



**GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
WITH ACCOMMODATION**

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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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What do we know?	2
What helps international students with their accommodation?	3
What hinders international students with accommodation?	4
What can we do?	5
Guiding Principle 1: Supporting students to have realistic expectations	6
Supporting students to have realistic expectations	7
Good practice example	9
Guiding Principle 2: Supporting students to find suitable accommodation	10
Supporting students to find suitable accommodation	11
Good practice example	15
Good practice example	16
Guiding Principle 3: Educating students about their accommodation rights	17
Educating students about their accommodation rights	18
Guiding Principle 4: Supporting students to seek help and report misconduct	20
Supporting students to seek help and report misconduct	21
Good practice example	23
Reflective Activity	24
Resources	25



Introduction

This guide is designed to assist practitioners and staff working for education providers and organisations that are involved in supporting international students to understand the accommodation market, secure appropriate accommodation and be aware of their rights while renting in Australia.

Education providers and relevant stakeholders can work collaboratively to assist international students to understand the Australian rental market and find suitable accommodation options. It is also critical for international students to be aware of their rights.

This guide provides guiding principles and specific strategies to support international students with finding suitable accommodation.

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



What do we know?

Accommodation is a key aspect of an international student's experience studying in Australia and is strongly linked to their satisfaction with their education experience. Poor housing situations or conditions can undermine international students' physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing¹.

Education providers play a key role supporting international students' experience with accommodation. Education providers are required under the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*² to provide information about accommodation options and the costs of living in Australia.

When there are housing shortages and increasing rents, it can be challenging for international students to find affordable and suitable housing - this situation can pose safety and exploitation risks.

The regulation of international student accommodation varies according to the type of accommodation and the state or territory in which the student resides, as per the Summary of Accommodation Types. The majority of students who live in rental accommodation are covered by the same laws as all other renters. Some international students live in unregulated accommodation such as unregistered and non-compliant rooming houses. Some students sign invalid sub-rental agreements.

¹ UNSW Human Rights Clinic (2019). No Place Like Home: Addressing Exploitation of International Students in Sydney's Housing Market. University of NSW, 7.

² National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018. Australian Government Department of Education.

Summary of Accommodation Types

■ Accommodation regulated through jurisdictional residential tenancy legislation*

- Most off-campus purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA)
- Private rental properties (such as houses, townhouses and apartments)
- Rental properties permitting co-tenanting where both parties sign a residential tenancy agreement

■ Accommodation not covered by residential tenancy legislation*

Alternative regulation – standards may apply

- Most on-campus university housing including university colleges/halls of residence
- Homestay accommodation

■ Links to state and territory residential tenancy legislation

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| ● Australian Capital Territory | ● South Australia |
| ● New South Wales | ● Tasmania |
| ● Northern Territory | ● Victoria |
| ● Queensland | ● Western Australia |

*Please refer to the relevant state or territory rental tenancy legislation

What helps international students with their accommodation?

■ Pre-departure and orientation programs

Pre-departure information and orientation programs are critical to supporting students to have realistic expectations and understand the accommodation options and cost of living in Australia.

■ Reliable and accurate sources of information

Accurate sources of information assist students in making informed decisions about their accommodation options and rights.

■ Free legal services

There are a range of free legal services available to assist international students in understanding their tenancy rights and accommodation options.

■ Coordination of support

Coordination between education providers and related stakeholders plays an important role in assisting students to find suitable accommodation and informing them of support services.



What hinders international students with accommodation?

■ Supply of accommodation

A shortage of rental vacancies decreases the availability of properties which can be rented by international students and increases the cost of accommodation, making it unaffordable for many. This means many international students may opt to live in shared accommodation in the unregulated rental sector or live far from their institution.

■ Insufficient information and fear

Insufficient information about accommodation options and rights at the predeparture and early arrival stages leads to a lack of preparedness and can make international students vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, the fear and difficulties faced by international students in seeking information and help can lead to them not reporting the misconduct of landlords and agents.

■ Lack of rental history

International students often lack access to the formal rental market due to not having a rental history.

■ Possible deceptive conduct and exploitation

Since many students try to find accommodation through social media and informal channels prior to their arrival, they are vulnerable to deceptive and illegal conduct.

Students can also face exploitation and misconduct from landlords and agents, especially during their first housing experience. They may lack understanding of issues such as:

- rental bonds
- who to complain to if bonds are not returned
- being forced to pay extra rent
- poor living conditions
- unfair evictions
- bullying, harassment
- discrimination
- assault by landlords or other tenants³.

³ Morris, A., et al., (2020). The Experience of International Students Before and During COVID-19: Housing, work, study, and wellbeing. UTS.; UNSW Human Rights Clinic (2019). No place like home: Addressing Exploitation of International Students in Sydney's Housing Market University of NSW.

What can we do?

Guiding Principles

Education providers and relevant stakeholders can work collaboratively to support international students to secure suitable living arrangements.

Education providers need to ensure that international students know their rights, where they can seek help and where to report malpractices they may experience related to their accommodation. These efforts should run in parallel with efforts to increase the availability of quality affordable accommodation.

Programs and initiatives supporting international students with accommodation should be centred around the following principles:

1. Supporting students to have realistic expectations
2. Supporting students to find suitable accommodation
3. Educating students about their accommodation rights
4. Supporting students to seek help and report misconduct



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1:

**SUPPORTING
STUDENTS TO HAVE
REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

Supporting students to have realistic expectations

It is important to help international students and their parents clearly understand the cost of living in Australia. By providing realistic information about living expenses, international students can make informed decisions about studying in Australia.

Education providers and stakeholders can use the following strategies to set appropriate expectations for international students:

■ Providing information well before international students arrive

It is important for education providers to include in their pre-arrival programs, information on what international students can expect to facilitate their preparation and transition.

Education providers should ensure that international students are made aware of different accommodation options and how much these are likely to cost, prior to their arrival. Living costs vary considerably by accommodation type and location.

Education providers and stakeholders should not wait until students arrive in Australia to provide them with information about accommodation options and their estimated costs.

For example, information could be provided via handbooks, apps, social media, YouTube, web pages and online or in-person pre-departure programs organised in the students' home countries.

Education providers could also recommend the [cost-of-living calculator](#) on the Study Australia website.

■ Involving parents in pre-departure communications

Parents should be invited to information sessions so they can help their children prepare for life overseas.

Deakin College involves parents as partners in the pre-departure programs organised in international students' home countries.

■ Promoting available resources

Clear and up-to-date resources play an important role in raising international student awareness of the accommodation options and costs of living in Australia. The Study Australia website, and state and territory study clusters, provide rich sources of information on their websites. Education providers should encourage international students to use these resources.

Examples of resources which can support international students with accommodation include:

A **cost-of-living calculator** on the Study Australia website which has been designed to assist prospective and current students in estimating their likely cost of living.

StudyAdelaide has a dedicated **accommodation portal** for international students, which includes links to providers, a cost of living calculator and recommendations to accommodation forum platforms.

The **Study Melbourne accommodation website** provides advice on tenant rights, where to go for help, avoiding scams and how to search for accommodation.

Study NSW's and **StudyPerth's** websites provide guidance on how to find accommodation.

Study Queensland provides online resources that include links to student accommodation, homestay and rental accommodation information and resources. In addition, Study Queensland also funds a 24-hour hotline (1800QSTUDY) for international student issues, including accommodation advice.



Good practice example:

The Study Australia International Student Cost of Living Calculator is a free, engaging web-based tool that allows prospective and incoming international students to estimate their cost of living while studying in Australia based on various lifestyle preferences and options.

The tool was launched in 2014 by Insider Guides, its original creator. It has been licensed by a range of partners, including ANZ Bank, Flinders University, Austrade, and StudyPerth. In 2019, it was part of a resource set that was awarded the International Education Association of Australia Best Practice Award in International Education.

Insider Guides was aware that international students did not have a reference point to help them understand how much they might need to spend during their stay in Australia. For many of these students this was also their first time living away from home. Students have many different lifestyles, and this impacts their spending patterns.

For example, a student who wants to live in private rental accommodation in Central Sydney, eat out 5 times a week and own a car while in Australia will have completely different costs when compared to a student who wants to live in a share house in the suburbs of Adelaide, cook their own meals every night and ride their bike to the campus.

This tool asks students a series of questions that allow them to see what their weekly costs might be, given their proposed lifestyle choices around shopping, eating out, location of accommodation, and hobbies. Once the results are presented, the tool allows the student to compare any change in costs if they wanted the same lifestyle in a different Australian city. The estimated costs are presented in both their own currency and Australian dollars.

This tool, which is updated yearly, helps set realistic expectations for students about the actual living costs they will face while they are still in their home countries.

International Student Cost of Living Calculator is available online at: www.costofliving.studyaustralia.gov.au.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2:

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO FIND SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

Supporting students to find suitable accommodation

Accessing affordable, suitable accommodation can be challenging for international students. Assistance should be provided throughout their student journey to help them find safe and suitable living spaces.

Education providers can support international students to secure appropriate accommodation by adopting the following strategies:

■ Offering clear and consistent messaging

International students can be overwhelmed and confused by the multiple information sources available related to the housing market, accommodation options and the rental process.

Stakeholder consultation suggested that providing consistent information about accommodation options, and who to contact across all platforms, can help to avoid confusion among international students.

Education providers should work closely with their state and territory Study Clusters and refer international students to their websites and physical locations to get support and advice.

■ Providing targeted resources

Education providers, accommodation associations, government agencies and related stakeholders should work together to develop targeted resources tailored to the needs of international students. These could include portals or web pages. This ensures international students are directed to trustworthy information presented in a way that is easy to engage with.

These resources will direct students to where they can find important and relevant housing information, lower-priced accommodation options, and accommodation hints and recommendations from education providers.

StudyAdelaide has a dedicated accommodation portal which helps international students look for reliable accommodation according to their needs.

■ Providing suitable accommodation

Education providers need to consider how to support international students with accommodation. This can include providing accommodation and working with other organisations to ensure a supply of suitable accommodation. It is essential to inform students before they arrive in Australia, if they have their own bathroom facilities or if they will have to share with other students.

Below are some examples of the work which is already underway within the sector to support students with their accommodation.

Study Gold Coast and the City of Gold Coast partnered together to launch the “Host for the Coast” campaign in January 2023. The campaign unlocked approximately 500 additional beds for international students in 2023. The campaign was promoted by the Gold Coast mayor and through social media. There are comprehensive registration and onboarding processes to ensure the suitability of the environments and to support positive experiences of both the student and host.

The University of Canberra and The Australian National University (ANU) have invested in a range of student accommodation, both on and near their campuses. This enables them to offer accommodation guarantees to all first-year students.

StudyPerth runs a campaign to increase investment in student accommodation within Perth.

Regional universities have developed strategies to address the student accommodation shortage. For example:

- James Cook University opened a student residence with over 400 beds on its Townsville campus in 2022.
- Charles Sturt University is offering all first-year students, including international students applying for on-campus accommodation, a guaranteed place.

■ Increasing homestay options for international students

The 2021 Census reported 3.5 million empty rooms around Australia which could be tapped into to ease a shortage of other types of accommodation.

However, it is important to ensure that education providers have established minimum homestay standards that are in line with best practice standards when arranging their own in-house homestay program or working with homestay providers. Some education providers have formed networks of homestay providers to better support the needs of both students and homestay providers.

There are programs and initiatives in place to support quality and safety in homestay arrangements. For example:

In New South Wales, the National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme (NEAS), in collaboration with industry partners, developed **Homestay Quality Standards** which provide a quality assurance framework. The goal of the Standards is to ensure a sustainable supply of high-quality homestays and provide certainty for prospective students and hosts alike.

In South Australia, there are terms and conditions which a homestay provider is required to follow to be an accredited homestay provider.

In Queensland, homestay programs for international students under 18 years have strict guidelines.

There is some industry-led quality assurance. The Australian Homestay Network, which is independently endorsed by NEAS, undertakes the following to ensure standards:

- A rigorous background check of hosts.
- Online cultural and hosting training and testing for approved host families.
- 24/7 critical incident support.
- Homes have working smoke alarms and comply with relevant health and safety legislation.
- Hosts and all adult residents must obtain and maintain the appropriate safety checks, particularly child safety checks for students under 18.

■ Establishing partnerships with accommodation providers

Education providers and state/territory study clusters could partner with accommodation providers so international students can access reliable and diverse accommodation options to suit their needs.

This is particularly important for newly-arrived international students who may not be able to assess the reliability of accommodation providers.

Education providers could consider establishing a student accommodation team that directs international students to registered accommodation and homestay providers.

■ Promoting quality student accommodation

Education providers should ensure that accommodation options they refer students to are regulated or have some type of quality assurance. There are minimum standards for student accommodation through the National Property Accreditation Scheme by the Student Accommodation Association, the Australian Government Schools International Homestay Standards, and Australian Homestay Network.

■ Supporting homeless or at-risk students to find emergency accommodation

Education providers should have a plan and identified processes in place to support students who may become homeless. These protocols should be in accordance with the requirements of the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*, Standard 6.8.

The National Code requires education providers to have and implement a documented policy and process for managing critical incidents that could affect international students' ability to undertake or complete a course.

Education providers and state/territory governments should consider providing emergency accommodation for international students to ensure they have a safe place to stay if they are unable to find accommodation upon arrival, or if they unexpectedly need to leave their existing accommodation.

Providers will prioritise the safety and wellbeing of international students that experience gender-based violence while living in student accommodation.

The Australian National University Students' Association Accommodation Assistance Program provides emergency accommodation to eligible students enrolled at ANU who are experiencing an emergency or have difficulties finding accommodation.



Good practice example:

Study NT International Student Accommodation Grant

Study NT established the International Student Accommodation Grant to assist international students moving to Darwin.

The Study NT International Student Accommodation Grant pays for six weeks' rent for new international students staying at International House Darwin or UniLodge Darwin. Applications are open to international students who have been accepted to study with an international education and training provider in the NT and have not yet arrived. The grant benefits international students by providing pre-departure support to assist international students in finding quality accommodation prior to their arrival.

One of the grant recipients provided this feedback: "The financial support provided has been instrumental in making my transition to the NT a lot easier. I was able to focus on my studies without any added stress about finances and accommodation. The application process was very easy and efficient".

Through this accommodation grant program, Study NT has been able to connect with newly-arrived international students and to share other programs and available support, including the Study NT Student Ambassador Program, which contributes to improving international students' holistic experience in Australia.

The Study NT International Student Accommodation grant is available online at: www.theterritory.com.au/study/students/accommodation-grant.

Good practice example:

Student Accommodation Adelaide: Collaborating to meet the accommodation needs of international students

Sourcing appropriate accommodation is essential to international students' study experience. Without a local network, students can find it challenging to compete for private rentals, especially since they do not have an established rental history. They may find it daunting to navigate student accommodation options to determine what best suits their needs and budget.

StudyAdelaide partnered with the Student Accommodation Association (SAA), a national body promoting quality student accommodation in Australia, to provide a detailed listing of quality providers. SAA focuses on accreditation to ensure providers meet requisite standards in delivering a quality living environment.

Student Accommodation in Adelaide was developed in consultation with SAA and its members and ensures the content balances accommodation provider requirements, and the information students need to make an informed decision. It includes types of accommodation and an overview of available options.

StudyAdelaide regularly reviews webpage performance, measuring click-through rates to accommodation providers, engagement on the webpage, while also seeking qualitative feedback from accommodation providers and students. The webpage is promoted through student communications, education agents, institution partners and StudyAdelaide's student portal.

Student Accommodation in Adelaide is available online at:
www.studyadelaide.com/student-accommodation-adelaide.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3:

EDUCATING STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR ACCOMMODATION RIGHTS

Educating students about their accommodation rights

All students have rights as tenants. However, international students are less likely to be aware of their rights and are more likely to face difficulties in finding help if they encounter issues, including the risk of them being exploited or abused, or experiencing gender-based violence while living in student accommodation.

Efforts to protect international students should focus on empowering them by enhancing their awareness of their tenancy rights.

The following strategies are recommended for stakeholders:

■ Communicating tenancy rights to international students

Education providers and related stakeholders should develop various materials to educate international students about their rights as tenants.

For example, Tenants Victoria has developed a series of **Know Your Rights webinars**, particularly for international students, as well as other resources for all tenants in Victoria, such as an **Understand your repair rights toolkit**.

■ Providing tenancy advice and a referral service

It is critical to provide international students with tenancy advice and referral support to better inform them of how to find and secure suitable accommodation and avoid being exploited. Different stakeholders could partner to leverage their resources in doing this.

For example, Study Gold Coast partners with Queensland State-wide Tenant Advice and Referral Service to assist students to find accommodation by providing them with relevant advice and referrals.

■ Raising awareness of risks

It is important that international students are made aware of the risks they may face in finding accommodation, including the risk of them being exploited.

Education providers and stakeholders could establish a dedicated web page or use social media platforms that provide international students with information about the risks associated with finding accommodation, their tenancy rights and where and how to seek help.

■ Developing partnerships to protect student rights

Concerted efforts should be made to establish and sustain partnerships to guide and advise international students on their rights. Education providers could consider working with other support services, including community-run legal centres, housing complaints bodies, law enforcement agencies, privacy commissions, ombudsmen and anti-discrimination commissions, and student associations.

Education providers could partner with community-run legal centres or tenants' unions to provide on-campus student rights, tenant rights and accommodation information sessions.

Victorian education providers could partner with Victoria Legal Aid who have produced a [series of videos about the law](#) for people who have recently arrived in Victoria to support international student understanding of their tenancy rights. These videos include basic legal information about rental agreements and how to deal with real estate agents.





GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4:

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO SEEK HELP AND REPORT MISCONDUCT

Supporting students to seek help and report misconduct

Education providers and related stakeholders should provide international students with guidance about when they should seek help and where to report exploitation.

Education providers and related stakeholders could adopt the following strategies to support international students when they seek help and report misconduct:

- **Informing students of the support services available to them and how to access these**

International students may be prevented from seeking support and reporting misconduct due to a lack of knowledge of available services, social isolation and cultural differences. It is important for education providers and related organisations to give advice on complaint handling processes and the services that protect students against unlawful practices.

Information about how to make complaints and what constitutes a breach of tenancy rights should be made available to international students on their education provider's website.

Teachers and support staff could collaborate to embed information in their programs about the availability of support services and the processes to follow when seeking support.

The **National Student Ombudsman** will be able to receive and investigate complaints about a broad range of issues, such as student safety and welfare, including gender-based violence.

■ Referring students to appropriate specialist legal services when required

Education providers and stakeholders have a responsibility to provide guidance and support to assist international students in resolving and overcoming the problems they encounter. Education providers should be aware of, and communicate to international students, the legal services that can support students if they experience issues with their accommodation.

For example, [Redfern Legal Service](#) and [West Justice](#) provide free legal services that international students can access.

Study Melbourne offers a free [International Student Employment and Accommodation Legal Service](#) that gives international students the opportunity to speak with a lawyer if they have accommodation concerns.

[Study NSW](#) funds free legal advice services, including accommodation issues, for international students.

■ Proactively engaging students

It is important that education providers are proactive in how they engage students to identify and discuss issues related to accommodation, their rights, and preventing exploitation.

This could be done by providing information during pre-departure and orientation sessions, and proactively meeting with students on a regular basis to create a rapport and opportunities to discuss accommodation and welfare issues. It is important to emphasise in these sessions that students have rights and that reporting exploitation or making a complaint will not affect their visa status.



Good practice example:

StudyPerth's My Legal Mate program

My Legal Mate, a free support service for international students by StudyPerth, provides answers to commonly asked questions about laws in Australia, as well as on-the-go information about a range of legal matters, including housing and tenancy issues.

Through My Legal Mate, students can take part in brief interactive quizzes available in seven different languages, to help them better define their legal problem through a series of Yes/No answers. This creates personalised pathways that then walk international students through legal and non-legal remedies, along with links to helpful resources.

My Legal Mate supports international student engagement by providing resources, and confidential legal advice that assists students in understanding their rights and obligations, in resolving legal issues, and providing guidance on legal matters related to accommodation and tenancy.

These services can be invaluable in providing guidance and emotional support during challenging times, as well as ensuring students have access to legal information and assistance when needed.

More information about My Legal Mate is available at:
www.studyperth.com.au/student-support/free-support-services.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Organisations should be encouraged to reflect on their policies, practices, and programs to support international students' accommodation needs. In doing so, they could discuss the following questions with colleagues and fellow organisations:

- ▶ What strategies can we use to encourage international students to report exploitation or to help them make complaints regarding their accommodation without them fearing they will be unable to effect change, have their visas cancelled or get into trouble?
- ▶ What can we do to support international students using social media to find accommodation and to protect them from deceptive conduct and financial scams?
- ▶ What risk assessment tools should we develop to assist international students to identify housing risks, and to help them avoid disruptions to their wellbeing and studies?
- ▶ How can we help an international student who becomes homeless?
- ▶ How can we proactively identify safe and appropriate accommodation options for international students who come to study with us?
- ▶ How can we work together with stakeholders to tackle the prejudices and misperceptions in the community that international students are causing rental inflation and housing shortages in Australia?

Resources

The following are accommodation services and programs to help international students find accommodation and protect their tenancy rights:

- Tenants Victoria offers a series of **Know Your Rights** webinars dedicated to the needs of international students.
- Study NT provides an **International Student Accommodation Grant** for eligible prospective international students in the Northern Territory
- **StudyPerth**, **StudyAdelaide**, **Study NSW**, **Study Melbourne**, **Study Queensland** and **Study NT** each have a dedicated web page that provides information about the options available for student accommodation in their state/territory.
- **International Student Employment and Accommodation Legal Service** by Study Melbourne gives international students the opportunity to speak with a lawyer about accommodation concerns.
- More resources and programs supporting international students with accommodation are available via the Virtual Map. The Virtual Map is available at www.isengagement.org/virtual-map.

