

**Audit of  
New Zealand universities  
against the welfare and  
accommodation sections of the  
*Code of practice for the pastoral  
care of international students*  
**Overview report**  
October 2008**





**New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit**  
**Te Wāhanga Tātari**

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**New Zealand universities**  
**against the welfare and**  
**accommodation sections of the**  
***Code of practice for the pastoral***  
***care of international students***

**Overview report**

**October 2008**

**This report presents an overview of findings following audits of  
New Zealand universities against the welfare and accommodation  
sections of the  
*Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students.***

**Site visits to all universities during May and June 2008 followed  
evaluations of printed materials and websites.**

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## **This report**

This report was prepared during September and October, following the completion of the individual reports for the eight universities. A draft of the report was submitted to an independent reader from within the university sector who is knowledgeable about the needs of international students. The panel is grateful for the confirmation of the approach taken in this report, and for the comments and suggestions for improvement.

The report provides an overview of the findings of the panel, and by reporting the range of approaches to the pastoral care and welfare of international students it is hoped that the report might be helpful to the university sector in its ongoing commitment to the enhancement of the pastoral care of international students.

It will be noted that individual universities are not identified by name. This is a deliberate decision. The panel is not convinced that the limited time spent in each university was sufficient to identify every example of good practice or effective initiative. To identify a university undertaking an effective activity might lead a reader to assume that no other university was undertaking a similar activity. The panel cannot be sure that this is the case.

## **Acknowledgements**

There was much read and talked about during the audit process that impressed the panel. It was particularly pleasing to hear from the universities that they were positive about the opportunities offered by the audits for independent review of support services and external input into their own improvement processes. The panel is particularly grateful for the assistance of international student support staff in all universities for the provision of materials, for staff co-operation during the site visit, and for the giving of staff and student time to talk with the panel.

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# 1

## Overview

### Introduction

All eight New Zealand universities are signatories to the *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* [the *Code of practice*], and over many years they have invested in services that provide support for academic study and learning for all students. Universities are ‘mainstreaming’ international students into academic support services while recognising that international students also have specific needs for pastoral care associated with study away from their home countries, and away from family and familiar support infrastructures. It is understood that universities contributed significantly to the development of the original *Code of practice*, and during this audit process, universities made it clear that they value the *Code of practice* as only a minimum benchmark for their services, and that they aim to provide services. They aim to provide the highest standards of service that their limited resources will permit.

The aim of this report is to bring together the findings of eight separate audit reports. This ‘Overview’ section of the report notes those aspects of university practice that are common to all universities. The remaining two sections of the report – ‘Welfare’ and ‘Attendance and accommodation’ – provide details of differences of approach under each aspect of the *Code of practice* considered during these audits. By reporting the range of approaches to the pastoral care and welfare of international students, it is hoped that the report might be helpful to the university sector in its ongoing commitment to the enhancement of the pastoral care of international students.

### Common features

The audits demonstrated that the international student support staff<sup>1</sup> in the eight universities have developed approaches, processes and activities best suited to their size and organisational structure. Nevertheless, a number of characteristics are common to all.

#### ▪ A culture of care

The panel was most impressed by the commitment of international student support staff interviewed during the site visits. Some support services operate with small numbers of staff, with staff carrying heavy loads and sharing responsibilities to ensure good services are available for students who need to use them. Staff at one university see themselves as an ‘evolving team’

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<sup>1</sup> The eight universities have different names for the units and/or personnel that provide support for international students. Some universities have a single international office of which student support services are one section; some universities have a separate student support agency which works closely with the international office and student services. In this report, ‘international student support’ is used to represent the appropriate agencies and/or personnel that have specific responsibilities for the support, welfare and pastoral care of international students as expected of them by the ‘Welfare’ and ‘Accommodation’ parts of the *Code of practice*.

where the role of staff and services provided are changing to reflect the changing needs of international students. Most universities emphasised they were working to develop cultures where the support of international students is the responsibility of every staff member within the institution.

It was apparent from interviews that the international student staff are enthusiastic with strong networks of support for international students across the university. There is a 'culture of care'. It was not unexpected to find that among students interviewed in all universities, there were one or two who had faced unanticipated problems which arose from their unique personal situations and which were difficult to resolve. However, in terms of general level of service, students interviewed were grateful for the attention paid by international student support staff, and were satisfied overall with the time they were given and the advice, help and support they received.

#### ▪ **Diversification of students**

All universities referred to the increasing diversification of countries and cultures from which international students come. Students from China still make up the largest group, but numbers are declining. By contrast, the number of students from Malaysia, India, Pakistan and the United States of America are increasing. Significant numbers of students come from European countries. The percentage of students who are enrolling in postgraduate degrees is increasing, and more students in this category are bringing families with them, which introduces a new dimension to pastoral care activities.

To cope adequately with the growing diversification of international students, universities have paid attention to the up-skilling of student support staff to ensure that they have knowledge and understanding of the needs of the students coming from such a variety of cultural and religious contexts. Student support staff find themselves faced with issues relating to academic as well as pastoral issues, and therefore must be knowledgeable about academic and welfare support services so that they are able to refer international students to the appropriate academic and learning support agencies within the universities. There has been a rapid growth in the number of students from the Middle East who place particularly heavy demands on both academic and pastoral care staff.

#### ▪ **Integration of student learning support services**

All universities recognise that international students, studying in a new country and away from familiar support systems in their home countries, have distinctive pastoral care needs. They are also entitled to the same standard of academic learning support and access to university support services as all other students. Therefore universities tend to mainstream and integrate international students with domestic students with respect to access to such support. International student support staff tend to operate as a point-of-referral, drawing on the other university and community services. Close relationships are maintained between international student support and these services.

#### ▪ **Visa and study permit renewal systems**

All universities have moved to a visas-on-campus system which requires students to come to the international office for visa renewal. This has provided an opportunity for staff to 'get in on the

ground floor’ and provide international students with an integrated service, with the visa service used as an opportunity to ensure not only that personal records and information are up to date, but also that international students who might potentially have pastoral problems are identified. Staff use the opportunity offered by these visits as an ‘alert system’ to look for any signs that students might potentially have pastoral problems.

- **Critical incidents plans**

All universities have some form of critical incidents plan which operates when there is a serious incident. For some universities, the plan operates only in the case of death. Staff from across the universities told the panel of examples of successful and effective implementation of plans and observed that information learned from debriefings after incidents was fed into regular reviews and updating of plans. Some students interviewed had, coincidentally, been involved in critical incidents and they were able to independently verify staff claims that the plan implementations were effective. Students involved expressed their gratitude for the extra support and pastoral care received on those occasions.

- **The *Code of practice***

All universities regard the *Code of practice* as useful in providing a checklist of minimal requirements with respect to pastoral care. It provides protection for international support staff as well as the students under their care, and thereby is important to the whole student experience. But the *Code of practice* is regarded as baseline only, which universities aim to exceed so that international students have a high level of pastoral care and protection. International student support staff are well-briefed on the requirements of the *Code of practice*, and some universities make an effort to make academic staff aware of the *Code of practice* and the service providers within the university to whom international students of concern may be referred.

- **Panel observations**

*During site visits, the panel was given some feedback from international student support staff on issues that arise in the application of the Code of practice. The panel was aware that a review of the Code of practice was taking place about the time of the audit visits, and that universities had had the opportunity to make submissions to the review. The following sets down two particular matters that arose in discussion during the site visits with international student support staff.*

- ***Recognition of the specific needs of tertiary institutions***

*While universities accepted the present Code of practice as a useful baseline for their operations, it was clear that many of the universities were frustrated by a Code of practice that attempted to address all levels of education and therefore placed requirements on universities that were inappropriate. A specific issue was the definition of international students, given that students from some countries and PhD students from all countries were paying domestic fees. Universities were regarding all such students as international, requiring the universities to fund and provide services specific to the needs of international students while receiving the domestic funding subsidy only.*

*There was support expressed for a separate Code of practice which was restricted to issues that were the proper concern of tertiary institutions. The under-18 requirements*

*were suitable for school pupils but were poorly-tailored for under-18 students capable of undertaking university study. There was also a growing proportion of students in universities who were mature students bringing families into New Zealand. It was felt that a tertiary-specific Code of practice could provide clarity by focussing on the provision of relevant tertiary-level pastoral care, with more support for pastoral care in the areas of sexual and mental health, and a section associated with families and their accommodation, education, health services and social activities.*

*The panel was made aware that the range of health issues has been causing an increased workload for support staff and a corresponding increase in the overhead costs of the delivery of services.*

- ***Medical insurance***

*Some universities were still concerned about the lack of clarity on what is considered to be appropriate medical insurance. Coverage is still considered to be insufficient to match the range of health issues – in particular, sexual and mental health – being presented by international university students. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of consistency and transparency relating to claims among insurance schemes, with some policies requiring medical bills to be paid and then claimed. This was proving to be stressful for many families, especially those on New Zealand aid scholarships and low incomes.*

***The panel is of the view*** *that the universities should work with the Ministry of Education and insurers to define an updated package which is more acceptable to universities and international students.*

## 2

### Welfare

#### 15.1 Support services

*15.1 Signatories must designate an appropriate person or unit as a resource for all inquiries about pastoral care from international students. The existence and availability of this person must be advised to students on enrolment.*

##### ▪ International student support office

All universities but one have dedicated international student support spaces, clear signage and adequate information about their whereabouts. The remaining university has made a deliberate decision not to have a designated international student centre, and has a dedicated international student advisor; pastoral care is devolved out to the academic units as much as possible.

The panel visited all seven international student support facilities and noted the clear display of office hours and the wide range of materials on display in each reception area, including information on the services offered by the international student support services. It was clear from comments made during interviews that students appreciate an identifiable international students' space where networking can take place and where information displayed can be easily accessed.

International student support services maintain links with student learning support centres and other agencies such as health and counselling, the chaplaincy and careers advice. Quite often international student support staff also provide details on advocacy on internationalisation and international student issues, services to departments and staff and have contact addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail and website addresses.

International student support offices have a variety of locations. They are situated in or near to students' association and student learning support facilities, or near to student services and admissions sections of registry, or next to the international office (dealing with international student recruitment and admissions) as part of an international student 'complex'. In some universities, although the support office might be placed away from the international office and other student services, they are well-advertised and students reported having had no problem in accessing them. Most universities have some form of student lounge space with limited computer access, either near to the international student support office or near student learning support services. Some of the lounges are large enough for gatherings of various sorts.

Universities vary as to whether there is an open door policy, or whether appointments are required except for special or urgent circumstances. Staff in reception areas are very important, and many are staffed by former successfully-graduated international students, and all universities provide 24-hour access through an office mobile telephone, or through university security services. In the latter cases, university security services can transfer international student callers

to international student support staff, although some students interviewed appeared not to be aware that this is so.

All universities have staff able to converse in a range of languages, and all have ready access to staff in the university whenever translation is required or telephone contact is needed with parents. Language facilities available in the community are also accessible in cases of need.

Students interviewed by the panel were grateful for the attention of staff. Comments included: *'The staff show themselves to be human'*, *'They made a difference to me'*, and *'The staff communicate well with us'*. Staff were described as *'helpful'*, *'approachable'*, and *'amazing'*. Communication by e-mail prior to coming to New Zealand was also appreciated.

Some students' associations have officers dedicated to the welfare of international students. Such officers have close contact with international student support centre staff, and they assist the staff in their planning for pastoral support.

## ▪ **Information**

Overall, the universities provide high quality printed materials. There is a wide range of marketing and promotional material with flyers in different languages. The panel was provided with examples of pre-orientation information, offer packs, arrival information packs, orientation packs, flyers on various aspects of university life, and guides to university life. A key initial publication is the *International prospectus* upon which students will often determine the courses in which they wish to enrol, and *Accommodation guide* which informs students about accommodation options. Pre-departure handbooks and new student guides are also useful. In all but one university, some kind of comprehensive *Guide for international students* (under various titles) is produced which is well presented and easy to read, and also provides a full range of information for international students prior to their arrival and what to expect and do after they have arrived. Many of the students interviewed expressed appreciation for the quality of the printed information they received from the university prior to leaving their home country. In particular, they stressed the value of the *Guide for international students*, which many of them said they had consulted prior to their arrival. Students' associations also provide all students with information on university services through publications such as a *Students' handbook* and *Diary*.

Universities also provide detailed websites, which are becoming the first point of call for most prospective and enrolled students, supplemented by key printed materials. One university reported that a survey following the 2008 orientation indicated that over 90% of the international students used the website before coming to the university. There are a variety of gateways on websites – about the university, study options, how to apply and services and support, and information to students on accommodation, arrival, visas, insurance and orientation. Some websites have questions and answers; some have photograph galleries; and one website has video clips.

Navigation on the majority of websites is easy and the content of the various pages clear with appropriate contact names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and website addresses. In a couple of cases, panel members and students independently experienced difficulties in using website search engines, and those universities assured the panel that they were being, or were to be, upgraded.

## ▪ **Feedback**

The amount of feedback sought through surveys and focus groups varies among the universities, and it was apparent to the panel that at one or two universities there is very little information upon which to assess the quality of the pastoral care of international students. Most international support services seek specific feedback of some kind, particularly on the relevance and helpfulness of orientation. Some seek feedback through questions within university general surveys on student satisfaction, particularly surveys related to university student services. All universities understand the value of on-going feedback and in applying the information gained into the enhancement of their services, and some are proactively looking at ways to improve the design of feedback mechanisms to obtain better-focussed information.

It is understood that from 2008, all New Zealand universities will all be involved in the International Student Barometer (ISB) surveys administered by the International Graduate Insight Group *i-graduate* – referred to by many universities as *i-Barometer*. This is an international system for surveying international students which is proving to be very informative and useful. This is the world's largest study of international students, was developed with support from 14 universities and since 2005 has provided feedback from 150,000 international students from 187 nationalities. ISB has been implemented in the United States of America, United Kingdom, South Africa, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and New Zealand. Those universities that were involved in ISB in 2007 reported having found the feedback useful in supplementing their own reviews of the effectiveness of their services.

## ▪ **Panel observations**

*The Code of practice requires universities to designate an appropriate person or unit as a resource for all inquiries about pastoral care from international students; the Code of practice does not specifically require a meeting space. Nevertheless, it was clear to the panel from interviews that international students appreciate spaces dedicated to international students, where they can access information to address the issues and problems that are distinctive to international students, and where they can meet with other international students, especially those experiencing similar difficulties in settling in. Further, international student support staff can hold functions and meetings on various topics associated with academic study and learning support. For some students, the links among the international student community and the link with this 'home' space remain strong; for others, the international linkages are not so important once they have developed relationships with students within their academic departments.*

*The panel also observed that the provision of a comprehensive Guide for international students is appreciated by students, many of those interviewed confirming that the Guide is used as a reference, along with the website. Quick access to information on a website is only as good as the search engine, and as indicated above, the state of one or two search engines led several students to bypass the search engine altogether and to search the website itself. Some students use the Google search machine which often provides better access to information within the website than the website's own search engine.*

### 15.2.1 Orientation

15.2 Signatories must provide support services to international students, including (but not limited to):

15.2.1 an orientation programme appropriate to the type of institution and the student.

#### ▪ Attendance

Universities spend much time and effort in presenting orientation for international students. Universities expect attendance by all students, but compulsory attendance is required by only one university. At that university, enrolment is impossible without evidence of attendance at orientation. Most universities monitor attendance and follow up those who do not attend and provide extra orientation sessions. Nevertheless, in some cases universities acknowledged that international students can slip through the orientation net, do not communicate and become ‘loners’. Staff do their best to identify and assist such students. It is also recognised that it is a challenge to make orientation compulsory for all international students given other concurrent events at the university. In addition, international students who have attended secondary school in New Zealand are reluctant to attend orientation because ‘they know it all’.

Late arriving international students are usually offered orientation sessions, but there were reports of some such students being reluctant to attend late orientation sessions or to follow up with international student support services. For those who arrive alone, international student support staff offer one-to-one orientation to those who request it.

Orientation is normally compulsory for English Language and Foundation Studies students at the arrival of every new intake during the year. The small numbers of students in each intake make it easier to monitor. Orientations for English language students have to be designed carefully, taking into account the students’ low levels of English competency at the start of their courses.

#### ▪ Content

The information in university orientations is presented in varying ways depending on the orientation length and the group attending. Plenary sessions – in which key matters such as the location of the international office, the international student support staff and their roles are emphasised – are combined with more interactive sessions on special topics – such as cultural adjustment, student services and academic matters. Some sessions involve people from the community (such as the local community constable, the local mayor or members of the local council, perhaps a community Asian liaison officer) to help add variety to the programme and thereby make it more enjoyable for students.

In most universities, the international students orientation immediately precedes the institutional orientation which, in turn, is normally supplemented by Faculty<sup>2</sup> orientations. The Faculty orientations have the advantage of being directly related to the academic environment in which international students will carry out their studies, and therefore are well-supported and

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<sup>2</sup> The universities are divided into relatively large academic administrative units, each of which normally comprise a number of departments in related disciplines. Various terms are used – Faculty (University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, Victoria University of Wellington), College (Massey University, University of Canterbury which also has one School), School (University of Waikato, which also has one Faculty) and Division (University of Otago, Lincoln University). In this report, the word ‘Faculty’ is used to refer to all such academic units.

appreciated by the students. In addition, halls of residence offer orientations for students, and focussed support for their students. The universities often provide workshops on 'Getting started', and students' associations arrange social orientation events and activities. International student support staff also arrange social activities of various kinds, especially during the first weeks of the semester.

Many international student support staff regard orientation for international students not as just a one-off event, but as an evolving model throughout the students' life cycle at the university. The potential for information overload is clearly recognised by the universities. Care is taken to monitor and devise orientation programmes to supply enough information and orientation materials that will assist students to be able to access the facilities and support services they need at times when they might require them. Information provided in written form consists of the requirements stipulated by the *Code of practice* including information on city accommodation, daily living, environment, banking, cultural activities, sporting and recreational activities, transport, student rights, complaints and grievances, how to access support, financial management, appropriate conduct in New Zealand, health and medical treatment, keeping safe, and emergencies. Such information is often presented in one comprehensive international students' guide that brings together important matters, and students are expected to retain the guide for future reference as needed. Staff often expressed the desire to have on-going workshops for students on topics such as culture shock/adjustment, building friendships with Kiwi students, re-entry for students graduating and returning home, as well as other topical sessions; however, the challenge is how to encourage students to attend.

#### ▪ **Contact post orientation**

After enrolment, universities keep in touch with international students by a variety of means, including access to international student support during office hours, e-mail newsletters, staff mobile telephone access after hours, e-mail communication, and texting. Students' association newspapers or magazines sometimes carry information relevant to international students; updates from the various support groups at the university and contacts through the clubs and societies on campus may also be relevant. Websites are also used as a vehicle, with some universities having alerts posted when students log on.

#### ▪ **Feedback**

International student support staff seek student feedback through surveys, on-line surveys, text message surveys and focus groups about the effectiveness of orientation programmes and the information provided. Sometimes prizes are offered to encourage feedback. Students interviewed by the panel during the audit site visits expressed appreciation for the orientations. Generally they found them useful and effective, and they enjoyed the fun bits and social activities! Those who took advantage of late orientations because of late arrival were particularly appreciative. There were, however, suggestions that postgraduate orientations might be better tailored to their needs.

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*The value of effective orientation activities relates to the speed with which students new to a university can settle into the different environment in which they find themselves, and thereby be*

*able to give due attention more quickly to their academic studies. There is much for new students to learn about their surroundings, and the panel was pleased to note that universities are always looking for ways to balance the need to provide students with as much information as possible to assist them become independent, with the need to avoid information overload.*

*Looking back at the various approaches to orientation taken by the universities and explained during the site visits, the panel supports initiatives in these particular areas.*

- *Orientations are delivered in English, and the panel supports the development of ways of presenting materials in a variety of modes, or with a variety of presentation styles and in different size groupings that allow more interactive approaches. Some universities have developed specifically-designed presentations for students entering English Language centres with little or no English, including the use of Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) presentations with strong visual content.*
- *Some universities are developing orientation programmes for postgraduate students new to the university, whose needs are distinct and different from undergraduates who are entering their first year of university study. The panel's support for these initiatives is strengthened by the dissatisfaction expressed by some postgraduate students at universities where all students, regardless of level of entry, are given the same generic orientation. In such cases, students were much more appreciative of orientations that were provided by the Faculty or the department which were very much focussed on the needs of a postgraduate in the particular discipline areas. **The panel is of the view** that some kind of institutional orientation is desirable for postgraduate students as well as undergraduates, but that institutional orientation of postgraduate students should be better aligned with their needs and expectations.*
- *Orientation time offers the opportunity for personal contact, and the panel supports initiatives where representatives of appropriate community groups and the local police contribute alongside university international student support staff. Police at orientation explain key features on New Zealand's laws, and show the human side to law enforcement. Some universities have a campus constable or access to the local community constable, whose aim is to build better public relations. At least one university has produced a pamphlet in conjunction with the New Zealand Police, which provides important information from the New Zealand Police for students new to New Zealand. In another university, the panel was told of a very effective seminar run by the local police constable, with a datashow, questions and answers and good humour, covering a range of matters including the law, money issues, the police force, gambling and drugs.*
- *One initiative that could be used in all universities, and suggested by students in several universities, is the inclusion of short talks and questions sessions from successful and senior international students who can offer reassurance to newly-arrived international students by describing their experiences of cultural adjustment during the settling-in period in New Zealand and at their universities.*
- *Universities are part of a wider community, and international students will have to adjust to living in those communities. The Council in one city has initiated a welcome campaign for migrants and international students, involving the City Council, the police, the university and other tertiary providers. Printed information supporting the*

*programme includes posters and a reference to a website which provides information in nine languages. In addition to the welcome programme, there have been programmes of intercultural training for tertiary provider staff.*

- *At least one university makes use of a DVD on driving in New Zealand (produced by Study New Zealand) which is effective through its use of colour, sound and music. Universities would like to see more of such materials developed, which would be invaluable in providing advice to international students in ways not hampered by less-competent understanding of English.*
- *The staff at one university described an initiative, currently being investigated, whereby students could use a one-click portal to a personalised page which also links to the students' most popular websites (for example, 'Trade me' and 'Grab a seat'). The personalised page would be used as a means of communicating important information and messages to the students.*

## **15.2.2 Cultural adjustment**

*15.2 Signatories must provide support services to international students, including (but not limited to):*

*15.2.2 assistance to students facing difficulties adapting to the new cultural environment.*

### **▪ Identification**

International student support staff commented to the panel that initially there are always difficulties with new cohorts of students as they adjust to New Zealand and university life. Staff noted that the most common difficulties are homesickness, loneliness and culture shock experienced particularly by students from countries where there are not many international students enrolled at the university, or where there is no appropriate cultural group. When students in this situation are identified, it is then possible for them to be given appropriate support by the international student support staff, together with the wider university accommodation, administrative or academic staff.

Students interviewed were of the view that, having experienced homesickness and the need for cultural adjustment, a significant step is for the individual student to take control of the situation as much as possible. Over time, most of the international students develop internal support structures and appear to have fewer difficulties.

Universities use a range of means to facilitate the identification of students in need of support, from as early as the time of the airport pick-up, during orientation sessions (where there are often smaller-group interactions), at the halls of residence, students approaching staff in the 'International Office', the on-campus health services, and word of mouth and concerns expressed by fellow students. Other means of identification include referral by academic staff or the department administrator or secretary or by academic progress monitoring processes, parents who sense there is a problem, and self-referral by the students themselves. Staff informed the panel that where there are dedicated international student support personnel in Faculties, stronger interaction with students in need can take place, thereby assisting international students to gain in confidence as they gradually interact with the other students in their groups.

Through orientation, printed and web information, the universities ensure that the students are aware of the information and contact addresses, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers for the full range of counselling services. These include medical health services, helplines, and may also include the local police, legal services, local branches of government agencies, Justices of the Peace, translation services, refugee and migrant services and the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **▪ Challenges**

Comment was made to the panel that the universities are aware of some challenges in assisting international students to settle in effectively. In some university cities, many students travel quite long distances to attend classes. Understandably, students from a particular country may also tend to stay together initially rather than attempt to make new contacts. In addition, it can be quite challenging to assist the ‘international student loner’ to make the adjustment when the student is living by him/herself in a city apartment and appears not to want any significant social contact.

Students from the Middle East and North Asia tend to face the greatest challenges in making the cultural adjustment. Those from the Middle East tend to remain in groups and therefore take time to culturally adjust and fit in socially. However, they tend to seek assistance openly which makes it easier for the international student support services to help. Students from North Asia tend to be reluctant to ask for help.

Most universities employ a person from Saudi Arabia – sometimes a senior student – who has first-hand experience of the Middle East and who can speak Arabic. Such a person has responsibility for developing processes and systems to support students from the Middle East and scholarship students, particularly to do with issues such as accommodation needs and cultural adjustment to New Zealand. Universities are assisting international student support staff, through staff training, to learn about the specific requirements of students from the Middle East and to develop processes and systems to ensure the students are receiving a high standard of service and support.

Another challenge is providing for students of different faiths. Universities provide prayer rooms for Muslim students and information in Arabic for students who wish to attend the mosque in the city or buy halal meat. At least one university has an officially designated Muslim International Student Adviser while other universities ensure that the international student support staff can receive appropriate advice on religious needs. An example of accommodating students’ needs is represented by at least one university in which tutorial times can be moved if possible to allow students to attend prayers.

Some university chaplaincies host occasions for students to meet and greet over light refreshments, with more than one university reporting the students taking notes as they watch pre-recorded New Zealand television news items prior to small group discussion of items of interest.

Universities have also begun to reach out more effectively to cultural groups that exist in the community to assist the staff in meeting cultural needs and finding appropriate support. By such means, international student support staff are assessing ways to integrate students into the community. In at least two university centres, church-sponsored initiatives known as ‘Operation Friendship’ are made available to international students and run social events for students of any religious persuasion.

### ▪ **Mentors and buddies**

All universities have various student mentoring programmes and buddy systems which can assist new international students to cope with cultural shock and to adjust to New Zealand life. There are also more generic university student mentor schemes in most universities. In the mentoring scheme for international students, senior international students act as mentors and are introduced to international students at orientation, and they interact with the new students who wish to take advantage of this scheme, share their experiences, and introduce the new students to the community's business centres.

The panel was assured that these mentors receive appropriate training for the job, designed to help them understand their role and the purpose and objectives of the programme. Working as mentors gives the international assistants the opportunity to develop the skills required to manage mentoring relationships and the resources needed to assist other international students. The mentoring programme usually lasts for the first few weeks of the semester, but could last longer by mutual consent between the mentor and the individual international students. One university recognises the work of international students who act as volunteers or mentors of other students through an awards systems and by recording this activity on their academic transcripts.

Both international student support staff and students who had been involved in mentoring schemes – some both as new students and then later in their student careers as mentors themselves – spoke positively about the value of such schemes in assisting students to cope with cultural shock, to adjust to New Zealand life, and to be better able to focus on academic study. Appreciation for the mentoring systems was expressed by the students interviewed.

### ▪ **Students' associations and clubs**

Students' associations have responsibilities for all students, and many associations have expressed to international student support staff that they wish to have more international students involved in their activities. Some associations employ part-time staff who focus on international students, with focus group discussions and buddy programmes which match international students with kiwi students are also in development.

Students' associations in all universities support a wide range of clubs and societies which are promoted to international students. The Tramping Club was quoted by one university as one club which assists international students to integrate and to gain a New Zealand experience. University cultural festivals are not uncommon and they are very popular when held. Such festivals normally incorporate language, dance, music and food. In addition, comment was made to the panel about the value of the university sports hall/recreation centres which, in some universities, are used by a significant number of international students. International student support staff often referred to the role that social and sporting activities play in enabling international students to bond and to make new friends.

One university provides students services grants for which applicants for funding are asked to set down how they are encouraging international students to join their club/society and how they assist international students in general. The grants were designed to assist international students to settle in to the university and New Zealand.

Students interviewed commented on how they had made new friends through the accommodation arrangements, the university's sport and recreation facilities and through the clubs and societies.

Cultural festivals were particularly appreciated. There was some comment from the students that they were keen to meet and mix more with domestic students, although the extent to which this happens would appear to vary from university to university. Some students reported having developed strong friendships with New Zealand students. International students tend to be found mixing better and forming cross-cultural friendships more towards the end of their studies.

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*Cultural adjustment is an area of high financial and reputational risk for the universities. The panel is of the view that all universities should ensure that specific support is provided for Muslim students right from the point of meeting them on arrival, to settling them in, through to ongoing pastoral care support.*

### **15.2.3 Advocacy**

15.2	<i>Signatories must provide support services to international students, including (but not limited to):</i>
15.2.3	<i>advocacy procedures, to ensure students are made aware of their rights and the signatory's obligations under the Code and how to access internal and external grievance procedures.</i>

#### ▪ **Promulgation**

Universities are proactive in ensuring that international students are aware of their rights, and they provide students with information to ensure they are made aware of the processes involved within the university for resolving grievances. All universities commented on their aim of resolving or pre-empting problems before they escalate. Students' associations often provide advocacy services which are available to international students. Sometimes international student support staff will undertake advocacy for students with landlords, and also work with the local Tenants Protection Association.

Both the written documentation and websites provide international students with information on advocacy procedures. Information is conveyed during orientation and by means of various booklets, flyers and posters. All university websites have information on advocacy but access does depend on the quality of the search engine.

Universities advise students of the existence and role of the International Education Appeal Authority (IEAA). International student support staff are supportive of the way the Authority system works in providing an independent arbitrator for students when all avenues within the university have been used.

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*International student support staff at the universities reported to the panel that while they supported the existence and approach taken by the International Education Appeal Authority, they wished to see some clarification of any relationship that there might be between the Office of the Ombudsmen and the Authority. Some feedback and professional development based around cases that have been presented to the Authority were also suggested by staff.*

### 15.3 Information and advice

- 15.3 *In addition to the requirements in sections 15.1 and 15.2, signatories must provide the following support services to international students if applicable:*
- 15.3.1 *information and advice on accommodation, including advice on whether the signatory has assessed the suitability of any accommodation and the result of any such assessment,*
- 15.3.2 *information and advice on driving laws, driver licensing requirements, and road traffic safety, including pedestrian and cycling safety, in New Zealand,*
- 15.3.3 *advice on courses,*
- 15.3.4 *advice on welfare facilities, including personal health services, mental health services, drug education and counselling, and problem gambling,*
- 15.3.5 *advice on accessing information on sexuality education, health promotion, and sexual and reproductive health services,*
- 15.3.6 *information and advice on relevant New Zealand laws, including laws on the sale of alcohol and tobacco products, and/or*
- 15.3.7 *information and advice on addressing harassment and discrimination.*

#### ▪ Promulgation of information

The universities ensure that international students have access to the range of information and advice concerning immigration permits and requirements, human rights, accommodation, driving, academic matters, welfare facilities, health, New Zealand laws, alcohol, tobacco and drugs, gambling, cycling and driving, sex (the legal age and the right to say ‘No’) harassment, discrimination and assault and discrimination. Such information is made available through printed materials provided prior to arrival in New Zealand and during orientation, and also on the universities’ websites and from international student support staff.

It was the view of the international student support staff interviewed by the panel that students read such information when they need to, and that they seek assistance when they require it. It was acknowledged by staff, and confirmed by students, that when seeking help, students might not necessarily approach the international student support staff, but might seek direct help from the appropriate health or counselling services provided on campus.

### 15.4 Meeting needs

- 15.4 *Support services for international students must be tailored to meet the needs of international students.*

#### ▪ Diversity of student needs

It is a challenge to provide general support to the growing diversity of needs arising from the increasing range of academic and social backgrounds of international students. Along with the rapidly increasing numbers of PhD international students has come an increase in the percentage and number of students who are older, often with families, which tends to cause them to be more isolated than the other students.

Another challenge reported to the panel is the request from increasing numbers of students early in their time at New Zealand universities for information on how to gain permanent residence in New Zealand. Universities in which requests are made work closely with Immigration Services whose staff attend the universities, say twice annually, to answer questions from international students.

International student advisors are increasingly aware of, and pressured by, the increasing complexity of the challenges of these situations and it is essential that staff are kept safe. International student support staff are often the first point of contact for students with needs, whether they come to the office in person or are referred by another staff member. Staff have access to the full range of university student support and health and counselling services to support them in their work, and staff will refer international students needing academic support and advice to the relevant agency within the university. In terms of academic progress, the Student Learning Centre provides services for the international students who need support in this area, such as courses run in academic English study and examination skills.

International student support staff receive ongoing professional development which can range from mentoring and one-on-one training to appropriate training courses. However, staff are generally not trained to deal with students' extreme psychological problems and these students can take up considerable time and resources. Consequently, good working relationships have been established between student support staff and with health and counselling services on campus who can assist with these students.

#### ▪ **Linkages through the university**

Most universities are realising the benefits arising from strong interactions between the central international student support personnel and Faculties. In the best instances, administrative and/or academic staff – quite often Assistant/Associate Deans – have dedicated responsibilities to international students to enhance the support and pastoral care of international students within the academic units in which the students undertake their studies. In some cases, the links are between academic departments and the international student support staff, and in departments with large numbers of international students, there may be a staff member designated with the oversight of international students. Where such links exist between the central international student support personnel and Faculty or department personnel, it has been possible to pick up on early warning signals concerning failing students within the academic units and to move quickly in support.

Besides Faculty infrastructures, the institutional-level academic progress committees are usually able to identify students, domestic as well as international, who have failed a preset number of courses – normally more than half of their courses for the year – and require them to meet with designated academic and/or advisory staff and, in serious cases, fulfil certain conditions before confirming enrolment for the following semester. Normally the university international student support staff will be notified of international students identified in this way.

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*Site visits demonstrated a range of initiatives to enhance the relationships between the institutional international student support centres and Faculties. In recent years, some universities have made a concerted effort to identify students in need, and staff commented enthusiastically on the strength of networks – including accommodation and counselling services, and a designated person in each academic teaching unit – to assist in this task. Staff interviewed were very positive about the progress made, and reported on Faculty initiatives proposed or being trialled.*

*For some universities, however, the approach has been less systematic, with institutional student support centres involving academic staff – individually or departmentally – setting up systems best suited to their teaching environment to identify under-performing students. In these cases, the links between the Faculty staff and the institutional support centre are very often built around one-to-one staff relationships, and support centres are keen to encourage academic staff to work even more closely within their Faculties. Some of this is time-intensive on the part of academic staff who appreciate, however, that this is an important part the pastoral support measures for international students.*

*Some universities reported to the panel on specific initiatives within those universities.*

- *Additional modules of study have been developed to meet particular needs of students with a writing skills module that is compulsory for students who are identified as having significant writing problems.*
- *Free inter-active workshops designed to improve the English-speaking capability of international students are offered through the university's foundation and bridging courses programmes.*
- *The university professional development unit is proactive in supporting academic staff on ways of working with international students, which will complement expertise which is to be developed at Faculty level.*
- *The university has an International Student Support Group which has representatives from each school of study and other relevant university services. It meets four times annually and shares ideas and information on support for students. The international student support office has representatives on the group and there is a student representative supplied by the Students' Association.*
- *The international student support staff were able to gain funding for an academic preparation course which commenced three years ago, and which was developed to assist New Zealand Aid students. All new New Zealand Aid Scholarship students come to New Zealand four weeks prior to classes beginning to attend the three-week course covering academic skills, computing and technology, budgeting, presentations, listening, accommodation and other topics. The panel was informed that the Schools have noticed a marked improvement in the confidence of these students and the quality of their work, and a reduction in the level of support and assistance they require.*
- *In some professional Faculties, an Associate Dean offers academic counselling for students; such counselling is provided by up to three staff on a daily basis and any students who appear to have pastoral concerns are referred to international student support staff.*

## **15.5 Information on international students**

15.5	<i>Signatories must hold the following information relating to each international student at all times:</i>
15.5.1	<i>full names,</i>
15.5.2	<i>current address and accommodation type, and contact telephone number(s),</i>
15.5.3	<i>passport and permit details (photocopy of title page and current permit), and</i>

15.5.4 full names and current addresses of parents for students under the age of 18, and of emergency contact persons and/or next of kin for students aged 18 years and over.

#### ▪ **Data collection**

Across the universities, international students are made well aware of their responsibility to keep their universities informed of changes of personal contact details. Keeping addresses up to date is a particular challenge, and the opportunity is taken when students come to the international office – particularly for renewal of visas and study permits – to ensure details are correct or updated. Most students have a mobile telephone and tend to retain the number supplied, and consequently, communication through mobile telephones and texting have become important means of contacting students who may not have fulfilled their obligations to supply the university with changes of addresses or other personal details.

International offices maintain records of student visits, and notes pertaining to the visits providing indications of the issues and matters discussed between any staff members and the student. Records may be hardcopy files held by the international office and/or by the international student support staff, and access to the files may not be available to other university student support services. Similarly notes of visits to Faculty international support staff may be confined to those agents. Such systems that lack a centralised clearing house make it impossible for access to case notes where this might be to the advantage of students who are at academic or personal risk.

In some universities, quite sophisticated forms of electronic data management systems were demonstrated to the panel. Such systems can include for each student the student's name, address (New Zealand and overseas), tracking of information provided (for example, fees and ID card), support (insurance and visa matters), academic papers (enrolment and history), progress, qualifications granted and contacts with support services including international student support (basic notes on contacts either confidential or open). Such systems enable a strong case management system to be used in supporting international students

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*The panel is of the view that electronic systems for the management of data and of records associated with academic and pastoral care (such as academic staff interviews, international student support staff consultations, health and counselling sessions) should be developed by all universities. Demonstrations of systems in place in two universities assured the panel that ways can be found to allow access by university personnel to a complete history of a student's contacts with all university services, while restricting access to detailed and confidential records only to authorised personnel in the appropriate section. Systems as observed in the two universities have particular merit in cases of crises or emergency, when authorised personnel other than the person who worked with the student can access information which might be critical for proper attention to be paid to the student's needs. Therefore the panel is of the view that such electronic systems should be introduced across the sector.*

## 15.6 Child Youth and Family Services

15.6 *If a signatory believes an international student has been, or is likely to be, ill-treated, harmed, abused or neglected, they must notify CYFS in accordance with the CYFS reporting protocol, or the New Zealand Police, of their concerns.*

The Universities have had no need to refer any students or situations to the Child Youth and Family Services.

## 15.7,15.8 Communicating with parents of students under the age of 18

15.7 *Signatories must contact the parents of any prospective international student under the age of 18 prior to enrolling the student, and must establish communication arrangements with parents that can be used in the event of an emergency.*

15.8 *Signatories must communicate regularly with parents of international students under the age of 18.*

At the time of the audits, there were less than twenty students under the age of 18 enrolled in degree programmes in New Zealand universities. Universities are pro-active in supporting these students as it is recognised that these students require particular attention in terms of their special needs to the extent that the review of the pastoral care of under-18 year old students is regarded as an important feature of the annual review of procedures.

Under-18 year old students within English Language centres and Foundation Studies courses are taught in small classes and therefore it is easier to ensure adequate pastoral care. Students who are under-18 years old in undergraduate courses require particular attention, but to be in undergraduate courses at such an age, students have to be able to cope and they tend to be highly motivated and high-performing. They also tend to be quite mature for their age and independent. In cases where the parents may have been the strong motivators, some students might struggle for motivation when they are away from home, and international student support ensure that the support for these students is available.

Universities correspond directly with the students' parents as much as possible, and have letters to parents translated where this is required. Sometimes the universities are required to correspond to parents through authorised agents and they reported that they have no reason to doubt the effectiveness of the contacts with parents through this means.

## 15.13 Students with additional needs

15.13 *Signatories must document where they believe on reasonable grounds that any international student is unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation and/or unable to adequately safeguard his or her personal welfare, and ensure that the following provisions are complied with:*

15.13.1 *signatories must meet and communicate regularly with such students,*

15.13.2 *signatories must determine whether it is appropriate to communicate with parents or next of kin of such students, and must communicate regularly with appropriate persons; in any such communications, signatories must ensure that they comply with the principles of the Privacy Act 1993,*

15.13.3 *signatories must liaise with other agencies if necessary for the care and support of such students, and*

*15.13.4 signatories must determine the living circumstances of such students and provide assistance or appropriate referral if the student is not considered to be living in an appropriate situation.*

#### ▪ **Identification**

International students who have very special needs are identified by various means and at various times: at the time of course approval, during orientation, through the academic and administrative staff in academic departments, the student health services, the hospital and word of mouth. More than one university referred to situations where international students had significant health problems but had not declared them prior to travelling to New Zealand. Sometimes staff discussing minor issues with students may, after some questioning, identify more serious issues. Universities recognise, therefore, that staff must be well aware of the health and counselling services to which students can be referred. Prompt action may be needed, and normally a case-management approach is taken to follow the progress of the student, with follow-up meetings and support for the student appropriate to their needs.

Another trigger for potential problems is an inquiry from parents saying that they have not heard from their daughter/son for some time; student consent is sought before the staff initiate contact with parents. The rights of students aged over 18 and the Privacy Act can sometimes conflict with the university's strong desire to support students with problems: staff may believe that parents should ideally be contacted, but this is not legally possible without student consent. Such situations might involve a student who is showing signs of compulsive gambling or who has failed courses, but the student's parents cannot be legally informed.

#### ▪ **Services provided**

For students with additional needs, specialist agencies are required. Within the universities, chaplaincy services are called upon, and often work closely with student health service counsellors. Many other areas of expertise are available off-campus, and universities have links between international student support staff and university counselling staff with the mental health services available through the hospital system. Other links with relevant agencies that might exist in the local community are multi-ethnic councils, migrant and refugee centres, Asian liaison officers, consulates and embassies if accessible, immigration services, midwives, gambling services, and police networks.

#### ▪ **Critical incidents**

All universities have critical incidents policies that are enacted on appropriate occasions and in appropriate settings. The panel was told of the effectiveness of the various inter-connections between staff, students, parents, friends, overseas contacts, police and legal personnel during the implementation of plans on occasions of psychiatric, significant trauma, injurious and fatal incidents. Some universities implement critical incident plans only in cases which involve death. Normally each implementation of the plan is followed by a debrief and review, leading to improvements where deemed necessary. In two universities, some of the students interviewed had been recipients of support and counselling associated with critical incidents in which they had been involved or with which they had been closely associated. Such students commented that the implementation of the policy demonstrated that the staff really cared; staff contacted the students' families overseas, visited the injured in hospital and helped with other forms of support which were all greatly appreciated.

## ▪ **Panel observations**

*It would appear to the panel from discussions with staff in the universities that advisors and counsellors are handling increasingly complex situations and problems, and that staff need an increasing range of skills to assist the students who are referred for support. The following are some of the initiatives reported to the panel.*

- *A university ‘risk intervention team’ or ‘risk advisory committee’ meets monthly to discuss university students at risk, including international students. Representatives from accommodation, student and health and counselling services, the international student support staff and Faculty staff attend the meetings, and students deemed to be at risk are followed up. The staff commented to the panel that often a problem apparently being experienced by an international student in one aspect of her/his life – for example, lack of academic progress – was an indicator of another problem such as health.*
- *Student advisors run a course for general staff on working with international students to assist them identify early signs of problems and to advise them on where to refer such students. This is a three-hour session run four times each year as part of the ongoing staff development programme administered by human resources.*
- *A memorandum of understanding has also been developed with the Police so that an early warning can be given to the university about any international student who has come to the attention of the Police.*



### 3

## Attendance and accommodation

### 16.1 Monitoring attendance

*16.1 Signatories must have processes in place to:*

*16.1.1 ensure that international students are maintaining their course requirements, and*

*16.1.2 follow up in the event that a student ceases attendance before course completion.*

#### ▪ Attendance

It is simply impractical to monitor attendance by students at large lectures because of the large enrolments in courses, particularly in first-year courses. Normally attendance at lectures is not compulsory, which gives little meaning to the keeping of attendance rolls. However, attendance at small-class tutorials can be monitored, and where courses require compulsory attendance at tutorials, laboratory classes and clinical placements, departments' attendance records are maintained.

In some universities, early warning of non-attendance is triggered by failure to hand in a first assignment. But there are barriers to this being appropriate. In some disciplines, it is appropriate that not all items of assessment need necessarily to be completed as only a certain number of items are included in the final grade. In others, data for individual assessment items is not entered into departmental or Faculty data systems until all grades are reviewed and a final grade determined for the course. In addition, in some courses the non-completion of all in-term work does not preclude students from sitting and passing the end-of-course examinations.

Universities reported that while formal attendance may not be recorded, there are informal ways of tracking the work performance of students. Where there are good links between the academic staff and international student support staff, academic staff quite often take initiatives when they are aware of poor attendance or non-submission of work by international students. In particular, where class sizes permit, attention is paid to first-year students, and where there is concern, the students are referred to appropriate support services, usually with the knowledge of the international students support staff.

#### ▪ Performance

Universities reported various ways of monitoring performance, with most universities operating systems whereby all students, domestic as well as international, who fail substantial percentages of their courses (from half to the whole semester) are identified. Such students are normally required to be interviewed before being allowed to re-enrol, and in the case of international students, international student support staff are made aware of under-performance and appropriate support will be offered. The staff commented that they are keen to encourage academic staff to work even more closely with them on these monitoring systems, which are an important part of the pastoral support measures for international students.

The panel was made aware of the disproportionately high level of assignment plagiarism and examination cheating among international students. Universities have been imposing increasing vigilance during examinations and systems to make clear the disciplinary consequences to students who knowingly cheat.

#### ▪ **Panel observations**

*The panel observes that because of the size of most university classes, and the normal practice of non-compulsory attendance at class, monitoring of attendance is on most occasions inappropriate in the university setting. The panel noted the attempts being made by universities to consider ways of monitoring attendance and performance. Activities such as developing university-wide minimum guidelines for monitoring attendance, and/or developing 'early warning'/monitoring systems which could identify students facing problems are to be encouraged, but are quite often Faculty-level initiatives and not accepted or in place across the university. Even more rare is the existence of formal monitoring of each student, with reports on international students that may be at academic or other risk being referred to Faculty-level administrators and/or academic advisors, or to appropriate institution-level personnel.*

*The panel is of the view that it would be helpful to all students, domestic as well as international, if a simple system, ideally using computer technology, could be implemented across the university to alert staff to students who have not submitted work. The idea would be to use technology to act as a trigger, and in cases where submission of in-term assessment is required and the alert does indicate a problem, to have staff refer international students to the international student support service for referral on to appropriate support services and agencies.*

*Examples of schemes in place to monitor performance as reported to the panel are summarised below.*

- *In professional Faculties, non-submission of work and poor attendance by first year students are identified, marks for the first assignment and non-submission of work are monitored, and students on off-campus placements are monitored.*
- *International students on scholarships are normally closely monitored at Faculty level, and such monitoring is normally a requirement of scholarship funding.*
- *One university is implementing a system to monitor student attendance and performance through a First Year Experience policy which monitors all students, both international and domestic, for academic progress, including attendance, failure to hand in assignments and poor results. The system has been implemented in specific Faculties in the first instance, and eventually may be implemented in all Faculties. Data is entered into the university's electronic database and reports are produced which identify students at risk. The First Year Experience team, which includes international student support staff, contact the students mentioned in the reports and ascertain what needs the students might have.*

## 17.1 Accommodation provisions

17.1 *Signatories must designate an appropriate person or unit as a resource for international students requiring assistance with accommodation. The existence and availability of this person must be advised to students on enrolment.*

### ▪ Accommodation types

International student support works alongside university accommodation services in responding to the requests of international students for assistance with accommodation. Links and communication between accommodation services and the international student support are maintained, and once at the university, students work with the accommodation services over problems and concerns.

Universities provide student accommodation either on or close to the campus, and offer assistance in accessing privately-administered flatting or homestay accommodation. Universities are situated in different environments – some in the central business districts of large cities, some in the suburbs of cities. Students studying on central city campuses who can find suitable and affordable accommodation only in the suburbs have travelling costs that might not be experienced by students at campuses situated in smaller cities or in suburbs. The distance that some students have to travel because they cannot afford inner city accommodation rentals was a concern expressed to the panel, as was the need to travel at less desirable times of the day. It is not always possible for universities to accommodate changes to timetables to facilitate travel to the university at a reasonable hour of the day. The affordability of accommodation also impacts on international students with families; in addition, there are issues for these students around access to schooling for their children.

The availability of accommodation in the communities varies, and liaison with communities is becoming an important part of the business of university accommodation offices. Another factor to consider is the price of accommodation, and the panel heard from some students that insufficient financial means makes it difficult to find suitable accommodation in a city where accommodation rentals tend to be relatively high. A concern expressed by one central city university was with respect to accommodation in private apartments, where outer security doors can make it difficult for international student support staff to visit when they might have concerns about an international student and wish to visit the student to ensure that she/he is safe and well.

### ▪ University accommodation

Universities offer places in halls of residence or flatting accommodation overseen by the universities. In general, high proportions of first-year international students live in halls of residence, although some international student support staff reported to the panel that that students who had attended New Zealand secondary schools to complete their National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are often reluctant to go into halls accommodation. It is possible to offer further support to students in halls, often in close consultation with international student support staff as to students' needs. This support is appreciated by the students, and in several universities there are currently insufficient places in the university halls of residence to meet the accommodation demand completely.

Halls of residence have full-time managers, normally live in, and there are trained residential assistants who are older students and who assist the students in their halls in any appropriate way.

Inter-cultural training is also provided for staff and residential assistants in a number of instances, so that they are better prepared to appreciate the cultural expectations of international students. There is someone on call 24 hours a day, and particular efforts are made in the first weeks of the year in order to help students settle in. Staff and the residential assistants in the halls of residence provide pastoral support and guidance to all students, domestic as well as international. Halls in several universities told the panel of special academic support programme initiatives within their halls of residence, and provided statistics to support their claims of the increased percentage of students who had passed all courses.

Staff can also alert international student support staff to particular students for whom the halls have pastoral concerns. Some halls provide academic learning support for all students through some form of tutorial scheme. Particular needs are met in some halls through the provision of alcohol-free areas, and/or women-only areas, and/or floors for postgraduate students only, gender specific accommodation, and/or pods within floors to meet any special accommodation needs of international students.

Halls of residence at the universities typically are filled quickly, with the consequence that some international students, including those in their first year, reside in private apartments.

Some universities also provide self-catered flats or apartments which often comprise a high proportion of international students. Self-catered flats make it easier for those with specific dietary requirements to prepare food in ways that suit their cultures. One university has a Kiwihost system in operation in the flats, whereby a third or fourth year student acts as the welcomer in a university flat of four-to-six students.

Concerns mentioned by the staff included students not being fully prepared for their arrival. Many international students give very little notice of their arrival, if any; and often they have not arranged any temporary accommodation for themselves. This is particularly a problem for students who wish to live off-campus. Finding accommodation for students who bring their families with them is becoming more of a challenge as they require off-campus accommodation. The accommodation staff give a priority to arranging temporary accommodation in the halls as a stop-gap measure until the families can find private rental accommodation.

## ▪ **Homestay**

Homestay is an option for all international students, but it is compulsory for under-18 year old students. Some universities have contracts with home-stay providers, with the contracts being reviewed as requested by either party. The ease with which universities find homestays appears to vary from community to community, with some universities finding it relatively easy, and others facing challenges. Students and their parents will often expect the homestays to be near the university campus, but, naturally, this is not always possible. There are some challenges in terms of dietary and (non)smoking requirements. Some universities run seminars utilising homestay hosts who have had positive homestay experiences with students from the Middle East so that stereotyping of particular cultures can be broken down.

There have been some tensions when under-18 year olds who have lived in New Zealand for quite some time do not wish to have homestay accommodation, and would prefer to go flatting with their over-18 year friends who have more freedom. At times under-18 year olds resent the restrictions imposed on them and perceive it as being unfair. However, under-18 international students are required by the *Code of practice* to stay in homestay accommodation.

▪ **Panel observations**

*The universities are aware of the need to ensure that the delivery of high-level pastoral care and the management of student safety are given high priority as a key risk management strategy in protecting their international student business. Most universities experience critical after-hours incidents in their halls of residences or accommodation villages and these present a business and reputational risk that must be managed rigorously.*

*As with any pastoral care service, the panel heard of specific personal issues which faced one or two of the students interviewed, arising from unique sets of circumstances that will always occur and be outside of most normal expectations. One area in the Code of practice, however, that might become a cause of concern relates to accommodation for under-18 year old students.*

*The panel was informed of an illustrative situation where an under-18 year old from Europe wished to flat near the university and had the full support of parents. However, the university was required by the Code of practice to place the student in a homestay, which proved to be some distance from the university. The panel believes that when an under-18 year old student shows maturity, comes from within a cultural context not dissimilar to that of New Zealand, has the support of appropriate flatting companions, and has the support of parents, then under such circumstances there should be provision in the Code of practice for the university and parents to take responsibility for allowing the student to go flatting rather than be in a homestay. This would occur on such a rare occasion, and **the panel is of the view** that international student support staff are capable of ensuring an appropriate level of oversight to ensure the safety of a student in this situation.*