

Resource 4 Professional Roles, Responsibilities And Values In International Education

- How did you acquire the knowledge, and develop the skills you use in the workplace?
- What would you say are the major challenges to international education into the future, and challenges to your role?

Towards Best Practice in International Education: Staff Training and Professional Development

In meeting the goal of excellence to which all universities aspire, the development of their key resource, their staff, is a major issue. Provisions made for the support for new staff, staff appraisal, feedback, encouragement and opportunities for all staff to improve, is an especially relevant benchmarking issue.⁵

It would be fair to say that most professional staff in international education come into the field through a range of professional pathways, some of these not directly connected to education, such as marketing, business management and specialist areas such as counselling. This observation highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of the industry, as we have come to define it. It also indicates the richness of the experience many of our staff bring to their positions.

One recent 'snapshot' survey of ISANA workshop participants revealed backgrounds in psychology, theology, public relations, office management, social work, international business and tourism management. Such professional mobility is probably adding to our collective competency in a general way, and individuals with these backgrounds can certainly perform at a high level.

The professional backgrounds we bring to international education generally equip us, to some degree, with a framework and knowledge to use in our roles, with a great deal learnt the workplace. This workplace experience is invaluable, as there is little specific training for the complex roles many of us perform. Only one of the survey respondents reported formal study towards a degree in international education. One declared he was 'deprived of professional development!'

Some academic courses do address aspects of international education within historical, cultural and managerial frameworks, and there are courses which incorporate international education components. But as long as there is a lack of formal competency training, we will continue to employ staff, for example in international student services, with only vaguely connected credentials and experience.

⁵ McKinnon, K., Walker, S., Davis, D. (1999) *Benchmarking: a manual for Australian Universities* Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra. p.139

This leads to a situation where we expect our staff, relying on previous experience, to perform outside their professional disciplines, and perhaps beyond their capacity. Generally, we do not insist that academic staff undertake professional development which addresses cross-cultural teaching practice.

However they are often called upon for a number of non-academic functions, indicating that work in international education is multidisciplinary and operates 'horizontally' across institutions. In schools, our registrars often shoulder additional responsibility for international student welfare. Student services staff in faculties are frequently required to 'interpret' sensitive student issues for students.

All of us in some way are affected by the experience of international students. Considering this, it is disturbing how little formal training we actually have in specific areas, and how under-committed we appear to be in this regard.

We need to challenge the 'anyone can do it' approach. In such professions such as teaching, or medicine, we would not, and should not employ people with responsibility, who do not already have relevant credentials in their field. In a 'new' and rapidly growing dimension of education in New Zealand, we can expect professionalisation to be an evolving process, but we need to be mindful of the implications of having inadequately regulated or inappropriately prepared practitioners.⁶

Towards best practice in developing programs, policies and services

Some factors to consider when developing policies programs and services:

- Distribution of income
- Student services structures and models
- Dispute resolution
- Student leadership and participation
- Student organizations-level of activities and engagement
- Staff-student ratios
- Networks for policy implementation
- Cultural diversity and productive collaboration
- Transition experience
- Student expectations
- Integration between local and international students
- Attrition rates
- Student support programs
- Facilities and amenities
- Equity, diversity and access
- Student experience
- Management and policy

⁶Dunstan, P. (2003) Towards Best Practice in International Education: Staff Training and Professional Development. 17th IDP Australian International Education Conference, extract.