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*Supporting students in their diversity of cultural identities*

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Supporting students in  
their diversity of cultural identities

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## Section 1: Introduction

European Universities are enrolling increasing numbers of students, who are travelling to Europe for study in Higher Education Institutions. This booklet adds to the debate on how institutions can support students from different cultural backgrounds in their diversity of cultural identities in an equitable and balanced manner. This phenomenon raises interesting questions such as:

- How do the changing definitions of Citizenship within the EU and the diversity of cultural identities found in international students affect the identities in academic life and the position of 'world' students?
- What special provisions need to be made to accommodate these students?

This booklet seeks to provide some answers, based on the experience of three diverse Higher Education Institutions in Europe –

*Dublin City University, Ireland,*

*Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen,  
Flanders, Belgium,*

*Pädagogische Akademie des Bundes, Wien, Austria*

With the growing demand for higher education in some world regions (Asia being the best example) and heightened marketing activities by destination countries, the volume of applications from international students has been steadily increasing over the past decade (Kelo 2006; p.1-2). Our research findings show how diverse the situation is. Many of the policies and procedures are bound up in the culture of the host organisations and often place the student outside the decision-making process. Many Higher Education institutions are only beginning to organise the admissions process at institutional level, how to deal with the volume of inquiries and applications, how to select suitable students, how to manage Interculturalism, how to ensure sufficient academic capabilities. Within the European and global citizenship debate issues such as assimilation and integration can arise in this context. In no other area are these issues within the framework of acculturation (marginalisation, separation, integration, assimilation) more relevant than in education.

In these guidelines we consider key issues for institutions and support staff who work with international students studying in their non-native countries.

## Section 2: Methodology

The purpose of this research is to help stakeholders focus on the important issues surrounding the subject matter: namely the institutional support of international students with a strong emphasis on *global citizenship*. This research attempts to outline some basic facts and assumptions discovered through a systematic research process conducted in three EU member states. The rationale for the choice of methodology depends on what we are trying to do rather than a commitment to a particular paradigm (Cavaye, 1996, p.230). Through an interpretive research approach (Berger & Luckman, 1967, Gadamer, 1975) the research team aim to produce a guide for practitioners which focuses on issues relating to working with students from different cultural backgrounds. This study primarily looked at international students as a semi-representative body of students from different cultural backgrounds.

The research team used three sets of questionnaires for the investigation:

- *to collect information from students from cultural backgrounds different from their host institution/country.*
- *to collect information from staff, such as lecturers and tutors, in issues relating to the support of students from different cultural backgrounds ('International students').*
- *to collect information from administrative and management staff, such as staff working in the International Office of a Higher Education Institution, in issues relating to the support of students from different cultural backgrounds ('International students')*

## Section 3: Findings

### - Institutional

In this section the commonalities and shared structures, as well as differences, of the three institutions we surveyed are highlighted. As this booklet is designed to help encourage good practice the outcomes are described firstly from the institutional basis based on available data, publicity material and other relevant literature. The second part of this section outlines and comments on responses to our questionnaires and focus groups with our three target groups: i.e.:

- *International students*
- *Administrative and International office staff*
- *Academic staff.*

This section offers a brief insight into the views and opinions of these respondents. The interpretation of the data has been analysed using a ranking and hierarchical order. While the results are not generalisable, they attempt to describe 'truth' within the three institutions.

The final recommendations drawn from the research are outlined in Section 5 by the use of a *matrix*, acts as a suggested guide and framework for those practitioners, institutions, and academic staff who work, or intend to work, in supporting students from different cultural backgrounds.

The case study focussed on three institutions which differ significantly in size, type of location and study programmes.

#### **AUSTRIA – Pädagogische Akademie des Bundes**

The Pädagogische Akademie des Bundes in Vienna is a Teacher Education Institution for pre- and in-service-training with a total of 1199 students in the academic year 2005/06 (498 pre-service teacher training, 669 in-service-training and 32 students in a Master programme) with strong international relationships. There are 128 staff.

In the staff exchange programme 30 teachers from other universities visited the institution and the same number from our institutions taught at other institutions. The mobility of students and staff is used for research and development work, which means added value to the individual as well as the institution.

The International Office is centrally organised: three staff members work part time. They are responsible for international contacts in general, international projects, and student and staff exchange.

## **BELGIUM – KATHO University**

KATHO (Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen) is situated in South-West Flanders. In 1995, seven institutes of higher education amalgamated, and its departments are now located in four small, but dynamic and historical cities: Kortrijk, Roeselare, Tielt and Torhout. Over the past 10 years student numbers have risen by over 35% to 6,500 students. In 2002, KATHO joined the Association of K.U.Leuven, with 11 other University Colleges.

Offering every student an international experience during their three-year education cycle is a challenge KATHO and the International Office have eagerly accepted. Internationalisation is a high priority in the University College.

In 2005/06 the institution was involved in 30 international projects (one of which was completely coordinated by KATHO; in the others KATHO was active partner), involving 300 bilateral contracts with universities and institutions of higher education spread over nearly all European countries and worldwide. In 2005/06 170 students studied abroad, 75% of them female. In 2005/06 we received 191 incoming students, 75% of them female.

## **IRELAND - Dublin City University**

Dublin City University is a young university, in Dublin, Ireland. Like other universities, DCU is a place of learning in which all members of the campus community, staff and students alike, develop knowledge and acquire skills. It ensures that students gain direct experience of industry and other workplaces, and it offers the very latest technology and facilities to ensure that all are equipped to become leaders in their chosen fields. Thus it is an ideal environment for the international student or exchange student.

DCU is a major research institution, which has gained worldwide recognition for the work of many of its key researchers and research teams. It has long been involved in supporting non-traditional students and there has always been a good number of non-Irish EU and non-EU students attending the University.

Since its foundation, Dublin City University has been involved in international student exchange activities and in the development of international teaching and research links. The University is committed to international student recruitment and support, and to the development of international strategic alliances. The International Office is responsible for pursuing and developing the university's commitment to international students and linkages and international student recruitment. The team at the

International Office is dedicated to servicing the interface between the university and the international student and educational environments. In order to better support and integrate the international students, the International Office is situated within Student Affairs.

### **Institutional comparisons**

The three institutions all have different goals, philosophies and priorities. The following section of this booklet outlines the certain relevant aspects of each University, such as size, range of study, participation etc.

<b>Size:</b> (2006/2007)	DCU	9,765 students
	KATHO	6,500
	PÄDAK	1,100

**Location:** DCU and are located in the capital cities of their countries; KATHO is in the southwest of Belgium.

**Study programmes:** PÄDAK Vienna is an initial and in-service teacher training institution at bachelor level; the other two institutions offer a broad variety of study programmes, from Business Management, Health Care to Sport Science.

KATHO and PÄDAK each have a cooperative Masters programme.

### **Developments in internationalisation**

All these institutions are committed to international student recruitment and support and to the development of international strategic alliances. While DCU and KATHO have worldwide contracts and partners, PÄDAK mainly cooperates with partners within the framework of LLL.

The three institutions have well established International Offices, with the number of staff proportional to the size of the institution. KATHO additionally has a special system of part-time departmental international coordinators, to guarantee the implementation of the international programmes within the departments. At DCU, the international Office is located within Student Affairs, in order to promote the integration of international students. Cooperation with Student Unions and student support services are an essential part of their work.

The activities of these International Offices are very similar in each institution:

- Language courses for incoming and outgoing students;
- Recruitment of international students;
- Orientation/counselling meetings for outgoing students;
- Induction week(s) for incoming students;



- Administration and management of international agreements/contracts;
- Academic and social integration of international visitors and teaching staff members;
- Participation in international fairs and other fora.

PÄDAK and KATHO offer courses introducing aspects of intercultural/cultural communication for international students (AT: 'Welcome Europe'; BE: 'The International Classroom'). DCU use monthly coffee meetings for similar purposes as part of the integration activities in DCU.

KATHO also has activities for its students returning from exchanges, presenting their learning experiences and informing prospective outgoing students. KATHO assesses student applications to select 'no-risk' students.

DCU offers academic support classes from training in modes of assessment, interaction with academic staff, use of academic resources, and forms of class work, learning to learn and constructivist learning tools, open to all non-EU-students.

### International participation

In the area of student mobility, one aspect is particularly interesting: of the outgoing students, 88% of PÄDAK, 75% of KATHO and 78% of DCU are female (2005/06). There are similar proportions of males and females in the incoming students.

The proportion of incoming exchange students to the total student body is similar in PÄDAK and DCU (11%), less in KATHO. KATHO has similar numbers of incoming and outgoing students; PÄDAK shows more than 4% difference.

Table 1: Participation in international activities (2005/06)

	KATHO	PÄDAK	DCU
Number of students	6500	525	8895
International projects	30	16	14
Coordination of international projects	1	6	4
Bilateral contracts	300	48	100
Staff exchange outgoing	88	30	6
Incoming students	191 (2.9%)	61 (11.6%)	1008 (11.3%)
Outgoing students	170 (2.6%)	38 (7.2%)	98 (1.1%)

Percentages are of total number of students. In Katho students can only study abroad in their final year, so 8.5% of this year are mobile.

The size of an institution does not necessarily impact on the level of participation in international programmes.

### **Conclusions on the characteristics of the institutions**

The number of outgoing and incoming students attending these institutions has still not achieving the level recommended proposed by the Lisbon declaration. More efficient, more diverse approaches are required. The unbalanced participation, weighted in favour of female students, raises two different questions: firstly do we do enough to support male students to engage in exchange; secondly do the institutions and/or the whole process favour one gender? What are the determinant factors? Further research is needed on this. While support for students to study abroad before they leave institutions is well developed, in many cases support on their return to their native country is less developed.

## **- Students & Staff**

### **International students**

We found that most incoming students had conducted their own preparations before going to the new country. But this preparation was quite erratic and focussed mainly on language issues (where this was relevant) and practical preparation such as transport, accommodation, finance etc. The majority of incoming students only began their preparation in the month before they travelled. Asked what advice they would give to other students considering international study, many suggested language training as the highest priority and then careful consideration of destination location. They recommend meeting other exchange/Erasmus students, and felt they would have found it helpful on cultural and inter-cultural issues. Their reactions to their reception in the host country were very varied. About half of them said that cultural visits and relationships with Institutional International Officers/Staff were very positive, and provided a 'safety network' for them. The other half found arrival and integration very difficult, reporting particularly difficulties in making new friends. Almost 40% felt they had no 'safety net' when they had arrived. Most students perceived the institutional International Office and their staff as primarily informational. Interestingly, most students viewed their relationship with the academic staff as more important and influential. While academic staff ranked a variety of communication skills as the most important factors in working with students from different cultural backgrounds, students

ranked traits such as listening skills, better cultural awareness, flexibility, adaptability and patience.

### **Administrative and International office staff**

We were careful to triangulate this research data with other responses about this element, being aware that institutions were likely to present a more idyllic picture for students entering their institutions through their promotional material and marketing literature, which we accessed through the admissions departments and/or their websites. In our study the International Offices were helpful and positive, and there is no doubt that the services they provide are very valuable to international students. But increasingly many western European Universities rely on the revenue international students generate to support their domestic and national activities. In some European higher education institutions the fees for international students can be up to three times the EU/national rate.

The International Offices of the three institutions ranked the following joint highest in terms of student support:

- Personal relationships with each student, offering informational and advice (accommodations, finance etc),
- 'Orientation' both culturally and academically.

The next rated 'on-demand information', such as information used and required on a case by case individual basis.

Asked about the kind of problems incoming students most often bring them, they cited first accommodation, followed by language problems. Also ranked highly (yet never mentioned by students) were issues around choice of academic courses and modules by students.

When asked what problems academic staff brought them about students from different cultural backgrounds, they saw language and communication issues as the greatest problem, followed by issues of diversity and coping with a diverse cohort of students.

It was significant that when asked what problems their offices had in working with students from different cultural backgrounds, they all responded, 'no problems'. All of those consulted suggested that a unique benefit of working with these students was that it increased their own understanding of cultural and cross-cultural diversity.

### **Academic staff**

The academic staff in all three institutions saw their roles in working with international students as unique and generally favourable. They all felt strongly that it was important to have a good understanding of the particular needs of international students, especially in the area of cross cultural understanding. Communication needs and issues were also rated highly, and language issues were cited as a constant problem for both teacher and student. Many academics wanted structures for institutional academic support, such as extra time for examinations, more language proficiency classes, and more tutorials that explored academic content. Over 40% of academic staff said that international students often had problems mixing or 'fitting in' with other students in their institution. Again, language issues were ranked as the greatest problem.

There was a mixed response when asked for perceptions of how well their own institutions supported students from different cultural backgrounds. A half said that traditional systems did not suit these students, while a half thought their institution supported this group adequately. All academic staff felt that further training should be provided for anyone teaching in this area, as specialist skills and knowledge were necessary.

## Section 4: Practice and principles in supporting international students

### Introduction

This section looks at support from both the perspective of the student and from the institution. The two main aims for student support are:

- to ensure or improve study success and overall student experience
- to increase or consolidate the attractiveness of the institution (Kelo 2006 p. 128)

We summarise examples of good practices in different categories. We would suggest that each institution should select its own priorities, checking and adapting these each year. In section 5 we present a tool to evaluate and continuously improve student support for international students.

### Approaches to international student support: the organisation of services for international students

An institution's sensitivity towards international students and the development of student support depends on attitudes and related factors resulting in various motivational beliefs:

1. *Student support is important to improve students' rates of retention, performance and success*
2. *Institutions have a duty of care for the total wellbeing of students*
3. *International students (who pay tuition fees) have the right to receive good support, and they expect it*
4. *Well developed support is an attractive and competitive factor. Support and services are also useful for incoming and outgoing students, and regular students*
5. *Student support contributes to the internationalisation of the institution and how it deals with diversity*
6. *Institutional choices are influenced by national factors, such as those imposed by national legislation (Kelo 2006, p.128-135).*

Kelo suggests the main levels of service provision in an institution are:

- central level office
- departments and faculties
- student unions or associations.

Different approaches are possible:

- separate provision vs integration with provision for locals
- centralised, decentralised or combined organisation of student support.

### Separated or integrated support for international students

We found that international students do not necessarily have greater needs than regular students. They have different needs, depending on culture background and previous learning experience. Even among 'home' students there can be a wide variety of needs (Kelo 2006 p.136-152). Below we summarise the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of separated and integrated support and centralised or decentralised support.

Table 2: Comparison of integrated and decentralised support

	<b>Separated support</b>	<b>Integrated support</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	Belief that IS have different needs	Belief that each IS and local student has own needs,
	More centralised support by the existence of a well defined central international office, responsible for all services: administration, social, cultural and psychological support,	Separate services only for administrative and legal procedures  Constant training and briefing of people from different offices, sharing knowledge
	International office or building is visible in the institution	More decentralised support  Departmental/faculty coordinators are contact points
<b>Pros</b>	Specialisation to suit needs / challenges faced by students	Prevention of a split university
	Higher level of staff specialisation	Raises the internationalisation of the campus
	Visibility for international affairs	
<b>Cons</b>	Danger of a split in the university	Sometimes the needs of IS not adequately met
	Internationalisation is the work of some people, but is not a common responsibility	International Office has sometimes to take over the responsibilities
		International office feels need to raising cultural awareness in faculties

Table 3: Centralised or decentralised support

	<b>Centralised support</b>	<b>Decentralised support</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	All services under one roof: a single point of contact	A service office for general issues, enquiries, guidance
	Managed by a Student Services Coordinator	Specialist units for career service, study skills workshops, writing centre, language support  Not much developed in institutions  Support at faculty level on academic performance of the students
<b>Pros</b>	Easier access to each service	Personalised approach of students possible
	Better guidance to the right person	Adapted and specialised academic support
	Students know where to find assistance	
	Staff more professional and competent in student support	
	Better coordination	
	Higher profile of students services	
<b>Cons</b>	Increasing of pressure on academic staff for administrative duties	Support for faculties not always on the same level
	Less personalised approach for students	Depends on financial and human resources
		Depends on the level of interest
		Overlap between central and faculty support

Student Organisations generally offer additional services, influenced by national and institutional circumstances. In a number of universities student unions offer services including advocacy, special events and international clubs. Most have an international officer for specific issues affecting international students. Some student organisations offer 'buddy programmes' (Kelo 2006, p.146).

Students are not concerned about how support is organised, but want a sufficient level of services, attention for particular needs, action to facilitate integration, clear information about

availability of services, and staff who refer students to appropriate services at all levels (Kelo 2006 p. 147).

To realise these objectives, additional tools and instruments can be established, such as:

- Creating units or committees for service development; the international office can be part of a network of advisory services or the student support committee
- Coordinating activities with the departments and faculties
- Pooling resources beyond the institution, and using student helpers and volunteers in the international office, improving efficiency with online tools and specialised services. Peer mentoring is often effective and efficient
- Improving the information: presentation of all services in welcome meetings, information on services in handbooks and by e-mail alerts; service providers announce each other's activities through mutual awareness

### **Information and orientation**

Communication and information provision are vital to successful study for international students. All information needs to be effectively communicated in clear, coherent and simple language. Students need information on many aspects of their new life, such as immigration, visa regulations and local procedures, admission requirements, tuition fees and other costs, term/semester dates and examination schedules, rules related to course assessment, the university and campus, the destination country and city, study tips and work opportunities. This can be presented through internet, e-mails, hard copies, guide books, leaflets, information sessions and recently orientation programmes. Recommendations on information provision are summarised in the following table, based on Kelo (2006 p.153-169) and our own findings.



Table 4: Information provision

WHEN	WHAT
Pre-arrival information	<p><b>Information packages in hard copy or online.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Content: legal issues, arrival information, payment procedures, housing arrangements, climate and cultural information, first weeks programme, study programme possibilities. <i>objective:</i> better leave of the country and start of studies abroad.</li> <li>•In-country pre-departure information session for selected and accepted students. <i>objective:</i> support in preparation, in dealing with culture shock and intercultural communication.</li> <li>•Outreach Programme to connect future students with actual students <i>objective:</i> students feel part of the host university</li> </ul>
	<p><b>More comprehensive on-arrival information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Content: practical information, free-time activities, sports, accommodation, restaurants, shops, safety, university regulations, year planning and examination dates, exam conditions.</li> <li>•Checklist of what to do the first weeks: appointments for enrolment, fee payment.</li> <li>•Orientation Programmes from 1 day till 1 week.</li> <li>•Information desks providing booklets and brochures on all aspects, practical help on arrival.</li> <li>•Information kiosks in cafeteria/hall for student-to-student orientation</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Permanent information tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Guidebooks and leaflets</li> <li>•International student diaries</li> <li>•Regularly updated web-based information</li> <li>•Information Desk for international or for all students</li> <li>•Online information search engine</li> <li>•A freephone number (24 hour)</li> <li>•Information workshops (money management, housing, volunteering programmes)</li> <li>•Buddy or mentor schemes which involve second and further year students in guiding new arrivals</li> </ul>

We describe two information tools referred to earlier: orientation programmes and mentor schemes.

### Orientation programmes

This has various objectives:

- Setting out the wealth of information considered helpful or even necessary.

- Familiarisation with the university, campus, staff members, timetables, academic courses and procedures.
- Creating a feeling of welcome and belonging
- Facilitating the passage from the home to the host university.

Stakeholders in this are the central administration, student services office, student associations or unions, departmental staff, and staff from particular support like library and language centre. External experts could also be invited, such as different student representatives, local students unions, local bank staff, police, careers service, sport centre: the programme might be developed in cooperation with them. There could be formal sessions on academic or social orientation, practical orientation tours by student mentors to the city and country, alternating with informal moments like a welcome drink. Study skills sessions might be included.

Students can arrange practical matters (e-mail accounts, registration and payment of fees). An international orientation program brochure could guide students through the orientation days. Different orientation programmes need to be organised in a coherent, accessible and clear manner, so that students know where they have to go, when and for what kind of information.

#### **Student mentoring schemes**

Buddy or mentoring schemes build connections between new students and students further in their studies, or between incoming and local students. Mentorship is usually for a year. This offers new students the opportunity to know and talk with more experienced students. Mentors/buddies organise individual meetings and tours, to show key places and tell them what to expect, and information and training sessions on topics like tutorials and academic writing. These schemes are most successful when the mentors receive training in leadership and meet regularly in a network of peer leaders.

#### **Language support**

Support to improve the use of the language of instruction is always very important. Support can be offered in advance, through summer courses or a short introduction course of some weeks. During their stay students should have the facilities of language centres that allow focus on the course contents as well as substantial study skills practice and local learning methods (Kelo 2006 p.170 – 178). Language support is usually offered by a more or less independent centre, but may sometimes be part of the academic programme.

There are three different forms of support:

- language courses
- access to self-study material
- ad hoc individualised or group support

### **Language courses**

*Pre-sessional:* mostly intensive or semi-intensive, sometimes part of the admission conditions, often with a fee.

*In-sessional:* usually weekly or twice weekly, flexibly combined with other courses, and specific enough to respond to the level of the student (which is assessed by a language test). These courses are usually free of charge, and generally in learning English.

These courses may or may not be part of the Learning Agreement. Where they are, the student will receive credits after the completion of the taught course or the self-study contract with individual meetings and a successful assessment. Some universities organise student-to-student tandem systems designed to practice oral skills.

Sometimes students can study the local language in an introduction course, as this will be useful for their social and daily life and sometimes for their placement. The European Commission sponsors three week European intensive Language Courses (EILC) which introduce the local language and culture. Students sometimes continue in evening classes weekly or twice weekly, if this is useful for their placement.

### **Self-study material, online tools & multimedia centres**

For example, students might have access to an independent learning centre, which would offer self-study, and self assessment facilities. Booklets on language learning techniques can guide students

### **One-to-one support**

This offers language support as and when needed. Generally, academic staff can offer suggestions on text organisation, cohesion and clarity of expression. Individual consultations are in general 30 minutes in length.

### **Academic support and career enhancement activities**

International students may have substantially different attitudes towards studying, teaching and learning methods, and student – teacher relationships than is the pattern among students of the host country. Academic support and study skills training should ensure that international students are aware of the expectations and learning and teaching methods at the host institution: this will provide them with the

necessary skills and help improve their chances of achieving their full potential (Kelo 2006 p.179-195).

This academic support could be decentralised to specialists in departments and faculties, focusing on training in specific learning skills, academic writing and intercultural skills. Training on general study skills training might be offered centrally, for example by a central learning and teaching unit. These types can be complementary. Further academic support could be delivered by library staff and IT services, on training in research tools and methods and using online resources. Academic support may be part of the regular program where didactic methods centre on problem-based learning.

Academic support, always important, is particularly necessary at the start of a new programme and in the final stages of writing a thesis.

Academic support includes:

- monitoring progress through skills workshops tutorials, in order to intervene before drop-out or failure;
- workshops on learning and study skills, either thematic workshops or more long-term training on topics such as time-management, essay writing, presentation skills, understanding assignments, public talking, note-taking, learning and memory, or dealing with stress and anxiety. Training can be offered through specialised centres (writing skills centre, numeracy centre or a library);
- individual tutoring, study related personal counselling and on-demand workshops;
  - PAL (Peer Assisted Learning), where student leaders run two or three groups before an assessment. Leaders are selected for their own performance in the modules and for their facilitation skills;
  - panel meeting after induction weeks, where academic staff and students give tips and reply on questions about how to succeed;
  - PAC (Peer Academic Coaching), where students re-examine their personal academic strengths and weaknesses with other students, under the supervision of a student coach. Topics on the agenda might be learning tools, study trips, study habits and techniques, study resources, coping and problem solving strategies, academic tutoring and advice;
- self-study material can be offered in various ways:

- a student resource centre, with video, audio, printer and computer based resources with software on assignment writing, speaking and listening;
- study-guides (course work books, samples of exemplary materials, practice questions, past exam papers); and
- access to online information skills training on finding library material, searching databases and researching on the internet.

### **Career enhancement: providing work opportunities and improving international competences**

International competences, work experience and other personal skills are all considered very important. Many of these skills can be gathered indirectly, but many international students like to gain work experience, even though they may not be officially permitted to work. The institution can provide workshops on job interview techniques, CV writing, group discussions, and employees' rights. Creating volunteering schemes and other opportunities to gain work experience is important. Examples include international programme assistants, who work a few hours a month preparing and distributing advertisements for international events or contributing to an international newsletter. Volunteer workers get training and receive a certificate on finishing their job. Degree students will appreciate the international office helping with work permit procedures. The institution can also help organise internships for international students, contacting potential employers and dealing with practical issues like work permits.

Gaining, improving and demonstrating international and intercultural competences is important. Some institutions have developed initiatives such as a global leadership programme, which combine studying abroad for a period and participating in activities such as mentoring international students, attending international workshops, and following foreign languages or regional studies. Other examples are of global citizenship awards and international proficiency certificates.

### **Practical support, welfare and leisure**

Practical support includes help with administrative issues, assistance with housing, welfare support and free-time activities. Much of this practical support is offered by the international office: visa applications and renewals and residence permits are often organised by the international office or its equivalent. International students will also have access to the same student support facilities as local

students. Additional support may sometimes be possible, depending on finance, and the internationalisation and recruitment policy of the institution (Kelo 2006 p.196 -202).

### **The ability to remain in host country**

Visa support is one of the most frequently used individual services.

Support with arranging housing is important for students studying in a language other than the local language, as they might not be able to communicate adequately with private landlords or agencies. Housing support can have different forms:

- offering lists of available accommodation;
- organising and offering accommodation;
- organising home stays with a family;
- organising temporary accommodation for the first weeks; or
- a meet and greet service, bringing students from the railway or airport to their housing.

### **Wellbeing**

International students in general need more support in their physical, medical and psychological wellbeing than local students. This is because they are away from their family and social network, or have the pressure of family expectations. Workshops to prevent or counter issues such as stress management, work management, or anxiety, as well as courses on intercultural communication or relations are appropriate courses for such students. These services can be offered by academic staff members, but are more often delivered by psychologists and social workers. Some institutions also help with the student's parents, children (childcare facilities) and family (advice for students with families) of the student, mostly in postgraduate programs.

### **Feeling good and having fun**

Many activities can help to realise this objective:

- trips and excursions to different destinations
- sport tournaments, cultural events, special international events.

These activities can be organised by the international office or faculties, but the student union often plays a more important role. Some activities are exclusively for international

students, others facilitate activities that connect with local students, and other activities may be open to all students.

Other initiatives can be:

- an international lounge, coffee mornings, open all day with wireless connections, TV, a pool table ... the aim being to bring students from different countries together in an environment in which it is comfortable to study, relax and meet;
- an international café;
- an international student activity program that organises sport activities, wine tours, competitions and parties;
- student clubs;
- places for practising different religions;
- adaptations to diets in university catering and restaurants.

## Section 5: Matrix and recommendations

### Conclusions and recommendations

In this final Section we summarise examples and possibilities of support for international students, clustered into different areas. These examples are no means exhaustive and are primarily based on the outcomes from our case studies in Ireland, Belgium and Austria.

Additional recommendations are drawn from a variety of sources, including Kelo's book, *Support for international students in higher education* (published by Lemmens in 2006). Each institution will need to be creative and flexible in designing and implementing the support for international students, depending on such factors as:

- the national context
- the institutional mission
- the composition of the student body
- recruitment targets
- available resources

The matrix is designed to be used by practitioners as a template to develop good practice. As discussed earlier, the unique and individual cultures of each institution will always have to be considered.



Table 6: Recommendations for supporting International Students

	Information and orientation	Language support	Academic support	Practical support, welfare, leisure
Pre-arrival	<input type="checkbox"/> Information package in hard copy and online from home organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Language course (short introduction course, pre-sessional, or in-sessional)	<input type="checkbox"/> Workshop on learning and study skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Support in arranging housing
	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-departure information for outgoing students	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to self-study material		<input type="checkbox"/> Preventive workshop in internet communication and stress management
	<input type="checkbox"/> Reach out programme connects future & current students			
First week(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> On-arrival information	<input type="checkbox"/> One-to-one language-support	<input type="checkbox"/> Panel meeting after introduction week (academic staff and students union)	<input type="checkbox"/> Get together party
	<input type="checkbox"/> Checklist: what to do the first week	<input type="checkbox"/> Language course (short intro course, pre-or in-sessional)	<input type="checkbox"/> Peer-Academic-Coaching (PAC)	<input type="checkbox"/> International student activity programme
	<input type="checkbox"/> Orientation programme for week 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to independent learning centre	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic support by the library staff and IT-services	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Information desk			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Student-to-student information: involvement of students union			
Permanent	<input type="checkbox"/> Guidebook	<input type="checkbox"/> Language course (pre-sessional, or in-sessional)	<input type="checkbox"/> Student resource centre (assistance in writing, speaking, listening)	<input type="checkbox"/> Adapted places to practise religion
	<input type="checkbox"/> International students diary	<input type="checkbox"/> one-to-one-support	<input type="checkbox"/> Study guides	<input type="checkbox"/> International lounge / café
	<input type="checkbox"/> Updated web-based information	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to independent learning centre	<input type="checkbox"/> Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)	<input type="checkbox"/> International students activity programme
	<input type="checkbox"/> Information workshops by the counsellor on money management, housing, study programmes		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual tutoring	<input type="checkbox"/> Student clubs
			<input type="checkbox"/> Self-study material is offered	<input type="checkbox"/> Adapt dietary catering in the university
			<input type="checkbox"/> Training of global citizenship	<input type="checkbox"/> Intercultural events
			<input type="checkbox"/> International newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/> International competitions (e.g. sports tournaments)
			<input type="checkbox"/> Quality assessment of services: by the academic staff, the international office and the students union	

## Summary

This booklet sought to answer how Higher Education Institutions can support students from different cultural backgrounds in their diversity of cultural identities in an equitable and balanced manner. This process did raise some interesting questions such as: How do the changing definitions of Citizenship within the EU and the diversity of cultural identities found in international students affect the identities in academic life and the position of 'world' students?

What special provisions need to be made to accommodate these students? The research also brought up several other questions that could benefit from further research.

The conclusions and recommendations were based on the experience of a sample of diverse Higher Education Institutions in Europe. These included Dublin City University, Ireland, Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen, Flanders, Belgium, and Pädagogische Akademie des Bundes, Wien, Austria.

There is a significant amount of literature available on this area of learning. This research team debated long and hard about delving deeper into the literature. However it was decided that this guide/booklet is as practical and helpful as possible to those that work in this domain. The bibliography section directs the reader to further academic findings, models and theories that may also be helpful in your own context. The main rationale for developing such a booklet is not posed here by the authors or by the participants surveyed but is best summed up by our fellow CiCe colleagues in another booklet relating to this series. *'One of the greatest successes of contemporary European culture is its high level of cultural diversity: no other part of the world has so many cultural communities'* (Issa, Dinvaot & Petrucijova 2006, p.1). It is this diversity that we within the higher education institutions in Europe need to embrace, socially, academically and systematically. The idea of assimilation and conformation simply will not enrich our students' learning. Adaptation, flexibility and a willingness to change are the key concepts learned through this research process.

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