



MEMORANDUM

TO: PVC (International), International Office

FROM: UNE International Students' Association

DATE: 17 June 2004

SUBJECT: UNE-ISA Submission to: 1) PVC (International)
2) International Office

The ISA committee has received feedback from members (international students) expressing their dissatisfaction with the quality of the support services (academic and welfare) currently available on campus. The students are concerned that the students' services have continued to diminish especially during this semester one this year. Students have cited the lack of proper advice regarding academic skills support, accommodation, work permits/visa related issues and, childcare costs among others. Some students have sometimes been frustrated by the absence of specific IO staff when their services were needed. Occasionally, they have been sent back and forth, - from one office to another searching for the correct person to deal with their problem.

The committee acknowledges that although the IO has been able to address some of the above issues recently, a number of them are yet to be dealt with or are recurring. Students raised issues about the kind of language and academic skills support available to international students. They assert that although the LAS programs provided by University through LTC are commendable, these programs, in most cases, only assist in writing and speaking. Other academic skills support like the 'drop-in-sessions' that used to be available seems to have been withdrawn.

Also, a number of students are worried that the new IO structure appeared focused more on marketing (offshore) and partnership than improving the services to international

students once they are on campus. They argue that if the University is indeed serious about making itself one of the best destinations for overseas students, improvement of quality service on campus should be a prerequisite to any marketing and publicity strategy.

In light of the above students' concerns the last ISA Council meeting asked the Executive Committee to write to the university requesting the clarification of the new structure of the International Office. The following are issues on which the ISA Council would like information or a response:

- a) the effects of the restructure on the quality of services to international students.
- b) which staff in the IO will be involved in advising international students and on which specific issues.
- c) concerns about the lack of both academic and welfare support for the international students in semester one 2004.
- d) specific on-going help for international students in understanding the requirements of the Australian academic system.
- e) the hours when particular IO office staff are available to international students, since most of them are part time employees.
- f) a continuous communication from the University (the PPCI and the IO) to the ISA about the changes as they are implemented.

Furthermore, in relation to on-going improvement of quality services for the students and their dependants, the Executive Committee suggest that:-

- The officers responsible for providing advice to students should clearly state their roles to (new) students - for example, helping to deal with legal, financial, immigration, discrimination and culture shock issues.
- Apart from the students' orientation, the IO or its appointee should assist the dependants accompanying international students also settle perhaps by providing a session for dependants addressing:
 - how they can access counselling services
 - help in coping with homesickness
 - difficulties in settling
 - issues like suitable childcare.
- The IO ought to provide clear information to students who are planning to come to UNE with their dependants. Specific childcare details (the cost and centre information) should be included in the information package to prospective students with children.

- As part of orientation the following should be provided to students:
 - housing information should be provided to new students (signing leases and changing/moving rooms and legalities involved).
 - up to date information on the cost of living, health and medical care and employment
 - information on general consumer protection policies in place in NSW.
- The University should have in place a support structure to help students seeking temporary accommodation especially students with dependants/families. Some students have expressed their frustration with the lack of such support at present.
- Regarding academic adjustment, peer mentoring (whether provided by continuing overseas students or Australian students) should be organised and introduced to new students. Peer mentors could then act informally as starting point for the students who may require familiarity with the Australian system of education (share stories about their academic adjustments and explore positive strategies to fulfil the requirements).
- Language and Academic Support available to student needs to be publicized constantly. Peer mentors would facilitate information sharing.
- Drop in sessions and/or individual consultations need to be reintroduced and reinforced.
- Faculty mentors and tutors should be assisted/trained to understand and accommodate the needs of International students in particular.
- Workshops made available to students should include; assessment requirements, strategies for efficient reading, faster reading and making notes, critical analysis and exam strategies.

In conclusion, the committee would like to reaffirm that the key object of UNE-ISA is to liaise with the relevant Universities bodies to ensure that international students on campus get the maximum support they require to fulfil the academic obligations at UNE. Thus, it is NOT just another students' club/group like chess, hockey, or a social gathering. We seek to work with the University to ensure that international students at UNE have the best possible academic outcomes and return home as enthusiastic ambassadors for UNE.