



**GUIDE FOR ENHANCING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'
INTERCULTURAL AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Overview

This guide 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 examples of innovative practice.

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

A complete list of the guides is below:

- 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 and their employability
- Guide for supporting international students with accommodation
- Guide for supporting international students with crisis navigation
- A framework for developing innovative programs to enhance international student engagement.

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Introduction

This guide is designed to assist practitioners and staff working for education providers and other organisations who work to support international students with their intercultural and community engagement.

International students study in an education system and live in a culture that are new to them. This means they need to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds and develop intercultural capabilities to effectively navigate their studies in Australia. These intercultural challenges, and how they are managed, influence the experiences that international students will have.

Strengthening international students' engagement on campus and within the community supports many aspects of their life in Australia. This guide provides guiding principles and specific strategies on these.

The guide builds on research findings from desktop analysis, consultation workshops, surveys and interviews with international students, graduates, education providers, government, community, and professional organisations.





What do we know?

Education providers have an important role to play in supporting international students' intercultural and community engagement.

The *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*¹ (Standard 6) requires education providers to:

- support international students in adjusting to study and life in Australia by providing them with information on, or access to, an age and culturally-appropriate orientation program.
- give international students access to a range of services, including English language support.

¹ National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018. Australian Government Department of Education.

What helps intercultural and community engagement?

■ Preparing international students for intercultural and community engagement

Providing orientation, information, and support for international students to develop their English language skills and cultural understanding is an important means to facilitate intercultural engagement.

■ Peer support programs and volunteer opportunities

Mentorship from senior students and volunteering are valuable ways to assist new international students to interact with their institution and their local community.

■ Intercultural engagement in the classroom

Intercultural engagement in the classroom is enhanced through the creation of a comfortable and welcoming environment that encourages international students to engage with peers, teachers and learning activities.

■ Sharing cultures and values

It is important to develop opportunities for international students, especially new students, to interact with peers, teachers, and the community through initiatives where they can share their culture and values, while learning about other cultures.

■ Structured programs

Opportunities to participate in structured and regular programs to connect international students with the local community and domestic students are needed for effective intercultural and community engagement.

■ Inclusive, supportive, and respectful institutional approach

Education providers could develop a whole-of-institution approach that acknowledges the rich cultural background, language and learning experiences international students bring so as to eliminate stereotypes and assumptions about them.

What hinders intercultural and community engagement?

■ Lack of confidence

Some international students lack the confidence to participate in classroom discussions and engage in conversations in English.

■ Lack of awareness of resources

International students may not be aware of the resources and support programs available to them within and outside their institutions.

■ Lack of local community awareness

Local communities may not be aware of how they can be more welcoming and inclusive of international students.

■ Lack of resources and collaboration

There may be insufficient institutional resources and lack of collaboration among related organisations to support international students' intercultural communication and engagement.

■ Siloed international student programs

Programs designed specifically for international students may discourage regular interactions with domestic students and contribute to a lack of intercultural engagement.





What can we do?

Guiding Principles

Programs and initiatives supporting international students in their intercultural and community engagement could be centred around the following principles.

These principles are based on research findings from desktop analysis, surveys, interviews, and consultation workshops:

1. Embracing cultural diversity
2. Promoting shared learning
3. Preparing students for study
4. Encouraging student participation
5. Providing ongoing support
6. Implementing a whole-of-institution approach



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1:

**EMBRACING
CULTURAL
DIVERSITY**

Embracing cultural diversity

International students come to Australia from many diverse countries, and they add richness to our already culturally diverse community.

Education providers and organisations could consider the following strategies to embrace cultural diversity and enrich international students' intercultural communication and engagement:

■ Respecting diversity and integrating cultural experiences

Respecting the cultural diversity of students helps international students to engage. International students should be encouraged to contribute to Australia's already vibrant multicultural society, but they should not be forced to assimilate as this undermines their culture and values.

Cross-cultural events and experiences need to be expanded to support intercultural engagement in a two-way process that recognises the richness of international students' cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Education providers could encourage students to embrace cultural diversity in ways that empower international students to engage and interact with a variety of people.

This can be done through initiatives and programs where international students share their culture and stories. Events may include the sharing of artworks, food, national dress, and participation in cultural festivals. For example, the University of Newcastle celebrates Harmony Week with various activities including live music, cultural sharing, dances and free food from countries like Argentina, Spain, and Tibet.

Teachers can organise classroom activities or assignments where international students reflect on their own stories and experiences. This could lead to discussions about how the diversity that international students bring can help enrich learning for everyone.

■ Enhancing understanding of new cultures

Creating opportunities and places for cultural exchange allows for international students and local communities to learn about different cultures. This could include public spaces, different physical environments, programs, and events that support intercultural and community engagement. Some examples are:

- providing opportunities for international students to learn about Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- organising multicultural events to promote cultural understanding.
- celebrating important religious and cultural events, including the Lunar New Year, Moon Festival, Diwali, Eid al-Fitr and Rosh Hashanah.

■ Professional development

Staff play a key role in supporting international students and should understand their needs and cross-border challenges and how cultural differences may affect the way they seek help.

Intercultural training plays an important role in facilitating engagement for staff and may also be beneficial for students to facilitate international and domestic student engagement.

For example, many international students find it difficult to understand Australian accents. Staff should speak clearly and slowly and avoid using slang whenever possible.

■ Raising awareness of international student contributions to Australia

International students are valued members of the Australian community. They not only contribute to enriching Australian education, culture, society, and the economy, but are also an important source of skilled workers. Promoting and celebrating international students' success stories is one way to raise awareness of the contributions they make.

For example, education providers could help by highlighting and promoting international student success stories and contributions. This could include showcasing alumni and graduates who were involved in community activities as students or who have started businesses that employ local workers.

Many education providers, such as the University of Adelaide, the University of Melbourne, and Flinders University have International Student Ambassador programs which increase the recognition of international students in the community.

Good practice example:

An international student engaging with local communities

As an international student at Holmesglen Institute, Divyangana Sharma has proactively engaged with local communities through her various roles as a content writer, student leader, and student on placement.

While health is Divyangana Sharma's passion and field of study, she loves to create content and share stories. This allows Divya to create and share her nursing and mental health stories that people can relate to. She has worked with organisations, such as Meld Magazine and Insider Guides, to create content that aims to increase international students' awareness of different subjects including mental health and LGBTQIA+.

With a natural interest in leadership and a passion for being the voice for international students, Divya has actively sought opportunities to develop and exercise her leadership skills, even if this takes her out of her comfort zone. She stepped into the role of the Chair of Holmesglen's Student Representative Council, which provided her with a valuable opportunity to enhance her skills. During her term as the Council Chair, Divya refined her ability to speak in front of an audience, both in person and virtually. She also developed a solid understanding of official meeting protocols and the importance of keeping accurate records.

As nursing placements are a requirement of her course, Divya has used this opportunity to connect and understand the personal and clinical needs of her patients and identify health trends in the wider Victorian community.

Good practice example:

Swinburne College Conversation Club

The Swinburne College Student Hub assists students to achieve high-quality academic and wellbeing outcomes by offering a wide range of activities tailored to support individuals and groups based on their academic and language needs.

The Conversation Club, which is an initiative of the Student Hub, provides opportunities for domestic and international students to interact informally with one another on a range of topics. Hub staff also participate in the sessions, which have an open structure designed to incorporate students' areas of interest. This often leads to students offering each other guidance from their experience living in Australia.

The concept of the Conversation Club is simple, but highly effective. It enables international students to engage with each other in an informal setting, helping them to improve their English language proficiency and their intercultural communication. It provides them with non-threatening learning experiences in their new learning environment while helping them to gain a deeper understanding of Australian culture.

The Club's inclusive environment encourages students from different classes to engage in meaningful conversations that nurture their learning journey. As a result, international students are enhancing their academic and personal development during their time at Swinburne College.

Anecdotal feedback from students demonstrates the positive impact the Conversation Club has on students' English language acquisition and learning skills, including critical thinking, asking questions in the classroom, and participating in discussions. The popularity of the activity each week indicates that students find the Club beneficial.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2:

PROMOTING SHARED LEARNING

Promoting shared learning

Shared learning is a two-way process. It involves the student and the educator developing new approaches to teaching and learning while negotiating the circumstances associated with a student learning in a foreign country.

Reciprocal learning occurs when people from different cultures interact with openness to new teaching and learning approaches. This includes understanding the new and changing social circumstances students face and how these impact their daily lives and their educators.

Developing connection programs between international and domestic students and the community they live in plays a key role in fostering international student engagement, and their sense of belonging.

Education providers can use the following activities to support international student engagement with domestic students and the community:

■ Providing mindfulness activities

Mindfulness activities can help domestic students understand that international students are not all the same.

Education providers could consider organising activities to help staff and students understand that international students come from a variety of cultures, hold differing values, and speak different languages. Although they are often faced with similar challenges in a new educational environment, international students experience these challenges differently.

For example, teachers or support staff can organise a mindfulness story activity. In this activity, international and domestic students are asked to take a step back, avoid judgmental thoughts and practice mindful listening to understand each other's different life stories and challenges.

■ Providing opportunities for connection

Providing structured, consistent and regular opportunities for connection between international students, and domestic students and communities, helps to enhance their intercultural and community engagement. These activities can provide international students with opportunities to take leadership roles.

Education providers and organisations could consider developing buddy or mentoring systems, or providing opportunities for sporting or hobby-based connections with local communities and ethnic groups.

The *G'Day Mates* program at University of South Australia enables international and domestic students to support other students to enjoy life in Adelaide.

The Filipino Community Council of Victoria has a program to introduce international students to their local ethnic community.

■ Nurturing inclusivity

Feeling included is an important first step to facilitate shared learning and intercultural engagement.

Teachers and support staff could consider promoting inclusivity by involving international students as partners and co-creators in activities where everyone shares their thoughts and needs.

An inclusive curriculum encourages all students to share their cultural insights and perspectives in the classroom, and to model inclusive language at all times.

■ Supporting a constructive relationship

A constructive relationship between teachers and communities, and international students, is the foundation for shared learning and meaningful intercultural engagement.

Education providers could consider offering different modes of communication that enable students to engage in activities in multiple ways.

For example, students could be invited to voice their needs and concerns, and provide written or oral feedback on their courses through emails and/or consultation meetings.

■ Encouraging international student participation

Education providers can explore various ways to facilitate international student participation in programs, workshops, and activity clubs.

Encouraging international students to participate in activities outside their comfort zone is important to help them overcome the fear of failure. It also encourages them to venture out and make social connections.

Effective strategies for developing international students' social connections can include:

- cultural dinners, artistic performances, and social gatherings where they are encouraged to speak about their cultures and traditions.
- employing international students as volunteers and having them organise social or sporting activities that promote social connectedness.



Good practice example:

Beyond I.D.entity_ program

Supported by the Banyule Arts and Culture grant 2022, Feifei Curiosity, a community engagement organisation, has led and co-designed the Beyond I.D.entity_ program with international students, alumni and the Banyule City Council to increase international student engagement in their local communities.

Beyond I.D.entity_ uses art as an accessible, diverse and inclusive platform for international students to explore their intersectional identities beyond 'international students', share and collaborate in storytelling, and connect with their local communities. Through a series of artist-led workshops including music, photography, theatre, film making and sensory storytelling, students learned about themselves and each other. They also develop meaningful friendships with each other, artists and the wider community.

Going beyond conventional exhibition or gallery spaces, the artworks live and breathe in public places at the Ivanhoe Library, tell their stories with local communities and challenge stereotypes about international students.

Through online feedback forms, in-person and online interviews and anecdotal collections, international students, local community members and artists shared that the artworks created through Beyond I.D.entity_ served as an intercultural communication catalyst, broke down the barriers of cultural differences, and nurtured a sense of belonging to local communities. The program encourages the local community to engage with the artworks to help them understand international students better.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3:

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR STUDY



Preparing students for study

Registered education providers are required to provide all international students with access to an age and culturally-appropriate orientation program.

Well prepared students with some knowledge of Australia often adjust more quickly and have a better study experience. Preparation comes in many forms, but it generally helps students align their expectations with what they are likely to experience once they arrive.

The following strategies assist international students to prepare for intercultural communication and engagement:

■ Pre-departure briefings and orientation for international students and their parents about studying in Australia

Pre-departure briefing or orientation is an effective and popular way to prepare international students for their study. Parents should also be involved in the orientation program, so they can gain an understanding of what their children are likely to experience. When parents are well-informed, they can provide better support for their children.

Teachers and support staff can educate international students and their parents on the differences between the learning approaches used in their home country with those used in Australia in an informal and friendly manner.

For example, Deakin College involves parents as partners in online pre-departure and orientation programs to help create realistic expectations about their children's learning in Australia.

■ Having multicultural support staff

It is beneficial for international students to have access to support staff who share their cultural background, and with whom students can discuss their problems without the fear of these being disclosed to anyone else, including their parents.

Education providers could consider providing bilingual counsellors who share the same cultural and/or language background as international students.

■ Preventing international students from being culturally siloed

Communication and routine interactions only with peers from similar backgrounds can lead to feeling disconnected from Australian students and the wider community.

Activities such as conversation clubs and cultural events, e.g. Swinburne College Conversation Club, can help international students engage with peers from other cultural backgrounds.

■ Mentorship and buddy systems with fellow international and domestic students

As new students often feel more comfortable interacting with their peers, senior students could be encouraged to mentor them by introducing them to organisational and community cultures.

Education providers could organise and promote mentoring and buddy programs to new students.

For example, the Melbourne Peer Mentor Program (The University of Melbourne) and ActivateUNSW (University of New South Wales) provide peer-to-peer support for undergraduate students when they enter the community as new students.

■ Developing an equality mindset between international and domestic students

It is important that teachers and support staff help international students understand that the difficulties they may face in the learning process are often similar to those that domestic students encounter, especially those related to basic skills in numeracy, literacy, and digital skills.

Ways to support the development of an equality mindset include identifying shared experiences across international and domestic groups, particularly with domestic students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Good practice example:

International Student Mentor Program at Ivanhoe Grammar School

The International Student Mentor Program at Ivanhoe Grammar School (IGS) involves international students studying in the Ivanhoe International Academy (ELICOS Program) with their international and domestic peers in mainstream classes. Many of the international students at IGS have previously studied in the ELICOS Program and see this program as a way of ‘giving back’ and developing their communication and leadership skills.

The International Student Mentor Program enables students to form friendships, improve their communication skills, build their confidence, and connect with their community. The program also aligns with the IGS Learner Attributes including courage, compassion, and collaboration.

Students are encouraged to share their experiences, which helps to develop their intercultural understanding and appreciation of their diverse cultural backgrounds. The Program offers a range of mentoring topics with the student voice being integral to topic selection. Examples of topics include:

- Cultural similarities/differences – teenage/adolescent years, motivations/aspirations, family/society expectations
- Subject selection in International Baccalaureate (IB) and Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Co-curricular options such as sport, music and performance
- Debating
- Clubs (dance, film club, chess club, games)
- Holiday activities
- Music and sport preferences, hobbies, shared interests
- Cultural comparisons - language instruction (multilingual), school routines, educational experiences.

The program is evaluated through student reflections on the benefits of the program as well as selection, addition and change of topics in liaison with the International Student Council and International Prefect Team.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4:

ENCOURAGING STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Encouraging student participation

Engaging international students in activities, based on their interests, provides them with opportunities to develop their own sense of place while working on minimising their feelings of isolation.

The following strategies can be used to encourage student participation:

■ Creating opportunities for students to pursue their interests

Encouraging and supporting international students to pursue their interests can help them to engage with other students and the community more generally.

Engagement activities for international and domestic students could encourage them to have conversations to informally discuss topics which are inclusive and enjoyable so that international students can feel more relaxed and engaged in a multicultural group.

Education providers and organisations can offer opportunities for all students to engage in activities of interest including sports, arts and crafts, media and music, and invite international students to speak about their culture.

The following examples are initiatives that provide opportunities for international students to pursue their interests and build connections:

Be You-Be Scene is a project that has developed a series of theatre workshops for international students, providing them with scope to develop their voice and presence.

BFriend, a not-for-profit organisation, working in partnership with other organisations such as the World Kitchen, offers free fun activities, including food presentations, tastings, comedy and dancing.

Some activities and services by local communities are available in different languages and are run by multilingual staff. An example is the Ethnic Community Services Co-operative.

Chinese Academic Business Learning & Education (CABLE) identifies first year academic high achievers in the Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong, to provide and share their experiences of studying and living overseas as well as building community engagement. CABLE leaders participate in a broad range of social and sports activities involving both international and domestic University of Wollongong students.

■ International student leadership and ambassador programs

Leadership and ambassador programs are a valuable way to assist international students to engage with the community.

Education providers and organisations could consider designing leadership and ambassador programs that aim to identify and develop international student talent, and promote and share the leadership capacity of international students with the broader community.

For example, the City of Sydney International Student Leadership and Ambassador program offers free training, work integrated learning and volunteering opportunities for international students.

■ Leveraging social media platforms

TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are among the most popular and rapidly growing online platforms used by international students.

Education providers could work with related organisations to leverage these platforms to promote support services and opportunities for student participation in intercultural and community activities.

■ The student voice

Capturing the student voice is an important way to inform the development of effective intercultural engagement programs and activities.

Most universities have international student bodies that provide representation, peer support and events such as the University of Western Australia Student Guild.



Good practice example:

University of South Australia (UniSA) G'Day Mates program

This program comprises a diverse team of domestic and international students and assists UniSA international students to engage with their domestic peers and enjoy life in Adelaide through a range of social activities, networking events, information sessions and cultural and community activities.

The G'Day Mates program involves working with students as partners. It employs domestic and international students as leaders on casual contracts so that they can be involved in developing and delivering programs to enhance international student engagement with their domestic peers and local communities. The programs help to enrich international students' social connection with, and understanding of, local communities. The program also draws on student volunteers who receive recognition for their contributions via the UniSA+ Award. Upon graduation, students participating in the program receive an additional transcript which details their contributions.

Social activities have included laser tag, adventure rooms, Adelaide Oval climb, excursions to wildlife parks, movie nights and board game evenings. Partnering with local communities, UniSA international students have benefited from learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. Swim, sun, and beach safety are of huge importance in Australia and the program partners with a local surf life saving club for an annual beach day.

Information about the UniSA G'Day Mates program is available online at:
<https://i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-support-services/international-student-services/gday-mates/>



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5:
**PROVIDING
ONGOING
SUPPORT**

Providing ongoing support

It is crucial to support students before they arrive in Australia and continue this throughout their study journey.

Students flourish in safe and welcoming environments. Different forms and levels of support may be needed depending on the individual and their changing circumstances.

The following strategies could enhance intercultural and community engagement:

■ Creating environments where international students can engage with other students, their teachers and their institution's community

Giving international students a choice of spaces or environments may encourage them to feel more comfortable interacting with the learning community outside of study hours.

Organisations could consider providing these spaces outside of the classroom to encourage teacher and student interaction (e.g. lunches or picnics). Teachers and lecturers can make these interactions meaningful, but must always be aware of relationship boundaries with students.

Education providers could consider establishing online engagement groups for international students. However, these groups need to be actively monitored to ensure their effectiveness and to remove any potential risks.

For example, the Victorian Department of Education and Training runs awards programs, competitions (oral presentation, photo, video) and in-person events where international students bring along their domestic student buddies. These activities can help create bonds and friendships between international and domestic students and their communities.

Examples of virtual engagement groups include online discussion forums via Facebook, WhatsApp, or WeChat.

■ Having regular check-ins

Having regular check-ins with international students can ensure they get relevant information and instructions when needed, rather than overwhelming them with too much information during their induction. Chatting with international students in a conversational way can help to build rapport and trust.

A liaison staff member could be made available to check on the needs of international students.

For example, The University of Melbourne, Victoria University, and The Australian National University offer regular drop-in sessions where international students are welcome to ask an advisor or senior student ambassador questions.

■ Providing volunteering opportunities

Volunteering can provide international students with opportunities to connect with a range of people, and the community. There are many benefits to volunteering, such as improving the student's social connections, skills development, self-confidence and providing them with an opportunity to showcase their value to the community.

Education providers and community organisations need to consider how they can support international student engagement in volunteering.

For example, education providers could look to appoint more experienced international students to act as tour guides for new domestic and international students.

■ Connecting both international and domestic students with other support organisations

It is a key responsibility of education providers to connect students with reliable services outside of the institution which support their engagement with the community.

Education providers could recommend a list of external organisations that provide opportunities for international students to participate in volunteering programs.

For example, Chisholm Institute provides a list of volunteering portals such as Go Volunteer, Volunteering Victoria, My Future and local community websites, such as, Mornington Peninsula Shire, City of Greater Dandenong, and Cardinia Shire, that students can access for volunteering opportunities.

Good practice example:

Victorian Department of Education and Training

The Victorian Department of Education and Training runs multiple programs to encourage international student engagement with domestic students.

The International Student Voice Project, which is offered in several schools across Victoria, celebrates international students. The program supports international students to feel welcome, and helps domestic students to strengthen their intercultural understanding and develop global mindsets. The project includes:

- **International Student Voice Workshop 1:** Participating domestic and international students reflect on what good international student connectedness and inclusion means, and why intercultural understanding and a global mindset are important. Students design and develop activities they can lead at their schools, such as multicultural days, or language and cultural awareness competitions.
- **Post-workshop coaching, mentoring and support:** Following the workshop, students are provided with coaching, mentoring and support to help them and their teachers implement some of the activities designed by the students, such as developing a proposal or business case presentations.
- **International Student Voice Workshop 2:** The second workshop provides an opportunity for international and domestic students to present their activities, and discuss what worked, what didn't and what they learned from each other.

Multiple programs beyond what schools offer, such as awards programs, competitions (oral presentation, photo, video) or in-person events where international students bring along their domestic student buddies. These activities help create bonds and friendships between international and domestic students, and their community.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 6:

WHOLE-OF- INSTITUTION APPROACH

Whole-of-institution approach

It is important to develop a coherent, whole-of-institution approach to enhance international students' intercultural engagement, learning and communication with domestic students, and the local community. A whole-of-institution approach ensures a positive, caring, supportive, respectful, and diverse learning environment. A whole-of-institution approach requires guidelines for staff to assist international students' intercultural and community engagement.

The development of relevant principles for intercultural communication and engagement to inform policy and practice plays a fundamental role in how to enhance international students' sense of belonging, wellbeing, and to improve their educational experiences.

■ Structured, consistent, repeated opportunities for connection

International students' connection with domestic students and international peers is most often cultivated when the organisation or education provider has structures and consistent practices in place that encourage student engagement.

Education providers could support the development of platforms such as mentoring programs, student associations and student clubs, where international students interact closely and build sustainable connections with other students who share the same interest.

For example, Holmesglen TAFE runs a number of clubs for students to connect with one another.

■ Whole-of-institution policy that addresses stereotypes and assumptions

A whole-of-institution policy expects institutional leaders, teachers, professional staff, and students to consider and anticipate any stereotypes, assumptions and forms of discrimination international students might experience. Such a policy encourages all staff and students to reject and challenge racism and the stereotypes associated with being an international student and non-native speaker of English. Education providers also need to have strong procedures in place to respond to racist behaviour and any forms of harassment targeting international students.

Ways of addressing stereotypes and assumptions about international students within the organisation could include recognising the contribution of international students to the community and showcasing international students' values and talents through ambassador, leadership, and volunteering programs.

■ Social orientation on arrival

It is important for education providers to invest in building opportunities for international student engagement early in their journey and especially in the first month since this is the critical time for students to develop new habits.

Institutions could consider organising free events for students to provide opportunities for communication so academics and course coordinators can get to know students and listen to them in an informal setting. This ice-breaking activity can minimise the barriers students experience and encourage them to engage in study and social interactions.

Engagement activities for new international students include buddy groups, volunteering, and student clubs.

■ Coordination with the Learning Abroad office

The Learning Abroad or Study Abroad department is responsible for outbound mobility programs. It has an important role to play in facilitating a comprehensive approach to enhance international experiences through their engagement with international students.

An international student support team could collaborate with the Learning Abroad department to host intercultural events that help international students to connect with domestic students.

For example, International Student Support and Learning Abroad departments could work together to organise activities for domestic students who are engaged in a Learning Abroad Program. An example is the New Colombo Plan, in which students are mentored by and buddied up with international students, especially at pre-departure and re-entry.

Good practice example:

New to Curtin mentoring program

‘New to Curtin’ mentoring program (N2CM) is a centralised peer-mentoring initiative in which experienced students support the transition of new students into university. N2CM mentors share tips and advice, promote useful resources and events, provide one-to-one mentoring, and deliver various events for all mentees. N2CM supports international and domestic student engagement in parallel with inclusive programs that are open to all first-year students.

Pre-Orientation

- A Pre-Orientation Welcome fostering early engagement between new students.
- A Weekly Café Connect encouraging connection and shared experiences between international and domestic students over coffee.

Orientation Week

- International Student Welcome Session in partnership with the International Student Guild Association and external providers including BUPA and StudyPerth.
- First Year Rewards: students accumulate points for participating in accredited programs such as peer academic mentoring, volunteering, and joining a guild club enabling them to redeem points for prizes.

Extended Orientation (Week 1-4)

- Mini orientations for late international student arrivals
- Mentor Hub for new students to drop in, ask questions, join campus tours, connect with peers, and participate in fun activities.

Mid – Late Semester

- Biannual International Community Event showcasing rich cultures Curtin students represent and bringing the community together.
- A new to Curtin Quiz Night open to all mentors and mentees as a fun social event.
- Two-day Design Your Curtin Experience helping new students to integrate design-thinking principles in creating a personalised university experience.

Each stage is continuously evaluated through post-event surveys, short reflections and focus groups to gain insight into the program and ways to improve it.

Information on New to Curtin is available online at:
www.curtin.edu.au/students/experience/mentoring/new-to-curtin/

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Use these questions to re-examine your organisation's international student support programs and consider how you can adapt the practices outlined in this guide to enhance international student engagement with domestic students and the community.

- ▶ How can we build and sustain structured programs to support intercultural communication, engagement and learning skills and embed these in the curriculum?
- ▶ What more can we do to create an inclusive and safe environment to encourage international students to interact and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds and the local community?
- ▶ What factors do we need to consider to ensure multicultural events or celebrations truly promote appreciation and understanding of diverse cultures, rather than being tokenistic?
- ▶ How can we assess the effectiveness of the activities designed to develop mutual interest, cultural empathy, and reciprocal learning among domestic and international students, and to make necessary adjustments so we can continually improve engagement between the two groups?
- ▶ What factors and structural conditions do we need to address to empower international students to help them engage with local communities?

Resources

The following are examples of programs and organisations that provide support services for international student intercultural and community engagement:

- Study Australia provides a [list of volunteering opportunities](#) across the states.
- [Volunteering Australia](#) is the national peak body for volunteering.
- Study NSW organises the [International Student Welcome Desk](#) to greet international students arriving at Sydney Airport and make them feel welcome.
- [City of Sydney International Student Leadership and Ambassador \(ISLA\)](#) offers free training, work integrated learning and volunteering opportunities for international students.
- [The Victorian International Education Awards](#) recognise and showcase Victorian international students and alumni's contributions and engagement in the community.
- StudyAdelaide organises the [Summer in Adelaide program](#) for international students with free activities and events during the summer break.
- More resources and programs supporting international students' intercultural and community engagement are available via the Virtual Map. The Virtual Map is available at www.isengagement.org/virtual-map.

