



The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit
Te Wāhanga Tātari Kaute Tohungatanga o ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa

Report on web-based audit against *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students.*

In December 2005 this Unit wrote to universities to advise them that it had been agreed with the Ministry of Education that the Unit would carry out a paper-based and web-based audit against the *Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* for students enrolling for the first time in 2006.

Over the past few months the Unit has been conducting the web-based audit. However, workload has meant that the paper-based audit has not been started and may not be completed until the end of 2006.

Background

The Ministry of Education provided the Unit with a list of points within the Code on which to focus the audit.

Whilst every effort was taken to find information in relation to the Code it may be that the information was somewhere in the website and was not found. This raises the question that if it were not to be found when specifically looking for it, would a prospective student have read it?

The Unit has prepared an audit spreadsheet for each University. The spreadsheet shows the date of the initial examination and the time taken. The content in the spreadsheets was finalised on 10 August 2006. Probably the most important result to come from this exercise is that it took, on average, two hours to find all the information and make notes. Would students spend even one hour researching and reading? It is fair to say that even if they did it could not be said with certainty that they would have read all the information required by the Code. It is our view that the paper-based information would always need to be used in conjunction with the web-site information.

The Unit does not have any expertise in web design and these comments about usability of the websites are subjective. Each web user would have a preference on how a website should be set up. Nevertheless, it is hoped this feedback will be useful. In each case the menu path that was taken to access the information was noted down but there may have been other ways to get to this piece of information.

Best sites

The best sites were those that were professionally presented in an easy writing style. The sites were easy to navigate and all of the necessary information was easily accessible. The sites contained a lot of good information and were welcoming. The user would feel it would be a comparatively straightforward process to enrol knowing they had all the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision on their course of study, the facilities and the accommodation.

Worst sites

The worst sites were those that were more difficult to use because the menu structure did not allow systematic reading of the information. These sites may have contained basic information, but there was not enough detail to make an informed decision. Some links did not work in some cases.

Other comments

- Some universities have the full prospectus available as a pdf on the website and although the document is sometimes large, it is the most useful document to be able to access.
- Some websites use hyperlinks within the text which can require going backwards and forwards which is not nearly as effective as when there is a well designed menu which eases navigation. These should be used carefully as there may be information below the hyperlink that you think will be read but the user may have gone on to other areas.

The Administrator for the Code, Ministry of Education, will be sent this two-page report, along with the spreadsheets for all universities. The spreadsheets remain *confidential* to the individual universities and to the Ministry, and any information contained in the spreadsheets that may be used by the Ministry by way of illustration must *not* be used in any way that might identify the university.

Each University will be sent this two-page report, together with the spreadsheet that refers to their University. The Unit trusts that the notes made on the spreadsheet will be of help to the University as it seeks to provide the best possible service to its international students.

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