, especially in the fields of IT, healthcare, teaching and engineering. In supporting the country's internationalisation agenda, a national strategy has been written for the promotion of Denmark as an attractive study destination. This strategy is divided into two main parts—purpose and areas for action.

In terms of purpose, the strategy is aimed at assisting Denmark in:

- Enhancing the quality of the Danish educational institutions by attracting the most able and best qualified students to the country;
- Making Danish institutions more attractive in the international market for the recruitment of students and researchers;
- Meeting the needs of the Danish labour market by attracting highly talented international students;
- Strengthening the internationalisation of Danish higher education.

To achieve these goals, the national strategy includes the following four areas for action:

- Collecting information and research about the international higher education market with the aim of further supporting strategic development at the institutional level;
- Promoting Denmark as an attractive study destination;
- Developing information material and guidance for international students;
- Eliminating barriers for incoming student mobility.

In order to support the national strategy, CIRIUS facilitates and coordinates a number of initiatives to ensure that international students are supported throughout their experience with Danish higher education institutions, particularly from the first point of contact through to their arrival in Denmark to commence their studies. The “Study in Denmark” website<sup>3</sup> contains information on the education system, the experience of studying in Denmark, the recognition of foreign diplomas and other qualifications, living in Denmark, grants and scholarships, and tuition fees and other costs. A searchable database allows international students to locate programmes taught in English and the requirements of such qualifications. An increasingly sophisticated social media and student-focused area encourages contact with full-degree non-European international students already enrolled in Danish institutions of higher education.

At the national level, CIRIUS also coordinates the collection of relevant data on student support and the international student experience in Denmark, most recently by commissioning the UK company i-graduate to run the Danish International Student Barometer project, benchmarking student satisfaction with an international group of universities in regard to the arrival experience, the academic experience, the living experience and the level of support provided by CIRIUS and individual universities.

CIRIUS also plays an important role in supporting institutions as they develop appropriate services for international students and helping them navigate potential areas of difficulty, such as immigration and international student visa issues. Part of this work is accomplished through the organisation of staff training and conferences on key areas relevant to the development of good practice—for example, “how to use the web for student recruitment” and “the requirements of welcoming international students”. However, while there is a national policy for the internationalisation of Danish education, there is

---

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.studyindenmark.dk>

not a national code of conduct or legislation related to the type and scope of services offered to international students. At this point, while institutions are eager to receive support and training in delivering an appropriate level of service to international students, there is reluctance among many to accept any additional regulation of the higher education sector. In Denmark, a more relaxed approach, with loose guidelines of what constitutes ‘good practice’ in the area of international students and international support services is likely to be more acceptable to many institutions and other stakeholders.

### *France*

CampusFrance (originally known as EduFrance) was established in 1998 to promote French higher education abroad and encourage greater international student mobility into France. Supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministries of National Education and Higher Education and Research, CampusFrance includes an international student support function to ensure that prospective students have sufficient information about French educational choices, in addition to offering advice and facilitating the visa process and a smooth arrival in France.

While there is no formal policy on the support of international students in France, CampusFrance is currently developing a Charter for Quality in association with a range of stakeholders to underline what international students can expect from their study and living experience in France. This will function as a guideline for institutions of higher education and help to enhance the existing advice provided to incoming foreign grant and scholarship holders. There is an acknowledgement that the need to encourage more international students to choose France—both for diplomatic motives and for an overall interest in greater internationalisation—brings with it an associated demand for improved student services with some degree of specialisation for non-European full-degree international students. In order to develop the Charter, CampusFrance is currently liaising with all key organisations at the national and regional levels.

The CampusFrance website<sup>4</sup> contains information on study options, costs, scholarships and grants, living in France, and an overt promotional section called “why choose France?” A course search allows prospective international students to review 36 000 programmes taught in France, while a “finance your studies” search function allows students to locate possible grants and scholarships. Additional information is available through video testimonials, a diary of international events, an online visa application form and downloadable brochures and other documentation. The popularity of the

---

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.campusfrance.org>



CampusFrance website underlines the importance of good information provision: between January and May 2009, 1 150 000 visits were made to the site, augmented by 410 000 visitors to CampusFrance offices worldwide in 2008.

In addition to CampusFrance, three other organisations fulfil a support role for international students: Égide<sup>5</sup>, which focuses on the support of international scholars and interns upon their arrival in France; CNOUS (*Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires*), a student services organisation at the national level; and CROUS (*Le Réseau des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires*) at the regional level<sup>6</sup>. CNOUS manages the regional CROUS network and is primarily focused on the domestic student population, although the practical support offered to students does extend to those from overseas who are in receipt of a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CROUS regional network is made up of 28 centres and is augmented by a further 14 local centres (CLOUS) located in 12 university towns. The explicit international role in CNOUS/CROUS is fulfilled through the *Sous-Direction des Affaires Internationales* (SDAI), which is focused on the reception of foreign scholars and their support throughout their study programme.

The organisation of services at the national level is very much focused on visa procedures and efficiently managing the immigration process. Where services have been successfully planned and implemented they have tended to be directed towards exchange students (largely through Égide) and full-degree international students in receipt of French government or other government scholarships or grant awards. With the engagement of CampusFrance in encouraging more international students to choose France, however, there is a clear recognition that support services need to be extended through the various stakeholder organisations to include all full-degree students. One new initiative through CampusFrance is the formation of a series of regional contacts to help support international student hosting services, reinforced by a quality assurance mechanism to ensure students receive services of the highest quality. Such contact points will eventually be available to new non-European full-degree international students in university cities and regional hubs throughout France. They will provide key services, such as advice on housing and administrative procedures, through a close cooperation between CampusFrance, CNOUS and local institutions of higher education.

### *Germany*

At the national level, Germany is among the most sophisticated of countries in terms of the support that is provided directly to international students as

---

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.egide.asso.fr/jahia/Jahia/lang/en/accueil/etudiants>

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.cnous.fr>

well as the funding offered to institutions to develop capacity in this area. The national organisation, DAAD (*Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*, or German Academic Exchange Service, in English), is an independent body whose membership is made up of German institutions of higher education but whose funding is derived from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the DAAD's mission is relatively wide-ranging, in the context of student support, the organisation plays three central roles: 1) to advise and support institutions of higher education on issues related to internationalisation and the development of international capacities; 2) to provide information to prospective international students on studying, living and working in Germany; and 3) to lobby and advise national political groups on issues related to international students and internationalisation.

While there is no formal national policy on international students or international student support in Germany at present, the value of international students to German institutions of higher education is widely recognised and an international marketing campaign to attract more students to the country has been implemented over the last five years. The need to legislate more directly, however, is recognised and DAAD is working to develop a code of conduct for all institutions of higher education that will offer guidelines on offering support to international students in Germany. Such an approach is also likely to have positive effects on the relationship between different ministries within the German government and overseas consulates and embassies, particularly concerning issues of immigration and working rights for international students.

Two major DAAD initiatives directly relevant to international student support—PROFIS and PROFIN—have been implemented in Germany in recent years, both of which have been primarily aimed at improving the success and retention rates of non-European full-degree students in German higher education. The PROFIS programme was intended to support the internationalisation of German universities and ended in 2008. The recently launched PROFIN project focused on the integration of international students in German higher education. Both programmes were funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). These initiatives provide a good indication of the growing awareness of the importance of student support and integration services for non-European full-degree international students in Germany: PROFIN alone has included 46 university projects since 2009 with a budget of EUR 1.7 million.

PROFIS<sup>7</sup> sought to develop capacity in the areas of information provision and counselling; selection and admission; and language training and technical support. Over the course of four years, 84 projects were funded by

---

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.daad.de/hochschulen/betreuung/profis/05094.de.html>

the initiative. Of these, 80 percent were regarded as successful in terms of external assessment, and 50 percent were later embedded within individual institutions of higher education and funded by the sponsoring institutions themselves. Overall, PROFIS found that to improve the retention and success rates of non-European full-degree international students in Germany, it was necessary to ensure that these students were fully supported and made to feel part of the larger (and local) student body.

The successor to PROFIS, PROFIN<sup>8</sup>, has focused on improving the integration of international students into German universities through the improvement of 'first contact' experiences between international and German students; better academic integration of such students into university faculties and departments; enhanced efforts to improve German-language training and support for international students; a simplification of admission and selection procedures; and an overall greater effort to internationalise teaching methods and styles. The PROFIN initiative is currently funding 46 projects. These are split between activities focused on individual approaches to the issue, and others that have been designated as potentially suitable for use as examples of good practice in other universities once the initial work has been completed. Because DAAD sees the need for the integration of international students as a wider issue affecting administrative and academic staff as well as students themselves, projects are currently funded at universities, universities of applied sciences, and student associations. A significant number of the PROFIN projects are focused on the development of student support services and the enhancement of the local conditions of international students. Examples include tutor, mentoring and coaching networks; buddy programmes; international student bodies; film projects; training for students; and intercultural competence training for administrative staff and local German students and mentors.

An additional resource for international students in Germany is *Deutsches Studentenwerk*<sup>9</sup>, the German National Association for Student Affairs (DSW), a voluntary organisation of 58 local student service organisations (known as *Studentenwerke-STW*). The DSW provides services for the support of students at German universities, primarily for Germans but with an increasing interest in non-European full-degree international students. The internationalisation agenda is now an explicit part of their mode of operation, with particular focus on developing a friendly welcome for students and integrating full-degree and exchange international students in Germany in parallel with the services offered by DAAD and individual universities.

---

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.daad.de/hochschulen/betreuung/profin/09239.de.html>

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.internationale-studierende.de>

### *Italy*

At the national level, Italy is perhaps the least developed of the study countries with no single organisation having responsibility for either the provision of information to non-European full-degree international students or the support of individual universities. At present, the “Study in Italy” website is the only national-level information service for international, mostly prospective, students, providing basic information on studying and living in Italy, programme and institution choice. Additional, specific information is offered to Chinese students wishing to pursue their studies in Italy in the academic year 2010/11, including application and other deadline details, and degree programmes taught in English. A programme search is also available to prospective international students seeking to locate specific undergraduate or graduate degrees taught in Italy.

The “Study in Italy” website<sup>10</sup> is supported by the *Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca* (MIUR) [Ministry of Education, University and Research] and jointly managed by the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA) and CINECA, a consortium of 40 Italian universities and other research institutes. CIMEA promotes mobility among EU citizens, yet the current project also clearly appeals to non-European full-degree international students, not least because there is no other source of information available at the national level. Given this information void at the national level, prospective non-European full-degree international students are expected to derive relevant information from individual institutions.

Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MIUR recognise the importance of a national-level approach to develop a policy that supports both internationalisation of Italian higher education and international students at Italian universities, yet at present there is no national policy nor is there an intention to formulate one. Where initiatives do exist, they tend to be focused on the training of staff in international issues, such as marketing, recruitment and student support services. Such trainings are administered by the *Scuola di Management per le Università, gli Enti di Ricerca e le Istituzioni Scolastiche* (SUM) [School of Management for Universities, Research Institutes, and Schools], founded by MIP Politecnico di Milano in 2002. Notable also are the activities of *Diritto allo Studio*, which mainly organises housing and dining services for Italian students. In regions such as Trento, this organisation has increasingly made special efforts to address international student needs in these areas.

### *Poland*

At present, student support and advice is offered through a private organisation, the Perspektywy Education Foundation, although the Erasmus national

---

<sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.study-in-italy.it>

agency also contributes to the support of international students in the country. The activities of Perspektywy are augmented by support received from the Conference of Rectors, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and individual institutions of higher education, in addition to the commercial activities of Perspektywy itself. The mandate of this initiative has evolved since activities were first undertaken in 2005 to a position where the provision of information is at the heart of the work, first and foremost to prospective international students, and second to Polish institutions of higher education. Other significant aspects of Perspektywy's activities are:

- Organising international marketing and branding efforts at the national level to create a common country brand;
- Stimulating the process of internationalisation in Polish institutions of higher education through the organisation of conferences on the topic and raising awareness of related issues in Poland;
- Lobbying government and other public and private bodies to ensure that internationalisation is supported more thoroughly throughout Poland;
- Providing knowledge, training and practical support to Polish institutions of higher education in internationalisation and international marketing.

The information role in Poland is largely filled by the 'Study in Poland' website<sup>11</sup>, currently administered by Perspektywy and the Conference of Rectors, representing the majority of Polish universities. The website provides information on Poland, the Polish education system, the type and range of study programmes available, tuition fees and living expenses, in addition to downloadable guides for students interested in particular universities and/or academic programmes. Information is available in English, with a programme search tool allowing for students to locate their area of interest by type of degree, language of instruction and city or region of the country. A separate section exists on "How to apply", also in English, with a complete explanation of the application process and the general criteria required for university admission in Poland.

As present, no national policy exists focusing either on the recruitment or support of non-European full-degree international students, and cooperation between departments and ministries is somewhat underdeveloped. However, there is some acknowledgement of the importance of developing relationships with students from developing countries and those from strategically important countries like Belarus, for example. There is also some momentum

---

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.studyinpoland.pl>

developing, particularly through the activities of Perspektywy, to focus more on the recruitment of tuition fee paying students as well as regain some of the Polish talent that has migrated to other countries. While there is greater attention given to internationalisation generally and the provision of support services to international students more specifically, the OECD observation in 2007 that “there is no national policy to stimulate activities directed towards internationalisation. There is no clarity about any legal instruments which might need to be put in place to foster the internationalisation of the system,” continues to be largely true in Poland today.

Student services provision in general is not well developed in Poland. As with many countries where the implementation of tuition fees is a relatively new concept, the idea of ‘service delivery’ in universities (and the subsequent expectation among students for professionally delivered support services) is in its infancy. The growing private sector in Poland is facilitating something of a change in attitude towards the delivery of student services, but essentially this is only now becoming an issue for all institutions of higher education. The work undertaken by Perspektywy, particularly in terms of professional development through conferences and presentations, is highlighting the importance of this issue and the committee behind the ‘Study in Poland’ initiative ensures something of a holistic view, incorporating university and government representatives.

The role of support services for non-European full-degree international students could be currently described as being in a ‘pioneering’ phase in Poland, where their relevance is acknowledged by many stakeholders but action has yet to be fully or cohesively implemented. Perspektywy is likely to play a pivotal role in the future development of this agenda, supporting examples of good practice throughout Polish institutions, in addition to facilitating government-level support for issues including immigration, work regulations and student financial support.

### *United Kingdom*

Two key bodies exist in the UK to explicitly help support international students, The British Council and the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). There is, however, no overarching national policy on international students in the UK and, overall, there is little appetite for a common policy on services, not least because the sector is now too large and too independent for this to be relevant. Indeed, any kind of central intervention is likely not to be welcomed by individual universities and colleges because student support is now viewed as an area of significant competition among institutions and the provision of services for international students is one that is essentially driven by the positioning of the institution in the marketplace.

Among UK education providers, a clear understanding exists of what student services are—from visa advice, admissions counselling, advice on housing, airport meeting and greeting, and support of all kinds throughout the programme of study. Moreover, tuition fees and the increasing competitive advantage of offering additional services to international students has made the role of these very services more important. There is a common understanding in this context, therefore, that should universities and colleges want to remain competitive and make an impact on their markets, student services have to be of the highest standard.

Though lacking an explicit national strategy in this area, the UK does benefit from a broad network of policies and actions at various levels that support the provision of high quality student services. This is evident in the work of UKCISA, the National Student Survey, the National Union of Students, initiatives such as i-graduate's International Student Barometer, and work currently being undertaken around the quality of postgraduate supervision. While many of these activities are aimed at national students, they also impact on the experience and perception of international students in the UK, and contribute to an almost self-governing environment. The introduction of the Prime Minister's Initiatives (PMI 1 and PMI 2) has undoubtedly heightened the awareness of UK institutions about the overall concerns of international students in the UK and their welfare and student experience. Indeed, PMI 1, launched in 1999, and PMI 2, announced in 2006, set into motion a series of coordinated activities designed to energetically promote UK higher education abroad—through branding, a dedicated website, various publications, related campaigns, and collaboration with agents—to attract tens of thousands of new international students to UK higher and further education.<sup>12</sup> The British Council was called to play a primary role in these activities.

The British Council defines itself as “the United Kingdom’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities,” with the primary objective of building “engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide.”<sup>13</sup> It is a registered charity, established in 1934 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1940. It operates at arm’s length from the UK Government and, as such, does not implement UK Government policy. The British Council is funded to a great degree by its own revenue generation activities with an approximate GBP 232 million from the sale of services. In addition, it receives a further GBP 189 million from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, GBP 7 million in grants from other government departments and GBP 122 million from a range of

---

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi2-history.htm>

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/about-us/who-we-are/vision-purpose-and-values/>



other sources, including sponsorship, matching funds and administration of scholarships.

The British Council does not organise or deliver direct services to international students *per se*. Rather, the responsibility for international students, and international education more generally, lies with the Education UK Partnership, which is managed and supported by the British Council. Launched in April 2005, the Partnership has more than 290 members from the higher, further and independent education sectors. Education UK Partnership members are able to access material that will support them in the provision of student services or good practice measures. Membership may also allow institutions to access advice or participate in pilot schemes that may have an impact on the provision of their services.

The other significant body in the UK, UKCISA, is an independent entity funded by a mix of subscriptions from 500 member institutions, some UK Government support, and revenue from training courses and other activities. At present its main aims are to:

- Increase support for international education and raise awareness of its values and benefits;
- Promote opportunities for greater student mobility;
- Encourage best practice and professional development for those working to support international students in the UK.

In order to achieve these aims, UKCISA's work includes the monitoring and influencing of government and education sector policy through close contact with senior officials, policy makers, partner organisations, and sector bodies throughout the UK; producing regular electronic and print publications to inform members and students about current legislation, regulations and resources; delivering training and advising services (for both members and students/members of the public); supporting, sustaining and expanding a network of members committed to the ideals of international education and high standards of international student support; initiating and encouraging research which helps to identify key issues and areas for future investigation and development; and working indirectly and in partnership with others to encourage greater mobility into and out of the UK.

UKCISA is currently focusing much of its attention on two areas. One is the provision of information and advice to UK institutions and incoming international students in light of the recent changes to immigration procedures and visa requirements for the UK. In this area, it is important to note that UKCISA represents its members and their interests on the Joint Education Task Force,



working on immigration issues and changes to the UK visa/immigration policies. The other key area of focus for UKCISA at the moment is the overall improvement of the international student experience in the UK in association with the Prime Minister's Initiative.

UKCISA provides information directly to institutions and international students, either before students arrive in the UK or during their studies. An indication of the scope of their work is reflected in statistics from their 2008/09 Annual Report. During that period, UKCISA answered 11 000 advice calls, distributed 1000 copies of the UKCISA manual, sent out regular mailings to 2500 recipients, had 1300 subscribers to its email discussion list, and received 40 000 hits per month on the organisation's homepage.

Of the current funding of GBP 7 million in PMI 2, GBP 387 000 has been dedicated to researching the quality of the international student experience in the UK. UKCISA and its membership work together in this area very closely. Part of this focus has been to make what might previously have been termed 'Cinderella' services (welfare support for international students) central to the international student experience in the UK. There have been three particular developments that are relevant in this context:

- The International Student Calculator<sup>14</sup> has been launched to help prospective international students with their budgeting and money management.
- The Prepare for Success website<sup>15</sup>, developed in association with the University of Southampton, caters to international students before they arrive, in terms of providing a range of information relevant to their forthcoming study experience at a UK institution. There is a great concentration here on the way in which all levels of study programmes are delivered in the UK, how students are expected to study and the common learning styles.
- Teaching and Learning for International Students (TALIS) has been launched in association with the Higher Education Academy to focus on learning support and academic development for international students in the UK.

---

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.studentcalculator.org.uk/international>

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk>

## 2.5 Conclusion

Altogether, the work of the national organisations and advisory bodies profiled in this study provides ample evidence of a broad range of activity at the national level relevant to international student services. Unique national contexts and traditions, the particular characteristics of the local higher education system, and resource opportunities and obstacles all serve to influence the way in which these bodies conceive of their roles and choose to act in this sphere.

Though distinct in many ways, the study countries do share on some level, however, a fundamental interest in developing and sustaining internationally competitive higher education institutions. Attracting and ultimately graduating talented international students can contribute to this objective, and offering appropriate services to this population is an important component on the way to ensuring student satisfaction and success.

As the discussion evolves around the topic of a distinctly European higher education ‘brand’, the national organisations and advisory bodies active in internationalisation may wish to seriously consider crafting a more cohesive message about the international student experience in Europe. One way to do this could be through the adoption of a code of conduct or ‘good practice’ for international student services provision at the European level, which could articulate a baseline understanding of what non-European students could expect in this area. In addition to providing a framework of understanding for students, such a tool could also serve as an important reference point for many countries that are working to more systematically implement and/or assess support services for international students. Chapter 7 provides one example of how such a code might look.

Regardless of developments on the specific question of a code of conduct, national-level organisations will likely continue to play a key role in the areas of information provision to both institutions and students, and in the representation of the internationalisation agenda—including international student support—to both domestic and foreign audiences.

### 3 The institutional perspective: Service delivery approaches and challenges

Why are we talking so much of services now, given that large numbers of international students have attended European institutions for decades, and indeed, centuries? The framework in which students now find themselves, and the kinds of students that come in increasing numbers to European institutions for degree study, have changed. All of this poses new challenges both to institutions and to students. Larger numbers of students than ever before are now coming from outside of Europe and from countries without historical, cultural or linguistic links to the region. Indeed, preliminary findings from ACA's work on the EURODATA II: Study on Mobility Developments in European Higher Education project—to be made public in late 2010—indicate that the share of non-European students as a proportion of the total number of international students in Europe grew from 45.6 percent (or 510 749) in 1998/99 to 49.5 percent (or 745 868) in 2006/07. In addition, the new degree structures adopted by most European institutions are less flexible than in years past. They require students to be functional from the start of the programme, and to progress at 'full speed' from the very beginning and throughout the duration of study. Institutions recognise the value, therefore, of creating environments where students are able to concentrate on their studies from the start, without having to waste time or energy on practical issues related to living abroad.

In many countries, and at many institutions, support for international students has become an imperative. Institutional quality is beginning to be measured not only in terms of teaching, but also as a function of the availability of facilities, services, and overall student support. However, not all institutions have reached this level of awareness and commitment to student services, and in many cases student support is still seen as an add-on, addressed only by dedicated staff in the international office, but without a strategic approach or institution-wide commitment. Understandably, the extent and organisation of international student services—as well as the motivation to provide this support—varies between countries and institutions; there is no agreed-upon 'minimum' threshold of provision, no one 'good practice organisational model', and no single justification for the investment in international student services. However, the main objectives of service provision (both for international students as well as for the general student population) turn on two main issues: **satisfaction with the overall student experience** and—often more importantly—**academic success** (decreasing drop-outs and improving performance and on-time graduation). The specific support given to international students is mainly justified by the perception of greater needs of these students, and the importance of international student enrolment to the

institution or the country as a whole. Many other factors play a role in the development of student services at national or institutional levels, and the interplay among these various issues is not easy to decipher.

### 3.1 Motivating student support

The introduction of **tuition fees** in several countries may have changed both international students' expectations with regard to the overall offer of institutions, as well as institutional attitudes towards students. It should be noted, however, that students who do not pay any tuition fees may also be very demanding in terms of the educational and student services on offer, as studying is always an investment, whether fees are paid or not. Also, the increasing offer of **English-taught programmes** at European institutions—which, according to one estimate<sup>16</sup> has grown approximately threefold in the period 2002 to 2007—creates a new situation in which degree students may not master the local language of the country in which they study, and thus may not be in a position to effectively manage issues such as finding housing or navigating the host university administration on their own. At the same time, there may be a danger that full-degree students who are studying in the language of the host country rather than in English receive little to no attention. In other words, foreign students using the local language may be more easily overlooked as international students as compared to exchange students and those studying in programmes taught in English.

While it is clear that an institution's reputation still hinges primarily on its teaching and research profile, the quality and availability of facilities and services is often an important factor taken into consideration by prospective students. **Attracting** a significant international student body, which graduates on time and is satisfied with the experience, is not sustainable in the long term without adequate student support structures. And without international students, an institution's global standing may be negatively affected. In other words, to be international, or internationally attractive, institutions need to offer specific support to international students, making sure they are able to come (visa support), stay (housing and permits), progress (study support) and be happy with their lives (social activities, etc.).

Several German institutions suffer from a high **drop-out** rate of non-European full-degree students, and some believe that there may be a direct link to the provision of services (or lack thereof), as the present situation dictates that students have to navigate the administration largely alone, diverting their attention from studies to solving everyday problems. However, in Germany

---

<sup>16</sup> Bernd Wächter & Friedhelm Maiworm, *English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education*, ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education, Bonn: Lemmens 2008.

the institutional funding received from the government will be altered in the coming years so that one-third of all funds will be tied to students (including international students) completing their programme. It will therefore be very important to institutions to retain their degree students, and do what it takes to enable them to graduate on time. Indeed, it is likely that all institutions will be compelled to look after their international students better by providing a more extensive range of services.

Student services can also become a **'unique selling point'** for institutions that may not be able to compete as successfully otherwise. The Danish VIA University College, which is a small college located outside the capital city area, has adopted the philosophy of 'the caring institution', and sees itself as providing a '24/7 framework' for all its students (domestic as well as international), with support in three main areas: study, accommodation, and spare time. Because VIA has been working hard to attract domestic students for years, service systems are already in place at this institution which are not available in many other institutions in the same country. The case of VIA provides support for the assumption that institutions which have had to make an extra effort to attract domestic students, and thus to improve their services, may be better positioned to extend those services to international students. Indeed, often the main challenge is not setting up the support structures themselves, but rather changing the institutional approach and prevailing mentality. Some institutions in continental Europe are particularly challenged when it comes to developing and sustaining international student support services because they do not have a tradition of providing such services for their domestic students.

In this respect, large, better known, and well positioned institutions are especially challenged, as the immediate pressure of enhancing institutional attractiveness is not as strongly felt, and changes are slower to take place. An interviewee at the University of Rome La Sapienza, for example, underlined how they have actually "too many" international students, representing a financial cost to the institution, and thus trying to attract more international students is not at all a priority. In such cases, developing special support structures, and investing resources in these students, is often hard to justify.

On the other hand, not all agree that more is necessarily better. Indeed, beyond limitations posed by practical aspects such as human and other resources, institutions may well decide not to offer all the services they could potentially afford to provide. From culture to culture, sentiments run deep and vary widely in regard to what is too little and what is too much in the way of student support. For example, fears about "pampering students" have been expressed in some quarters. There is unlikely to be one 'right' answer to these questions: institutions must think carefully about what kind of image

they want to maintain or create, and how best to achieve this. Similarly, the differences in approach may be linked to different academic cultures and traditions, and as such must also be respected and maintained. However, it is very important to manage students' expectations, and to ensure, to the degree possible, that students understand what they are signing onto. For example, as the Aarhus School of Business (ASB) puts it, it is important that the institution communicate clearly to the students that they are expected to do some things for themselves, as ASB will not look after every detail for them.

### **3.2 Strategic approaches to services**

The new and increasing needs of international students, as well as their greater expectations for institutional support, in many cases have been addressed in an ad hoc fashion by the international offices, departments, or student organisations, and often without adequate structures, institutional support, or resources. However, several institutions have started to realise that student services must find a recognised place in institutional strategy, and that increasing recruitment abroad, the extension of English language programmes, the effort to attract some of the best students in the world, and the goal of becoming a truly international university must go hand in hand with the effective development of student services. When planning and evaluating services in a truly strategic fashion, it is imperative to keep in mind why these services are or should be offered in the first place. Are they to have happier students, or better performance? Or are they to mark a competitive advantage *vis à vis* 'rival' institutions?

From the interviews carried out in the context of this study it seems that, while an internationalisation strategy (or minimally the mention of internationalisation in the overall institutional strategy and mission) is starting to be the norm rather than the exception, an explicit inclusion of student support—and that of international students in particular—in such strategies is widely absent. Inasmuch as there were few cases in this study where an institution had no internationalisation strategy, so too were there few instances where an institution had formulated a position in relation to student services. However, it is clear that trying to boost internationalisation without adequate support for international students is likely to create several problems, both for students and for institutions. Such difficulties may begin with an overwhelmed and ineffective exchange or international relations office, to longer term detrimental impacts on institutional attractiveness through negative feedback by disappointed and unhappy students. For example, provision of English-taught programmes has to go hand in hand with adequate institutional communication in English, as well as a sufficient number of staff—across the institution—who can communicate in English. As aptly expressed by an interviewee at the VIA

University College in Denmark, “when an institution starts to recruit and host international students it requires a complete change of structures, practices, etc.”. In the enthusiastic rush to promote and recruit internationally, this fact seems to have been forgotten at many institutions. Managing student expectations is another critical component in this discussion. Interviews at the University of Sussex, for example, highlight a concern from the International Students’ Support unit that they have very little control of the ‘support’ message that Sussex student recruitment representatives and agents send out in particular countries. The International Students’ Support unit would like to be in a position to better manage the expectations of international students even from the earliest stages of student contact with the institution. Indeed, to be able to meet student expectations, the first crucial step is that the people involved in recruitment cooperate closely with those who will take care of the students once they arrive. Indeed, some universities have reported great benefits from joining the recruitment and support functions.

The University of Copenhagen claims to have moved over the past five years from what could be described as a naïve approach to internationalisation to a more strategic and purposeful approach. The recruitment of exchange students has not been difficult, but the institution is now keen to recruit more international degree students, especially at the masters level. However, as seen in several other continental European institutions, the University of Copenhagen has no central policy or standard for services for full-degree students (although such a policy does exist in relation to exchange students). This leads to significant differences in the extent of services provided by different faculties and programmes. While overall the level of services is considered relatively good, the growing numbers of students are placing pressure on some faculties to provide more with fewer resources. There is also a common dilemma in terms of managing institutional commitment and resource deployment for the development of international student services. The core challenge is that the services should be in place before any full-degree students are recruited, yet actual recruitment and enrolment patterns cannot necessarily be accurately predicted in advance. Ideally, the investment in student services should be seen as a necessary and long term commitment if an institution wants to recruit international students to its programmes.

The Politecnico di Milano has had a comprehensive internationalisation strategy since 2005. Unique among most of the institutions examined in the context of this study, the Politecnico di Milano’s internationalisation strategy makes explicit reference to international student services. The main areas of the strategy are: 1) development of marketing, 2) credential evaluation, and 3) services. A central success factor has been the full support of the rector(s), which has helped to overcome some resistance in the administration. Since



the launch of the strategy, there has been an investment of EUR 1 million in internationalisation by the institution, including recruitment of a large number of staff for the international offices. The significant investment has been justified in terms of the Politecnico's goal to become one of the top 10 technical universities in Europe, and among the top 100 in the world. For this, it needs to be highly internationalised. Also the Bremen University of Applied Sciences launched a formal internationalisation policy in 2009, with support and counseling for international students as an integral part of this strategy. The Bremen approach considers counseling and support as "pillars of the international component" and proposes several specific action lines relevant to this work, such as an alumni network of international and German students, liaison offices to provide counseling in particular target countries, and events such as International Days to be organised in cooperation with national and international students. One of the further objectives of increased services to international students at Bremen is to decrease the drop-out rate among this population.

Some internal conflicts are likely to appear when discussing the allocation of resources and institutional priorities more generally. However, it seems clear that a minimal degree of consistency and strategic commitment to international student services can be beneficial not only to the international students (who would likely be better served), but also to the institution. Indeed, one of the main messages that has emerged from the study is that international issues cannot continue to be considered tangential to institutional strategy, and in a similar fashion student support should not be seen as peripheral to the effort to internationalise. Some of the problems mentioned by students in the context of this study highlight that a 'whole of institution approach' should be developed; and indeed, to facilitate the integration of international students into the broader society, and to reap the full benefits of their presence, a 'whole of government and society approach' is required when it comes to recruiting and hosting international students, particularly those who do not speak the local language. While some institutions still have a long way to go in this area, there are also encouraging examples. For example, the management of the Aarhus School of Business (ASB) in Denmark is strongly promoting a 'whole of institution approach.' ASB requires its staff to take an integrated approach to internationalisation and international students—which in practice means to attend to the international dimension in all aspects of their work—with the use of English considered a key element in this.

In addition to the previously mentioned mentality that students should largely be able to take care of themselves, and that 'doing it the hard way' is an integral part of what it means to grow up, there are also other issues that may hinder the development of international student services. At several institu-



tions, especially in Italy and Poland, the main foreign language spoken by older generations is not English. Consequently, it has been mentioned that professors who do not know English well (or at all) may feel diminished in their importance and status in the growing push to establish English language programmes. Internationalisation should be seen as a process of adapting to new approaches and situations. Feedback from several institutions examined in this study indicates that a 'generation change' is needed to facilitate fundamental changes in the prevailing mentality with regard to internationalisation and international student support. For example, at several German institutions an attitude of the 'survival of the fittest' persists, both in regard to international as well as national students.

There may also be internal resistance related to the notion of equity—i.e. investment in a few international students when the majority of domestic students are missing many important services too. Some institutions have registered either perceptions of tension or even outright hostility among national students in the face of superior services and privileges accorded to international students. However, institutions are beginning to realise that treating all students the same may not serve international students effectively or even make sense. Indeed, treating international students the same as national students may in some ways place foreign students at a significant disadvantage.

### **3.3 Practical organisation and sharing of responsibilities**

In addition to the prevailing institutional philosophy of internationalisation and student services, the level of development of student services depends of course on a number of other factors. Such factors include the level of internationalisation of the institution, the language(s) of tuition, institutional size and staff-student ratio, international promotion and recruitment activities, tuition fee levels, and—importantly—the prevailing academic culture. The continuum may thus range from a 'student as a customer' approach to a more traditional view of students as beneficiaries of free (or highly subsidised) education. In a similar fashion, the perceived role of the university ranges from that of a 'care taker' institution to that of a more disinterested 'knowledge dispatcher'. In addition, institutions are in most cases faced with the great challenge of matching institutional resources with international student needs, across a range of conditions that may be very difficult: very large numbers or very small numbers of international students, limited staff, limited funding, remote locations, lack of national level support, and so on. All of these conditions also influence, at least in part, the organisational structure that is adopted for the delivery of international student services.

In the main, international offices (or their equivalents) take care of international degree students. This is not always in their formal area of responsibility.

However, it appears to be common practice that, lacking better alternatives, the office initially created to support only exchange students also ends up helping international degree students. Often some support—especially that related directly to academic issues—is also given at the faculty or department level. At some large multi-faculty institutions, the decentralised system for dealing with full-degree students seems to lead to quite varied levels of support across the different faculties or departments. At the University of Warsaw, for example, some faculties recruit a large number of international full-degree students, have done so for years, and have even established their own international offices, while others provide fewer services and the Erasmus coordinator looks after all of the international students. When services are provided centrally for exchange students, there is a possibility that the smaller number of full-degree students receive less support. It is also common that students in ‘elite’ programmes, such as the Erasmus Mundus masters programmes, or in English language programmes (which may be the only programmes charging tuition fees within an institution!), benefit from more comprehensive services than other students. While such differentiation may not seem fair, especially in the long term, some institutions have reported that the existence of such ‘pilot programmes’ has supported wider recognition of the importance of student services, promoting positive changes in mentality at the institutional level. Institutions might still wish to consider widening the services of the ‘elite programmes’ to all international students to ensure that all non-domestic students attending a given institution (or even a programme in a specific country) receive the same scope and quality of services. In the meantime, good care should be taken to inform students correctly about the availability of services for their programme, with explanations about why variations in support may exist across programmes.

The degree to which student organisations have a central role in the delivery of services varies significantly. For example at Trier University in Germany there is enormous reliance on student-led solutions for international student support, either through the Internationales Zentrum, AStA or the country-interest societies on campus. It is as though the central services of the university have passed their duty of care wholesale to these organisations. Likewise at some Italian institutions, the Erasmus Student Network—originally created to support Erasmus exchange students—delivers important services to all international students, including degree students. The use of students in providing support for international students is certainly not a bad idea: using fellow students to help newcomers may have several advantages, ranging from cost savings for the institution, to more effective transmission of information among peers rather than to students from a more distant bureaucratic structure. Several good practice examples are described in Chapter 5. To mention but one here, Humboldt University employs more than 1000 current students

in all aspects of service provision for other students. This is a necessity due to limited resources, but the university has also observed some very positive aspects of this approach including fostering a notion of mutual support, volunteerism, student employment and allowing students to earn ECTS credits through their involvement. The university would like extend the use of students in the provision of student services, but this effort is currently blocked by labour union opposition. While recognising the benefits of student-to-student support, good practice seems to require that institutions take up the over-arching responsibility for the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and quality of the services, and not leave sensitive issues entirely in the hands of student organisations.

The institutional responses to questions regarding first priority areas of action in the coming few years indicate the emerging importance of the following in welcoming international students: services for families, accommodation, language (more English language materials, information, and English-speaking staff at institutions where some of the programmes are taught entirely in English), and support with finding job or internship opportunities (particularly for students in programmes taught in other than the local language). Many also recognise the need to train staff in international issues and intercultural skills, even though there appears to be little interest shown by staff for such activities across the institutions.

In terms of organisational structures, the creation of one central reference place for all enquiries of international students (be it a welcome office, a help-desk, or something similar) has been put on the agenda by several institutions, including the University of Copenhagen, University of Coventry, and University of Rome La Sapienza. In addition to enabling students to get all or most of the required information and support from one source, centralising international student support may also increase the cost-efficiency of services, by reducing service duplication. Concentrating international skills and competencies in one office may also enhance the quality of services, and ensure a comprehensive approach to information provision, among other things.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Higher education institutions in Europe answer to many constituencies and operate in a context of increasing demands and limited resources. As in all areas of their work, these organisations must carefully weigh costs and benefits, consider opportunities and obstacles, and operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. The determination of how best to respond to the needs of full-degree international students must therefore be made with the benefit of information in hand that is as current and accurate as possible. It also

requires a degree of strategic decision-making and prioritisation of interests that make sense for the host institution, based on its unique strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations.

As the higher education community in Europe moves forward in its efforts to attract and retain ever larger numbers of full-degree students from around the world, it will become increasingly important for individual institutions to make careful decisions about what they can and cannot offer in the way of support services. Quality, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability will be important elements to consider in this enterprise.

## 4 The student perspective: Needs and expectations for services

A critically important aspect of the student services discussion is the question of needs analysis. There are many ways to assess what services are most appropriate and effective to support international students coming to Europe for full-degree study, but one of the most obvious (and seemingly least employed) is to query students directly. The ENATIS project did just that.

Over the course of two months in 2009, a 27-question online survey was made available to the international students enrolled in the institutions participating in the study.<sup>17</sup> A total of 1278 responses were received from students from 124 countries. The majority of respondents were enrolled in postgraduate programmes (47% at the masters or the equivalent level and 13% in PhD programmes or other research activities), with 40 percent of the responses coming from international undergraduate students. The largest number of students (46%) was in either their first year or enrolled in one-year programmes. Some 59 percent of all respondents indicated that they paid tuition fees.

The survey was structured to provide feedback on the experience of students with certain types of support, and the relative importance of certain services, during three distinct phases of the international student experience: pre-arrival, upon arrival at the host institution, and over the course of the study experience while the student has been enrolled at the host institution.

### 4.1 What services do full-degree non-European students want?

It appears that many institutions are working to make the necessary administrative and logistical changes to implement the delivery of new services for full-degree international students. Yet, many institutions still find it difficult to inform students about specific services as well as the overall apparatus available to assist them. The majority of respondents (76%) reported that before they arrived at the institution they received information that was general in nature and not tailored to either their specific country or unique circumstances. In addition, as many students (39%) received information infrequently from their institution as did receive frequent contact (39%) about their programme of study or the services offered. Perhaps more critical, a relatively significant

---

<sup>17</sup> The institutions themselves circulated the survey to the students, and the project requested that only full-degree international students from outside Europe be selected to respond. However, it was not always possible to ensure that other categories of international students were excluded, given that institutional record-keeping for international students does not always distinguish between full-degree and short-term exchange students, or European versus non-European students. The impact of these 'extraneous' responses is considered to be negligible for the overall analysis, however.

minority of international students (21%) complained of not receiving any contact at all from the institution where they subsequently enrolled.

Of the international students receiving information from their host institution, the majority believe that the material was either of an excellent (15%) or good (47%) quality. However, over a quarter of international students (27%) believe that the information they received before arriving was of a poor standard, with an additional small proportion (11%) indicating that it was inadequate for their purposes.

Ultimately, (and irrespective of the tuition fee environment in which international students find themselves), mobile students expect institutions to offer them support services that enable them to make informed decisions about where they want to study and, ultimately, improve their opportunities for a successful period of international study. In many ways, this is by no means a new phenomenon given the long experience of many institutions working with visiting and exchange students, where the provision of services for students pursuing academic programmes of a shorter period is commonplace. But in the increasingly competitive environment of international, non-European student mobility and recruitment, the variety and quality of services offered by an institution is significant.

#### *Pre-arrival*

##### **Student comments:**

*“A lot more information is needed regarding finding an apartment. This should be done before the arrival of students, since this is a huge cost for students. A better understanding of the country-specific administrative procedures is also needed.”*

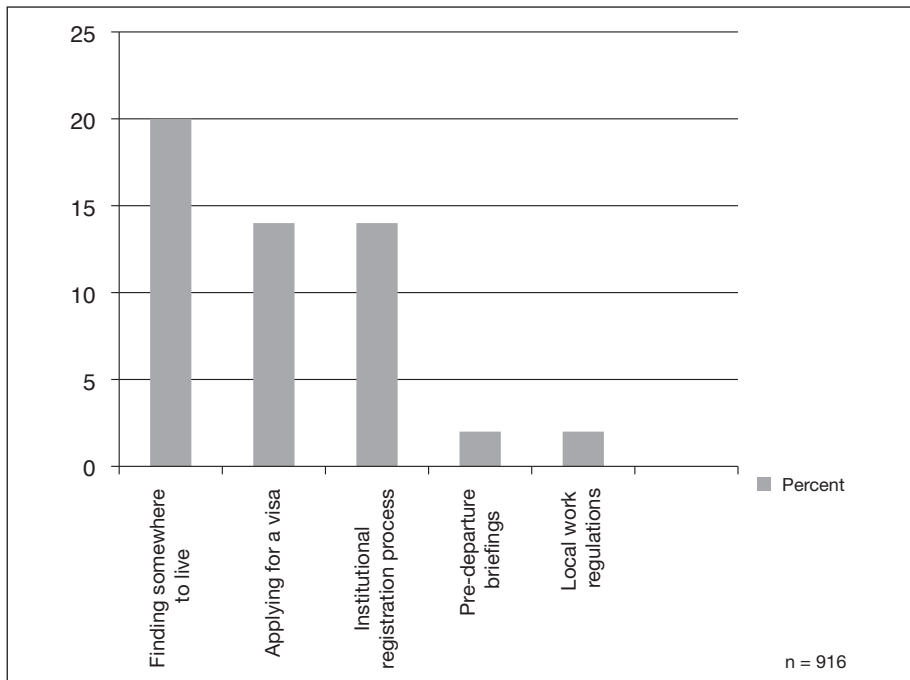
*“It would have been really helpful to have everybody explaining the same thing and not sending me to one office only to find out that I needed to go to another. Then back to the same one because there are different rules for different people.”*

*“More general information. They left everything to us in order to find out any kind of information which many students did through Facebook with older classmates. However, when you’re moving out of the country I think special attention should be paid to make sure everyone understands what they need or should be expecting.”*

But what services do non-European students expect to see offered by potential institutions during the information gathering and application (i.e. pre-arrival) period? While expectations of the services that should be offered vary by different student groups, and by academic level and nationality, a relatively clear

set of ‘priority’ services emerges from the interviews and survey. As Figure 1 illustrates, students indicate a range of services offered to them before they arrive that they consider most essential. The single most important service offered by institutions, according to international students, is support to help them find somewhere to live, either institutionally owned or managed or located in the local private accommodation sector. One fifth (20%) of respondents identified support to find “somewhere to live” as the most important service offered to them by universities, which stood out in relative terms as significantly more important than any other pre-arrival service. In comments received from students both from the survey and the site visits throughout Europe, the importance of accommodation is very clear. In almost all cases, the desire to be offered support to either find accommodation before arrival, or at a minimum be offered advice on the type, cost and location of housing available to incoming non-European full-degree students, supersedes all other service concerns outside of the academic arena. The concern is of course understandable and—despite the majority of responses to the survey coming from masters and PhD students—applicable to many students, irrespective of their age, previous international experience, or cultural background.

**Figure 1: Of the services offered pre-arrival, which do you regard as the most important?**



Interestingly, students were less focused on their prospective university or college offering them dedicated, institutionally-owned accommodation. Rather, their concerns were directed towards the provision of information about all types of available housing, the cost of accommodation, the safety and the relative location of the accommodation to the institution, and the process of securing somewhere to live.

The next two most important support services offered to prospective students in the pre-arrival phase were help with “applying for a visa” and “institutional registration process” (both identified by 14% of respondents). Students expect to receive detailed advice in both of these areas, one focused on the more generic issue of gaining a study visa for their particular country of interest through the offices of the relevant authority, the other concerned with an administrative process directly under the control of either the host university or the specific faculty in which they hope to study. In terms of visas, students make it clear that they expect to receive clear and up-to-date information on the relevant issues and procedures, even though they are often aware that it is not the responsibility of the individual institution to actually secure them a visa for their studies. This is potentially one of the key service areas that institutions will need to address in the future, not least with a tightening of study visa processes and requirements in a number of countries, in addition to greater legal obligations placed on institutions by immigration authorities.

Students’ interest in having the institutional registration procedures and requirements accurately explained to them in a simple form before they arrive is also significant. Students, particularly those intending to study at the post-graduate level, are often unfamiliar with the unique academic environments in the host institution and are therefore unaware of procedures that may seem obvious to either local students or those who have already completed a period of international study. Key concerns often focus on the academic requirements needed to fulfil the obligations of a particular programme of study, for example the number of compulsory or optional courses that have to be completed, or the way in which each institutional registration process actually operates. Additionally, a broader issue often raised by non-European full-degree students related to the institutional registration process is the need for a detailed explanation of the way in which their programme of study will be structured. Central to the concerns of many students in this respect, again particularly those with no previous international study experience, is the need to understand what study skills and methods will be required of them in their new study environment. Many students are unaware of the European style of studying and so require detailed explanations of how programmes will

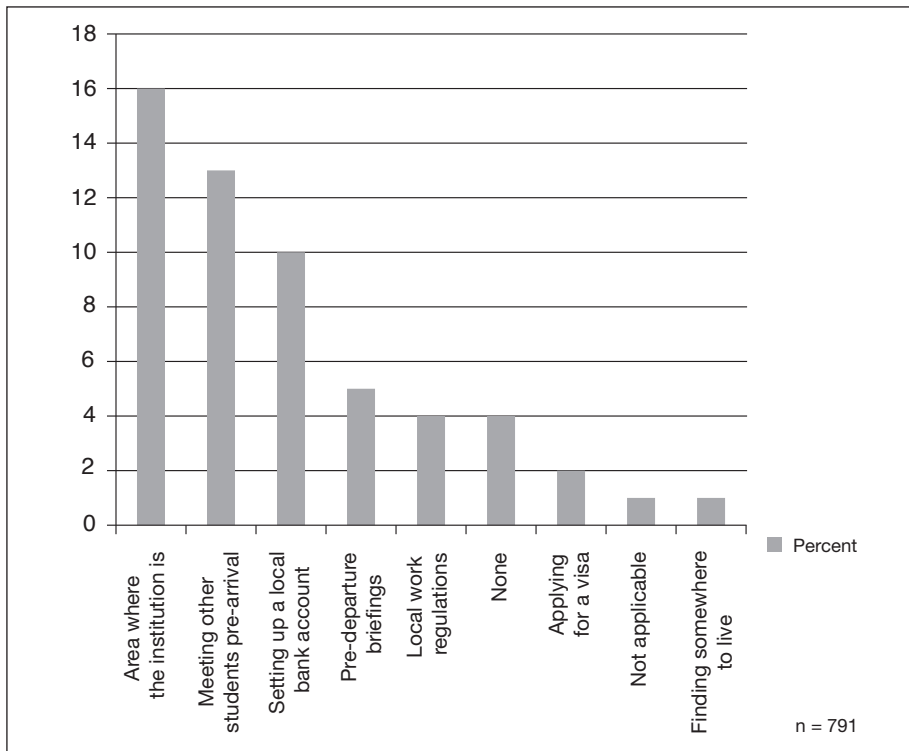


be taught, what academic facilities will be available to them, how their programme of study will be assessed and what individual academic staff members will expect from them in terms of work and their contributions in the classroom.

For the future, institutions should pay attention—and respond—to the call for more comprehensive and meaningful pre-arrival information in the three key areas of student support identified by the student respondents. However, it should also be noted that students from very diverse national and cultural backgrounds present a similarly diverse range of demands in terms of pre-arrival service provision. There is a considerable clustering of other service concerns in the survey results, including the importance of “pre-departure briefings” for students in their home country and information on “local work regulations” (both 2% of respondents). Other services consistently indicated as being of some importance to students before they arrive include information on financial aid, scholarships and detailed breakdowns of living costs, language preparation programmes, and integration activities.

While there is undoubtedly an increasing demand from non-European full-degree students for the provision of critical support services before they begin their programme of study, the extent to which students require their host institution to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive range of services is not clear. International students apply and act as individuals throughout the pre-arrival phase and as such, have varying degrees of need for support services. While many institutions throughout Europe offer impressive pre-arrival support services for all their students, this study indicates that a significant minority of students are sufficiently confident or self-sufficient not to require a menu of support services that will cover all of their possible needs. Figure 2 indicates that two particular services are regarded as the least important among those currently offered by institutions—information on the area where the institution is located (16% of respondents) and the opportunity to meet other students before arrival (13%). Other less important factors include support for opening a local bank account (10%), pre-departure briefings (5%), and information on local work regulations (4%).

**Figure 2: Of the services offered pre-arrival, which do you regard as the least important?**



Although students will perhaps always expect more support than an institution is either prepared or able to offer, it is interesting to note that a clear hierarchy exists among those services that are either regarded as most or least important. Such clear distinctions expressed by non-European full-degree students allow for a greater understanding of what prospective students may regard as essential information in the pre-arrival phase and what elements are less likely to be critical in their decision on where to study.

*On arrival***Student comments:**

“Information on housing and clear indications on the administrative aspects would have been important in all phases. Unfortunately continuous changes of the system and its rules makes it difficult to obtain clear information on the administrative aspects.”

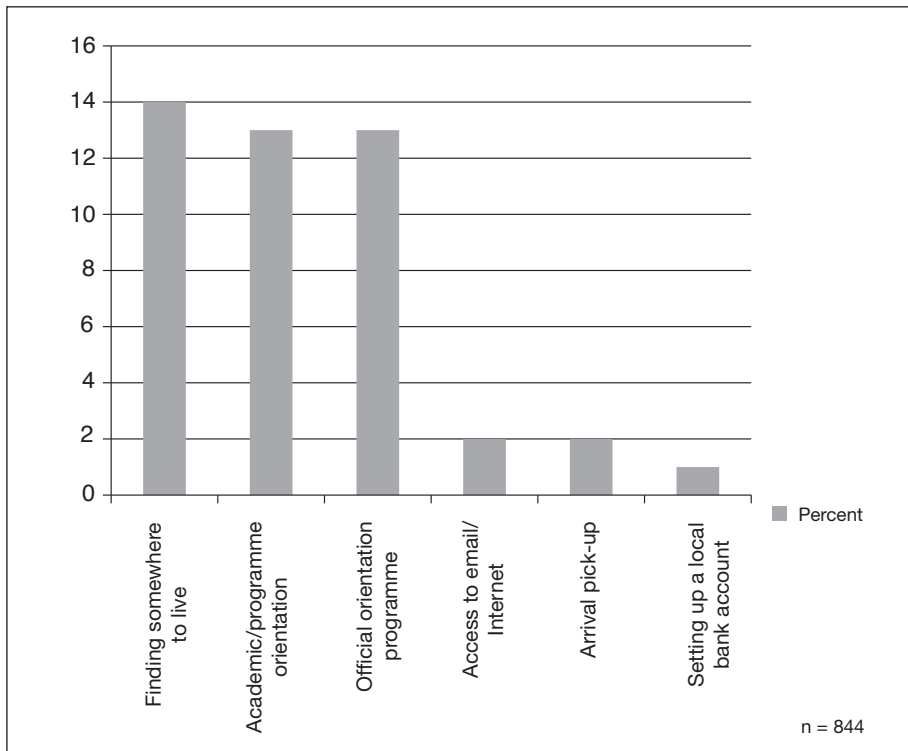
“I wish I had gotten more information before I had arrived. I did not know the city, I didn’t know what to expect in classes, and I didn’t even know when the school year began or ended, I had to call to find out.”

“Most of the information is given after arrival instead of prior to it. Most importantly, there are language barrier issues (in application for temporary residence card, insurance, etc.) that the school did nothing to help to resolve the problem.”

“Use students from years past with experience and knowledge to help the new students to answer their problems. The buddy programme is not enough from a practical standpoint, and it would be extremely beneficial to use international students who know what they went through and how to solve the problems.”

The support services non-European full-degree students perceive to be important when they arrive in the country where they intend to study, or specifically at the host university or college, provide a varied view of expectations in this area. Figure 3 reflects student opinion on the most important services offered during the arrival phase. As in the pre-arrival phase, “finding somewhere to live” (14% of respondents) and “academic/programme orientation” (13%) are regarded as the most important support services offered upon arrival. However, the relative importance with which the institution’s official orientation programme is regarded (13%) is also noteworthy. With the majority of non-European students unable to visit the host institution before they arrive to begin their studies, the importance of a well-planned and executed orientation programme is highly significant to almost all students. Students expect a comprehensive introduction to their university and its surrounding areas, including a social and academic programme that familiarises them with the local setting and enables them to meet local and other international students.

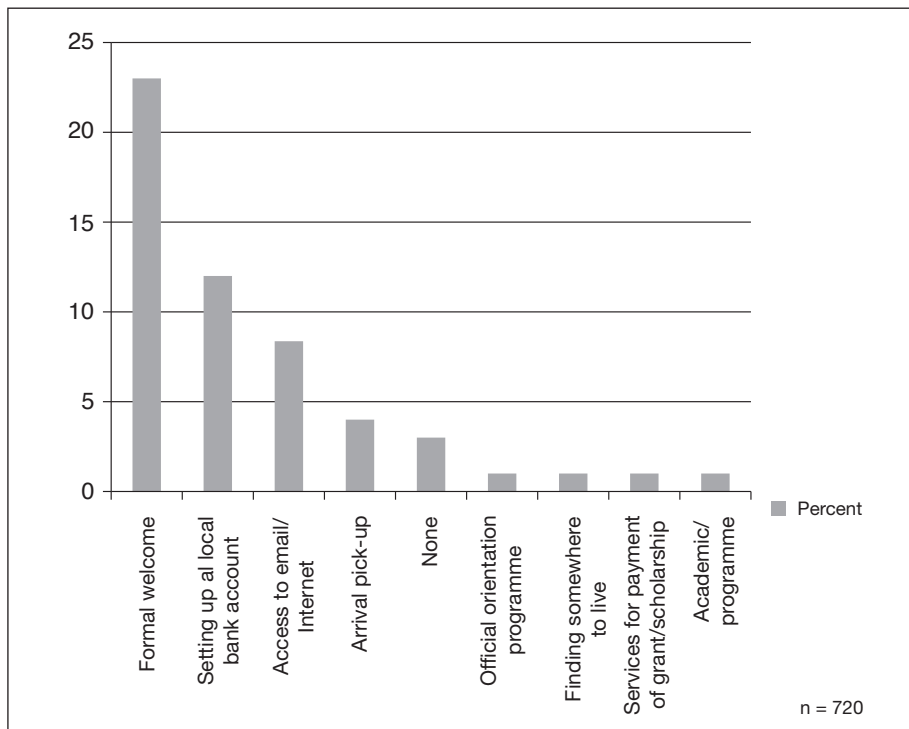
**Figure 3: Of the services offered on arrival, which do you regard as the most important?**



Perhaps more significantly, the services students indicate as most important to them and thus essential for their host institution to offer diverge somewhat from the anecdotal evidence from the field of international student recruitment. While the work of many Australian and UK institutions over the last five years has resulted in comprehensive packages of services for international students upon arrival, it appears likely that many students are focused most intently on just a few services that they consider essential for settling in to their new environment as quickly as possible. To this end, Figure 4 reflects the services that non-European students regard as the least important during the arrival phase. Services such as “setting up a local bank account” (12% of respondents) and “access to email/Internet” (8%) are regarded as being relatively less important than anticipated. This may be a function of the significant number of older, postgraduate respondents to the survey and perhaps their greater level of maturity and self-sufficiency. A further example of a commonly offered support service, purported to be of significance for

many newly arrived international students, is that of airport or arrival pick-up. While there is no doubt that to be able to meet each and every international student at their port of entry would make a lasting impression on students, the reality is that few non-European students responding to the survey regard “arrival pick-up” as the most important service offered by their institution (2%), while 4 percent of respondents actually regarded the service as being of least importance.

**Figure 4: Of the services offered on arrival, which do you regard as the least important?**



In this context, there is a more detailed discussion required between students and host institutions in order to establish which services are essential—not only during the arrival phase of the student experience but throughout students’ time at the institution—and which might be regarded as merely “nice to have.” Also important in this discussion is the question of where the responsibilities of the individual student and the academic institution begin and end. There is no doubt that the very act of encouraging international students to leave their home countries in order to pursue a full-degree programme abroad, for anywhere between

one and five years, carries with it a certain level of responsibility that the institution is required to fulfil. But by the same token, the personal responsibility of the student to organise, prepare for and embark on a period of international study cannot be underestimated. In both the pre-arrival and arrival phases of the student experience, students expect certain key services to be available to them as part of the ‘duty of care’ and the responsibility of the host institution. While the range of services may be significant, meeting key requirements—support with accommodation, advice on obtaining a visa, advice on institutional registration and an academic and institutional orientation emerge as the most significant in the present study—is the minimum students expect from their institution.

*During the programme of study*

**Student comments:**

“As a full-degree master’s student, there is NO ONE at the school who is responsible for us, or who helps us. I have gone to the international office and asked for help, and been turned away, being told that because I am not here on exchange, because I committed to two years versus 6 months, they can’t help me. Someone needs to be hired specifically to aid these full-degree students.”

“It was very important for me to know all the rules and regulations about student jobs and possibilities to work somewhere connected to your studies. We were provided with this info but already by the end of our first year of studies, when most of us have figured everything out by ourselves.”

“I would have liked a much better and well-equipped careers service with an international outlook.”

While students require the provision of key support services before and while they arrive, the support they receive throughout their programme of study can be essential if they are to have a positive and successful student experience. In this context, it is possible to divide the types of services students require between those that are more general in nature and those that are directly related to their programme of study. In some cases, depending on the country and the type of institution, service provision can be delivered at a local level, through a faculty, school or individual academic unit, or at a central level, through central institutional administrative units such as the registry, finance office or, in the case of some institutions, an international office. However, irrespective of the actual organisation of services offered by a particular institution, it is often more crucially important that students are simply made aware of where they can receive support or help when they need it.

**Figure 5: Of the services offered during your studies, which do you regard as the most important?**

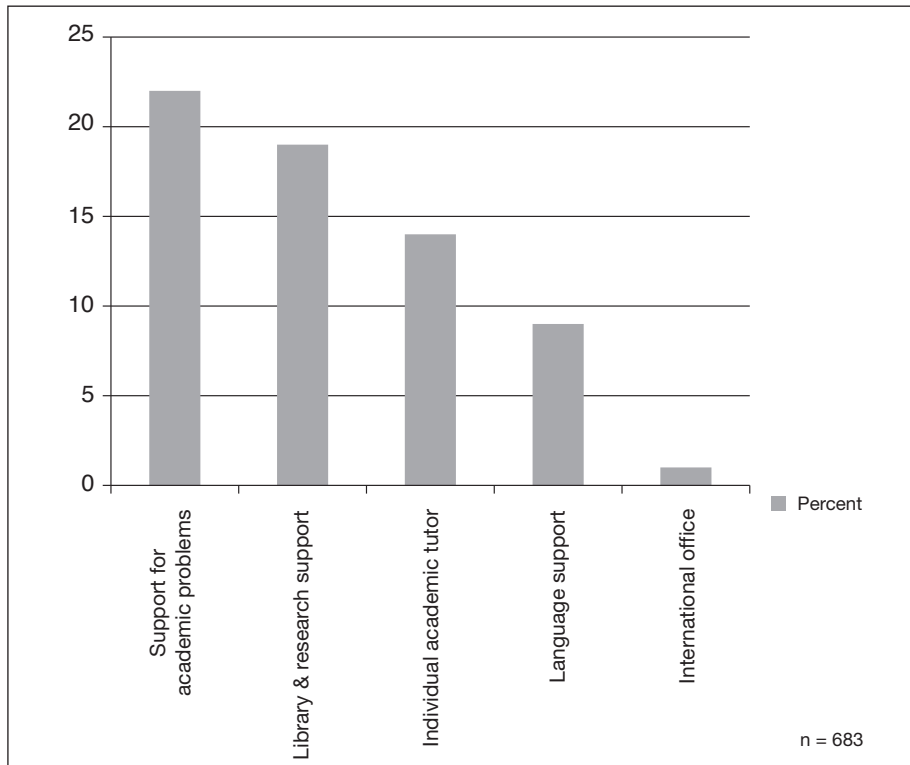


Figure 5 illustrates the general and academic services students regard as being of greatest importance to them through their period of study. Students are less concerned with the provision of more general services during their programme of study, perhaps reflecting the often formative stage of development of these types of services for many full-degree non-European students. The three most significant areas of support cited by students are all focused on specific aspects of the learning experience—“support for academic problems” (22% of all respondents), “library and research support” (19%) and access to an “individual academic tutor” (14%). The preoccupation with these areas of support seems to reflect concerns that the international learning experience requires special support for the individual student. Indeed, students are particularly focused on receiving individual counselling and support that enables them to navigate their programme and field of study as well as access to academic staff with whom they can discuss their subject area, assignments and other areas of assessment.

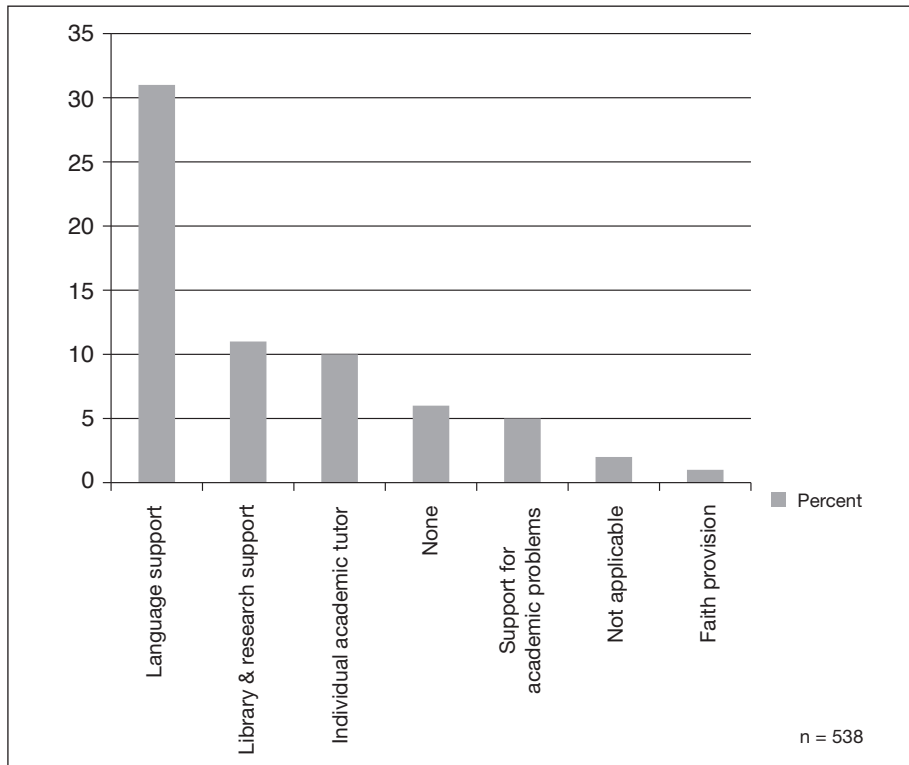
Language support is also an issue for many non-European full-degree students and their host institutions. Figures 5 and 6, however, indicate that the need for language support is rather polarised between those students who are capable and confident in the language of instruction and those who are not. Much of the reason that many students regard language support as the least most important support service offered to them (31% of all respondents) is because the language requirements set during the admissions process effectively pre-screen prospective applicants and generally ensure that students possess the necessary language skills to succeed in their chosen programme of study. In practice, however, there can be significant gaps between proficiency test results and real day-to-day functionality in a foreign language. For this reason, many ostensibly ‘proficient’ students seek additional language support, specific to their area and level of study, to ensure that they successfully engage in their academic programme.

Language support can also be seen as a much broader issue, already touched upon in the arrival phase through the students’ expressed need for specific support in academic or programme orientation. This broader issue might be termed ‘learning support’ since, on closer examination, students actually express the need not only for specific language support in their academic programme, but guidance through the local academic system so that they are aware of study requirements and study methodologies in an environment that is very different from their previous academic experience. With an ever increasing diversity of international students in universities throughout Europe, the need to ensure that students share relevant terminology and common academic and learning skills that equip them for study success is likely to be a significant issue in the area of student support in the years to come. Student respondents indicated that while they may have possessed advanced academic skills specific to their previous learning experience, the challenges of their new environment often necessitated additional support to help them acquire locally relevant study skills—for example, the use of a European university library system or the difference between small class teaching or seminar work, and the different emphasis on independent learning. Guidance in these areas was identified as being quite necessary and should ideally be provided by the host institution.

Figure 6 reflects the services that full-degree non-European students consider the least important during their study programme. Language support was regarded as the least significant for many students for the reasons outlined previously. In addition, a range of other services, including “library and research support” (11% of respondents), “individual academic tutor” (10%) and “support for academic problems” (5%) were viewed with relatively less significance. The apparent contradiction of these results when set against



**Figure 6: Of the services offered during your studies, which do you regard as the least important?**



the factors students consider most important is likely a function of the great diversity of need within the full-degree non-European student population throughout European universities. In many ways, such a situation serves as a notable reminder that, for as many students that need specific support for their programme of study or help to ensure that their living or cultural experience is as positive as possible, there are a significant number of students that require relatively little help or support. Most important for students across the board, it seems, is to be able to access the appropriate support services as and when they need them, and to be clearly aware of where to find help should they require it. From the institutional point of view, this is an important reminder that students continue to act and behave as individuals and a 'one size fits all' approach to student services may not be entirely appropriate or relevant in the current European higher education environment. In this sense, the need to ensure that service provision is based on a good understanding of what international students want and need is essential and such knowl-

edge, perhaps through student focus groups or questionnaires, should be updated on a regular basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

## 4.2 What do universities offer students?

### Student comments:

“There are many services, but the problem is that I didn’t know about most of them, especially services that could have been very useful for me if I’ve known about them before.”

“Any student services come from student organisations that we have formed ourselves and have been approved by administration.”

“If a university wants to become international and promises to offer most of the study programmes for international students in English, then I expect to receive all academic information as well as career events and further study-related events in English as well.”

“I realise now that in my university there are all the places necessary for the students’ needs, but they are not well-organised, partly because of the great number of students and partly because of the absence of specific advisors. You always need to run from one office to another, wait for hours for your turn.”

The array of services offered by institutions actively receiving international full-degree students is undoubtedly varied. There is a sense that many institutions have recognised the specific needs of international students and begun to meet these needs with a range of services, some new and others more established. In some cases, institutions have either adapted their existing provision for visiting and exchange students to include full-degree candidates or learned from administrative units engaged with short-term international students and added a separate series of such support services specifically for full-degree international students.

But the picture is mixed across the EU and institutions are in various stages of development in terms of the variety and quality of services they provide. The majority of institutions recognise that with a desire to increase the enrolment of non-European degree seeking students comes a responsibility to ensure that the overall experience for students is as fruitful as possible. This notion of a ‘duty of care’ towards non-European students has resonated with many institutional administrators, who now recognise that it is not entirely appropriate to allow students from overseas to ‘sink or swim’ at the host university or college. However, the varied stages of development in this area

exhibited by many institutions do have an impact on the type, variety and efficiency of the services provided for non-European students. That said, an increasing realisation at the senior level of the importance of service provision, often also including services for local and EU students, is beginning to change the landscape in many EU institutions.

In overall terms, EU institutions tend to engage relatively well with prospective non-European full-degree students before they arrive on campus. Information on services is generally available online (albeit to varying extents) and responsibility for disseminating information tends to be spread across a variety of offices, often differing from the centralised service point typically seen in Australian and New Zealand universities and colleges. In a number of countries, however, non-European students do ‘fall between the cracks’ when responsibilities span various administrative and faculty units. As a result, some aspects of service information (for example “local work regulations”) are not adequately covered. Table 1 presents details about the spread and frequency of pre-arrival information provided to non-European students.

**Table 1: Pre-arrival, were you provided information on...?**

Service	Absolute numbers			Percentage (%)			Total
	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	
Institutional registration process	950	217	94	75.3	17.2	7.5	100
Area where the institution is	935	232	96	74.0	18.4	7.6	100
Finding somewhere to live	773	400	88	61.3	31.7	7.0	100
Applying for a visa	588	311	362	46.6	24.7	28.7	100
Pre-departure briefings	508	521	221	40.6	41.7	17.7	100
Setting up a local bank account	456	671	132	36.2	53.3	10.5	100
Local work regulations	362	690	203	28.8	55.0	16.2	100
Meeting other students pre-arrival	311	755	188	24.8	60.2	15.0	100

The recognition of the importance of certain key services particularly focused on non-European students when they first arrive is widespread throughout institutions in Europe. While certain aspects of support are not always provided

by institutions, such as “arrival pick-up,” the more critical services required to support new non-European students on arrival in large part are. Staff are conscious of how they should welcome students and, in many cases, there is no shortage of enthusiasm and goodwill among individuals to provide the best possible service not only to non-European students but to all new arrivals. However, the reality of institutional budgets and resources throughout Europe dictates that service provision tends to have to be prioritised so that the essential services are delivered. Table 2 illustrates the extent to which institutions of all kinds prioritise certain services for arriving students, such as the “official orientation programme” and “academic/programme orientation” at the expense of those tasks that may be considered luxuries, not only by staff themselves but also incoming non-European students. While many staff recognise how welcoming it would be to pick up arriving students from their point of entry, the need to ensure that non-European students are familiar with the host institution and their academic programme of study is undoubtedly more important and therefore gets priority.

**Table 2: On arrival, were the following services offered to you?**

Service	Absolute numbers			Percentage (%)			Total
	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	
Access to email/internet	932	277	53	73.9	21.9	4.2	100
Academic/programme orientation	842	339	81	66.7	26.9	6.4	100
Official orientation programme	836	324	104	66.1	25.6	8.2	100
Services for payment of grant/scholarship	656	385	224	51.9	30.4	17.7	100
Formal welcome	655	500	108	51.9	39.6	8.6	100
Help finding somewhere to live	626	509	125	49.7	40.4	9.9	100
Help setting up a local bank account	489	640	130	38.8	50.8	10.3	100
Arrival pick-up	291	836	137	23.0	66.1	10.8	100

For the majority of institutions, particularly those where resources are limited or where the notion of ‘student services’ is comparatively new, there is a clear need to prioritise between those services that students believe are es-

sential, against those that are viewed as comparatively less important. With the majority of full-degree non-European international students continuing to base their decision-making on the academic experience, institutions should ensure that support is offered in the areas that are most likely to help students settle in to their academic programmes and new learning environment.

The provision of services to non-European students once they are established on campus is also important. Table 3 presents the data relating to the four leading academic services—library and research support, support for academic problems, language support and access to an individual academic tutor. Students express a clear hierarchy of what they consider to be the most important services an institution should offer (see Figure 5 earlier in this chapter), with “support for academic problems” being of greatest significance, yet not all institutions involved in this study appear to provide this kind of service. In the survey, close to 30 percent of respondents indicated that their institution did not have a service that would help them when they had an academic problem—a significant minority in an area that many would regard as being critical for ensuring student success.

Institutions appear to be more responsive to student interest in library and research support. With international full-degree students coming from an increasingly eclectic range of academic backgrounds and traditions, the need to offer support in using libraries and other research resources is more and more important, particularly to help those students who are unfamiliar with the method of studying in the host country. The survey results show that nearly 83 percent of students were offered support to help them in their use of the library and in support of their research. This stands out as a notable strength for many universities’ student support efforts, and is an important point to communicate to all prospective full-degree non-European international students.

**Table 3: Are the following academic services available to you?**

Service	Absolute numbers			Percentage (%)			Total
	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	
Library & research support	1041	130	84	82.9	10.4	6.7	100
Support for academic problems	692	372	196	54.9	29.5	15.6	100
Language support	588	411	256	46.9	32.7	20.4	100
Individual academic tutor	501	548	205	40.0	43.7	16.3	100

The remaining two areas of academic services that students consider important—access to an individual academic tutor and the provision of language support—are not always as consistently available. The tradition of a university assigning an individual academic staff member to be responsible for the intellectual welfare of a student and their successful academic development is one that is common in only a few European countries, although students are expressing an increasing wish to have access to this kind of tailored and individual academic support. According to the survey, only 40 percent of respondents indicated that they had access to such a service; a low figure when compared with the relative importance (regarded as the third most important academic service; see Figure 5) international students place on this kind of academic support.

The provision of language support is an increasingly complex issue for many European universities. In the academic context, international students are not always aware that they will require very specific support in this area as part of their academic programme, but the need for universities to ensure that there is adequate support is of the utmost importance. In the survey, just under 47 percent of students indicated that language support was offered: again, a comparatively low figure for an issue that many students indicate is critical in their overall academic experience. Yet for those students that arrive at a university and discover that their language ability is not sufficient to enable them to participate fully in their academic programme, access to dedicated language support is perhaps the most important service they may use. For universities, language support is particularly successful when tailored to the needs of individual students unaccustomed to a particular way of writing or studying in a language that may not be their mother tongue. It is now relatively common, for example, for international students to be offered support by their institution according to their academic area, their level of study or the requirements of assessments, examinations or other types of academic work.

Table 4 indicates the range of services universities in the survey commonly offer their international full-degree student populations. At present, it is clear from the data that despite the importance with which international students view institutional support to find accommodation, nearly 43 percent of respondents indicated that there was no such service offered by their university. With international students travelling greater and greater distances for their degree programmes, the need for universities to ensure that they are able to offer sufficient support for students should there be problems with their accommodation is very important. It is perhaps in this area where universities should consider prioritising any resources that they have to provide greater support for international full-degree students, many of whom are unfamiliar with how to deal with such problems in the host country.

**Table 4: Are the following general services available to you?**

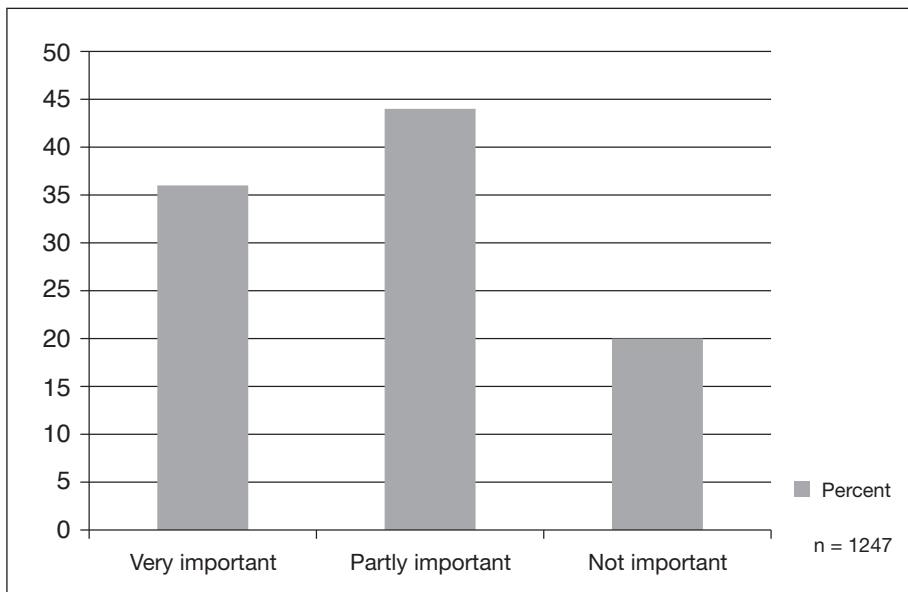
Service	Absolute numbers			Percentage (%)			Total
	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	Offered	Not offered	Don't know or N/A	
International office	956	170	131	76.1	13.5	10.4	100
Organised social activities	818	268	170	65.1	21.3	13.5	100
Student counselling/ advice	738	308	213	58.6	24.5	16.9	100
Services for payment of grant/scholarship	719	270	270	57.1	21.4	21.4	100
Students' union	683	294	278	54.4	23.4	22.2	100
Health or medical service	620	422	213	49.4	33.6	17.0	100
Careers service	611	395	245	48.8	31.6	19.6	100
Help with housing problems	524	540	196	41.6	42.9	15.6	100
Access to religious facilities/services	279	424	538	22.5	34.2	43.4	100

More generally, the data provide a strong indication that the type and range of services required by international non-European full-degree students are varied and that universities should ensure that they cater to as many of these requirements as possible. For many European universities, however, where the provision of student services, even for domestic students, is a rather new concept, this requires a degree of prioritisation to ensure that resources meet the expectations of international students as closely as possible. Essentially, universities should be able to offer a basic range of support services for international students that meet their most pressing needs and allow them to successfully complete their programme of study. To this end, as indicated in Table 4, there are certain aspects of the student experience that perhaps can be less supported than those where students believe them to be critical. While the role of a student union or guild can be very important for many international undergraduate students, for example, it is often far less of a critical factor for those pursuing a research programme. For universities where resources are limited, this process of prioritisation is both necessary and key for ensuring that the needs and expectations of international students are adequately met in a way that is financially viable and sustainable for the institution.

### 4.3 The impact of support services on student decision-making

While there can be little doubt that the majority of non-European students require some level of support service before and during their period of study, what is the actual impact of service provision on the student decision-making process and a student's willingness to recommend their particular experience to other prospective students? As illustrated in Figure 7, students consider the availability of services at their university as significant in their decision of where they wanted to enrol for their degree programme. Only 20 percent of respondents regarded the availability of services as "not important" in their final decision, while 36 percent regarded them as "very important". By adding those students that considered services as "partly important" (a further 44%), there is a clear indication that the role of services is central both to how a student makes a decision about where to study and the overall student experience at any particular institution.

**Figure 7: How important was the availability of services at your university in your final decision about where to study?**



Such a clear indication by non-European full-degree students on their perception of the importance of support services has fundamental implications for those institutions actively engaged in the recruitment of these students in the future. While many institutional staff at the operational level are already aware of the importance key services have for full-degree students,



often through their experience with non-European visiting and exchange programme students, those involved at the senior management and policy levels of institutions are sometimes unaware of the need to develop a more robust and diverse strategy for the provision of services directed towards non-European full-degree students. Moving forward, the importance of services to international students of all kinds is unlikely to decline and there is an argument that it will, perhaps, become a more critical factor for many students trying to decide between similar institutions in different countries.

However, there is also a distinction between those systems of higher education where service provision is a relatively new concept (for example, Germany, Italy and Poland) and countries where service, and often tuition fees for non-European students, have been established for some time. As evidenced by the results of the survey, the availability of services is an important part of the student decision-making process, yet further discussion with non-European students offers a far more complex picture than the survey data alone indicate. For many, the experience of studying at an institution where the provision of support services is either inconsistent or difficult to access, thus making day-to-day life difficult, reflects negatively on the overall institution. However, in almost all cases, if the academic experience meets the expectations of students and they were additionally aware of how a particular higher education system operates, the disappointment with the level of services does not necessarily dictate that they will advise other students against coming. It is important to emphasise that for many students, the choice to study at an institution or, more generally, in a particular country, is made with an overarching focus on the academic offer and some awareness that comprehensive services will not be offered.

Indeed, for many non-European students currently enrolled in European universities and colleges, their overall student experience is often positive despite a lack of services. What emerges from this study is how resourceful and flexible many degree-seeking non-European students actually are and how successful they are at navigating national or institutional systems, particularly by seeking support from alternative sources (fellow international and local students, for example). That is of course not to say that this is a satisfactory status quo for institutions moving forward in an international higher education landscape that is becoming more competitive every year. While many students do make the decision to study in a specific institution or country because of purely academic or intellectual reasons, the role of services is likely to continue to grow in significance for students accustomed to a service culture in other aspects of their lives.

The impact of tuition fees, however, polarises the importance of the role of support services for non-European degree seeking students. For some stu-

dents, pursuing degree programmes with no or low tuition fees has an impact on their expectations for the type of student experience they are likely to have. While key services, such as visa advice and support for finding housing, continue to be important, students are less critical of an institution's lack of an overall service mentality or the availability of more general support services. This is certainly not the case in systems of higher education where tuition fees are commonplace, or at individual institutions where non-European full-degree students must pay high tuition fees. In the context of this study, the UK stands out as an example of where non-European students are significantly more demanding in terms of the level of service provision, with high expectations as to how they will be supported throughout their student experience, from pre-arrival through to graduation, more so than in other parts of the EU. While other factors might be at play here—such as the inevitable raising of overall student expectations that comes from more aggressive and visible international marketing campaigns—the charging of market-rate tuition fees inevitably brings with it market-level expectations with regard to the standard, variety, and comprehensiveness of services provided.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The range of support services required by full-degree international students is wide and appears to be growing as this population expands and diversifies across Europe. The prospect of making sense of—and responding to—such a potentially very broad set of needs and expectations may be quite daunting to those individuals and institutions responsible for assuring even a minimal level of meaningful service provision.

An interesting and potentially reassuring element of the student feedback collected by this project, however, is that—by and large—most students seem quite reasonable in their expectations. The sense gleaned particularly from the focus group sessions in the various study countries is that students do not always expect 'everything' from their institution. Rather, they expect to get what they are promised, and to have timely access to appropriate offices or individuals who possess the information and/or qualifications to address their issues or problems.

In response to these expectations, institutions would be wise to weigh their recruitment promises carefully against what they can reasonably deliver. It is also critical that institutions have a comprehensive understanding of what the student service infrastructure requires, as well as a clear sense of how all of the resources in place for international students hang together in a network of information that is accessible to students as needed.

## 5 Bringing it all together: Problems, solutions, and examples of good practice

The variety of support services available to non-European full-degree international students across the six study countries stands as testament to the genuine consideration academic and administrative staff have given to this aspect of the internationalisation of higher education. Across the crucial areas of information, orientation, integration, language support and an array of practical issues (including housing, support for families, and visa and immigration processes), universities throughout Europe have systematically identified and responded to many of the issues critical to the study success of new international students.

This review of the most common support issues faced by non-European full-degree international students reveals an encouraging variety of solutions that universities have already formulated and implemented to ease the burden of entering both a new country and an entirely new education system for international students and their families. Advances in technology have been critically important in improving the delivery and receipt of essential services. It is now considerably easier to manage the expectations of new international students through a mix of web and other online communications, so that their arrival on campus is as informed and smooth as possible. Moreover, the identification of integration and language issues as crucial to the learning experience has helped universities and funding bodies target initiatives to improve the delivery of services in these particular areas.

The following discussion is organised to reflect the four crucial areas of student experience and service delivery: **information and orientation; integration with local students and communities; language; and practical issues**, such as those related to housing, registration and visas, support for families and work placements. Major issues in each of these phases are identified and solutions and examples of good practice are offered.

### 5.1 Information and orientation

Information is one of the basic needs of all students, and is especially important for international students who are likely to need more guidance on issues that are familiar or even obvious to national students, and who may face problems related to language. At the most fundamental level, information is considered not only the most important area of support, but really the only specific service needed by international students (in addition to services on offer for all students). While information provision is especially crucial in the period immediately preceding and upon arrival at the new university, it is also a service that continues to be relevant throughout the study experience.

Information may cover a number of areas. At the most basic level, this typically encompasses logistical and visa/entry issues, as well as fundamental details about the host institution. On the logistical front, students need information on procedures for securing entry into the host country (i.e. visas), as well as residence permits, and possibilities to work while studying. Essential host institution information includes such basic details as term dates, registration and examination requirements, and other procedures. Often, though not always, such information may be entirely or in part delivered by national level organisations. For example, recognition and equivalence of previous qualifications is often regulated at the national level, and thus also information on requirements is delivered at this level. However, many institutions go far beyond general and basic information. It is established good practice to give guidance on a number of issues that may make a student's arrival smoother and integration into the environment easier and more meaningful by providing information on aspects ranging from history, politics, and local customs, to weather, food, and local habits, and further to study tips and work opportunities.

Various units within the same institution may have a role to play in information provision. The responsibilities may be shared, for example, by the international office, student services office, and a central information desk, but departments and faculties also may have the duty to share information, e.g. about the programme or faculty specific dates, rules, and requirements. In addition to information provided by the institutions themselves, several national level organisations in the countries visited in the context of this study produce material especially designed for international students. For example, many countries have created, through more or less independent national level agencies, "Study in ..." websites with comprehensive information on studying and living in the given country. Such information is typically generic in nature, and concentrates on aspects that are common to all higher education institutions in the country, often provided with the purpose of promoting the country's higher education abroad. Issues covered include general information on the destination country (climate, habits, language, culture, and cost of living), information on the country's higher education system (e.g. guidelines on equivalency of foreign diplomas, or admission requirements (if national admissions standards apply), tuition fees, and different higher education institutions. They may also address other issues such as visa requirements or safety. Information by the national organisations can be used as an important additional tool, most typically for pre-arrival information, both by students as well as universities.

Whether coming from a national level or an institutional source, the most frequent information problems discovered in the context of this study relate to the language in which information is made available, and its consistency and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, from the point of view of individual universities,

there is the question of the division of responsibilities between different information providers. For example, it is very important to make sure that information delivered to prospective students by agents or an internal recruitment or admissions office (or even the university's own website) corresponds to reality: students should know what to expect, and have the right to expect what has been promised. The problem of language often becomes central for students studying in programmes delivered in something other than the local language (e.g. in English in non-English speaking countries), and for information which is not specific to international students, such as registration for examinations or housing. As long as information is dispatched from the international office, language issues can often be easily overcome. However, staff in other offices often do not speak any foreign languages, or not to a sufficient level. This is a frequent hurdle for example in Poland, where Russian has long been the first foreign language, rather than the now more widely spoken English language. Surprisingly, not all institutions offering programmes in English have a website in English, for example.

Another problem has to do with the risk of 'information overload': if all information is delivered at once, it can be hard for students to identify the items that are most relevant for them at any given moment. Indeed, several institutions have opted for gradual delivery of information, endeavouring to share relevant details at appropriate moments throughout the application, admission, enrolment, and study period. In parallel, however, some students have complained about the total absence of contact with the university between admission and arrival, and the lack of information provision. This seems to be true especially for institutions with very high student numbers (both in general and for international students), and in countries or at institutions where attracting international students is not a priority.

### *Electronic tools*

Quite naturally, information is delivered through a number of media, including the internet, e-mails, paper based guidebooks and leaflets, as well as information sessions either in the students' home country (prior to departure) or at the host institution, most typically during an orientation programme. For reasons of cost and time, among others, electronic means are rapidly taking over paper-based information tools: they are easier to 'send' and to up-date, and are nearly always available—even when the guidebook has been lost, or the information leaflet has been tossed. In addition, electronic tools allow for the use of extras, such as interactive pages, online question-and-answer tools, videos, music, and a greater variety of visual aids. Social networking tools such as Facebook are growing in popularity. The same can be said of interactive web-sites, which feature comprehensive online databases, as well as written information complemented by videos of experts or current students sharing their knowledge or experiences on a particular subject (e.g. housing).

The University of Nottingham's "Pathway 2 Nottingham" initiative is a prime example of excellent use of such extra visual materials. Pathway 2 Nottingham is a comprehensive online resource for all international students covering issues of immigration, finances (including banking basics and even featuring a video of an interview with a bank official explaining how to set up an account), accommodation, welcome, arrival and studying<sup>18</sup>. The site provides links to a video for each topic with a staff member explaining the issue, as well as videos of student comments, e.g. on housing.

The French institution Sciences Po set up Facebook groups to help students get in contact with one another before arrival and saw students beginning to use these in 2008/09. Aarhus School of Business in Denmark also established on its website a Facebook-like tool called "ASBYou", allowing prospective students to meet and get to know each other before arrival. However, the experiment, which was opened in 2008, was closed after the first year, as it was obvious that students preferred to use the social networking tools that they were already using anyway. The overall objective of these efforts—whichever specific tools are employed—continues to be to assist students in sorting out the issues themselves and generally providing them with less but more precise communication. For exchange students, this has worked quite well, in many cases giving them instant access to information and reducing the number of emails to staff at the same time.

At the University of Trento's Faculty of Economics, contact details are shared among admitted students before the programme begins so that the students can contact and get to know each other prior to their arrival in Italy. The students have themselves created a Facebook community where they can share tips, questions, and concerns. Similarly, students at the Faculty of Mathematics have created a Yahoo group for mutual advice. This group also continues to function actively beyond the pre-arrival period.

### *On-arrival orientation*

The pre-arrival and arrival period is the most crucial in terms of students' need for information and the institution's need to deliver information effectively. Orientation programmes<sup>19</sup> are one of the most important tools for delivering information to new international students. Indeed, students themselves in the context of this study mention the orientation or induction programme

---

<sup>18</sup> See: [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/pathways/international\\_route\\_1](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/pathways/international_route_1)

<sup>19</sup> 'Orientation programmes' is used here as a generic term to describe all those events which are organised for new (international) students at the start of the term with the purpose of welcoming them to the institution, helping them to orient themselves within it, and delivering relevant information related to their studies.

as one of the most important services they have benefitted from during their studies. An orientation programme gives the institution an opportunity to offer a large amount of information to all new students prior to the start of the academic year. In addition, and very importantly, orientations aim to familiarise new entrants with the campus and the new learning environment, as well as with each other. Though not frequent in some countries, orientation programmes are becoming mainstream across Europe, while the form, extent, duration, and style of the programmes vary greatly. In some cases there is either no specific international welcome programme and in others the programme is only for exchange students, not for degree seeking international students. Sometimes the central level orientation programme, which tends to concentrate on practical and social aspects of student life, is complemented by an orientation at the faculty or department level. In fact, in most cases several actors are likely to be involved in the organisation and delivery of the orientation programme or programmes at the institutional level. These may also include student associations or unions, departmental staff, and staff from particular support units or facilities within the university, such as the library, language centre, or health services. Furthermore, external experts may be invited to give presentations at the orientation programme, e.g. the local police to provide briefing on safety issues or banks giving advice on opening a bank account. Often, however, a less extensive approach is adopted, and in some case the orientation programme is limited to a welcome speech by a representative of the university management and perhaps a social event.

The two main items typically covered in orientation sessions include 1) orientation to the university (and its programmes) and 2) orientation to the city and country (and its customs and rules). The first one can be further divided into social and academic orientation. The categories and the use of terminology are by no means clear and homogeneous between (or even within) institutions: in some cases 'academic orientation' means everything from information on available services to study skills workshops, and thus also covers many practical details as well as strictly academic information. An ideal orientation would cover all of the abovementioned aspects: academic, social and practical. This can be done either by including all such elements into one programme, or covering all aspects through a combination of programmes. These can be organised independently or jointly by several parts of the university as most appropriate; e.g. an academic orientation can be prepared by the faculty (or by a study skills service, if at the central level), a social orientation by the students union, for example, and the practically focused orientation by the international office, student services office, or the central administration.

As orientation programmes usually take place right before the start of the term, and thus prior to the arrival of all other students, new international arriv-



als often get a privileged chance to complete all formalities—such as registration and enrolment, getting library card, etc.—when fewer people are around. In many cases ‘buddies’ are used to accompany students to the different offices, and to help them in completing the various formalities. The goal is to have students ready, after the orientation, to emerge themselves fully in the degree programme without having to take care of a number of practical matters. An added value is to familiarise these students early on with both the campus environment as well as at least some staff and students. This is considered very important, as the term time is short and no time should be lost when it starts.

Often welcome programmes also include tours of the campus—typically with more experienced students as guides—tours of the city, and a more or less extensive social programme. The social programme is no doubt the more ‘fun’ and informal part of the orientation, but it has an important function in the overall programme design: if the aim of the induction is to facilitate the integration and sense of comfort and confidence (‘feeling at home’) of the new students, sufficient opportunities for socialising and getting to know each other—and preferably also staff—must be created. According to the experience at the LUISS Guido Carl<sup>20</sup> in Italy, for example, students who arrive after the orientation programme integrate much more slowly and to a lesser degree than those who have participated in the orientation. The institution has thus decided to organise an extra orientation and social opportunities for those students who arrive late. This helps their integration somewhat, but cannot replace the actual orientation programme.

Several examples provide a sense of different approaches taken to international student orientations and demonstrate efforts at innovation and flexible delivery. For example, the University of Coventry amended its international orientation programme for September 2009. Due to questions of space, the event was previously limited to 400 students. Now the institution has opted for a four-week staggered programme, where students can attend sessions they consider relevant, at appropriate times. This new system caters also for students who arrive at slightly different times. Sessions are offered in the evenings and at the weekends, offering advice on integration, study skills, cultural and social issues, with social activities throughout. There are also several campus tours every day, which students can join when they wish. The orientation programme sessions will be available via podcast on the International Office website so that students who miss programmes will still have access to the information. This programme is not, however, able to transmit

---

<sup>20</sup> LUISS Guido Carli is the short form for the full institutional name, *Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli di Roma*.



the social dimension of the orientation via the web, and was due to be assessed at the end of 2009.

For the last eight years, Sciences Po in France has offered a three-week orientation period for international students. The programme, adapted from a format designed initially for visiting and exchange students, combines exposure to the Sciences Po approach to academics, in addition to a general introduction to life in France. Somewhat uniquely, the Sciences Po programme is provided for a fee (EUR 250), and while it is not compulsory, it is very strongly recommended to all international students. This orientation not only provides an opportunity to deliver a host of information to the students, it can rather be described as a pre-term training course in study and language skills. Indeed, the programme gives the students an opportunity to practice oral and written presentations as they are done in France, take French classes and methodology classes, and get support on practical matters such as finding accommodation, getting residence permits, registering at the university, choosing courses, etc. Also, tours of the university are provided. Students are thus better equipped both in practical and academic terms to start the academic year. The plan is to run a second orientation programme later in the year for late arrivals and those beginning programmes mid-year. An interesting feature is that the Welcome Guide given to the international students on arrival is written and compiled by fellow students; the programme also uses existing international or French students as coordinators.

At the University of Trento, in Italy, the “Welcome Week” is a combination of presentations on administrative and practical issues by the central administration, and didactic introductions organised by some faculties with high numbers of international students. In addition students can benefit from a privileged enrolment process prior to start of the term and before the arrival of all local students. The programme includes aspects such as an overview of the university, the available services and the website; visits to faculties of interest, the Language Centre, and the university sports centre; a guided tour of the town with an English speaking guide; and informative sessions related to immigration and residence permits. In addition, the Faculty of Mathematics organises a meeting for all its international students, by programme, where the students are informed about academic aspects, e.g. what is required to gain a degree, how examinations are evaluated, how oral exams are run and evaluated, where and how to get scholarships, and so on.

#### *Ongoing/on-demand information provision*

While the beginning of the academic programme is perhaps the most crucial moment of information need and delivery, quite naturally these needs do not end at the start of the term. And while all basic information may have been

delivered in written form on arrival, the possibility of accessing up-dated and clearly presented information as the need arises is very important for students. Indeed, several institutions underline how a lot of information can be given to students, but it does not mean that students necessarily absorb or later consult that information, or are able to find what they need without assistance. Additionally, while electronic information is taking the place of printed material, face-to-face contact with students remains important.

There are often numerous ways to access information at a given institution, e.g. the university website, international office website, and sometimes even department or student organisation websites. While the benefit is that students are likely to get the information one way or another, a common challenge is related to ensuring the overall consistency of information, as well as its completeness. Coordinating the various websites is often a cumbersome task, but is generally very much worth the effort. In this regard, it is important for international students to have—to the extent possible—one central point of contact, and one main source of information. A single contact point seems desirable for several reasons, both from the perspective of students and institutions: one contact point enables the institution to collect and concentrate all information in one place, thus reducing duplication of work across offices, and ensuring that students do not need to go from one office to another in search of information and assistance. In practical terms, it is also better to concentrate all information relevant to international students where there are the necessary language skills (e.g. knowledge of English) in order to ensure effective communication with students.

University of Rome La Sapienza has concentrated its information and support services in a center called “CIAO” (short for *Centro informazioni accoglienza e orientamento*, in English the Information, Welcome and Orientation Center). The center is run by 22 volunteers of the national community service and 160 students who are on study-work contracts at the university. The center provides information in such areas as registration and subscription, the hours of operation of various offices and facilities, use of the IT system of the university, administrative procedures, and promotion of cultural and social activities. A recent decision will lead to the establishment of a new, parallel center, based on the same model and specifically targeting international students, to be called “HELLO”. This would become a comprehensive ‘welcome office’ for all international students, on all non-academic matters. It will be placed in the same building as the current CIAO center, and will thus benefit from existing know-how and materials. The office will be staffed by people from the international relations office, foreign students’ office, Erasmus office, as well as by some foreign students, among which there will be several native speakers of English.

Responding to student enquiries is very labour intensive, and some institutions (or their international offices) struggle to respond to all questions and to have time for all students who come to the office for some help and direction. A way to reduce the number of individual enquiries is to organise specific sessions on particularly topical or frequently-requested themes. For example the International Office of the University of Nottingham organises weekly presentations on key topics such as extension of visas, trips and events, or working in the UK. This has significantly reduced one-to-one advising on these issues, as students can be referred to the appropriate information sessions.

Another way to reduce the number of enquiries is to prepare comprehensive and easy to read guidebooks for international students or on-line information sources. The Support Services Team at the International Office of the University of Nottingham, for example, publishes a number of comprehensive booklets for incoming international students. *The International and EU Students' A-Z Guide to Nottingham* is sent to students before they arrive on campus so they can prepare for their first few days in Nottingham. Literally an A to Z guide of life at Nottingham, the 77-page booklet contains guidance on a range of academic, social and living issues for international students and a directory of offices where help can be found. Also, Humboldt University publishes a student guide in English and German for international students, where all services are listed with clear explanations of what is on offer, where services can be found and who is eligible to use them. This publication is available in printed form and online. The international office also maintains an incredibly detailed and well-structured information database with details on everything from post offices to shopping, the university's international activities, travel information, etc<sup>21</sup>. The Poznan Medical School similarly creates its 'Freshman Survival Guide' with a range of practical information from visas and health service to banking and sports. Sciences Po's welcome information booklet is bi-lingual, in French and English. This is a nice strategy, which avoids having to produce two different booklets, and it caters at the same time to the needs of all international students: those in English-taught programmes and those in French language programmes.

Important information exchange also happens directly from student to student. This exchange takes place informally, between students of the same nationality, or those living in the same residence halls, or taking the same courses. However, in some cases it has proved helpful to support such exchange, especially prior to start of the term (and prior to the international students' arrival) by organising means of putting future students in contact with each other, or with students already attending the university: Yahoo groups

---

<sup>21</sup> See: [http://www.international.hu-berlin.de/an\\_die\\_hu-en/studierende/orbis/studis4studis](http://www.international.hu-berlin.de/an_die_hu-en/studierende/orbis/studis4studis)

and Facebook communities are examples of such coordinated networking. The international office or its equivalent creates a community, instructs students how to become members of the group, and the rest follows almost naturally. Several institutions also take advantage of their more experienced students to provide information to new students. For example, University of Rome La Sapienza employs a number of students in its welcome office (CIAO), and is planning to employ international students in the future office dealing with specific international student enquiries (HELLO). Humboldt University's International Club, which is organised by the international office, is run by students who help with general enquiries and registration for cultural events and trips, offer visa advice (although generally only on extension of residence permits), run a mentoring programme called STUDIS4STUDIS and a language exchange that pairs international students with German students to improve language skills and help integration. Buddy or mentoring schemes are also a useful way to help new students collect information on the new institution, city, and country.

## **5.2 Support for integration and intercultural learning**

International students travel abroad not only to get a better education, or one different from that available in the home country, but also to expose themselves to a different culture; to gain international contacts, intercultural understanding and skills; and to improve or learn languages. In other words, students go abroad also to have an international experience.

Often, however (and sadly), students cannot exploit their study abroad period to its full potential. In fact, several of the institutions included in this study, and several of the individual students who participated in the focus groups across Europe, expressed concerns regarding a low degree of integration of international students into the local community, with local students, and sometimes even among themselves. A lack of integration of international students goes against the broadly defined objectives embraced by many institutions to create an 'international study environment', and the proclaimed value assigned to having international students on these campuses. Lack of integration can lead to a low level of emotional attachment by international students to the host country and institutions, and thus may reduce the expected positive impact of having international students serve as effective alumni and informal ambassadors across the world. Presumably, a greater degree of integration—or a reduced sense of isolation—among international students would also improve institutional understanding of the different needs of international students and the rationales for differential services to meet those needs.

The problem of integration is not a new one, and international students, whether exchange or degree students, have a history of either sticking with

other foreigners, or indeed interacting most frequently with their compatriots, thus forming little 'ghettos' within institutions. However, with the increased offer of programmes taught in English in countries where English is not the main language of instruction the problem has intensified for two reasons. First, international students on these programme may not speak the local language at all. And secondly, in some cases the English-only programmes are run in parallel to similar programmes taught in the local language, and thus almost all students in the English-taught programmes are foreign. While there are issues related to integration of international students into all aspects of campus life (associations, students' union, campus jobs, extracurricular activities, and so on), challenges also exists in terms of integrating international students into the surrounding environment and society more at large.

Language sometimes creates barriers to this kind of integration, especially when international students attend English-taught programmes in countries where English is not the main language. Without knowledge of the local language, it is harder for international students to get involved in a number of activities organised by student organisations or other entities. And, it may simply be harder to make friends with the local students who might be shy about speaking a foreign language. This is one of the reasons why several institutions have noted a far greater degree of integration among international students themselves, as opposed to engagement between international and national students. While this may be completely understandable, the dynamic will inevitably reduce the impact of internationalisation on local and international students, as well as for the broader institution. A question that needs to be considered is to what extent the students should also know the local language in order to have a good overall experience, to integrate into the local environment, and indeed to gain as good a cultural understanding of the country as possible in a limited timeframe. While this study did not give a definitive answer to this question, it is clear that the importance of local language knowledge depends on the educational offer and set up at the host institution, as well as the language competencies in the country in question: at the Poznan University of Medical Science, for example, programmes in English are followed to similar measure by national and international students. This is understood to have had a significant positive impact on the integration of the two student groups, and on making international students a part of the academic community, not an annex to it. On the other hand, in countries where English is widely spoken, like the Netherlands, it is easier to get by without any knowledge of the local language.

#### *Integration among international students and the social environment*

While everyone is free to choose their friends, and nobody—international or national student—can be forced to engage in intercultural activity, sev-

eral institutions have implemented measures to support the integration of international students into the local academic and social environment, and some have been especially creative with inventing mechanisms and activities that give an incentive for international engagement. Examples of smaller and larger steps taken by institutions include organising mixed housing for international and national students, organising study groups and classes so that different nationalities work together, or involving students in internationally-oriented or themed activities and events. Sometimes international or intercultural activities have a strong social flavour (like an international disco), sometimes they may concentrate on the exploration of different habits and traditions (e.g. celebrations of different national or religious festivities), and they may also have a more academically oriented purpose related, for example, to study skills or languages.

For example, the KUSTOS programme at Humboldt University in Berlin offers intercultural training aimed at reaching the institution's every international student. The programme teaches practical techniques and methods of studying, in addition to building cross-cultural competence. About 300 people participate in the scheme four times a year, including PhD and masters students, young employees, and student assistants. KUSTOS has two activity lines: 1) courses on how to study in Germany, directed at international students to enhance understanding of the unique aspects of German academic culture and 2) intercultural awareness and skills courses. In addition to the courses, the KUSTOS programme also includes subject specific mentoring. As the programme was struggling to retain students to participate as mentors, it now also includes specialised training for mentors to encourage students to learn new skills, such as managing group dynamics or how to organise an effective seminar, all in an effort to show student mentors the concrete advantages of taking on this role. The programme is academically driven, from the Institute for Comparative Education, and is available to all non-European international students at Humboldt. Notably, in 2007 the programme won a prize from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With the aim of improving integration and contact with German students and to improve the overall study experience for international students, the University of Bremen has decided to launch a series of international sessions at the faculty orientation programmes at the start of the new academic year. These will promote study skills development for students and help them understand German academic culture and German approaches to teaching and learning. In the longer term, the objective is that these sessions will be prepared and led by second-year or other advanced-level international students. In cooperation with some faculties, the University of Trento in Italy organises welcome seminars on Italian political and social life and contemporary history

in a comparative context. These seminars are popular among students, who appreciate the chance to learn—in English—more about the country in which they are studying.

At some institutions the International Office is involved in organising trips and excursions for international students. For example at the University of Nottingham, the International Office organises an extensive range of trips and visits around the UK and publishes an annual plan of trips for all international students. Events are specifically designed for international students and are open also to students with families. All trips are subsidised by the university and prices range from free events up to GBP 17. At the University of Trento, the welcome office regularly organises excursions both in Italian and in English, for all international students, scholars, and staff in the surroundings of Trento and further afield. The trips are free of charge for international students, and offer thus an excellent opportunity to spend some time with the fellow students, and to get to know the area better.

With funding from the Prime Minister's Initiative<sup>22</sup> and UKCISA, the University of Nottingham has recently created a scheme called Culture Vulture<sup>23</sup>. Culture Vulture is a group set up to allow students from all over the world to meet, form friendships, share languages, and enjoy cultural and social events. The programme is open to all students, and their families, and is composed of two main parts: 1) providing information and organising social activities, and 2) matching new students with current students for friendship and help with 'settling in'. The programme helps people to meet and get to know each other, and then—eventually—to visit the homes of people from other countries. The Culture Vulture subscriptions are managed through a dedicated Facebook group. Students can enter online their preferences for the part of the world they want to get to know, as well as their general interests, to enable a good match.

Other institutions have likewise made efforts to increase and improve their cultural and social events offerings, and examples in this vein abound:

- The Danish VIA University College, in addition to many other initiatives, organises an 'International day' where international students share cuisine from their home countries. Holidays in other countries are also marked.
- At the University of Sussex the International Students' Support unit coordinates cultural immersion and integration programmes. These bring together international students through various means, including col-

---

<sup>22</sup> See the section on the United Kingdom in Chapter 2 for more information about the Prime Minister's Initiative and UKCISA.

<sup>23</sup> See: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/international/culturevulture>



laboration with the Students' Union, alumni friendship and home-stay programmes—bringing current students together with former Sussex students—and contact with UK students. The majority of these activities are subsidised by the university and are in great demand from the students. Recent events have included a “British Food Evening”, Indian Diwali and Chinese New Year—all of which were very popular. Some funds are also available to support initiatives for new activities proposed by international students. These can be cultural or social, but the unit provides seed money to encourage greater involvement and integration.

- At the Poznan University of Medical Science in Poland, following feedback from the students, the university now organises holiday parties, such as Thanksgiving, Norwegian Day, Chinese New Year, and so on. The university is also considering introducing a course examining cultural differences between the international students' home countries and Poland.
- At the University of Trento, in Italy, international students, coordinated by the welcome office, host a fair called *Caffé delle lingue*. In this “Languages Café” tables are designated by country and are stocked with books and other material about the respective country. This has become an important meeting point both for Italians who are learning a foreign language and for foreigners who have very limited possibilities to speak their native language in Trento. The *Caffé delle lingue* provides much-needed opportunities for sharing, trying to break the barriers between students of different nationalities, and promoting interest in other cultures across the student body. Some such events have also been organised at local high schools to promote the interest of local pupils in other countries, and to open minds to other cultures.
- The Orbis Humboldtianus International club at Humboldt University in Berlin welcomes all students (international and German) who want to meet people from other countries and cultures, and each semester students receive a brochure called “*Kulturplaner*” which contains the programme of the club. The club offers a range of activities including historical and political discussions, field trips, theatre and museum visits and concerts, as well as a “language market” (*Sprachbörse*) to help match language tandems. Attached to the club there is an Information Point, open every weekday for 3-4 hours, and visa services for students are offered in the same location every Wednesday.

While International Offices tend to be—almost universally—the promoters of international and intercultural events and activities, it is strongly felt that efforts to



support integration are not only the business of these specialised units. Indeed, it has been underlined by several institutions involved in this study that this work should be a joint effort of the administration, in its entirety, as well as the teaching staff. Many international mobility advocates insist that the ultimate aim is for all domestic students and staff to come to see incoming students as a resource for the institution, and for the country. Indeed, integration can also be promoted effectively in the academic environment. At the VIA University College in Denmark, for example, the lecturers organise study groups so as to make sure that international students are in groups with Danish students. Although facilitating progress among such integrated study groups is openly recognised as requiring a great deal of work from the lecturer, the common feeling at VIA is that this kind of international integration does work well after a period of adaptation on both sides. In addition to study benefits, the international teamwork also has a positive impact on the social side as students are placed in a position to more easily develop friendships across national groups.

Social integration is an area that presents significant opportunities and challenges. To overcome some of the cultural barriers to participating in events organised by students' unions, for example, some Danish and British institutions have been focusing specifically on the social dimension. For example, the University of Coventry's International Office is working together with the local Students' Union to offer more events for different groups of international students, including events where alcohol is not served. Meanwhile, some institutions have a policy to mix different nationalities when placing students in the residence halls, with the aim of supporting integration and improvement of English language skills among international students, and to avoid the creation of 'nationality ghettos'. But living together is not always easy; differences in religious practices and eating habits can be especially challenging in these environments. A good balance seems to be hard to find, and may sometimes be symptomatic of a transition period from international student bodies comprised mainly of exchange students to a larger intake of international degree students, and from a concentration on Europe, to a wider proportion of students from countries outside of Europe.

While several activities are clearly taking place to support international students' integration into the academic and social community at the universities involved in this study, integration into the surrounding environment is still a big problem, especially when the students do not speak the local language. The Politecnico di Milano, for example, recognises the need to do more to support the integration of foreign students into the society at large, for the benefit of both sides. To this end, the institution is working to sensitise the city of Milan to the role and importance of international students for the whole of the local environment, including and especially local businesses.

### *Buddy schemes*

One significant activity area, which could be classified also as an 'information tool' and which is used by several institutions across the study countries included here, is mentoring or buddy schemes. These schemes are in themselves nothing new, and often are not even specifically designed for international students: indeed, in some systems (like for example the UK) it has been common for decades that new students are matched at the start of the term with second-year or more advanced students, who help the former to get oriented in the new environment in the first weeks of the academic year. With an increasing number of international degree students, universities have started to pay attention to the special needs of international students for such 'buddying'. Mentoring and buddy schemes are, in short, a more or less formalised approach to peer-to-peer support, but they can make a significant contribution to the level of integration of international students into the local environment, and with local students.

The mentoring schemes can take various forms; two of the most common involve either fellow international students helping new international students or host-country students helping new international arrivals. There are strong advantages to each of these systems: while other international students are likely to know better what kind of specific needs fellow international students may have in adapting to a new study culture and surrounding environment, local students as buddies may have better knowledge of the local system (shops, banks, housing, etc.), and provide better local language support. In addition, mixing international students with local students, even if only through an organised buddy scheme, may be advantageous for an increased degree of integration between the two groups. In opting for either approach, much depends on practical possibilities and institutional priorities, as well as the more precise expectations of buddies' responsibilities.

At Humboldt University in Berlin, a number of different mentoring schemes are organised, but the most unique feature of the Humboldt model is that student mentors may gain credits for mentoring new students. The university's FAMOS mentoring programme is a new initiative aimed specifically at international degree-seeking students, and is currently being piloted in the faculties of economics and philosophy. German students are paid to mentor international students to support them through formal procedures, from securing visas to housing, in addition to providing orientation at the university as well as subject-related support in the area of study skills. In addition to being paid, participation in the mentoring programmes will earn the students between five and six ECTS credits, which count toward their degree programme. Indeed, it is expected that those participating in the schemes as mentors will develop a range of teaching and intercultural competencies,

including language skills, that will have direct relevance for their future careers. The recognition by Humboldt University of both the importance of student services for non-European students as well as the broader benefits of participating in such a scheme for the future employment prospects of the local students is significant. Indeed, this scheme could be considered a good practice example, given the unique and effective way it is combining a benefit for international students (who receive valuable support), with benefits for local students (in concrete terms through ECTS credits which testify to the acquisition of new skills), and value for the institution (which can provide new services to international students in a cost-effective manner).

The International Business Academy (IBA) at the University of Aarhus in Denmark also pays buddies for helping new students. Here, the formalisation of the buddy scheme has led to a positive change in terms of increased dedication of the buddies to their 'job' and a higher degree of quality control by the administration. Also in Denmark, VIA University College is now considering establishing a buddy-programme where Danish students would be buddies for international students, in order to support the efforts to increase integration. At the moment, international students already studying at the school pick up new international students on arrival.

The importance of training buddies, among other things, depends on their role and the responsibilities assigned to them. There is an important difference between a 'social buddy' and buddies who dispatch information on formal aspects related to registration with local authorities, for example. At the University of Trento, buddies are both Italian and international students who volunteer to spend some time with new students, especially during their first weeks in Trento. The buddies show the town to the new arrivals, take them to lunch, introduce the new students to their friends, and generally see to it that the new student they are assigned to starts to feel at home. "Welcome Buddy" assignments may be made according to similar study or research fields, home country connections, or personal interests and hobbies, and can be contacted directly by e-mail by the incoming international student even before arrival. The buddies also give some 'friendly advice' so as to help the new students better prepare for their trip. The Welcome Buddies do not receive specific training, and thus students are encouraged to contact the welcome office on all formal issues such as visa or stay permit procedures, or health insurance coverage. Interestingly, the University of Trier has opted for the opposite: the International Office may not give legally binding information, such as on visas, and in their place, the information is delivered by the student mentors.

According to the assessment of the International Office at the University of Copenhagen, the mentor programme has an important role to play in fa-

cilitating integration of international students. In the Copenhagen scheme, the mentors typically help the international students on arrival (even airport pick-up), with registration with the national and regional authorities, and other practical matters. One of the university's faculties, namely the Faculty of Life Sciences (LIFE), has taken the mentoring scheme a step further. Through their faculty-mentoring programme, which is organised by the Secretariat for Internationalisation and Development Collaboration, all incoming international students are given a Danish "First Contact"<sup>24</sup>. The First Contacts organise a variety of social and cultural events during the term, like weekend trips, Christmas dinners, and so on. They thus have a strong social role to play in the integration of international students, and the contact extends beyond the first weeks (unlike for mentorships that are designed to help students with initial practical arrangements only). The First Contact is often mentioned by leaving students as one of the best things about their stay and it is therefore considered an important element in profiling LIFE—and the University of Copenhagen—internationally as a "university worth attending".

### 5.3 Language support

International students typically come from different cultural as well as linguistic backgrounds. Extra support during the academic year may be needed to enable international students to reach their full potential during their degree programme and not be disadvantaged vis-à-vis national students. Two kinds of language-related support can be identified: support for mastering the teaching language (be it the local language or another), and support related to the local language (in the case when it is not the same as the teaching language). For obvious reasons, the two are relatively distinct, and require different approaches. Support for the teaching language is often linked to study skills or academic writing support, and more generally on how to express oneself academically in the given language. Such support has been described in detail in the report *Support for international students in higher education. Practice and principles*<sup>25</sup>. This section will, on the other hand, concentrate on a specific issue linked to institutions where the teaching language and the local language are not the same, both in terms of support for the learning language, and most of all in terms of problems, solutions, and support related to the language competence of the students in the local language. The language proficiency (e.g. in English) of teaching staff at various

---

<sup>24</sup> See: [http://www.life.ku.dk/English/education/for\\_students/study\\_abroad/First\\_Contact\\_skjult.aspx](http://www.life.ku.dk/English/education/for_students/study_abroad/First_Contact_skjult.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> Maria Kelo, *Support for International Students in Higher Education*, ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education, Bonn: Lemmens 2006.

levels is also extremely important. This study shows that such difficulties are often considered to be far more vexing than those related to study-language support.

Indeed, while the problem of language competence has always been a critical issue for international students, new problems have arisen with the spread of English-taught programmes across Europe. While previously the main concern was related to the adequate knowledge of the local language, which was also the teaching language, now students who attend English-taught programmes in non-English speaking countries face a new challenge: getting by with little or no knowledge of the local language, which is spoken everywhere outside of the classroom—and often even within it. A fundamental question arises—how to prepare students for this challenge, and how to prepare largely non-English speaking institutions to receive students in English language programmes?

Not all institutions have thought through in full detail what receiving international students in English-taught programmes entails. If the knowledge of the local language is not a requirement for admission, then the student may fairly assume that knowledge of the local language is not necessary for life at the institution, and perhaps not even outside of it. However, this is not always the case, and students may be unpleasantly surprised to find that outside the classroom and the International Office, English is not used at all: not in common access computer laboratories (where all programmes may be only in the local language), not in the library, not by staff at any other administrative office apart from the international office, and not in sign-posting around the campus. In some cases, even the institutional website does not have a section in English. Several institutions are now waking up to the reality of the needs of international students in foreign language programmes, and several of them have started to analyse the possibilities of making the institution to some extent bi-lingual, or in any case counterbalance the difficulties raised by the language issue via extensive translation of university administrative documents, for example, or making a point of having staff with relevant language skills in a number of offices across the institution.

#### *Problems and solutions related to language and administration*

Several of the most fundamental language problems relate to the difficulties of students in English-taught programmes to communicate with the administration beyond the international office, to navigate the university's information sources, and to comply with formalities. Many universities recognise the lack of information in English, and while of all the institutions examined in this study had a section of their website in English, not all information relevant for international students was provided in English. Interestingly, for example, at

the Sciences Po in Paris, the monthly newsletter for international students is available only in French, despite the institution having several full-degree programmes in English. Often, administrative documents related to both the institution itself and to external matters—for example, to registration procedures with the local authorities—are only available in the local language. At the Aarhus School of Business-University of Aarhus, application forms for the local social security number are only available in Danish. The same is true for several institutions in Italy and in Germany.

At the Politecnico di Milano in Italy, all specific international student-related information is already available in English. The institution is now in the process of translating all documents used at the university into English, including for example the inscription form for examinations, which until now has only existed in Italian. The university has recently received funding of EUR 100 000 from a large philanthropic foundation (*Fondazione Cariplo*) for the translation into English of all official documents used at the institution, and the work was due to be completed by the end of 2009. Until then, students rely on the welcome desk to help them complete forms in Italian, which is both cumbersome for the students and time-consuming for the welcome office staff. In a similar fashion, the University of Trento aimed to have all official documents at the institutional level translated into English by the end of 2009. However, both institutions also recognise that signposting, notices, newsletters, and perhaps even computer programmes in at least some of the computer laboratories need to be changed, as these currently exist only in Italian.

Even when there is a strong recognition of the importance of offering administrative support in English—and making sure that all offices and departments, as well as libraries and residence halls have staff who can communicate in English—this is not always easy to implement in practice. Older staff especially—including academics—do not always master English. At Humboldt University, for example, for historical and geographical reasons, most staff speak Russian rather than English as their first foreign language. Similarly, in Italy, older generations tend to speak French rather than English as their main foreign language. Astonishingly, at a university in Italy no staff member speaks English in the office in charge of the official registration of international students. Indeed, those students in English-taught programmes—which are still very few and very new—are accompanied by their tutors or mentors to take care of the formalities in this office.

There are also several examples of good practice in this area. For example, the University of Warsaw as well as the LUISS Guido Carli in Italy provide their student records forms in English and have made these accessible via the internet. Interestingly, the University of Sussex emphasises that while knowledge of English is naturally not a problem among staff across the institution,

outside the international office there may be a more general lack of cultural awareness and little appreciation for the specific needs of international students. Therefore, though language competencies among staff should clearly be improved, language skills alone may not be sufficient to ensure smooth communication between the students and a number of offices. The Politecnico di Milano International Office has been pushing for courses on intercultural competence and cross-cultural communication for staff, but there has been very little interest to date in the offering; here, the mentality that it is the student who has to go all the way in adapting to the local environment and culture still prevails strongly.

The restricted extent of an English-language culture at the institution may also have a significant effect on the levels integration of international students: where there are very few activities outside of those specifically designed for international students (and often for them only), students tend not to have enough opportunities to mix with the local students, or to get involved more deeply in the life of the university. There is hope, however, that with time and the extension of English language programmes—which are in some contexts only at the very experimental level and still quite small in scale—institutions will be able to provide more activities and materials in English. Similarly, the participation of national students in programmes in English seems to improve the level of integration of international students. A ‘generation change’ in administrative staff may also bring with it a new mentality and better English language skills.

In the meantime, one cost-effective interim solution to such problems has been to use student helpers (paid) or buddies (often unpaid) to accompany students to offices where English is not spoken. In many cases the international office also takes charge in terms of delivering information even on issues not directly under its operational area, simply because the intercultural and language skills are based in this office. However, the need for responsibilities to be clearly defined is real. Indeed, official information with a legal bearing should be delivered by someone who can also be held responsible for the accuracy of the information. Thus, while the use of student helpers or buddies may be advisable for a variety of reasons, their use for the delivery of official information may create risks related to responsibility and accountability that have to be recognised and effectively managed.

### *Teaching of the local language*

In some cases, the local language is also the language of tuition of the international students, while in others (as in the case of the English-taught programmes) it is not. In both cases, students are likely to need, or at least appreciate the availability of programmes or other support in the local language.



However, the needs of the two student groups are different: while the former need to perfect their ability to express themselves formally and especially in terms of academic writing skills, students not being taught in the local language may benefit more from a beginners' course of 'everyday Italian' or 'basics of French'. The former is more directly related to the study success of the students, and the latter clearly to the overall student experience and integration into the local community.

A number of institutions involved in this study have demonstrated a willingness to offer local language tuition, heavily subsidised or even free of charge, for all of their international students. Interestingly, on the other hand, free language courses are not in all cases available to students studying in the local language, even though these students might benefit more directly from such programmes. However, in most cases, these students are expected to master the language before arrival, as demanded by admissions requirements, and it is then typically assumed that they will not need any language related support during their studies.

Even when language support is offered, however, not all students take advantage of the opportunity. Data from the student focus groups for this study indicate that the main reason for this is very simple: they do not have enough time to attend non-compulsory classes, however much they might like to. With a tight programme to follow and significant time investment needed to read material in a foreign language, international students simply cannot dedicate enough time to attend language courses during the academic year. A very practical solution to this has been implemented at the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Trento. The faculty has decided to make Italian language courses obligatory for students on English-taught masters programmes. And to compensate, students can gain up to three ECTS credits for attending the course. The course includes both Italian language (at various levels) and Italian culture and society taught in English. This is an interesting example of good practice, which shows the importance given to the knowledge of the local language and culture, even in a programme taught in English, and in the field of Mathematics. On the other hand, the VIA University College, for example, offers intensive Danish language courses to its international students. However, as the courses are not credit-bearing, the institution does not receive government funding for their delivery, which creates problems for their sustainability, especially in moments when funds are scarce.

At some institutions, learning or improving local language skills is linked to the available mentoring schemes. For example the International Center of Trier University in Germany organises language support, where a German native speaker spends an evening every week with a group of four or five international students whom she or he tutors. While the programme started



first only in German, it has now been extended to include other languages that students would like to practice. Similar language tandems or language exchanges are organised at several institutions across Europe.

While students in English language programmes have easily recognisable support needs in respect to the *local* language, their possible support needs in the *teaching* language (English) are rarely seriously addressed. Following the example of several British universities which offer extensive English language support to international degree students, it would seem logical that any institution teaching in English (or any other non-native language for international students), should be able and willing to offer language support also relevant to the language of instruction. However, this is not current practice among the institutions included in this study. Similarly, with the important exception of the UK, the needs for language support of international students in programmes taught in the local language tend to be ignored: again, students are expected to have mastered the local language by virtue of having met the admission requirements. However, given that language competence and study skills are understood to be closely related, support for foreign students in the local study language may need to be seriously considered. While English-taught programmes in many cases enjoy a special status—with more personalised support and mentoring—students who enrol in an ordinary programme delivered in the local main teaching language are often considered (for better or worse) as local students. For example at the University of Science and Technology Krakow (AGH) student focus group participants expressed concern for the fact that teachers seemed unaware of the extra challenges they face studying in Polish, in comparison to national students, and they yearned for more support and appreciation for their efforts. Similar cases were also observed in Italy and France. In other words, there could be a danger that full-degree students who are studying in the language of the host country rather than in English will receive the least attention of all students; that is, it may be forgotten that they are actually international students, too.

Good practice ultimately requires a ‘whole institution approach’ towards international students. If programmes are offered in English, the institution should be equipped to welcome these students campus-wide: there should be personnel in all offices, libraries, relevant departments, and so on with sufficient language skills to be able to respond to the students’ queries, and ensure that international students do not encounter unnecessarily burdensome communication conditions. Barring these kinds of resources, institutions should make it clear that while not a formal requirement, knowledge of the local language is essential for survival at the host institution.

## 5.4 Taking care of practical arrangements

### *Visas and permits*

In part due to language difficulties, in part due to the complexities of local systems, many international students, and indeed international office staff themselves, find the formalities related to visas and residence permits one of the most time-consuming areas of student support. It is clearly an area where the support of the international office (or someone else within the institution) is most heavily demanded and where students' information needs are most acute. To this end, guidance from the international office (or whichever group or entity is responsible for this area, up to and including buddy programmes, in some cases), is crucial. Several institutions involved in this study reported that international office staff spends most of their time answering enquiries and/or producing documents for visa applications and renewals, both for individual students and in some cases also for their families. Indeed, visa support is one of the most used individual services. The extent of involvement by institutions ranges from simple issuance of information and supporting documents to actually managing with the whole administrative process. In some cases, in addition to the engagement of the international office, the local students' union may also have an office dealing with immigration issues. While some institutions would be pleased not to deal with visa issues at all, the ability of students to enter the host country and stay legally depends on the regularisation of the visa registration process, and thus this service remains a 'sine qua non'—something that simply has to be offered by the university if it wishes to recruit students from outside of Europe. To all of this a further complicating element comes into play for those students who study in programmes in other than the local language: instructions, documentation, and forms to be filled in are usually only available in the local language.

Institutions have found inventive ways to deal with the formal requirements and the local or national 'red tape', which can be harder or easier to navigate depending on the country. In Italy, the process of securing a residence permit is complex and at times very lengthy. Long delays in obtaining a permit effectively lock students in the country, as leaving Italy before securing a stay permit may preclude them from re-entering the country. This is especially frustrating and penalising for PhD students and young researchers, who might need to attend international conferences or research team meetings in other countries. In addition, time delays are worsened by the fact that students have no 'fast track' to official registration. The University of Rome La Sapienza, which has a very high number of international students on its campus, has been able to convince the local registration office to open a branch within the university. This office is dedicated entirely to dealing with permits for international students, which is a great advantage, as the time delays are

significantly reduced, help is more easily at hand in case of language or other difficulties, and students can go through the registration process without leaving the campus. The Politecnico di Milano is working on reserving dates for student registration at the local registration office. This is also intended to reduce waiting times. Similarly, the University of Trento, together with some other local institutions and the Province, have created a working group and put together some funding to create a specific desk at the registration office for residence permits for the students. In addition, in order to avoid linguistic and administrative obstacles, international students are assisted in the different administrative offices both within and outside the university by a student collaborator with relevant foreign language skills.

In the UK, where the students consulted for this study did not report concerns about the registration process complexity, several institutions nevertheless indicated that most of their time is tied up in dealing with visa and immigration related issues, and that the situation will likely get even more demanding as a consequence of a new UK visa process. To increase efficiency, several institutions organise regular information sessions on visa renewals, and other related issues, as such sessions are a good way to reduce individual enquiries.

Even in countries with a less heavy bureaucracy regarding stay permits, international students may need support in understanding what documents they should submit, and, importantly, help with issues related to language. Sometimes the welcome week or orientation programme includes trips to the local registration office, or at a minimum, visa overview sessions where key details are explained to the students. Help may also be required in completing forms in the local language. At the Danish International Business Academy, for example, students are strongly encouraged to bring all official-looking mail into the student office to have staff translate potentially important documents.

### *Housing*

Another issue that risks diverting international students' attention from their studies particularly upon arrival—and even make for significant differences in student satisfaction between one institution and another—is housing. Housing is a complicated matter to take care of from a distance, and yet is one of the first things a student needs on arrival. International students across the study countries indicated housing to be one of the areas where they most wish to receive support—and the area where the support very often falls short of needs and expectations. The expectations vary, too, from guaranteed student residence housing available and confirmed prior to arrival, to help in identifying reliable estate agents, or assistance in the form of checking private rental contracts. While housing is also an important issue for national students, international students face significant difficulties in comparison to

host-country students, as they may lack knowledge about neighbourhoods, legal issues such as rental contracts or deposits, typical costs and arrangements, or may not even know where to start to look for a place. In addition, support with arranging housing is even more important for those students studying in a language other than the local language, who might not be able to communicate adequately with private landlords or real estate agencies.

Some of the main problems with housing are the lack of adequate and suitable—and affordable—housing (some cities, especially capitals, suffer from lack of appropriate accommodation, high demand, and high prices); the lack of university or subsidised accommodation; insufficient quality of accommodation; lack of specific housing for students with families; and lack of support with finding accommodation. Some of these problems are out of the control of the university: it can do nothing or very little regarding market-driven rental prices, its resources in offering university accommodation to all students may be limited, or national level regulations may restrict possibilities of hosting students with families in university residences<sup>26</sup>. However, institutions can do—and are doing—many things to help students face the problematic issue of housing. At some institutions, for both practical and financial reasons, accommodation is only offered to visiting and exchange students. The rationale here is that these students may face more difficulties finding accommodation in the local community due to the need for short term leases and furnished housing. Some institutions have invested in residences themselves and are therefore able to offer housing, at least for the first year of studies, while others concentrate on helping students to find accommodation outside the university context.

The University of Copenhagen's Faculty of Life Sciences, for example, has its own housing office where one full-time staff member and a part-time student employee assist students in finding accommodation. It is also able to guarantee all international first year students a place in university housing. The University of Nottingham, which can accommodate more than 4 000 students in a variety of university-owned residence halls, houses and flats, also guarantees a place to all first year non-European students. After the first year, students are better able to look for private accommodation, as they are more familiar with the local environment, can visit apartments, and have perhaps met people with whom they could share housing. At VIA University College, however, all new international students are guaranteed accommodation for the duration of their studies. It has been a strategic choice by the institution to offer high-level services to international students, to be able to attract them. The institution operates an on-line booking system where

---

<sup>26</sup> This is the case in Italy, where student housing can host only individuals over the age of 18.

students choose their accommodation themselves. The hope is that allowing students to choose their rooms themselves will ultimately make them more satisfied with their accommodation. Similarly, at the University of Science and Technology Krakow all students are offered a room in a residence hall for the duration of their studies. The university residences are all located in the same area and thus form a 'student city' with a total of 9 000 students in residence. The concentration of housing has enabled the institution to offer a range of services locally within the residences, such as a library, kindergarten, and sports facilities, among other amenities. Indeed, students' expectations in regard to housing—especially university accommodation—go well beyond a bed for sleeping and a desk at which to work: it is considered standard that residence halls should be able to offer a number of facilities and services ranging from wireless internet access, to dining, meeting and sports facilities, and further to libraries, separate study spaces, and other resources within the residences.

At the Politecnico di Milano, housing is considered a priority area in terms of international student support. Since 2005, all international students with a scholarship have been granted a room in a residence. This corresponds to slightly more than half of all international degree students. Meanwhile, the university is increasing its housing places from the current 1 500 to 3 000, trying to create mixed halls to avoid ghettos by nationality. Eight new housing projects are underway at the moment, each with at least 100 places, offering housing for a total of more than 1 000 students. These projects will be completed within 2-3 years, and are expected to bring a great improvement to the current housing situation. Presently, the university rents apartments and then sub-lets them to students, which means that the university assumes the primary responsibility as the property owner for payment, and shoulders the rental burden for rooms that remain empty.

*Opera Universitaria* in Trento organises housing for national and international students, and guarantees a place to all international students for their first year. The residences have common spaces that can be reserved for events, and also some funding of EUR 80-100 000 is given each year to student organisations that propose specific activities. The residences have three 'inter-cultural mediators', of which one is a psychologist who offers counseling for domestic and international students alike. The presence of intercultural mediators is considered important in mixed residence halls, as difficulties and conflicts may arise in these contexts for a great number of reasons, ranging from different cleaning and eating habits, to unfamiliar religious and cultural practices. Booking for housing can be done online, and in English, and is thus also relatively easy for students who have not yet arrived in Italy, and who take part in English language programmes. The important aspect of the

housing offered by the *Opera Universitaria* is that it is made available two weeks before the start of the term. This is not always the case at other institutions, and indeed students have mentioned as an important problem the fact that university accommodation, where available, is typically only accessible from the first day of the term. This is generally too late for international students, who are thus forced to seek temporary (and often expensive) accommodation for the first days or weeks of their stay.

Sciences Po in Paris blocks rooms for students in the *Cité Internationale*—the largest concentration of student residences in Paris—for the first month of their stay to allow them to look for private accommodation during this period. In addition, students receive advice about accommodation options, including sources, locations and prices from the international office.

Housing is consistently mentioned as one of the main difficulties and worries by international students, and the institutions are reassuringly aware of this. For many, increasing and improving university owned or coordinated housing is one of the main priority areas for services development. However, often the issue is not entirely in the hands of the institutions, who may at best provide some support to ease the burden on the new international students.

### *Support for families*

Students arriving in a foreign country with their families face yet another set of problems and questions that may need to be addressed by host institutions, especially if they are to maintain or increase their attractiveness to young researchers. Two obvious problems relate to housing, which poses different requirements for families than for single students, as well as visas and permits for family members of international students. Some institutions offer information on regulations and practicalities related to family life in the host country, taking care of visa renewals, or registration processes, and even providing support, for example, with school and childcare resources. The University of Nottingham, for example, has a 50-place nursery on the University Park campus for children from 6 months to 5 years, where students may benefit from subsidised childcare. The university also has a “Child Care Support Scheme” to support childcare costs of some students. The University of Science and Technology Krakow campus, which administers several student accommodations, also has a kindergarten where international students with families may find a place for their children. Others, such as the Law Faculty at Humboldt University, have created a new ‘baby room’ for students with children.

Support to integrate into the local community, to get to know other young families in similar situations, and more generally the organisation of social activities, is often highly appreciated by spouses and families. The Univer-

sity of Nottingham, for example, organises an extensive range of trips and visits around the UK. The events are specifically designed for international students, families with children, and those who have joined their Family Link scheme (described below). All trips are subsidised by the university, with several events and trips being free of charge. In addition, each term the international office coordinates a children's event for all international staff and students' children.

The University of Nottingham runs a special programme called "International Family Link". The programme was formed several years ago to introduce mature international students to local people who are willing to offer hospitality in their own homes. The scheme was created to enable students and academic visitors to experience British life and culture outside the university environment. Getting to know local people and going into real homes, was considered an important way to enhance the cultural experience of international students and their families. The hosts, who can be singles, young families or, for example, retired staff of the university, may offer the visitors a Sunday lunch or a family meal one evening, or join together for an outing in the local area. Along these same lines, the University of Trento has created a "Family Network" for students with families. The network encourages different activities that bring the families of students together, and help them address issues of common interest. For example some spouses have organised an informal "morning tea group" which meets each week at a different person's home for social purposes, which also offers opportunities to organise further events.

### *Work opportunities and internships*

Interestingly, according to a wide variety of student and institutional respondents involved in this study, an increasingly common question students ask when looking for a place to study, and when choosing a degree programme is, "Can I do an internship while studying?" or even "Will you find me a job when I graduate?". While these expectations may seem exaggerated, they are real, and in one way or another institutions are expected to help students to make the transition from study to work, and minimally to gain skills that enable students to apply for a job, compile a CV, or to perform well in a job interview. Career services are not necessarily specific to international students. Indeed, several institutions, especially in the UK, have had careers offices for decades which provide job search advice and career support to all students, national and international alike. However, some institutions have taken special care to create services specifically directed at international students. The University of Copenhagen, for example, has held specific International Career Days, designed both for Danish students wishing to pursue an international career and international students interested in pursuing a career in Denmark. The international careers day has been a great success and highly



appreciated by the students. The institution also has plans to create a portal with international jobs, including jobs at the university itself.

Students may also need to work—both for experience as well as simply for maintenance—during their studies. At the University of Nottingham, international students are offered support to find temporary employment relevant to their programme of study for short periods of up to 12 weeks through the ‘International Student Placement Programme’. Students receive a training allowance of GBP 190 per week for their participation in this programme. The University of Trento careers service organises stages and traineeships, and is now beginning little by little to look for student placements abroad. More and more international students request traineeships, but since many of them study in English-taught programmes, and lack sufficient Italian language skills, there is a problem related to language competences in local enterprises.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Overall, the ingenuity with which the provision of such services is implemented across Europe is exemplary. While institutions may face significant problems in terms of resources and staffing, particularly in the current financial climate, the work that has been done to date to seek and find solutions to meet the needs of non-European international students offers practitioners many concrete examples of good practice.

In an ideal world, support services for international and other students on campus would be well-resourced, fully integrated, and perhaps even housed in a purpose-built administrative facility. In practice, this type of scenario is highly unusual in European higher education. Rather, it is often the enthusiasm and professionalism of individual staff members that have the greatest impact on the lives of students. The problem with this situation is that it is difficult to assess this work broadly and systematically; it is also unrealistic to expect this approach to work well for any ‘economy of scale.’

Offering examples of good practice across the full range of study countries, however, indicates that, for every international student service need or challenge, there is already likely to be a solution in operation somewhere in Europe. Exploring and documenting service provision in the wider European context, therefore, is perhaps the most important factor in eventually delivering meaningful support services to all students. Learning from and benchmarking against the experiences of others will help each institution develop an approach that makes sense for its own profile and the unique needs of its students.



## **6 What have we learned?**

### **Main findings of the ENATIS project**

The presence—and plans for further recruitment—of full-degree non-European international students is a significant factor in the rapid internationalisation of higher education throughout Europe. International students undoubtedly expect a certain level of service from their university before they arrive, during their programme of study and, in some cases, after their graduation with support for finding a job. The level of such expectations, however, tends to vary according to the country in which a student intends to study—for example, where there are fees charged for education, an expectation of what might be termed ‘professional’ services exists; where no or low tuition fees exist, an international student tends to be more forgiving of the level of the services with which they are provided. However, as more students travel to international destinations to complete full-degree studies, the comparison between one country and another becomes an integral part of the decision-making process, and the promise of support services becomes a more significant factor in terms of where students ultimately choose to study.

Numerous key findings have emerged from analysing how a broad spectrum of institutions of higher education across the six study countries plan and execute their support of non-European full-degree international students. These findings cover the pre-arrival and marketing phase, to the arrival and study period in the host country. In addition, an examination of the approaches adopted by national and other agencies help us to understand the importance of international students to the local and national environments, as well as the way in which these bodies champion legislative and policy frameworks to support international students. These findings should be read in the context of the practical examples offered earlier in the book.

#### **6.1 Student behaviour and expectations**

The availability of services is an important part of the student decision-making process. However, there is a clear distinction between those systems of higher education where service provision is a relatively new concept (for example, in Germany, Italy and Poland), and countries where service, and often tuition fees for non-European students, have been established for some time. For many students, the experience of studying at an institution where the provision of support services is either inconsistent or difficult to access, thus making day-to-day life difficult, reflects negatively on the overall institution. However, in almost all cases, if the academic experience meets the expectations of students and they were additionally aware of the tradition and reputation of how a particular higher education system operates, the disappointment with the level of service does not necessarily dictate that

they will advise other prospective students not to come. It is important to note, however, that for many students the choice to study at an institution or, more generally, in a country is made with some awareness that there will be limited student services on offer. In these cases, the availability and quality of their academic programme of their choice is the more important determining factor guiding enrolment.

Indeed, for many non-European full-degree international students currently enrolled in European institutions of higher education, the overall student experience is often positive despite a lack of services. What emerges from this study is how resourceful and flexible many degree-seeking students are and how successfully they navigate a national, local or institutional system by seeking support from alternative sources—for example, fellow students who are willing and able to offer advice and, in some cases, well-organised services, run by and for students, supporting integration, housing and the development of appropriate study skills. Tuition fees, however, polarise the importance of the role of support services for non-European degree seeking students. For many students pursuing degree programmes with no or low tuition fees, their expectations for the type of student experience they are likely to have are generally modest, potentially making them more ‘forgiving’ in situations where service provision is poor and/or difficult to access.

There are, however, clear indications of what support services international students expect from their institution, irrespective of whether tuition fees are charged or not. Students expect to receive:

- information about their living and study experience before they arrive on campus;
- targeted support to help them find housing and to navigate any legal registration requirements;
- an introduction to their academic subject area;
- a formal orientation programme, allowing them to be aware of ‘how things work’ in their new environment;
- some form of study support, either from their specific faculty or from the institution as a whole.

And for those on research programmes, students expect to receive tailored academic support through a personal tutor or supervisor.

In the main, institutions of higher education throughout Europe meet many of the basic demands made of them by international full-degree students. The majority of institutions have recognised—at least at the operational level—the

need to invest more significantly in services for international students, even if at this stage a fully-fledged commitment has not been adopted at the most senior policy level of the institution, or the services themselves have not yet been completely implemented. While institutions do not always provide every element of student support, the more critical services required to support new non-European students on arrival certainly are in place. Staff are conscious of how they should welcome students and, in many cases, there is no shortage of enthusiasm and goodwill among individuals to provide the best possible service not only to non-European students but to all new arrivals. Limitations on budgets and other resources, however, present constant challenges.

The types of services offered to enrolled, non-European, full-degree international students are divided between those that are focused on academic support and those that are more general and related to life outside the classroom. Students have a relatively clear hierarchy of what they consider to be the most important services an institution should offer, with support for academic issues being of greatest significance. While institutions are aware of this demand, the actual implementation of academic support is not altogether comprehensive. Indeed, some 30 percent of student respondents indicated that they did not have access to “support for academic problems”, perhaps one of the most significant findings of this research. This suggests, then, one of the most pressing issues for all internationally active European institutions of higher education is the need to ensure that international students have sufficient support so that they can both successfully integrate into their academic programme and ultimately graduate from it.

The provision of language support, both in the local language or where the teaching medium is different from the local language (for example in many English-taught programmes) is an issue many European universities are currently reviewing. In the academic context, international students often require very specific support related directly to their programme of study, for example, helping them to understand complex academic terms and acquire study skills in a foreign language. Either through dedicated academic staff or buddy schemes providing peer-to-peer support, an enhanced level of support is required in almost all of the universities examined in this research. Furthermore, providing tandem language support so that international students are able to integrate effectively into the domestic student body and the local community is an area that requires additional investment for universities seeking to more effectively support their international full-degree student body throughout the course of their studies.

## **6.2 National organisations and advisory body activities and approaches**

The roles played by national organisations and advisory bodies throughout Europe in support of international students are diverse. Their activities, however, can be classified into two distinct areas: those services offered to international students directly, and those services offered to institutions of higher education. Both of these areas can be broadly regarded as elements of advocacy on behalf of international students, albeit addressing two different audiences.

### *Activities addressed to students*

The services offered to students by national organisations and advisory bodies are remarkably consistent across all study countries and perhaps reflect the relatively defined nature of the mechanics of attracting international students to a country. Key findings can be categorised in the following ways:

#### *Marketing and recruitment*

The need to present a national image to prospective international students, often linked to the provision of information about the host country and its higher education offerings, now appears to be the minimum requirement for a successful national-level campaign to attract international students, particularly those from outside the EU and seeking full-degree programmes. Such an image is most often conveyed through marketing and information campaigns, largely but not exclusively focused on the development of an attractive and informative national website. Supporting literature and other marketing material—typically explaining the study environment, the process of studying and living, the advantages, the costs and the impacts of studying in a particular country—often augments such online campaigns. This kind of practical information tends to create an overall impression of the country as a whole.

#### *Funding information*

All national organisations include a significant amount of information for international students on the cost associated with studying in the host country (including the level and range of tuition fees, the cost of living, scholarships and other funding opportunities) and the ways in which they might fund their programme of study. Where relevant, such information highlights any national scholarships or bursary schemes available to prospective international students, and the procedure for applying to such funding schemes. An increasing trend at the national level is for national organisations to also offer detailed information on the cost of living, particularly concerning housing and related aspects of the student experience.

*Practical support*

All national organisations and other related advisory bodies ensure that prospective international students have the relevant information to allow them to negotiate the practicalities of studying and living in another country. Centrally, the information provided is very much focused on the requirements and procedures necessary for securing a study visa, generally through the offices of an embassy or consulate in a student's home country. In addition, national organisations offer students support on local issues such as registration requirements, work regulations and other country-specific requirements. Overall, the need for national-level organisations to offer a unified and 'official' view on such procedural and practical matters is one of the most essential features of the promotion of higher education to international students.

*Activities addressed to institutions*

The services offered to institutions by national organisations and advisory bodies are quite inconsistent across the study countries, largely matching the point of development each country has reached in terms of international full-degree student recruitment. Key findings can be reviewed according to the following areas:

*Marketing and recruitment*

It is common to find national organisations advising their institutional stakeholders on the state of the market for international student recruitment and providing them practical support—whether it is through the provision of market information or through the development of a national education brand. In practical terms, it is also common to see direct support offered by government agencies in particular to universities when they travel abroad, either through a nationally-organised presence at an international education event or fair, or the funding of specific marketing campaigns, such as national-level literature on the benefits of a country's higher education system. In only a small number of cases, a membership fee levied on institutions pays for such services.

*Legislative information and advocacy*

National organisations and related advisory bodies help coordinate a significant amount of advocacy on behalf of international students within each country context. Such a role spans both the dialogue between parts of the government—particularly ministries handling immigration, foreign affairs, education, labour and employment—to ensure that international students are welcomed and supported, and the information passed between institutions of higher education and different organisations to ensure the legislative environment is appropriate for international students

and their dependants. This work also includes the circulation of updated rules and regulations so that institutions of higher education operate with the most current information available and convey relevant information to their prospective international students.

#### *Capacity building*

Many national organisations now include an explicit training and professional development function from which institutions may benefit. Such activities support the development of individual members of staff in a complete range of areas, including marketing and recruitment techniques, counselling, advising, visa support, housing and other practical policies and cross cultural issues. It is also now very common for such activities to include an annual conference or similar event, where institutions come together to discuss crucial issues related to their day-to-day activities and have the opportunity to hear speakers from other countries. The focus on developing an increased professional capacity related to the internationalisation of higher education is a core function of many national organisations and advisory bodies and is widely seen as an essential task if a country is to develop a greater international impact and profile.

#### *Funding*

It is increasingly common for national organisations to offer funding for the development of institutional initiatives aimed specifically at improving the international student experience or the provision of international support services or integration activities. While such funding support varies enormously from country to country, it can be a very significant feature of the role played by a national agency in the internationalisation of its higher education system. In some cases, funding is relatively modest and is intended only to support the initial phase of a new activity until institutional funds are found to support new ways of working on a more long-term basis. Financial support for institutional initiatives is by no means widespread in all the countries reviewed for this study, with those already investing more broadly in the internationalisation of their higher education system more likely to offer development funds to individual projects in the hope that they raise professional standards throughout the sector.

### **6.3 Institutional activities and approaches**

According to this study's findings, institutional practice varies considerably from country to country. The single most important factor that accounts for such differences is the level of investment available for international support activities. In this context, the UK, with its established tuition fee regime and a more market-orientated approach to student satisfaction, tends to offer a wide range of practical examples. This does not mean that what the UK institutions do is

somehow better than what is done in other countries; but simply that there is more funding for such activities. However, an increasing number of universities across Europe are adapting the services they have traditionally offered only to shorter-term students (such as those on international—or European—exchange schemes) to address the needs of full-degree students, albeit with little or no increase in the resources available to them. Such approaches depend very much on the goodwill and enthusiasm of staff and existing international students but are perhaps not entirely sustainable in the long run.

Despite appreciable variations across the institutions examined in this research, the following broad set of findings reflects some important trends seen in the activities offered by these very different institutions in the six study countries. These include:

#### *Marketing and recruitment*

All institutions of higher education now recognise the role marketing and recruitment has to play in the internationalisation of higher education generally and securing qualified international students in particular. Institutions have a far greater focus on the provision of appropriate information to prospective students than ever before, with all institutions now offering comprehensive websites, often in a number of languages (including local languages and English), as their main communication tool. Institutions are also concerned about the accuracy of the information they provide to prospective international students, working to ensure that it matches the actual student experience and does not create false expectations that will ultimately result in low student satisfaction. In broad terms, institutions of higher education provide information on academic programmes, fees, cost of living, the student experience, relevant support services available, career opportunities and other learning outcomes as part of their marketing and recruitment campaigns.

#### *Pre-arrival information*

An increasing number of universities and/or their existing international student organisations offer detailed information to prospective students at the pre-arrival stage. Such information is focused on very practical details including housing and other accommodation issues, necessary preparation a student should undertake before arrival, any legal regulations—such as police or health registration—details relevant to their programme of study and their first few weeks of term. Many universities also try to put new international students in touch with current students before arrival, again to enhance incoming students' level of preparedness, minimize unrealistic expectations and make accepted students feel more personally connected to the host institution.

### *Arrival and orientation*

Arrival and orientation services are among the most widely discussed support issues for staff and international students. Overall, dedicated arrival services can clearly benefit some students and are expected of some institutions (particularly those where high tuition fees are charged). However, the necessity of such amenities as transport from a point of entry to a university campus or a residence location is somewhat unclear. In the UK, an increasing number of international students expect such a service, but throughout Europe, the provision of such services appears not to be particularly necessary. Orientation, however, is among the most critical of support services and its execution can make the difference between a positive and negative international student experience. The organisation of orientation activities requires a concerted institutional effort, where the programmes of central administration and faculties are coordinated and ensure that students are sufficiently well orientated to make the most of their study experience. Successful orientation programmes strike a balance between introducing students into the immediate environment—including tours, integration activities and any formal procedural requirements—and academic orientation, where the process and structure of their programme of study are explained. In an increasing number of universities, orientation is staged over a period of weeks (or structured as a ‘rolling’ programme) so that late arrivals have access to information they would otherwise miss. Perhaps the most important aspect of the arrival and orientation phase, however, is the support students receive to find housing. Institutions of all kinds are expected to offer assistance in finding students somewhere to live, whether this is in university-owned accommodation or in the local community. At a minimum, universities should guide students through the range of housing options available to them and offer access to short-term accommodation once they arrive so that they may search for housing in a reasonably comfortable fashion.

### *Integration*

Those universities and colleges reviewed during the course of this research have made considerable efforts to ensure that the integration of international students into the institutional and local environments is a significant aspect of their overall service provision. There is, however, an inconsistency in the range of activities provided to ensure that international students are indeed integrated academically and socially. Much of this inconsistency is due to the fact that a sense of the importance of such activities is only just emerging in many European countries. Until now, the experience of supporting international exchange students from a relatively small number of countries has required only a ‘light touch’ approach to integration support. The use of buddy systems, however, is now commonplace and helps eliminate many



boundaries between international and local students. Buddy systems also allow students to access a range of services including social and cultural activities, language and learning support, and the development of local networks that benefit all participants. An increasing number of activities to tackle integration issues are being organised between central administration (often the international office) and different academic units so that the range of support is more comprehensive and cohesive.

### *Continuing support*

While the support of non-European full-degree international students is often focused at the beginning of their programmes, the need to offer continuing support is very important. Access to academic and student mentors can be critical for ensuring that students are able to complete their programme of study successfully. Meanwhile, language support, either in the local language or in the language of instruction, is perhaps one of the most significant issues for many international students. The need to offer access to support, particularly in what might be termed 'academic language', is crucial if students are to successfully complete their programme of studies. Academic staff also need to be made aware of the difficulties students face when studying in a foreign language. A further aspect of continuing support concerns the information provided to students on issues such as work regulations and other related formal requirements, particularly for those students interested in developing a career in the host country. Some highly responsive universities have identified the need to bring international students into contact with local and national employers, over and above the minimum requirement of informing them of their rights to work during and possibly after their studies. Overall, the publication (electronically or through more traditional means) of an international student handbook is an essential part of supporting international students throughout their study period, allowing students to quickly reference any information they may need.

### *After graduation*

The development of services for graduates of universities and colleges across Europe is in a formative stage. However, there is an overall acknowledgement of the growing importance of such services and in many cases, internal discussions have already been initiated so that structures supporting alumni development and alumni associations can be established. Only in the UK is there a tradition of international alumni associations, utilised in a number of ways including advocacy, student recruitment and fundraising.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Making sense of the landscape of support services for international full-degree students in European higher education requires an understanding of perspectives at the institutional and national levels, as well as at the level of individual students. Each of these stakeholder groups presents a particular set of needs, expectations, and aspirations, and within each set of actors there is also considerable variation in terms of priorities and spheres of interest and action.

There are many positive developments to report. Full-degree students from beyond Europe are finding their way to European higher education institutions and do not appear to be disappointed, in the main, by what they find here. The institutions that receive them seem increasingly aware of their needs and willing to respond with a broad range of solutions to support students' personal and academic adjustment. Meanwhile, the national-level organisations and advisory bodies examined in the context of this study are working, in different ways, to support both individual students and the institutions in their respective countries, by providing information, building capacity, and encouraging improvements in service delivery options and quality.

Still, much work remains to be done. This is true not only in terms of information provision and direct services to students, but also as relates to overall coordination and communication across the multiple layers of actors, all with a stake in the international student experience. For example, while a great deal of information is available at both the national and institutional levels, quantity does not always translate into quality—i.e. accurate, accessible, appropriately timed or relevant information that students can effectively use. Meanwhile, institutions cannot provide an unlimited menu of services, nor can national agencies maintain an unlimited portfolio of activities. Indeed, some countries do not even have advisory bodies or similar organisations with the capacity to provide national-level engagement in this area.

Still, there appears to be a growing sense at both practical and policy levels that services for international students from beyond Europe really matter, particularly as concerns full-degree students, who have typically not benefited from the more specialised attention long afforded to short-term exchange students across Europe.

## **7 Recommendations: Towards a European code of good practice**

The intention of the ENATIS project was not to pass judgment on the current provision of services offered to non-European full-degree international students; rather, it was intended to examine the different approaches taken by universities and institutions of higher education throughout Europe (and in particular across the six study countries) to support the increasing numbers of international students entering full-degree programmes. From the outcomes of the research, it is apparent that universities and their supporting national and local agencies are already giving the broad issue of service provision a significant level of priority, in many cases with national and institutional strategies already formulated and being implemented in this area.

With the expansion of international activities and the myriad issues related to the internationalisation of European higher education continuing to evolve, now is perhaps an opportune time to offer a framework of guidelines to institutions of higher education wishing to welcome non-European, full-degree international students. These guiding principles are presented here in the spirit of aiming to support the development of good practice for all European institutions and agencies. Given that the role of student services and their impact on enhancing the attractiveness of European higher education is likely to become more important in the future, such guidelines may well become a resource of some significance for the development of international student strategies for many different kinds of stakeholders.

The guidelines that follow draw on the major findings and experiences from the ENATIS project. They are categorised to reflect the most critical phases of the international student experience and are ordered with an eye to supporting the planning processes of key decision-makers. The guidelines do not, however, represent an exhaustive inventory of what institutions and agencies of all kinds should provide international students in terms of support services; rather they suggest the minimum action that should be taken for those actively engaged in the recruitment, support and education of international full-degree students coming to study from beyond Europe.

### *Marketing and recruitment*

- Ensure that all marketing and promotional material accurately reflects the reality of the institution;
- Ensure that all marketing and promotional material is available in the appropriate language(s);

- Provide prospective international students with accurate contact details for staff in the institution who are responsible for marketing and recruitment issues;
- Ensure that international students receive regular communication throughout the application and recruitment phase;
- Deploy traditional and online communication channels to reach prospective students before they arrive;

#### *Pre-arrival advice*

- Support international students to find somewhere to live;
- Ensure that information on accommodation options includes the type of housing available, its cost and location, any safety concerns, and any available support network (student or institution-led);
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of applying for and obtaining a student visa;
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of institutional registration, including all deadlines;
- Offer students complete advice on the process and requirements of any local registration;
- Offer students complete advice on the structure and requirements of their academic programme;

#### *Arrival and orientation*

- Provide a complete institution and faculty orientation programme for all new international students;
- Consider planning arrival and orientation activities across the whole institution, incorporating academic, social and cultural activities;
- Consider holding orientation activities over an extended period of time to ensure late arrivals have appropriate access to the most important information;
- Ensure that support is offered to newly arrived students to ensure that they locate appropriate accommodation;
- Involve current international and domestic students in arrival and orientation activities;

#### *Successful learning and integration experiences*

- Ensure that each international student has a dedicated point of contact within the institution for all academic and social issues;

- Provide international students with a dedicated handbook for their continuing support, either online or as a printed publication;
- Ensure that a social and cultural programme for international students is offered throughout the year, involving current students, the institution and the local community;
- Ensure that international students have access to appropriate academic support and development resources;
- Provide clear academic guidelines for each international student, including explicit requirements for success and failure;
- Develop and utilise current students to help support new international students through mentoring and “buddy” schemes;
- Ensure all international students have access to dedicated language support for academic and social purposes;

#### *Work and regulations*

- Provide clear and concise details of work and other formal regulations to prospective international students;
- Designate a point of contact in the institution responsible for advising students on legal requirements;
- Ensure all relevant information is updated regularly and is easily accessible to all international students;
- Ensure that international students are supported appropriately to find part-time work that satisfies all legal work requirements;

#### *After graduation*

- Offer students the opportunity to remain engaged in the life of the institution;
- Offer students membership in a formal alumni association, and allow for active participation in either the host country or their home country;
- Offer students the opportunity to connect with prospective international students interested in studying at the host institution;
- Provide students with the contact details of former graduates from their home country;
- Offer networking opportunities for academic or professional purposes.

## **Annexes**

### **Annex I. Site visits: higher education institutions**

#### **Denmark:**

- Aarhus School of Business-University of Aarhus [Handelshøjskolen-Aarhus Universitet]
- International Business Academy
- University of Copenhagen [Københavns Universitet]
- VIA University College

#### **France:**

- American University of Paris
- Sciences Po

#### **Germany:**

- Bremen University of Applied Sciences [Hochschule Bremen]
- Humboldt University [Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin]
- Trier University [Universität Trier]

#### **Italy:**

- LUISS Guido Carli [Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli di Roma]
- Politecnico di Milano
- University of Rome-La Sapienza [Università di Roma-La Sapienza]
- University of Trento [Università degli Studi di Trento]

#### **Poland:**

- AGH University of Science and Technology [Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza Im. Stanisława Staszica w Krakowie]
- Poznan University of Medical Sciences [Uniwersytet Medyczny im. Karola Marcinkowskiego w. Poznaniu]
- University of Warsaw [Uniwersytet Warszawski]

#### **UK:**

- Coventry University
- University of Nottingham
- University of Sussex

**Annex 2. Interviews: national-level organisations and advisory bodies****Denmark:**

- CIRIUS-Danish Agency for International Education  
[Styrelsen for International Uddannelse]

**France:**

- CampusFrance
- Égide
- CNOUS (Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires)
- CROUS (Le Réseau des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires)

**Germany:**

- DAAD-German Academic Exchange Service  
[Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst]

**Poland:**

- Perspektywy Education Foundation

**UK:**

- British Council
- UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs)





## What is ACA?

Founded in 1993, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a not-for-profit pan-European network of major organisations responsible in their countries for the promotion of internationalisation in education and training. Current membership is comprised of 19 such organisations in 16 European countries, as well as associate members from North America and Australia. ACA's secretariat is located in Brussels, Belgium, in easy reach of the European institutions.

### ACA is active in the following fields

- ◆ The promotion of innovation and internationalisation in (higher) education and training;
- ◆ The enhancement of contacts, networking and cooperation between its members and third parties;
- ◆ The provision of fast and up-to-date information on important developments in the European institutions and international organisations via a monthly published e-newsletter, regularly held seminars and an annual conference;
- ◆ Research into and publications on internationalisation in education and training;
- ◆ The provision of know-how and expertise in the management of international cooperation projects and programmes;
- ◆ Contract work for third parties.

Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)

15, rue d'Egmontstraat

B-1000 Brussels

phone: +32 2 513 22 41

fax: +32 2 513 17 76

e-mail: [info@aca-secretariat.be](mailto:info@aca-secretariat.be)

web: [www.aca-secretariat.be](http://www.aca-secretariat.be)

## **ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education**

Kerstin Janson, Harald Schomburg, Ulrich Teichler

### **The Professional Value of ERASMUS Mobility. The Impact of International Experience on Former Students' and on Teachers' Careers**

Bonn: Lemmens 2009 ISBN 978-3-932306-96-9

Paperback: € 29.80

Maria Kelo (ed.)

### **Beyond 2010. Priorities and challenges for higher education in the next decade**

Bonn: Lemmens 2008 ISBN 978-3-932306-92-1

Paperback: € 29.80

Bernd Wächter & Friedhelm Maiworm

### **English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The Picture in 2007**

Bonn: Lemmens 2008 ISBN 978-3-932306-89-1

Paperback: € 24.80

Maria Kelo

### **Support for International Students in Higher Education. Practice and Principles**

Bonn: Lemmens 2006 ISBN 3-932306-82-1

Paperback: € 25.00, pdf file: € 12.00

Maria Kelo (ed.)

### **The Future of the University. Translating Lisbon into Practice**

Bonn: Lemmens 2006 ISBN 3-932306-78-3

(out of print), pdf file: € 12.00

Maria Kelo, Ulrich Teichler, Bernd Wächter (eds.)

### **EURODATA. Student mobility in European higher education**

Bonn: Lemmens 2006 ISBN 3-932306-72-4

(out of print), pdf file: € 19.80

Jeroen Huisman, Marijk van der Wende (eds.)

### **On Cooperation and Competition II. Institutional Responses to Internationalisation, Europeanisation and Globalisation**

Bonn: Lemmens 2005 ISBN 3-932306-68-6

Paperback: € 30.00, pdf file: € 12.00

Franziska Muche (ed.)

**Opening up to the Wider World.**

**The External Dimension of the Bologna Process**

Bonn: Lemmens 2005 ISBN 3-932306-67-8

Paperback: € 24.80, pdf file: € 12.00

Franziska Muche, Maria Kelo, Bernd Wächter

**The Admission of International Students into Higher Education.  
Policies and Instruments**

Bonn: Lemmens 2004 ISBN 3-932306-62-7

Paperback: € 24.80, pdf file: € 12.00

Bernd Wächter (ed.)

**Higher Education in a Changing Environment.**

**Internationalisation of Higher Education Policy in Europe**

Bonn: Lemmens 2004 ISBN 3-932306-55-4

(out of print), pdf file: € 12.00

Marijk van der Wende, Jeroen Huismann (eds.)

**On Cooperation and Competition.**

**National and European Policies for the Internationalisation  
of Higher Education**

Bonn: Lemmens 2004 ISBN 3-932306-54-6

Paperback: € 30.00, pdf file: € 12.00

Friedhelm Maiworm, Bernd Wächter (eds.)

**English-Language-Taught Degree Programmes  
in European Higher Education.**

**Trends and Success Factors**

Bonn: Lemmens 2002 ISBN 3-932306-47-3

Paperback: € 19.80, pdf file: € 12.00

Ulrich Teichler (ed.)

**ERASMUS in the SOCRATES Programme.**

**Findings of an Evaluation Study**

Bonn: Lemmens 2002 ISBN 3-932306-41-4

Paperback: € 19.80, pdf file: € 12.00

Bernd Wächter (ed.)

**The Virtual Challenge to International Cooperation in Higher Education.  
A Project of the Academic Cooperation Association**

Bonn: Lemmens 2002 ISBN 3-932306-40-6

Paperback: € 19.80, pdf file: € 12.00

Bernd Wächter (ed.)

**Handbook of European Associations in Higher Education.  
A Practical Guide to Academic Networks in Europe and Beyond**

Bonn: Lemmens 2000 ISBN 3-932306-37-6

Paperback: € 31.00, pdf file: € 12.00

Bernd Wächter (ed.)

**Internationalisation in European Non-University Higher Education.  
A Project of the Academic Cooperation Association**

Bonn: Lemmens 1999 ISBN 3-932306-35-X

(out of print), pdf file: € 12.00

Bernd Wächter (ed.)

**Internationalisation in Higher Education.  
A Paper and Seven Essays on International Cooperation  
in the Tertiary Sector**

Bonn: Lemmens 1999 ISBN 3-932306-33-3

(out of print), pdf file: € 12.00

**Traditional or fast: print or pdf**

All ACA Papers are available as a traditional print version,  
but most of them can now also be obtained as a pdf.

**Contact:**

Lemmens Medien GmbH  
Matthias-Grünewald-Straße 1-3  
D-53175 Bonn  
Germany  
phone: +49 228 4 21 37-0  
fax: +49 228 4 21 37-29  
e-mail: [info@lemmens.de](mailto:info@lemmens.de)  
[www.lemmens.de](http://www.lemmens.de)







European higher education has long attracted international students from within the region and beyond. A strong tradition of intra-European mobility in recent decades is now being complemented by an energetic effort to expand the enrolment of non-European students, a key element in the overall European push to strengthen the competitive position of Europe's higher education sector. By most accounts, this is an exciting development, but it also raises many important questions. Most fundamentally, what do non-European students – notably those who are coming to Europe for full-degree programmes rather than short-term exchange experiences – need from their host institutions in order to succeed? Are the institutions receiving these students delivering necessary information and support services in effective and appropriate ways? What constitutes good practice in this area, and what are the stakes for failing to get it right? *International Student Support in European Higher Education* addresses these and other highly pertinent issues, providing in the process concrete suggestions for practitioners and policymakers who are keen to ensure that the world's internationally-mobile students view Europe as a destination for both academic excellence and care for the 'whole student'.

**ISBN 978-3-932306-99-0**