A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Overview

This framework has been developed as part of the Best Practice International Student Engagement project, funded by the Australian Government through the International Education Innovation Fund (IEIF). The core aim of this project is to develop a series of guides and resources to enhance international student engagement.

The evidence-based guides and resources have been developed through:

- Desktop analysis of existing literature and examples of innovative practice.

- Three surveys, capturing over 6,000 responses from international students, graduates, education providers, government, community and professional organisations.

- 11 consultation workshops with 213 stakeholders.

- Interviews with 40 key stakeholders.

This research has identified the key themes involved in international student engagement and gives examples of innovative practice.

This framework is part of a series of six guides intended to improve policies, practices, and programs to enhance international student engagement.

Below is a complete list of the guides:

- Guide for enhancing international student engagement through teaching, learning and language

- Guide for enhancing international students' intercultural and community engagement

- Guide for enhancing international students' mental health and wellbeing

- Guide for enhancing international student engagement in work integrated learning (WIL) and their employability

- Guide for supporting international students with accommodation

- Guide for supporting international students with crisis navigation

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Introduction

This framework outlines guiding principles that underpin the development of innovative programs to improve international student engagement.

This framework has been designed to support staff from all education sectors, professional organisations and all levels of government so they can develop international student engagement programs across a range of areas.

Guiding Principles

Effective engagement with international students requires a holistic approach that understands how aspects of a student's cross-border life are interlinked and interdependent. These may include academic performance, intercultural experiences, mental health and wellbeing, employability, accommodation, finance, life plans and aspirations.

The following principles have been identified as being key to the development of international student engagement programs:

1 Co-design

2 Empathy

3 Inclusion and responsiveness

4 Accessibility and clear communication

5 Integration

6 Coordination

7 Sustainability and staff capacity building

8 Evaluation of effectiveness

9 Transferability and scalability

International Student Engagement Framework

The framework represents the interrelationship between the guiding principles and the development of engagement programs across the following themes:

- ▶ international student engagement through teaching, language and learning

- ▶ international student engagement with their local communities

- ▶ supporting international students' mental health and wellbeing

- ▶ international student engagement in WIL and employability

- ▶ supporting international students with accommodation

- ▶ supporting international students in crisis navigation

International Student Engagement Framework

ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

CO-DESIGN

EMPATHY

INCLUSION AND RESPONSIVENESS

INTEGRATION

COORDINATION

ACCESSIBILITY AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION

SUSTAINABILITY AND STAFF CAPACITY BUILDING

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

TRANSFERABILITY AND SCALABILITY

Teaching, language and learning

Mental health and wellbeing

Engagement with domestic students

Engagement with local communities

WIL and employability

Accommodation

Crisis navigation

Co-design

Students are more likely to participate in programs they have helped to co-design with their institutions and that have been informed by student input and feedback.

Placing international students at the centre of support provision means moving away from regarding them as passive recipients of support services. Instead, it is important to regard international students as active partners in co-designing and tailoring the services to suit their needs and characteristics.

Empathy

Engagement programs and staff need to be empathetic towards how international students feel about living in an unfamiliar academic and social environment, and not studying in their native language.

Inclusion and Responsiveness

To develop an inclusive and responsive engagement program, organisations need to understand and be responsive to international students' diverse characteristics, challenges, needs, values, and cultures.

The effectiveness and accessibility of support resources can be hampered by their lack of cultural appropriateness. Programs need to be constantly updated so they remain responsive and relevant to the changing needs of students while adapting to changing contexts, policies, cohorts, sectors or emerging crises.

Integration

Support services across different areas within a school, college or university should be integrated and focused on supporting the holistic international student experience, rather than operating in silos, targeting different needs of international students separately. All aspects of international student engagement and experience are interdependent and rely and impact on each other.

For example, international students' accommodation and finances will affect their wellbeing and engagement in learning. Similarly, their engagement with domestic peers will impact their learning (through group work and group assignments) and their sense of belonging in Australia.

Accessibility and clear communication

Support resources for international students need to be clearly and effectively communicated.

International student engagement and education experience are improved when students are aware of the support services available, and know how to access these services and the benefits these services can provide.

Access to resources and their promotion could be improved with greater collaboration and communication between the education sector and external stakeholders.

Coordination

Coordination among different stakeholders who support international students, including education providers, professional organisations, community groups and different levels of government is more likely to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and capacity building of these programs. This can leverage the strengths of each organisation individually and collectively.

Sustainability and staff capacity building

Longer-term planning and funding ensure the sustainability of programs and services. If experienced staff with skills and knowledge are retained, programs will not need to be reinvented. Well-planned service delivery requires succession planning to support ongoing quality.

Staff require timely support, including flexible and accessible professional development, if they are to up-skill or re-skill.

Evaluation of effectiveness

Responsive evaluation of programs is important for the efficient and effective use of resources. The ongoing improvement of programs is most likely to occur when acting on feedback from staff and students.

Transferability and scalability

Engagement programs, where appropriate, can be adopted, adapted or scaled up to engage with different cohorts of international students.

Innovative practices are often initiated by individuals or specific groups within organisations and communities. These innovations are often ad-hoc and organic. But if they are to become widely adopted and transferable across the sector, these practices must be documented and shared both within and between organisations.