

**School of Education**

**Support Services for International University Students: An  
Australian Case Study**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
Curtin University**

**September 2011**

## **DECLARATION**

**To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.**

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The completion of this research has not happened without the support and commitment of others. I would like to sincerely thank the international students and university staff who contributed their views and experiences to the various stages of this study. Their honesty and willingness to express individual thoughts and experiences was critical to understanding the phenomena.

To Associate Professor Katie Dunworth and Professor Duncan Boldy my sincerest gratitude for the excellent supervision and your guidance, support and encouragement during this research journey. I have learnt so much from you both.

To my family I am so very grateful for all your love and patience. To my husband Barney an especially big thank you for believing in me.

Finally to my friends and colleagues who provided an unwavering amount of tolerance, humour, patience and support my sincerest thanks.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to an improved understanding of international students' support needs by identifying the issues that are significant to students in terms of their study experience, the services they consider as valuable and the factors that contribute to the degree to which those services are taken up. Included within the parameters of this study is a review of the background development of international education from a global and national perspective and the legislative and governing frameworks which impact on educational institutions that provide courses of study to international students. This is followed by a review of the literature in relation to international student experiences as regard the culture of support, adjustment issues and support service provision and utilisation.

The research was undertaken in one university with a long history of enrolling international students in courses of study in Australia. The university has a corporatised model of operations with a strong emphasis on meeting strategic targets and 'balanced scorecard' outcomes. In 2010 10, 702 international students were enrolled onshore in the education institution across various programs of study and these students account for close to 25% of the institution's total onshore student population. Within the setting, support services are provided in accordance with the legislated requirements for education providers in Australia. Utilisation of services within the university is variable and no research exists which had examined in any depth the culture of support service provision, student awareness, use, access, perceived importance and barriers to use of services.

A three stage research process was used to examine the phenomena, involving interviews with key support service providers in the university, focus groups with international students and a subsequent survey, to which 395 international students responded. The majority of international students were of the view that the range of support services provided was appropriate and met their needs. There was clear evidence however that the current services needed to be improved and that a more

student centred focus was crucial to ensure services were provided in a way which was useful. Issues raised as influencing use of services by international students included the culture, importance, awareness, quality of information, access, timeliness and cost.

One overarching recommendation is made and associated implementation strategies proposed, both related to the future management and direction of support and support services delivery in the university. Central to the recommendation is the need to implement a student centred model of support and support service delivery within the university. As set out in the conceptual model developed, the critical elements needed to support this approach include the need to: conduct a review of the current services to ensure they are provided in a way which is useful to students, design a quality framework for the delivery of services which includes the coordination, delivery and ongoing management and monitoring of services, review strategic plans and identify organisational learning needs to facilitate development of the student centred model of support service delivery.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines student support services from the perspective of international students in one higher education setting in Australia. In order to undertake this research it was necessary to consider the impact globalisation has had on education. Economies have been reshaped, government policies have been redefined and global markets established. From a higher education perspective, globalisation has resulted in the opening up of higher education to worldwide demand. Globalisation is about 'interconnectedness', which results in an increased ability of countries and individuals to communicate more frequently through greater technological speed and spread. This has enabled previously isolated individuals and countries to be part of the spread of knowledge and information through education and the development of global knowledge networks.

For higher education, the influence of globalisation has resulted in increased student mobility, rapid increases in international student enrolments, development of collaborative research links and increased cross-border cooperation. Students from different cultures with differing education systems have sought and obtained educational opportunities in countries like Australia. Predominantly, this has involved students undertaking experiences in English speaking universities with recognised educational programs of study. The changing context of higher education has contributed to a paradigm shift in thinking about higher education and the operational model required. Universities have reshaped their structure and embraced a focus on a corporate model of operations which includes market competitiveness, economic rationalism, financially focused outcomes and the development of education as an export.

Australia is an active participant in all aspects of globalisation and the development of education as an export. Educational institutions have identified opportunities and rapidly expanded their international capacity, particularly through increased enrolments of international students, with the support of the government. The 'international education industry', as it is typically referred to in literature, has grown at an unprecedented rate in Australia since the mid 1980s, when the Federal Government agreed to allow full-fee-paying international students to enrol in courses of study within Australia. In a relatively short space of time since this decision, international education has become a major export for Australia. In 2009 there were 629,918 international students studying in Australia and international education was the third largest export industry, worth 18 billion dollars to the economy (Phillimore & Koshy, 2010). This represents an increase of 21% since the 2007/2008 financial year (Olsen, 2009) and, according to Phillimore and Koshy (2010), an overall growth of 76% since 2002. Australia is now a significant contributor to the global international education arena. The management of this export and the industry is of critical importance. Providing relevant and effective support and support services to international students in an environment which is conducive to their use is essential for everybody involved.

The benefits of the rapid global and national development of the education industry in Australia are many. Firstly as an export it has provided obvious significant economic benefit to the government, to the community in general and more specifically to higher education institutions (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004). In addition, it has added richness to the culture of Australia through stimulating increased diversity across all aspects of life within local communities (COAG, 2010), including differing foods, traditions and religions. Thirdly, from a diplomatic perspective, international relationships have facilitated development of important diplomatic partnerships through programs such as the Colombo Plan between 1950 and the early 1960s and the University Mobility in Asia Pacific (UMAP). Many graduates of these schemes are now in leadership and key government positions in their home countries, and this has enhanced the reputation of Australia as a quality program provider and



facilitated the flow of international students from these countries to Australia (Gallagher, 2011; Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). The university peak body, Universities Australia, also provides the Australian government with access to a database identifying all university collaborations overseas (Olsen, Dodd & Wright, 2009). This assists the government to facilitate diplomatic dialogue with governments and potential business partners, and to identify opportunities for collaborative activities.

As part of the development of the industry, Australia introduced the Overseas Services Policy in 1985 which meant that educational institutions could enrol overseas students, not on a scholarship scheme but as full-fee-paying international students. This change in policy direction initiated rapid growth in the enrolment of full-fee international students. Although Australia was already a signatory of the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS), in 2005 Australia agreed to a more liberalised approach toward trade. For educational providers these decisions liberated regulatory requirements and meant additional fee paying students could be enrolled (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Gallagher, 2011; Ziguras, Reinke, & McBurnie, 2003). This enabled educational institutions to build infrastructure and develop resources for teaching and research areas which would not have been possible given the reduced Federal Government funding to higher education in the last decade (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005a; Marginson et al., 2010; Ziguras et al., 2003). At some educational institutions the percentage of enrolled international students is so high as to be strongly linked to their financial viability. Adams (2007) suggests the figure may be as high as 30% while Bradley et al. (2008) is of the view it may be greater than 40% in some instances. According to Bradley et al. (2008), this is 'not a sustainable long term strategy' (p. 93) because it relies on the international education industry in Australia maintaining continued high levels of overseas student enrolments regardless of competition or changes to currency and/or the market.

Although the transformation of the international education industry has contributed to financial viability and sustained growth for many education institutions, negative aspects have emerged in relation to the educational experience. Concerns have been raised about the welfare, safety and security of international students, visa irregularities and the quality of educational courses offered by some providers. According to Deumert et al. (2005a), Hellsten and Prescott (2004) and Marginson (2010), the rapid transformation of the industry has resulted in the development of concerns in relation to the quality of the experience and the wellbeing of enrolled students. The speed of the expansion and the focus on full-fee-paying international student enrolments has shifted the direction of the industry and, according to Deumert et al. (2005a), resulted in international students being viewed as ‘consumers rather than individuals with social needs and economic rights’ (p. 330).

The rapid expansion of the international education sector, and the emergence of the concerns previously noted, contributed to the decision by the Federal Government to review higher education in Australia (Bradley et al., 2008). The aim of the review was to establish the vision for education in Australia through to 2020, taking into account the global context. The international education sector was examined as part of the review process and the report recommended the need for change in the governance of the industry if Australia was to maintain its reputation as a safe study destination and a provider of quality education courses. Unfortunately, further concerns about the safety, security and welfare of students, in particular following violent student attacks in Victoria and New South Wales, emerged after the review and focused greater worldwide attention on Australia and the international education sector. This, according to Baird (2010), Marginson et al. (2010), Murray, Hall, Leask, Marginson and Ziguras (2011) seriously damaged Australia’s reputation as a society which is tolerant of cultural difference and a safe destination in which to study.

Continued violent attacks and ongoing security concerns threatened the foundation on which much of the international education sector had been established. In

response to the threat, the Australian government brought forward a review of the regulatory frameworks suggested by Bradley et al. (2008), including the *ESOS Act 2000* and the *National Code of Practice 2007*, and announced a Senate Inquiry into the international education industry in 2010. This enquiry resulted in the release of the *International Student Strategy for Australia 2010 – 2014* (Evans, 2010b). Central to both the review and the inquiry is student welfare and security and the quality of the educational experience including the provision, structure and management of support services.

Although the revised regulations and strategies, plus their various supporting documents, detail the range and type of support services which are required to be accessible to international students, this does not necessarily guarantee they are provided in a context that is appropriate, are relevant to student needs and readily accessible. An extensive body of research and scholarly literature exists describing the difficulties international students' experience, and the adaptations and adjustments they make whilst studying in a foreign social, cultural and academic context. Researchers have variously described the kinds of adjustment difficulties students experience as culture shock (Chapdelaine & Alextich, 2004; Furnham & Bochner, 1982), acculturative stress (Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004), adjustment stress (Myburgh, Niehaus, & Poggenpoel, 2002; Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003; Wang, 2004) and squeezing effect (Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

Research by Australian academics (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008), suggests the adaptation and adjustment issues arise not only from emotional and social loneliness but also from cultural loneliness, which results from the loss of an individual's social networks and the disconnect experienced being away from the home cultural environment. From the students' perspective, providing support services which can assist them to manage adjustment issues is therefore an essential part of the study experience. According to Hellsten and Prescott (2004), services need to be offered in a contextual environment that is student centred, which respects

the social and cultural sensitivities of international students and addresses the challenges and difficulties these students experience as they adjust to studying away from home.

In acknowledging the adjustment difficulties international students face, the research literature has identified factors that predict adjustment issues, such as English language competence and learning difficulties, social and cultural differences, financial concerns and health issues (Andrade, 2006; Bradley, 2000; Choi, 1997; Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005b; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Mori, 2000; Mullins, Quintrell, & Hancock, 1995; Myburgh et al., 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Ward, 2001). The research evidence suggests that the degree of distress experienced differs between ethnic groups and Asian students studying away from home face more difficulties than some other international students in adjusting to the cultural context of their new study environment (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Choi, 1997; Lee et al., 2004; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). In addition, Tomich et al. (2003) found that the further students were away from their cultural context the greater the difficulties experienced in terms of adaptation. This is of particular relevance for Australian higher education institutions, with their predominant 'Western' culture and the high numbers of enrolled students from Asia (Banks & Lawrence, 2008).

Australian research by Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) identified security as a growing concern which impacted on the adjustment of international students. In the context of this research, security is described as including physical, social and economic security encompassing both 'human rights and cultural differences' (p. 181). A systematic review of 64 quantitative research studies undertaken in the USA over the ten year period 1990 – 2009, (Zhang & Goodson, 2011), confirmed the view that the most frequently reported predictors of adjustment difficulties were stress, degree of available social support and English language proficiency. In addition, other potential predictors were country of origin, self efficacy, social interaction and length of stay.

Having an understanding and appreciation of the adjustment issues and potential predictors associated with adjustment difficulties is essential to the interpretation of research examining international students' choices of study destination. A survey, by the private research group IGI Services (2008) of students from 143 countries, indicated the major determinants of where students choose to study included personal safety and security, financial costs, living expenses and capacity to obtain employment, both during their course and after study completion. This supports Australian research by Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006) which identified similar key criteria used by international students in selecting Australia as their study destination. The most recent survey results suggest that these same issues continue to impact student choice and decision making (IGI Services, 2010).

Country image and brand are also key determinants in choice of study destination. Both Sawir et al. (2008) and Cubillo-Pinilla, Zuniga, Losantos and Sanchez, (2009) found country image and brand were more influential in determining where students chose to study than the institution itself. This supports Australian research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) which found that the choice of country was the first decision potential students made, followed by selection of institution. Decisions were made based on awareness and knowledge, quality of reputation, personal recommendation and the strength of the established alumni. Whilst country image and institution brand are important aspects of marketing and the corporatised paradigm, the importance of additional factors which impact student choice is also evident. According to McInnis (2004) and Zhang and Goodson (2011), knowing the key issues affecting student decisions about where to study and the choice of course, is essential information for educational institutions and those challenged with the responsibility of maintaining target numbers of enrolled students. Managing the reputation of a country and ensuring the provision of quality education which includes sufficient support in all aspects of the study experience, is critically important to sustaining the number of international students wanting to enrol and study in educational institutions.

To help students adjust to their new environments, universities worldwide have committed, in varying degrees, to providing support and support services that can assist international students in adapting to the different language and learning styles, social and cultural contexts and to managing the various individual issues they face. Merely providing a range of services however will not obviously improve adjustment unless the services are utilised and are effective. Smith (2006, 2007) and Forbes-Mewett (2008) argue that support must be meaningful to be effective and that providing support services in a depersonalised, generic manner will mean they are unlikely to address the needs of students. Supporting this view, Jou and Fukada (1995) found those students who perceived they had received a greater level of support were better adjusted while there was a negative effect on those who needed support but did not feel they had received it. This suggests that how the context and meaning of support is conceptualised, both at an individual level and by the institution, impacts on how support is provided. Literature suggests that there are varying views about the meaning of support and support provision and that these have underlying assumptions which drive the model of how services are delivered. According to Jacklin and Le Riche (2009), confusion exists about how the word support is used. In some instances the provision of support is seen within a deficit model in which the individual has problems which need to be addressed, while others view the need for support to be about the development of a culture of support within the organisation.

Bartram (2009) describes the culture of support within the concept of a holistic approach, in which a nurturing environment is critical to the development of learners. Choenarom, Williams and Hagerty (2005) focused on the importance of social support providing a framework to facilitate development of the structural characteristics of a social network as well as the perceived availability of resources and social support services. Social networks are important in that they can enhance an individual's ability to cope by providing emotional support, task orientated assistance, communication of expectations and social contacts (Vaux, 1988). Research also indicates that access to and use of social resources and support can

also impact positively on an individual by minimising any amount of stress experienced (Bin & Clum, 1994; Choearom et al., 2005; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990; Wong & Wai, 2000). At the same time however, it must be noted that social networks are by nature voluntary, and according to Sawir et al. (2008), have the potential to be ambiguous, erratic and incomplete. As a result, they cannot be relied on to provide the necessary support for every student all of the time. Providing useful support and support services and resources within a conceptual framework which assists international students to manage when social networks are limited, is therefore of critical importance to both educational institutions and enrolled students.

Academic support programs, mentoring and social support services have been introduced into campus life with varying degrees of success (Abe et al., 1998; Bin & Clum, 1994; Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994). Whilst the research evidence suggests that these programs are very beneficial to students who utilise them, by way of strengthening their ability to cope and increasing the likelihood of achieving their academic goals, many international students fail to utilise the resources provided. A range of reasons for this have been identified. It has been argued that failure of students to use available resources and services stems from differing cultural norms and values (Burns, 1991; Mori, 2000), a fear to admit they are experiencing difficulties and the possible stigma associated with acknowledging the need to use services or to need support (Abe et al., 1998; Bradley, 2000; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Mori, 2000; Wynaden et al., 2010). This is particularly evident in the research literature examining the utilisation of counselling and related services. The reasons students fail to use available resources and services relate to not having enough time and being too busy with study (Kingston & Forland, 2008), insufficient information about availability, a lack of effective and adequate communication about the services and insufficient information about how to access them (Bradley, 2000; Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Mori, 2000; Wang, 2004).

The evidence increasingly suggests a different framing of support service provision is needed. With the rapid changes in higher education, McInnis (2004) suggests that

institutions need to rework how they operate so that they ‘fit within a student’s life’ rather than expecting students to ‘fit within how institutions decide to run their operations’. This essentially means the need to move towards an approach that places students at the centre of service delivery. Clegg, Bradley and Smith (2006) support this, suggesting that ‘...understanding student support needs requires an exploration of institutional factors and the cultures and contexts within which support operates’ (p. 102). It is therefore essential that educational institutions engage in research with international students enrolled in their institutions, to understand the culture of support, the issues international students face and their support requirements in relation to their international study experience. Understanding the overall experience from a student perspective will enable the institution to develop and deliver more appropriate services in a contextual environment which maximises their use by international students when needed.

The aim of this study was to contribute to an improved understanding of international students’ support needs by identifying the issues that are significant to them in terms of their study experience, which services they consider as valuable, what factors contribute to the degree to which those services are used and what context is the most appropriate and beneficial for services to be provided. In the context of this research, an international student is considered a full-fee-paying student from an overseas country, enrolled and studying at an educational institution in Australia. Developing a better understanding of how higher education institutions fit within the lives of international students and the experiences they encounter will provide greater insight into what and how to provide the most useful support services for this group. New information gathered will have the capacity to assist universities to understand the views of international students and to further develop a conceptual model for the delivery of the most appropriate support services. This research will enable issues identified in recent recommendations to be examined within the context of the study’s research objectives.



## **1.1 Research Objectives**

The study had three key objectives. They were to:

- identify what international students perceive as the main issues they face studying in an overseas educational institution and their relationship to the range and appropriateness of services provided;
- identify factors that enhance or inhibit the use of support services by international students;
- recommend strategies to improve the delivery of support services to international students.

## **1.2 Significance of the Research**

A number of factors make this research highly significant for the future of international education and international students in Australia. The review of the ESOS Act (Baird, 2010) indicates that the provision of support services which are adequate and appropriate is critical to the future sustainability of the international education sector in Australia. In 2005 Andrade (2006) reviewed the research findings for the previous ten years (1996 to 2005) which had examined the adjustment factors for international students studying in English-speaking universities. This produced an extensive amount of evidence to support the view that educational institutions could not continue to enrol foreign students and expect them to ‘adjust to life in a new country and educational system without appropriate support and services’ (p. 133). Universities Australia (2009) in their position paper *Enhancing the Student Experience and Student Safety* supported this view, and emphasised the point that students are the ‘centre of the student experience and provision of a safe environment for study is essential’ (p. 5).

This was supported by Adams (2007) who argued the reason international students choose to enrol in higher education institutions which charge full-fees, relates to the infrastructure, support and services provided. In the release, in October 2010 by the Minister for Tertiary Education Chris Evans, of the *International Students Strategy for Australia 2010 – 2014*, support of a high quality study experience for international students is identified as needed to sustain the future of international education in Australia (Evans, 2010b). One of the initiatives in the strategy, yet to be implemented, is to provide a more effective understanding of the rights of international students and available supports (Murray et al., 2011). International students need to be well managed, supported and cared for during their study experiences and providing support services that are appropriate in an environment which facilitates their use is essential.

The evidence from the existing research indicates that support services, as they are currently delivered, are not meeting the needs of international students and that understanding the context in which they need to be delivered to ensure they are used and useful is critical to the future direction of the sector. In a recent review paper of the current state of research in international education, Murray et al. (2011) were of the view that there is sufficient evidence of deficits in student welfare, support and engagement of services. This view supports in particular the extensive work undertaken by Marginson et al (2010) who have argued strongly for improved support for international students. Therefore this research is timely and relevant for three reasons; firstly, the significant concerns which have arisen for international students in relation to their welfare, safety, security, accommodation, employment; secondly, the outcomes identified in recent reviews into the industry which indicate a need to improve support service provision to international students and thirdly, the importance of the sustainability Australia's international education industry. In addition, evidence is emerging that the reputation of Australia, as a study destination, has been damaged and that export income associated with international students is beginning to evaporate (Healy, 2010). Observations that universities in Australia wish to maintain, if not increase, their international student numbers (Trounson,

2010b) mean the outcomes from research such as this are critical for the future of the international education industry in Australia.

While there is an extensive amount of research and scholarly literature detailing the experiences of international students, the adjustment issues they face and the difficulties encountered whilst undertaking an overseas study experience, there is only limited research which has examined support service provision and utilisation from a whole of institution context. Dunstan (2007) suggests this is surprising given the importance of international students and the fact that support services are at the centre of international student experiences. Understanding student views of available support services, including awareness, importance, use and usefulness, and their relationship to the study experience is essential for educational institutions if students are to be satisfied.

A considerable amount of the research already undertaken has examined specific support services, e.g. health and counselling, and specific support programs e.g. mentoring, peer-pairing programs and English language development. However less research has examined the whole experience, including the education institution culture and environmental context in which support and services are provided. From an education provider perspective, it is essential to understand the issues facing international students enrolled in their institutions and how services can be provided in order that they are relevant, accessible and effective. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) argue that institutions need to constantly evaluate the entire student experience, rather than reacting to problems. Evaluating the entire experience will assist educational institutions to manage issues within the contextual environment appropriately and to provide the range of services available in a manner which Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) suggest ensures they are 'safe, accessible and useful to the student' (p. 29).

The information gathered from this research will be useable by universities for identifying those support services which international students need, value and use.

In addition it will assist them to determine how services could be delivered more effectively and provides a model for the delivery of support services which is student centred, taking into account the core values of the organisational culture in which they are delivered. From a student perspective, the information and recommendations will enable the identification, provision and delivery of support services which are relevant to student needs in an environment conducive to usage by this student population. The benefits of providing support services to that meet student needs cannot be underestimated. Support services, if utilised, can assist students to manage more effectively and as a result assist in achieving more successful outcomes in terms of their study experience (Bultjens & Robinson, 2011).

### **1.3 Outline of Research Methodology**

A single-site case study was used to gather data in a three stage process. The first stage involved an extensive review of the literature and the collection of qualitative data from interviews with key providers of support services at the university, namely Curtin University. In the second stage, focus groups were conducted across the four different academic discipline areas of the university. Information from the focus groups was gathered from international students across a broad range of academic and cultural contexts. Information obtained from this stage informed the third stage, the development, piloting and administration of an online self-complete survey including both closed and open-ended questions.

The survey was administered via email to international students who met the criteria for inclusion in the research. The study population was managed by the Strategy and Planning area of the educational institution in accordance with the university's policy on access to students for research purposes. The total population of international students onshore studying at the educational institution and who met the selection criteria was 3,105. This population was surveyed in two batches, the first in semester 2, 2008 and the second in semester 1, 2009.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

The scope of this research has been limited in a number of ways. The intent was to explore in-depth the use of support services by international students in one educational institution in Western Australia rather than to undertake a broad based general study. While this study has resulted in findings that relate to a particular setting, they cannot be generalised, as each educational setting will have its own individual approach to service provision within their own institutional context.

The second limitation concerns the restrictions placed on the researcher in terms of access to the population. The educational institution receives multiple requests for access to students for research purposes and has, as a result, adopted a policy of managing access to enrolled students for such purposes, and controlling the process of survey dissemination. This limited the researcher's access to students for invitations to complete the questionnaire and meant the approach was less personal than would have been the case had the researcher had direct access to the student population. In addition to this limitation, the educational institution did not provide the researcher with access to the whole population as one group. As a consequence, the survey population was split into two groups, which were accessed six months apart. This resulted in time delays for dissemination of the survey. The restricted access and resulting less personalised approach combined with the population being split into two groups and surveyed six months apart, may have resulted in a reduced overall response rate.

The final limitation relates to the extent of missing values in the demographic responses and the impact of this on determining the representativeness of results by faculty, gender and age. The reason for the missing values is not clear but may have resulted from the fact the demographic questions were located at the end of the survey. Students may also have felt reluctant to identify themselves given the sensitivity of comments they provided, even though anonymity was assured.

## **1.5 Ethical Issues**

Permission was obtained from Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee and the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Academic, for internal purposes, to undertake this research. Participation in all stages of the study was voluntary, and informed consent was sought for the first two stages. Completion and return of the final online survey instrument was considered as implying informed consent. Survey respondents were de-identified and confidentiality guaranteed.

The researcher is an employee of the educational institution in which the study was completed. To reduce the likelihood of any potential ethical conflict occurring, the researcher did not have access to, or knowledge of, the names of students included in the study population.

## **1.6 Outline of the Thesis**

This first chapter has provided a foundation for the thesis through the introduction of the research problem, the identification of the background which frames the research context and the establishment of the research objectives. The significance of the research has been discussed and an outline of the research methodology used provided, including limitations.

Chapter two provides a review and analysis of the literature relating to globalisation and the development of the international education industry. This is considered in the context of Australia's global position within the sector and more specifically within Australia, taking into account the legislative frameworks governing the industry.

Chapter three discusses the student experience of studying in an overseas context, issues students face and the adjustments they are required to make to manage this context. Concepts of support are described and the research evidence surrounding student utilisation of support services is presented.

The fourth chapter describes the education setting in which the research was undertaken. Understanding this setting is essential to the interpretation of the phenomena investigated. The education setting is discussed in terms of location, size, financial security and the strategic approach and ethos which underpins the overall function. In addition, the support services provided by the education institution are outlined and the evidence to indicate the level of effectiveness of the support services is provided.

Chapter five sets out the conceptual framework and describes in detail the research process and the data analysis methods used. The chapter provides a rationale for the approach and describes how each stage provided information to inform the development of the next. Data analysis is discussed in each stage of the process and any ethical considerations noted.

Chapter six provides the findings from each stage of the research. Qualitative information was gathered from the semi-structured interviews in stage one and the focus groups in stage two. Issues which enhance or inhibit the use of services were identified. Analysis of the survey questionnaire data identified the views of international students in relation to support service use and provision within the educational institution.

The final chapter, seven, is concerned with summarising the findings, identification and discussion of the overarching recommendation and implementation strategies and providing suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND**

This chapter provides background information about globalisation and the impact of this from both an economic, social and cultural perspective on higher education, in particular the international education sector. Rapid changes which have flowed as an outcome of globalisation have contributed to the emergence of two distinct, but inter-related, paradigms in higher education. One is the corporatised model of management; the second is one which embraces internationalisation and the value of diversity, cross border movement of students and cultural awareness. Specific reference is made to the development of international education in Australia, including the social and political decisions which have changed the focus of international education and encouraged internationalisation of educational institutions. The legislation and regulations governing the provision of international education in Australia are described with specific reference to recent reports and reviews describing the current situation in relation to international student welfare, provision of support services and issues with regard to student security. Recommendations for the future direction of the international education sector are discussed.

#### **2.1 Globalisation in Higher Education**

Globalisation is described by Marginson and van der Mende (2007) as embracing both economic and cultural change which opens up borders, enables global investment, provides a common finance system, facilitates cross border mobility of products, assists development of worldwide systems of communication and sharing of knowledge. Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999) define it as ‘the widening, deepening and the speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness’ (cited in Marginson and van der Mende, 2007, p. 8) which creates inter-dependence and convergence impacting the economies and culture of countries. Altbach and Knight



(2007) describe it as the ‘economic, political and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> Century higher education toward greater international involvement’ (p. 290). The impact of globalisation and the resultant economic and societal changes have, from an international education perspective, facilitated a shift in international education, from that of ‘diplomacy and intercultural learning to economic motivations’ (Lee and Rice, 2007, p. 383). Marginson et al. (2010) suggests this has corporatised international education and shifted the focus for students from customer to consumer and hence towards a market-driven paradigm. Woolf (2002) agrees, and argues the impact of globalisation and the resulting interconnectedness of countries and individuals have further isolated the poorest people who cannot afford or who do not have access to global networks.

Whatever the view, it is clear the world today is more closely linked, with more frequent opportunity for communication provided by improved technology, faster transportation and economies which increasingly buy and sell products to each other. Higher education and international education is firmly embedded within the globalisation agenda and to a degree has been swept forward with the rapid changes which have occurred. Increased access to knowledge and information has changed the way many view education (Altbach, 2004; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Burbules & Callister, 2000; Harman, 2004; Hser, 2005; Larsen, 2004; Marginson, 2004; Rhoads, 2003; Subotzky, 1999; Woolf, 2002). Marginson (2004) describes this redefined higher education environment as the three Cs: competition, corporatisation and consumerism (p. 3). Yang (2004) agrees but argues that higher education has had little choice, as demands from society and governments have increased pressure on university governing bodies to globalise their activities, generate additional income, strengthen accountability and improve efficiency and effectiveness. While Altbach (2004) supports these views, describing it as the ‘McDonaldisation’ of higher education, he also points out that higher education institutions which choose to ‘ignore the changing landscape risk becoming irrelevant and moribund’ (p. 6).

In response to the challenges brought about through globalisation and the corporatised model of educational management, universities worldwide have moved to strengthen and internationalise their activities (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004). Vision and mission statements have been reworked to incorporate a more global perspective and strategic and operational plans have been developed to include benchmarks around desired teaching and learning, research, international and financial measures and outcomes. Marginson and van der Wende (2007) and Pelletier (2003) describe the changes in the structure and operations as the new public management of higher education. Massaro (2010) agrees stating that the new model has increasingly moved higher education more toward a corporate 'for profit' model of operations where a return on investment is expected (p.18).

Universities now have a strong focus on a business model of operations. International linkages are aimed at attracting and enrolling international students to assist the financial sustainability of their institutions and to foster recruitment of foreign students to undertake scientific and technological research (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bain & Cummings, 2005). This is essential, according to Hser (2005), Marginson (2004) and Woolf (2004), in what is now a very competitive market-driven higher education environment. In the new model, economic markets, competition between and within institutions, incentives to engage in entrepreneurial opportunities, links with business and industry and output measures and performance indicators are embraced. Marginson and van Mende (2007) and Pelletier (2003) describe this as 'quasi corporate outcomes' (p. 18) applied to education settings. Within the higher education environment Forbes-Mewett (2008) is of the view this focus creates a dissonance between those who control the allocation of resources, i.e. administrators, and those staff who are attempting to deliver quality educational experiences to international students.

To manage in this environment universities have aggressively marketed international education and increased enrolment of international students (Ziguras et al., 2003). According to Kemp, Madden and Simpson (1998), in 1950 there were approximately

100,000 students undertaking study abroad programs worldwide. In just over 30 years this figure increased to one million by 1980 (McCormack, 2007) and by 2009 the numbers of students undertaking study abroad programs was estimated to be 2.5 million (Altbach et al., 2009). Future predictions by Banks, Olsen and Pearce (2007) forecast continued global growth with estimates suggesting there will be in excess of 3.7 million students studying away from their home country by 2025. More recently Altbach et al. (2009) indicated the figure could be as high as seven million by 2020. These predictions however may well be overestimated in the long term due to the continued global financial issues.

Although initial commentary by sector analysts in Australia indicated there was little evidence to support a decline in international student numbers (Olsen et al., 2009), recent figures published by Trounson (2010b) suggest the effect is now more evident and that there has been a significant drop (17%) in international students enrolling in the English language sector in Australia. This drop in numbers may well flow on into higher education. Phillimore and Koshy (2010) support this view indicating that the evidence in the first half of 2009/2010 suggests a decline from the previous year of 11.5% in higher education visas for study in Australia and a 6.3% decline in international student numbers overall in the year to June 2010. Recent commentary by the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) confirms there has been a decline in the number of international students enrolled in courses of study (Connelly, 2010a). Whilst historically, according to Harman (2004), financial downturns only minimally affect student enrolments, Phillimore and Koshy (2010) argue that the drop in student enrolments numbers in Australia is of greater concern because of additional factors such as the strong Australian dollar, increased competition, reputational damage from student safety and security issues and changes to visa and immigration regulations which have reduced the ability of students to obtain permanent residency in Australia.

While criticisms have been voiced with regard to the corporatised reform of higher education, what is evident from the research literature is the significant impact

international education and internationalisation has had from a political, social and technological perspective and the importance of this for developing and developed countries from an economic perspective. The global development of international education is described in detail below, highlighting the interrelationship existing between the social, political and economic agenda of countries involved. This discussion is important in the context of this study as it presents background information and discussion about the evolution of the international education sector and the different paradigms which have impacted this development to date.

## **2.2 Background to the Development of International Education**

From the time universities originated, international education has always existed and been part of the global environment. Initially there were few universities, everything in Western education systems was taught in Latin and there were only relatively small numbers of students and academic scholars (Altbach, 2004). Attendance at university was considered an elitist activity. Scholars and students moved between institutions and countries predominantly as a way of sharing knowledge, scholarship and supporting improved diplomacy (Altbach, 2004; Woolf, 2004; Larsen, 2004; Harman, 2004). This resulted in the development of what Harman (2004) describes as an ‘international community of scholars’ (p. 17) and was the foundation for the development of international education (Meiras, 2004).

Governments supported this ideology, seeing the benefits of presenting a positive image abroad as increasing their country’s credibility and respect. From a scholarly perspective international interaction enhanced learning and the quality of programs through peer involvement, international acknowledgement, shared research and a vision for the future (Dunworth, 1999; Woolf, 2004; Larsen, 2004). While universities developed and expanded over time, international education remained a fairly minimal part of the overall activities of educational institutions until the 1950s. During that time governments and universities supported international activities for staff and students through scholarship and grant activities.

From the 1950s onwards, the mood in higher education worldwide began to change. In Western countries democratisation of society began to occur, there was a movement away from the elitist model of education and universities were considered a place of opportunity and education was more accessible for all levels of society (Dunworth, 1999; Woolf, 2004). English became and continues to be the dominant language to communicate knowledge for professionals, researchers, scientific development and academic publications (Altbach, 2004). Differing views began to emerge about the role of international education and internationalisation. Each country's response to this was varied, according to its individual government policies, regional interests, socio-cultural contexts, specific trends in international relations and trade and the history and culture of higher education at a national and institution level (Marginson & van der Mende, 2007; Woolf, 2004). Countries became more strategic in their thinking and investment and research in science, technology and information management was seen as reflecting national power (McMahon, 1992). Education became an integral part of politics, diplomacy and international collaborative efforts. This, Dunworth (1999) suggests, resulted in the direct involvement of government in education and was strategic in the 'linkage of higher education to politics, planning, economics and social interest' (p. 107).

The global international education market has grown at an average rate of 2.7% over the last 20 years. Australia has consistently maintained its position as the third largest exporter of English-based higher education over the last decade (Baird, 2010). The USA and the UK remain first and second respectively (Bain & Cummings, 2005; Baird, 2010; Harman, 2004). Germany, France and Canada have also made significant inroads into market share over this time. In the USA, international education remains partly subsidised, with the focus being predominantly on cultural exchange and foreign aid rather than revenue raising (Marginson, 2004). According to Hser (2005), this framework has resulted in the USA lagging behind and to a degree missing the explosion of technology and science which has impacted higher education and the international student movement globally. Universities in the USA have not focused sufficiently on changes which have occurred in the higher

education sector in other countries such as Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Canada, France and the UK, which have been aggressively marketing their respective countries to potential countries and students. Instead, according to Katz (2006), they have relied on their reputation and alumni to attract international students. Marginson (2004), is of the view that this is not an issue and the academic prestige of American universities means they can survive without the entrepreneurial paradigm needed by other countries.

Although the corporatisation of universities in the USA has been slower, with many universities believing there is no need to be involved in this model of operations, there is evidence changes are occurring (McCormack, 2007). Universities in the USA are starting to acknowledge they need to more actively engage in the market themselves if they are to sustain their position as the leader in international education and student mobility (Harty, 2007; Bain & Cummings, 2005). In 2006, according to Harty (2007), there were more than 560,000 international students studying in the USA, which represents approximately 30% of the world market, and many of these were supported by the USA government through scholarship schemes. This figure is less than in the previous decade, when the USA had a market share of 33-37% (Kemp et al., 1998). In part, the decline is due to aggressive recruitment by other countries but also as a result of the September 11, 2001 terrorist bombings in New York and the subsequent government actions which resulted in heightened visa restrictions, difficulties in obtaining a student visa (Bain & Cummings, 2005; Harty, 2007; Katz, 2006), concerns by students about levels of support and the perception of racism and discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007). Acknowledging the impact these factors had on international student recruitment is essential when considering the current context of Australian international education. There was, according to Bain and Cummings (2005), a decline in student numbers of approximately 2.4% in each subsequent two years following the terrorist bombings.

Figures from McCormack (2007) have indicated a rise of 3.2% from the previous year in the number of international students studying in the USA in the fall semester

of 2007 which is the first significant increase since September 2001. This rise may indicate a turning point. This view is supported by Branch-Brioso (2009) who identified that the number of student visas issued in the USA for the 2007/2008 study period reached an all time high in excess of 620,000. According to Zhang and Goodson (2011), in 2007/2008 623,805 international students were pursuing higher education in the USA and this contributed 15.5 billion dollars to the economy. Research by IGI Services (2008) suggests that issues such personal safety and security, cost and difficulty of obtaining a student visa remain as significant negatives for potential students considering study in the USA. This is supported by Branch-Brioso (2009) who reports, based on analysis of student numbers, that even though overall the number of student visas have increased, international student visas and exchange visitor visas have not for countries such as Africa and Asia, due mainly to difficulties in obtaining a visa. While the USA continues to maintain its position as the first choice of destination for students seeking to study overseas, international students have indicated that they need to know that if they decide to undertake overseas study their welfare and security will be managed with the adequate provision of support services. Educational institutions therefore need to ensure they provide support services in an environment which is appropriate and contextually relevant.

From the perspective of countries within the European Union the development of international education has varied between countries and over time. Mostly the focus has been on academic development and opportunity for learning and sharing cultural exchange. Since the end of the Second World War international education in European countries has focused predominantly on student exchange programs within Europe. Germany and France have made the most significant advances in terms of international education, due largely to their strong resource base and capacity to sustain higher education (Marginson, 2004). Tuition remains for the most part free or partly subsidised across most of Europe and this has encouraged cross national education and student movement of a non-commercial nature.

With so many countries bordering each other in Europe the ability to move across borders and maintain equity of educational qualifications and standards was seen as critically important in future development. This focus was sentinel to the thinking behind the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the aim of which was firstly to bring into alignment, with a more transparent system and common framework, all higher education systems in the European Union member states. It was believed this would lead to a seamless exchange of students, academics and scholarship between these countries (Harman, 2004; Marginson & van der Mende, 2007). In 2006, 45 European Union countries, including the UK, were signatory to the agreement. The second aim was to encourage students outside the EU to enrol in universities within the EU. In an effort to increase the enrolments of students from non EU countries, universities have increasingly offered their courses in English (Katz, 2006).

In the UK, international education had a similar early development pattern to that of Australia. In 1951 the UK and Australia were signatories to the Colombo Plan. During the inception of this aid plan the UK sponsored significant numbers of students from South and South East Asia to undertake courses of study. From 1978 the sentiment in international education and higher education globally began to alter as the potential commercial benefits from enrolled international students became evident. Based on this thinking the UK made the decision to introduce full tuition fees for foreign students attending university (Harman, 2004). The intention with this government decision was to set the direction for the transformation of international education to a commercial activity and to develop it as a commodity that would provide benefit as an export to the UK. Full-fees would provide universities with additional income, enabling the government to reduce funding to the higher education sector in the UK (Marginson, 2004; Luxon & Peelo, 2009). This scenario signalled a significant fundamental shift in the traditional focus of higher education and was instrumental in Australia's subsequent decision to introduce full-fees (Marginson, 2004).



In 2005 the UK, along with other higher education providers such as the USA, New Zealand and Australia, became a signatory to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS). Whilst controversial in the sense that it removed many regulatory controls and supported reforms in public management, the focus of this agreement, according to Marginson and van der Mende (2007) and Ziguras (2003), was to promote freer trade in services which included higher education. As a result international education is viewed, according to Altbach and Knight (2007) and Ziguras et al. (2003), as a commodity and commercial activity. The removal of these barriers has been significant in the rapid growth of international education, particularly in the UK. The GATS agreement was also seen as instrumental in the development of the new public management framework of higher education which, according to Marginson and van der Mende (2007) and Pelletier (2003), is underpinned by entrepreneurial and market-driven activity. The UK has adopted an aggressive market-driven approach as a management strategy for the recruitment of international students. In 2006 the UK Prime Minister announced a recruitment goal of attracting an additional 100,000 international students by 2011 (Katz, 2006) as a means of keeping ahead of their competitors. Research undertaken in 2007 by IGI Services (2008) suggested that this strategy may be working as the UK was gaining ground against the USA as the preferred destination for students. Recent results from the 2010 survey indicate the USA and the UK with Australia remain the three dominant countries competing for international student enrolments (IGI Services, 2010).

While this aggressive marketing approach continues to take place in the UK, predictions from analysts in Australia suggested that although growth would continue, this would slow down from 2010 onwards (Banks et al., 2007). In 2008 Banks repeated this view, suggesting information gathered by IDP Education indicated a slowing in traditional markets had already begun in some sectors of higher education in Australia. Although higher education numbers grew 9% in Australia from January to April 2010, this was down from 12% in the corresponding period in 2009 (Trounson, 2010b) and overall international students numbers

declined 6.3% to June 2010 from the same timeframe in the previous year (Phillimore & Koshy, 2010). Year figures for 2010 confirm this trend with Connelly (2010b) identifying there has been a significant slowing in all education sectors in Australia and that in particular higher education has dropped from a 47% share of the market in 2009 to 32% in 2010.

The initial reasons identified for the global slowing and those supported by Katz (2006) and Olsen et al. (2009), were largely due to increased competition, the emergence of new markets and the development of 'educational hubs', such as have occurred in Malaysia and Singapore. The development of educational hubs in overseas countries has meant courses are available to local students in these countries, negating the need for those students to travel overseas for their study. In addition, international students can be attracted to study at these hubs instead of undertaking studies at the main education institution in another country. This, Murray et al. (2011) suggest assists countries to balance their inward and outward flow of students. The potential benefits of this arrangement mean that local students, who would have previously been required to leave their home culture and family, are able to remain in their home environment reducing potential adjustment issues and ensuring support is provided in an appropriate context. For international students enrolling in education hubs in overseas locations this may mean less distance from their home environment and reduced adjustment concerns, particularly if they remain within a similar cultural context.

According to Murray et al. (2011) and Phillimore and Koshy (2010), more recent additional reasons identified for the fall in international student numbers and those specifically related to Australia, include the strong Australian dollar, recent violent attacks on international students and changes to visa and immigration regulations. Recent media commentary by Trounson (2010b) supports this and argues that the continued global uncertainty and the safety and security concerns associated with international students, in Victoria particularly, may be contributing to the decline in numbers onshore in Australia. This highlights the need to ensure that the industry is

managed well and quality educational experiences are provided to this group of students.

The effects of globalisation on higher education and the resultant internationalisation activities undertaken by universities have produced mixed views about the state of international education and the higher education sector. Altbach (2004), Knight (2007), Marginson (2004) and Marginson and van der Mende (2007) argue that while there have been some positive outcomes and that higher education has flourished, providing more opportunity and greater access, this has also brought concerns about how the culture of higher education has changed. Higher education institutions are increasingly being seen as more focused on the corporatised competitive and consumer model of operations rather than being involved in collegial student centred learning activities and that this has increased inequity in opportunity, particularly in developing countries. Smith (2007) describes it as quasi marketisation in that competition between independent providers is created.

Australia has similarly followed the corporatised approach by aggressively marketing itself as a welcoming and safe environment for overseas students. To support this approach the Government initially streamlined the student visa process and invested large sums of money in promoting Australia as a study destination. This resulted in a significant increase in international student enrolments. Education providers responded to the changes in visa process and developed courses of study through partnerships and twinning arrangements with overseas educational providers, which guaranteed the flow of students into their educational institutions.

Providing support services students need in an environment which is secure and respectful of their human rights is an essential component of the study experience. From an Australian perspective, the development of the industry has been incremental and increasingly regulated by government in an effort to protect students, educational institutions and the reputation of Australia as a study destination. These developments, including the regulation of the industry, have

assisted the rapid development of international education in Australia. A detailed discussion follows which describes the development of the international education industry in Australia.

### **2.3 Australian Development of International Education**

The development of international education in Australia has been dominated by the socio-political agenda which includes the importance of immigration. This has resulted in a number of definable approaches which can be divided into stages or phases. Back, Davis and Olsen (1996), Meiras (2004) and Smart, Volet and Ang (2000) all suggest that there were two phases. The first was the Aid phase which was motivated by socio-political rationales, resulting in Australia participating in the Colombo Plan. The second was an Income/Growth phase which followed the introduction of full-fees for international students and the development of the Overseas Services Policy in 1985. Dunworth (1999) is of the view it was a three-stage process which included Aid, Trade and Reciprocity while Buffington (2008) describes the three stages as Aid/Scholarship, Growth/Capitalism and Sustainability/Internationalisation.

The third phase of sustainability was suggested by Buffington in 2008 as a necessary direction for the industry in the future if it is to manage the emerging issues associated with the rapid expansion of international student numbers and the associated implications. The review of Australian higher education by Bradley et al. (2008) supported this view, indicating the need to urgently move into this next phase and redefine the direction of the sector toward a more mature consolidation of capacity and markets. To achieve this consolidation and redirection Bradley et al. (2008) identified the need for the sector to focus on the provision of high quality education which has the student experience as the primary focus. This was reiterated in commentary from the President of IEAA, Stephen Connelly, who indicated the need for the industry to rationalise and refocus to ensure its future (Connelly, 2010a). Within this context, the provision and delivery of support services identified by

students as needed, in an environment in which the student is the central focus of the experience, will be essential.

As previously indicated, Australia is the third largest provider of English-based higher education (Bradley et al., 2008; Harman, 2004). The main sources of international students in Australia are from South and East Asian countries (AEI, 2008; Harman, 2003; Phillimore & Koshy, 2010). Figures indicate that the number of students enrolled and studying in Australian education institutions in 2009 grew 13.2% over the previous year and that approximately 40% were enrolled in the Higher Education sector (AEI, 2009). Phillimore and Koshy (2010) suggest this translates into 203,324 international students enrolled in higher education in 2009. Given the high numbers of students and the substantial benefits they bring, it is essential that they are provided with the opportunity to integrate into a supportive and safe study environment so they are able to manage the significant issues they face when undertaking study in a different cultural, political, educational and social context to that of their home country. The stages in the development of international education in Australia are explored in more detail below.

### ***2.3.1 Stage 1. Aid***

Prior to World War II only minimal numbers of international students studied in Australia and these were mostly from developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. Students were either government funded by their home countries, had private funds to support themselves or were part of a small number of exchange agreements the Australian government had in place (Harman, 2004). At this point tuition fees for international students were established at the same rate as those for domestic students, there was little economic competition and public universities were 90% funded by the government (Marginson, 2004).

As a signatory to the Colombo Plan Australia agreed to provide assistance for economic development in South and South-East Asia (Back et al., 1996; Dunworth,

1999; Smart et al., 2000). The philosophy that underpinned this plan was embedded in what Meiras (2004) describes as 'social responsibility' (p. 372). The main aim was to stabilise the region, promote economic development and encourage peace. Australia's contribution in this agreement, which remained in place until 1976, was to fund sponsored students from within the region to undertake study in Australia and then return home (Harman, 2004).

In addition to this, the Vice-Chancellors of Australian universities instigated the Australian-Asian Universities' Co-operation Scheme (AAUCS) in 1965. The focus of this, according to Dunworth (1999), was the development of teaching, joint research, publications and staff exchange. Countries initially involved were Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and later Thailand and the Philippines. This scheme eventually became known as IDP Education Pty Ltd in 1969 with the main thrust of activity focused on conducting research which would facilitate the advancement of international education. Over time IDP has been transformed to have three primary foci: recruitment, English language testing and management of international aid projects.

The coordination of aid overseas survived a number of different changes of government and changes in title from Australian Development Assistance Agency (ADAA) to Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB). In 1982, following considerable concern about the effectiveness of sponsor programs and foreign aid objectives and with the knowledge that changes had occurred in the higher education sector internationally, the Australian government established two committees. The Jackson Committee was given the task of reviewing Australia's overseas aid programs and the Goldring Committee was asked to review the requirements for private overseas students (Dunworth, 1999; Harman, 2004; Meiras, 2004). The outcomes and recommendations of these reviews were vastly different and many were considered controversial.

The 1984 Goldring Committee report recommended taking a status quo approach, indicating that while the management of international students could be streamlined, the committee objected to the option that education for international students should become full-fee-paying and that a market-based approach to international education be taken (Harman, 2004). The 1984 Jackson report in contrast recommended strongly that international students should be seen as a commodity and international education should be considered an export (Back et al., 1996). Institutions should, according to the report, be encouraged to compete for students and funds. Armed with conflicting reports and knowledge that the UK had already made a decision to expand their higher education sector and deregulate the industry, the government decided to adopt recommendations from the Jackson report and introduce full-fee charges for international students from 1986.

This signalled the intent of the government to restructure and broaden what had been the traditional export base of Australia to include education. While sponsored international student opportunities continued, these were at full fee rates (Dunworth, 1999; Harman, 2003, 2004). This was a significant philosophical change and instigated the move from an aid-based approach to international education to an economic market-driven trade agenda.

### ***2.3.2 Stage 2. Trade***

From the introduction of full-fees in 1986 the market for international education was mostly unregulated, the focus resting almost entirely on the commercial export of higher education (Adams, 2007; Baird, 2010; Bradley et al., 2008; Ziguras et al., 2003). Numbers of students enrolled in courses of study in Australia grew at an unprecedented rate. Kemp et al. (1998) estimated the average growth rate over the ten years from 1988 to 1998 was in excess of 20% per annum. Similarly Harman (2004) estimated that between 1990 and 2000 there was a 282% increase in terms of international student enrolments in Australian higher education. Between 2002 and 2007 enrolments grew by an average rate of 8.5% per year (IDP, 2007a). Figures

released in 2010 by the Government estimate the international student enrolment figures across all education sectors increased by an annual rate of 13% from 2002 to 2009 (Evans, 2010a). The documented significant growth rate from the late 1980s onwards has not been without its issues for government, higher education providers and students.

In 1992, in response to pressure from neighbouring countries following problems with abuse of immigration regulations and concerns about academic quality and standards, particularly in the non-formal English language sector, the Australian government broadened its vision for international education. Whilst the advantages of the economic paradigm were very clearly evident, the importance of the social and cultural context and the impact of international students on the Australian community and culture and vice versa, were not as well recognised. This resulted in a move toward a broader internationalisation agenda (Dunworth, 1999; Harman, 2003, 2004). To support the new direction, universities incorporated the broadened view into vision and mission statements as well as their strategic and operational plans. The Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) introduced the University Mobility in Asia Pacific (UMAP) scheme between 1993 and 1996.

The focus of the scheme was to provide exchange placements in Asia to increase the mobility, broaden the experience and improve the social and cultural understanding of students and staff (Olsen, 2008). Internationalisation became a strategic focus for the higher education environment. In recognition of the need to maintain quality and standards through the rapid internationalisation of international education industry, the Federal Government introduced a *Code of Practice in the Provision of International Education 1994*. This established a standard of acceptable practice for all educational institutions to provide protection for students. In 2000, the *ESOS Act 2000* was introduced and this included the revised code titled the *National Code of Practice 2001* (ESOS Act, 2000). Adams (2007) argues that the Act when introduced, was a ‘sophisticated piece of consumer legislation with harsh penalties’ (p. 414).



To support and compliment the development of international education, the AVCC had introduced the *Code of Practice in the Provision of Education to Overseas Students by Australian Higher Education Providers 1990*. This code was developed to provide a framework of expectation around educational standards and the collection of data which could be used to gain a greater understanding and improve the management of the international education environment. The code was reviewed twice, in 1994 as mentioned, and 2005, during this second phase. The aim of the second review was to broaden the scope of the educational standards to take into account the fact universities were collaborating with overseas partners to deliver educational services both within Australia and in locations in other countries. In recognising this trend by universities it was essential the sector had agreed benchmarks and standards in place in relation to the recruitment, orientation, education delivery and welfare of students. The reviewed code became the *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education for Australian Universities 2005* (AVCC, 2005b).

Independent audits of every university in Australia which was a registered provider of education to international students, were also undertaken between 2004 and 2005. Universities were assessed against the standards and criteria established under the ESOS Act and identified in the National Code of Practice. The audit identified that the code failed to establish minimum standards to sufficiently protect the rights of the consumer and that these could, according to PhillipsKPA and Lifelong Learning (2005), threaten international students' welfare and rights. Recommendations were made to strengthen and broaden the scope of the legislation and the framework. The revised code was strengthened to protect the interests of overseas students and to ensure student welfare and support services met nationally agreed standards (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007 p.1). The need to strengthen the code was seen as important given the growth of student numbers within the sector.

Following national discussions with relevant providers and students, the *National Code of Practice 2001* was revised to become the *National Code of Practice 2007*. In

his recent review of the ESOS Act, Baird (2010) indicated that it is widely accepted that its introduction and the revised *National Code of Practice 2007*, had been critical to the successful growth of the sector and the view, during that time frame, that Australia was a provider of high quality education and a safe environment in which to study. Marginson, whilst acknowledging the Act was established with the aim of supporting the industry, challenges this notion, suggesting that as a country we had failed to embrace the opportunity by expecting international students to assimilate rather than embracing their diversity and that ultimately this had not produced quality educational outcomes (cited in Trounson, 2010a). Similarly, from a UK perspective, Smith (2007) argues that higher education had failed to provide sufficient resources in response to the rapid increase in non- traditional students and this, as a consequence, had not enabled them to assimilate.

While the government introduced standards to protect and manage the rapid growth, the impact of increased student numbers was affecting academic staff. The rapid growth in student numbers during this second phase had begun to outstrip resource investment at all levels: government, community and university (Baird, 2010). In 2006 more than 380,000 international students were in Australia on student visas. Of these, approximately 45% were enrolled and undertaking courses of study in the higher education sector (AEI, 2008). Concerns about the rapid increase in student numbers and the impact on teaching quality had begun to emerge as academics were required to cope with the impact of more complex multicultural teaching environments with minimal additional support. Many academics believed the entrepreneurial and internationalisation agenda adopted by universities at that time was driven by potential income dollars and this adversely affected academic culture and negatively impacted the quality of educational programs (Meiras, 2004; Trounson, 2010a). Welch (2002) agreed, suggesting that the agenda in universities moved from outcomes associated with education and social good to economics. Contributing to this view were the additional challenges which had emerged in higher education, already alluded to, including a reduction in government funding

and the adoption by institutions of a corporatised model of operations (Bradley et al., 2008; Marginson, 2004).

The traditional notion that universities are about academic freedom, discovery, contemplation, instruction and the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning (Burbules & Callister, 2000) appear to be in direct conflict with the corporatised managerial approach which focuses on measurable inputs and outputs. According to Subotzky (1999) the insertion of business-like models of operation into universities had resulted in the alienation of academics arising from increased student loads, reduced time to contribute to new knowledge, lack of involvement in decision making and little time for reflection and exchange of ideas, resulting in a reduction in their effectiveness. Smith (2007) supports this assertion that the impact of internationalisation within universities had resulted in a shift of educational thinking and curricula focus.

Increased international student numbers, more complex teaching environments, requirements for graduates to have an international focus for professional portability, and education policy framed as trade and economic benefit, risked undermining the quality and effectiveness of educational outcomes. Over time academics had been required to manage in a climate of declining staff-student ratios, increasing enrolment numbers and persistent cost pressures which had adversely impacted academic morale. Healy (2010) indicated that staff-student ratios were close to 25:1 and that in the 13 years to 2008 an additional 188,000 domestic students had been enrolled across the higher education sector at the same time as a rapid increase in international student numbers. Welch (2002) describes this as the constant ethos of 'do more with less' (p. 433) which academics are now required to work within. Smith (2007) is of the view that changes to the culture of academia and the managerial focus of higher education has 'undercut the authenticity of the relationship between staff and students' (p. 688) in such a way that students are viewed as consumers and university staff the institution product providers.

While these changes to work practices were not entirely attributable to the internationalisation of education, the changes have certainly impacted the teaching and learning environment and the capacity of academic staff to identify and to provide guidance to international students. Research by Tomalin (2007) examining the views of 150 staff, including academics employed in higher education in the UK, reported that from a staff perspective, students' cultural and religious diversity adversely impacted pedagogy and student welfare. Respondents indicated that educational institutions did not take these issues seriously enough and as a result difficulties were experienced by staff and students. While increased diversity was welcomed, many respondents stated that they felt ill-equipped to manage diversity and there was a lack of focus, support and resources at faculty level to assist with the challenges. Staff therefore continued to use a paternalistic didactic approach to teaching, which resulted in limited engagement of diverse groups in the classroom. Woolf (2002) suggested that many of these issues arose because universities were not international in their focus as many offer 'national degrees accredited within national frameworks and that this contributes to a dissonance between international students and universities rather than harmony' (p. 10).

Hellsten and Prescott (2004) examined the communication between teachers and students. They were specifically interested in examining the beliefs of international students as to what constituted quality teaching and how communication between students and staff impacted the learning experience. This research was undertaken at one Australian university and involved 48 semi-structured interviews with international students in the first year of their experience. The key issues identified were that international students' perceptions of quality and teaching directly related to the academic staff member involved and the level of support and guidance provided. International students indicated they felt a special effort should be made to accommodate the diversity of the student population and that this impacted on their view of the quality of the experience. Students generally perceived a lack of support in that no special effort was made to accommodate their differing needs.

According to Meiras (2004), the pedagogical implications of the internationalised classroom from an Australian perspective are significant and additional resources and support need to be provided to assist with developing an environment which supports diversity, facilitates greater interaction between all students and staff and provides quality learning outcomes. These views were echoed in a recent article by Trounson (2010a) and in UK research undertaken by Jacklin and Le Riche (2009). The latter stated that the pedagogical difficulties are significant and potentially could contribute to the development of adjustment and integration issues for international students.

From a local community perspective the increased numbers of international students in many areas was seen as extremely beneficial, enriching the economic and social fabric of community life. Concerns however began to emerge in 2007 in relation to accommodation shortages, student safety, security and welfare, career and employment prospects and affordability of Australia. These were noted at the time to have the potential capacity to adversely affect the international student study experience and therefore international student market and country image (IGI Services, 2008). Coinciding with this, it was evident from 2006 onwards that with increased competition from other countries for international students it was imperative to consider a more sustainable model of operation. This needed to address the emerging issues, otherwise Australia would face the prospect of a decline in desirability as a country in which to study and this would result in a reduction in student numbers.

This second stage in the development of international education is viewed by some, such as Buffington (2008), as extending to 2006, when it became obvious that the increased demand for enrolment in courses could not be sustained. Student numbers had risen at a greater rate than the infrastructure requirements needed to sustain this, both within the campus environment and also within the external community. There was therefore a need to move to a more sustainable approach. This can be identified as the third phase. Commentators such as Olsen et al. (2009) suggest the movement

to the third phase had been slow and that although the industry was aware of the issues, nothing of significance had occurred or changed until 2008 when the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) was released. This review clearly articulated a need for the industry to move to a more sustainable model of operation, if long term growth was to be achieved. This would, as a result, help restore the reputation of Australia as a provider of quality education, in an environment where the central focus of the industry culture and that of individual education institutions was to support the academic and social needs of students.

### **2.3.3 Stage 3. Sustainability**

Australia has a major share of the global international education industry, estimated by Bradley et al. (2008) as approximately one tenth of the world market. Sustaining this industry in the face of rapid growth, concerns about the quality of educational courses and evidence to suggest student welfare was being compromised required Australia to take a more mature consolidated approach to how it managed the pathway forward. This third phase was and remains critical to the survival of the industry, particularly given the significance of the export industry to Australia and, according to Connelly (2010a), because Australia has significant obstacles to overcome including the continued strong Australian dollar, the damage to Australia's reputation internationally and changes to the skilled migration requirements, as discussed previously. The growth of international education has been supported to date by a number of initiatives from the Australian Government, although recent reports by Baird (2010) and Bradley et al. (2008), indicate that resources provided have not been enough to manage the industry and a restructure and further investment is needed to adequately support the sector.

Feedback from students indicates that graduates up until recently have been satisfied with both their student experience and their course of study. A 2007 survey of a cohort of students, both international and Australian, was undertaken to assess the overall satisfaction of students studying in Australia and whether this had changed

from a previous 2006 survey. This survey was commissioned by AEI. The survey was managed by a private marketing and social research firm and included students in their final year of study across the four education sectors. Five hundred and sixty nine international students responded and while they indicated continued high rates of satisfaction with living in Australia (83%) and 85% of respondents indicated they would recommend Australia, the percentage rates had both declined from the 2006 results. Respondents on the other hand indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education in Australia (83%) which was an increase from 2006 (76%). When asked about recommending their specific course of study, 68% indicated positively.

A more recent survey, commissioned by AEI (2010) as part benchmarking data for the ISAS strategy, across all sectors of the industry, found that overall international students were satisfied with their living and study experience in Australia. In the higher education sector, 86% of respondents indicated overall satisfaction with living and 84% with their study experience. Issues identified from this latest survey suggest that accommodation, living costs, opportunity to earn an income and interaction with host country friends, remain issues of particular concern. Whilst the results from each of these surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction, the survey instrument has not been provided and information as to how the data has been managed is not evident. Australian Education International as the international arm of the federal government, has a significant role in the marketing and promotion of the international education industry and the promotion of Australia as a study destination. Any information should be treated with caution if the survey instrument and data collection methods are not available.

This suggests that while the overall experience of studying in Australia was positive, issues relating to specific aspects of the teaching and learning experience, as discussed previously, did not rate as highly and there was room for improvement (AEI, 2008). When asked about the quality of education in Australia as compared to other education destinations, 33% of respondents perceived that the USA offered

better quality than Australia, 28% thought the UK did and 12% supported their home country. Additional research by Banks and Lawrence (2008) indicated that graduates were positive about their study experience in Australia, with 88% saying they would recommend Australia as a place to study and 73% saying they would recommend Australia as a place to work.

In 2008, Govan and L'Huillier, from private research group Sweeney Research, examined the experiences of international students and their perspectives on university life in Australia. This research included local and international students. Of the 5408 students who responded 561 (10%) were international, with the majority in their first three years of study. In this research international students viewed their experience less positively than local students. They indicated that socialisation and integration were important measures of satisfaction for international students, and that overall their expectations in terms of their social interactions were not being met.

Being immersed in university life was important and this did not mean they only wanted to socialise with other international students. This research highlighted the cultural context of university life and presented a less positive perspective of how international students viewed their experience. It may also provide some understanding as to why students in the research undertaken by AEI (2008), previously described, indicated lower rates of satisfaction with their course of study and whether they would recommend the university at which they studied as compared with their overall satisfaction with the experience of studying in Australia. Given the research methodology provided additional questions which sought written comments rather than only prescribed survey responses, this may have enabled respondents to reflect in greater detail and depth on their experiences and to describe the changing view of students and the increasing difficulties they were experiencing (Govan & L'Huillier, 2008). Understanding the impact the cultural context of university life has on potential utilisation of support services, and the overall perception of the student experience, is essential to understanding what is required to provide a supportive environment for international students.



Research by IGI Services in 2007, described previously, indicated that Australia, for the most part, enjoyed a reputation for being safe, providing work opportunities after graduation, providing visas comparatively easily and for awarding qualifications that had a good reputation. Some concerns, however, did emerge. The most significant downside to studying in Australia, indicated by potential students, was that it was viewed as a mass education country and students who were attracted to Australia tended to be at the lower end of the academic ability spectrum (IGI Services, 2008). Since these relatively supportive studies in terms of overall satisfaction with Australia as a study destination, the landscape in the international education industry within Australia has changed dramatically. Concerns raised previously in the IGI Services study have continued to occur in some states of Australia with many commentators suggesting the industry is at a crossroads. Questions have been raised about the quality of education courses and the importance of student welfare and the student experience.

In Victoria and New South Wales a series of violent attacks against international students have received worldwide media attention, bringing into question the safety of Australia as a study destination (Marginson, 2010). Governments, at both federal and state level, have been criticised by Australian academics for their failure to adequately manage the student income security (Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2009) and also, according to Marginson et al. (2010), housing shortages, safety concerns and adequate access to safe public transport. In addition to these issues, private providers of educational services have been involved in visa irregularities, questionable quality in terms of courses delivered and/or have closed down without warning and with enrolled students left stranded.

While the corporatised paradigm of international education has brought obvious significant economic benefits to Australia through the global mobility of students, it has, according to Deumert et al. (2005a), been at the expense of effective social governance of the industry leaving students 'at risk in terms of their social rights for protection' (p. 330). Marginson, in a recent interview (cited in Trounson, 2010a),

goes further, suggesting that there has been a ‘...failure to see and value international students as people’ (p. 42). This failure to value and provide sufficient security has resulted in international students being afforded fewer rights and provided inadequate or inappropriate support during their study experience. As a consequence, issues in relation to the security and wellbeing of international students are now evident and according to Marginson (2010), these are impacting on the international education industry.

These concerns resulted in the Federal Government announcing it would conduct a Senate Inquiry into the international education industry in Australia and commission a review of the ESOS Act and National Code of Practice in 2009, rather than wait to review the implementation of the 2007 legislated changes as recommended in the review by Bradley et al. (2008). The outcomes of these reviews and the complementary work being undertaken by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to develop a strategy for international students should provide further direction for both government and the international education industry on a sustainable pathway for the future. A more detailed discussion is provided in the Legislative/Governing Framework which follows in this chapter. Ensuring international students are enrolled in an environment which has a supportive culture that assists their study experience and facilitates them to develop networks to enhance their integration is fundamental to the future of the industry.

Phase three of the development of international education in Australia is specifically aimed therefore on broadening the focus from a corporatised economic trade driven agenda to that of a rationalised and restructured sustainable model which will guide the industry in the future. At the heart of this must be a quality educational experience for international students at all levels. Internationalisation in its broadest sense is seen as a critical component of the higher education environment. Institutions are reworking their operations to focus on the key aspects of sustainability, which according to Buffington (2008) include: the management of diversity within the campus environment and how this links with the external

community; improved quality of educational courses through accreditation processes; greater recognition of qualifications nationally and internationally; provision of positive student learning environments; provision of appropriate support services to facilitate achievement of study outcomes; opportunities for employment during and after study has been completed; provision of opportunities for social interaction which assist positive social outcomes, and ensuring there is a sustainable skilled migration pathway for those students who wish to migrate on completion of the study. Recognition by those within higher education, including the government, of the need to sustain international education into the future has never been more evident.

#### ***2.3.4 Legislation Supporting the Student Experience***

Prior to 1984, when the Policy on the Export of Education Services was introduced, the majority of overseas students studying in Australia were sponsored by the Australian government. The introduction of the 1984 policy prevented providers from subsidising fees, unless students were on formal exchanges or had been awarded a scholarship. As a result, overseas students were able to enrol into courses of study in Australia as long as they were prepared to pay full-fees. Following this change, international student numbers grew at a rapid rate as students and providers promoted the benefits of studying in an environment with a rich multicultural history, a stable government structure, a reputation for quality education and an easy lifestyle. This expansion continued and it was not until 1990 that the *National Minimum Standards for the Marketing of Education Overseas*, were endorsed, establishing a set of standards for marketing courses to potential overseas students. This minimum set of standards was replaced in 1994 by a new code from the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) called the *Code of Practice in the Provision of International Education and Training Services* (Cook, 2008). The aim of the code was to identify a minimum set of standards which could be applied to all sectors of the international education industry. Seven standards were identified which defined for educational institutions

the requirements for recruiting, enrolling and managing international students onto their campuses. They included the broad areas of marketing, recruitment, student placement and provision of student support services.

In support of the rapid growth in international student numbers, the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC), now known as Universities Australia, developed a code of practice in 1990 titled the *Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to Overseas Students by Australian Higher Education Institutions*. This was revised in 1994 due to the expanding nature of the industry and remained in force until the two codes were amalgamated in 1998 (AVCC, 2005a). A further revision in 2001 broadened the scope of the code. The code is now part of the AVCC endorsed *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* (2005b). Although this code established accepted standards for educational institutions in relation to the provision of education and the management of the study experience, there was no legislative authority linked to the endorsed principles. As a result there was no capacity to sanction educational providers who did not comply.

#### *2.3.4.1 ESOS Act and National Code of Practice*

The focus of the *ESOS Act 2000* includes the protection of Australia's reputation in international education, ensuring provision of student supports and support for Australia's migration program (Cook, 2008). Because of continued concern about varying levels of commitment by universities and the issues faced by international students, the Australian government established a *National Code of Practice for Registered Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students through the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Legislative Act 2000*. Under this framework, institutions were given the responsibility of monitoring their own compliance with the Act, through inputs from students and parents. The register for courses, CRICOS, remained and institutions enrolling

international students were required to demonstrate their financial status and credibility with state governments.

The purpose of the *National Code of Practice 2001* was to provide nationally consistent standards for the registration and conduct of providers and persons who deliver educational services on behalf of registered providers. The standards were designed to ensure international students received education consistent and equitable with that of local students undertaking courses of study (ESOS Act, 2000). The *National Code of Practice 2001* is a legally binding agreement outlining the obligations of all registered providers of international education in terms of the services they are required to provide to enrolled students. Should any of the obligations be breached under the Act, approval for the institution as a provider of educational services for international students, may be withdrawn. The objectives of the code were to establish and safeguard Australia's reputation, protect the interests of international students, maintain the integrity of the student visa program and support the administration of the legislation (Schulz, 2009).

As part of the monitoring of the Act, an independent audit of ESOS operations Australia wide was undertaken in 2004 (PhillipsKPA and Life Long Learning, 2005). Whilst the report indicates there is overwhelming support across all stakeholders for the mandated legislation, there was acknowledgement of inconsistent interpretation of the requirements of the ESOS Act and failure to set minimum standards across a range of consumer protection issues. In particular, the audit report noted that whilst paragraphs 45, 46 and 48 of the *National Code of Practice 2001* require providers to have in place appropriate student support services and personnel, a significant inadequacy in provision was identified. There was significant variation in what services were provided, the way services were run, how accessible they were and whether students were encouraged to use them. In the recommendations of the audit it was identified that pastoral care was an emerging issue, as there were reports within the audit process of students, particularly those under the age of 18 years, experiencing difficulty with home-stay arrangements, financial hardship, mental

illness and breaches in visa regulations. Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008), whilst acknowledging that the Act recognised international students' rights, felt such rights existed more from a consumer perspective than from an individual person within a community and that the Act failed to address the significant issue of the security of students.

In concluding, the auditors indicated that the range of services varied greatly between educational providers and that the *National Code of Practice 2001* failed to clearly articulate detailed standards in relation to the range of services required. Two recommendations to arise from the audit included one in which the stated objects of the *ESOS Act 2000* should be amended to ensure the interests of international students were protected and that student welfare and support services for international students met national consistent standards. The second recommendation related to roles and responsibilities of regulatory authorities, identifying the need for the development of standards and their incorporation into the National Code of Practice (PhillipsKPA and Lifelong Learning Associates, 2005).

Following consultation with the educational providers, student bodies and States and Territories, the *National Code of Practice 2001* was substantially reviewed and enhancements made. Standard 6, Student Support Services, was improved to clearly articulate what level and types of support services are required to be in place by educational providers. The revised code came into effect from July 1 2007 (AEI, n.d.). Although changes to the *ESOS Act* to strengthen regulations around the welfare of students were recommended, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) were of the view that these were insufficient and did not provide overarching mandatory regulation that assured student security. As a result they believed that education providers would develop their own set of policies and guidelines and that these may well fall short of what students need. Dunstan (2007) agreed, suggesting that a lack of definition could be problematic in terms of compliance and that education institutions would potentially interpret the policies and guidelines as they wished, particularly in relation to qualification levels of staff and staff to student ratios.

Marginson (2010) argues the view that the regulatory requirements continue to treat international students as outsiders and as a result this continues to be a concern related to lack of access to basic human rights. In the context of his research, security encompasses an individual's physical, social and economic framework which includes human rights, cultural difference and relocation (Marginson et al., 2010 p. 181). During the revision of the Act changes were also made to visa regulations which operated alongside the Act. The aim of that review was to streamline and strengthen the visa requirements and facilitate greater clarity for both students and education providers.

#### *2.3.4.2 Australian University Quality Agency*

Subsequent to changes to the Act, the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA), which was established as an independent, not-for-profit national agency to promote, audit and report on quality assurance in higher education, identified 'Internationalisation' as a key focus for the audit round of universities commencing from 2008. A number of key areas were examined as part of this audit and these included the quality of the student experience, student support, the international student experience and student satisfaction. At that time the agency was the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education and had responsibility for auditing universities every five years (AUQA, n.d.).

Whilst AUQA had a cycle of audit for universities which included examining international education, the Federal Government also announced it would establish a separate review strategy to examine all aspects of Australian higher education. The aim of this review was to determine whether the sector was structured, organised and financed to position Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy. This was particularly important given that Australia's ranking within the OECD countries against performance, and investment in higher education had fallen (Bradley et al., 2008). The review included an assessment to determine whether international students were being provided with sufficient support and protection

whilst undertaking their study in Australia. The findings from this review were released for discussion in December 2008 and are discussed below.

#### *2.3.4.3 Australian Review of Higher Education*

The *Review of Australian Higher Education* identified four key areas as needing enhancement. These were:

- supporting the interests of students,
- delivery of quality as the cornerstone of Australian education,
- effective regulation, and
- sustainability of the international education sector (Bradley et al., 2008).

The report concluded that the international education industry needed to refocus and move to a broader more holistic model of operation with greater emphasis on the provision of improved support for students which meets their needs, so as to enhance their experience on campus. It also identified the need to address concerns in relation to fragmentation of responsibility, that processes were not outcome oriented and called for a strengthening of regulations and increased collaboration related to research and research students.

As a result, in August 2009 a review of the *ESOS Act 2000* and associated *National Code of Practice 2007* was announced. The final report was released in March 2010 and recommended immediate changes which were aimed at strengthening and simplifying the *ESOS Act 2000*. The report identified tougher registration criteria for public and private education providers and agents used by providers, better access to information about student support, improved protection around tuition arrangements and enhanced handling and support mechanisms for students who had reason to complain (Baird, 2010). To achieve this it was recommended that there needed to be a stronger national regulatory body with responsibility for the accreditation and



auditing of courses, which included the roles fulfilled by AUQA and the ESOS Act (Bradley et al., 2008).

The new national regulatory body, titled the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) will commence in 2011. This agency will have responsibility to monitor quality and standards within the industry and will have the power to sanction educational providers who do not meet the required standards. The auditing of the revised *ESOS Act 2000* and the *National Code of Practice 2007* will be managed through this regulatory body. The independent audit body AUQA will be restructured under this quality assurance framework. The auditing responsibilities identified as associated with TEQSA relate to monitoring compliance with the regulatory frameworks and managing the register of education providers and courses of study. Monitoring of regulations is a quality assurance mechanism used within a corporatised model of operations.

#### *2.3.4.4 Council of Australian Governments*

Subsequent to the release of the higher education review findings and recommendations, ongoing issues in relation to international student welfare continued to emerge and threaten the reputation of Australia and the international education industry internationally. The constant theme from all of the reviews relates to the need to realign the sector so the central focus is the student experience, which includes the provision of adequate support services and the management of the security of students in a way which supports their wellbeing, protects their rights, ensures the quality of their educational experience and the accuracy of the information they are provided. In June 2009, the Federal Government announced a Senate Inquiry into the international education industry. The terms of reference for this inquiry focused specifically on quality of information, advice, service delivery and support. Particular issues included in the terms of reference were student safety, accommodation, social inclusion and adequate international student supports and advocacy. A set of 16 interim recommendations focused on managing immediate

concerns in relation to support for international students studying in Australia. These recommendations included support for the provision of public transport concessions, improved pre-arrival information with specific reference to personal safety and accommodation, a review of limits controlling number of hours worked, visa restrictions, tighter control of agents and regulation requirements for providers (Parliament of Australia, 2010).

While interim recommendations were aimed at managing immediate concerns, COAG initiated a review to examine specifically the safety and wellbeing of international students in Australia. This review was designed to run in a parallel and complimentary manner with the other reviews. In April 2010, the then Minister for Education, Julia Gillard (2010), announced that COAG had committed to a range of initiatives to improve the support, safety and wellbeing of students. These initiatives were to be incorporated into the *International Student Strategy for Australia* (ISSA) which was being developed by COAG. It was agreed by COAG that the commitment to and release of these initiatives were needed to ensure practical support mechanisms were in place for students prior to the release of ISSA. The agreed initiatives were: provision of a central portal where international students can access information about issues such as safety, student support, housing and workplace rights; a national strategy to improve student connections with the community in which they live; establishment of an international student committee; provision of an independent complaints body and development of a taskforce in each state to manage student support should an educational provider with existing enrolled students cease to operate.

Following agreement by all states of Australia, the Minister for Tertiary Education released, on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2010, the COAG *International Student Strategy for Australia 2010–2014* (Evans, 2010b). The strategy was endorsed in February 2011 and is currently being implemented (Murray et al., 2011). This strategy has as its central focus the wellbeing of international students, the quality of their educational experience and the provision of up-to-date and accurate information. The purpose of

the ISSA strategy is ‘to support a high-quality experience for international students, in order to ensure a sustainable future for quality international education in Australia’ (COAG, 2010 p.2). The strategy is the result of governments, international students and education providers working together to formulate what is needed to ensure the future of the sector. The strategy outlines twelve initiatives to address four key areas, which include: international student wellbeing; consumer protection; the quality of international education; and the availability of more accurate and useful information (COAG, 2010).

The international education sector and individual educational providers will be required to embrace this range of changes identified in each review to ensure the sustainability of the sector overall. The ISSA 2010-2014 acknowledges both the recommendations of the Bradley et al. (2008) and the Baird (2010) reviews and aims to bring together the issues and concerns identified with a plan to move forward, which is supported through amendments to the ESOS Act. The provision of a safe and secure environment and the delivery of appropriate support services for international students are fundamental to this occurring. Providing an environment in which students experience safety and security in its broadest context will be essential. Delivering support services to students in an environment which assists them to engage with the services provided will be important to improving their experience. Baird (2010) suggests that adequately supporting international students while they are in Australia will be at the heart of the sustainability of the sector into the future (p. v). This sentiment is echoed in the ISSA released by COAG (2010).

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

International education is of strategic importance to the political, educational, diplomatic and financial development of many countries including Australia. The development of international education within Australia has followed three distinctive stages. Initially the focus of the industry was that of scholarship through aid schemes targeted specifically at neighbouring Asian countries. Since then, the

industry has grown rapidly moving from scholarship aid schemes to a more commercially driven business like model. Today, Australia is the third largest provider of English based educational programs of study attracting large numbers of overseas students to study in its educational institutions. Whilst this has brought significant benefit to Australia it has also required significant investment, regulation and management.

Australia has controlled the international education industry through stringent regulation of student visas, educational providers and education agents. This has provided reassurance to the government and has contributed to the development of a reputation that Australia is a quality provider of educational programs. The regulations however have not necessarily afforded students the protection and support that they need. Recent developments within Australia have suggested the need for a review of the structure and management of the industry. The outcomes of the reviews have clearly identified a need to focus more specifically on improvements in the security and wellbeing of international students, the provision of quality education programs of study and the provision of accurate information to support the needs of students. This requires educational institutions to ensure that the support services they provide meet the needs of international students. To achieve this, the sector as a whole and education institutions more specifically, need to better understand the issues international students face and the support services students require. Understanding the study experience, from the student perspective, will assist educational institutions to provide support services that are relevant to the needs of students, and in a culturally appropriate and supportive environment.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

This chapter discusses support, support service provision and the overseas study experience from the student's perspective. The experience of each student varies greatly according to individual background, life experiences and how each reacts and manages the contextual environment. Student experiences are discussed under three major adjustment groupings: language and learning, socio-cultural issues and security and wellbeing. Specific reference is made to the impact of language competence and styles of learning and their interrelationship with the social, cultural, safety and wellbeing experiences for students who undertake study in an overseas environment. Following on from this discussion the adjustment issues manifesting as a consequence of the overseas study experience are outlined. The final section discusses the literature and research evidence in relation to the concept of support and support service provision and those factors which impact on utilisation of support services or are viewed as barriers to their use.

#### **3.1 Overseas Sojourn**

The temporary nature of the overseas study experience is challenging (Andrade, 2006) and students who undertake these experiences are vulnerable and potentially at risk (Andrade, 2007; Deumert et al., 2005a; Forbes-Mewett, et al., 2009; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). International students are dislodged from their home culture, religion and support networks and are required to adjust to a new set of values, differing cultural norms and academic expectations. In this context international students have been described as 'sojourners' (Bradley, 2000; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Rosenthal et al., 2007), 'temporary migrants' (Deumert et al., 2005a), 'in transit' (Mori, 2000) or 'temporary inhabitants' (Luzio-Lockett, 1998) in that they are required to adapt to a new culture for a relatively short period of time before, for the majority, they return to their home country.

The sojourn experience is transient in its structure and context. According to Deumert et al. (2005a), international students are not considered by their host country as residents, immigrants or refugees and therefore do not have access to a wide range of services and supports available to individuals permanently residing in the country. By necessity, however, they are required to make significant adjustments and changes to adapt to the academic, social and cultural environment where they choose to study. Deumert et al. (2005a) suggests that this transient context results in international students being afforded fewer rights than migrants and certainly permanent residents, and this creates issues in relation to empowerment, equity and potential exploitation. Bradley (2000), in acknowledging the transient nature of the experience, suggests it is part of cultural globalisation and that those students who can make the necessary changes and adapt to the country in which they sojourn are those that can ‘carry their worlds with them in a known set of behaviours and perceptions of self’ (p. 419). Those that don’t make the necessary changes are more likely, according to Bradley (2000) and Wang (2009), to experience issues in relation to adjustment. Ramsay, Jones and Barker (2007) describe adjustment as ‘dynamic’, in that nothing is static, and ‘complex and multi-faceted’ (p. 248). The constant and complex nature of adjustment impacts on an individual’s ability to integrate within the environment.

The impact of the temporary status of international students cannot be underestimated and adjustment difficulties have been widely researched and documented. Understanding the context of the sojourn experience from the student’s perspective is therefore essential as it creates an in-depth understanding of the interrelationships between the adjustment issues identified by students, the necessary support mechanisms required to assist them to manage and the context in which they need to be provided, to create a more supportive environment.

## **3.2 Experiences of International Students**

Numerous studies have focused on the experiences and adjustment issues faced by international students. Many of these have examined the overall impact of the overseas experience including language competence, learning styles and the differing social and cultural contexts faced by this student population. Recent research has broadened the focus to include the emergent issues of student welfare, human rights and security. The literature associated with the experience of international students is discussed below under three broad experience headings: Language and Learning, Socio-cultural Issues and Security and Wellbeing. Each section identifies and discusses the research evidence specifically focused on the student issues experienced in relationship to that area. Often, the research identifies a relationship between the experiences in one area and those of another, for example, as is illustrated below, language competence is linked with social integration.

### ***3.2.1 Language and Learning***

It is widely agreed that English language competence is the single most important issue for international students and that the degree of competence will impact significantly on their overall experience (Burns, 1991; Choi, 1997; Deumert et al., 2005a; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Myburgh et al., 2002; Ong, 2006; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Rochecouste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir, 2005; Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2009a; Stallman, 2008). Language competence affects an individual's ability to adjust to the culture of academia, differing learning styles and to the achievement of learning outcomes (Brown, 2008a; Choi, 1997; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006).

English language and academic learning was examined in early Australian research by Burns (1991). This research considered the stress and academic problems of first year university students and compared international and local student experiences. Of the 133 international student respondents to a questionnaire (response rate 52%),

87% indicated they did not feel competent in tutorial discussions, 41% reported that they felt their relationship with staff overall was poor and that academic staff were not interested in assisting students, and 34% indicated that loneliness was a major problem and this resulted from social isolation and an inability to integrate into class tutorials and social events. These problems were compounded, according to international rather than local students, due to linguistic difficulties, a lack of social networks, social isolation and socio-cultural emotional difficulties. The study supported the view that international students are potentially at risk. As a result of these experiences, international students indicated they had difficulty adjusting to academic requirements such as language skills, study methods, class participation and time management.

Although this research is more than 15 years old and the number of international student responses was small, the information is important in terms of establishing an understanding of international student views at a time when international student numbers in Australia were smaller, the Act was not a mandated framework and the industry was less commercially driven. More recent research has continued to examine the cognitive dissonance experienced by international students as they adjust from one cultural context to another. This research is discussed in the section to follow titled *Socio-cultural Issues*.

Further Australian research undertaken in 1992 by Mullins, Quintrell and Hancock (1995) examined the study and personal experiences of local and international students in three academic institutions in South Australia. Of the 1250 respondents to a questionnaire, 436 (29%) were international students. The findings indicate similarity in the degree of stress for all students, local and international, in the areas of loss of motivation (28%), doubts about academic ability (18% and 20%) and financial problems (15% and 18%) respectively. International students, however, were almost twice as likely to experience stress in relation to part-time work (42%), fear of failure (38%), workload requirements (33%), nervousness and tension (24%),



doubt about academic ability (18%) and uncertainty about academic staff expectation (17%).

Several key study-related factors were identified as contributing to stress and these included a lack of understanding of what was expected of them, especially by the lecturers (76%), writing assignments (74%) and participating in tutorials (66%). In terms of the quality of the teaching experience, the areas most often mentioned related to poor accessibility of staff, poor quality of lectures and tutorials. Regardless of the issues identified, overall international students described their experience as challenging (65%), educational (60%), stressful (59%) and satisfying (only 42%). These findings by Mullins et al. (1995), like those of Burns (1991), were prior to the ESOS Act and similarly identified language and learning difficulties and associated stress resulting from a lack of confidence to participate in tutorials, limited integration and poor relationship with academic staff, leading to a lack of understanding of academic requirements.

Choi (1997) also completed research in 1992 prior to the introduction of the legislative requirements of the ESOS Act. This research examined the experiences, cultural, social, linguistic and educational, of Korean students enrolled at educational institutions in Victoria, Australia. Although this research was more limited and focused on a specific cultural context in comparison to the study by Mullins et al. (1995), similar issues were identified, particularly in relation to class discussion and participation and its relationship to language competency. In this research 65 international students completed questionnaires, and 30 were also involved in interviews. The interviews added depth of understanding to the difficulties identified in the questionnaire responses. In the survey, questions were asked in the areas of study skills, social use of English, expectations of relationships and communication with Australians. Responses identified that students had significant issues with language competence (44%), specific language idioms used (55%) and English for academic purposes (43%). This, according to respondents, resulted in difficulties

with spoken English (53%), class discussions (60%) relationships with Australian students (43%) and relationships with lecturers and tutors (36%).

According to the researchers the issues raised by respondents in the interviews strengthened the questionnaire findings, that English language competence was a major issue impacting on classroom conventions such as understanding lectures, note-taking and use of Australian or English idioms. As a result, students expressed the belief that relationships with teachers were unsatisfactory and that they felt 'lost and devoid of direction' (p. 274). These findings are similar to those of Burns (1991) and Mullins et al. (1995) regarding the impact of language competence on the development of academic and study skills and class discussions and participation. From a social point of view, respondents indicated that poor language competence contributed to conflict and impacted the development of good interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. Whilst highlighting the issues this student population faced, respondents also identified the importance of having support programs in place to help meet the needs of international students.

More recent research (Wang, 2004; Sawir, 2005) has found through the use of semi-structured interviews that language and learning experiences impacted on social interaction and the ability to integrate in the classroom. Wang (2004) interviewed 21 graduate international students and seven program representatives in the USA and obtained information about pre arrival motives, experiences within the program, the impact of graduate education and adaptive mechanisms. Findings from the combined 28 interviews identified two dimensions impacting their experience: academic study and social relations. Academic study challenges were linked to English language proficiency while the social relations dimension was dominated overwhelmingly by feelings of isolation felt in the classroom context. This, according to Wang (2004), resulted in feelings of exclusion from class activities and segregation. Language proficiency issues were extenuated from a lack of background information in particular issues, such as expectation of the educational system, knowledge of classroom protocols and rules about speaking and writing styles.

It was evident from staff responses that they assumed these students already possessed knowledge about the educational system, expectations of the study experience and protocols specifically related to academic learning. This meant that both students and staff had different expectations of each other. A lack of communication between program coordinators and international students was evident. Program coordinators were not aware of many of the resources available to support international students and as a result had not implemented support systems to assist the needs of international students. Wang (2004) concluded that international students were unsure about services and did not, as a result, seek assistance or advice even when it was needed.

It has also been found that the type of prior learning of English has an impact on how well students are able to use language when they arrive. Sawir (2005) interviewed 12 students from five Asian countries. A key finding supported the view that prior English language learning affected how well international students coped with Australian university requirements. Prior use of English language was found to have been focused on grammar, and that students had poor exposure to English conversation skills prior to arriving. This was found to impact negatively on individual communication behaviour and an individual's ability to manage in a social and academic context. This research is important in facilitating greater understanding in relation language testing, levels of language competence and why students with the required English language levels still have difficulties managing.

Lack of linguistic competence has also been found to affect negatively the development of students' social networks. In 2005 Australian research, international students were asked about issues in relation to social and economic experiences, particularly academic English, access to support networks, work arrangements, loneliness and isolation, safety and discrimination (Deumert et al., 2005a; Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005b) and work-life balance (Ong, 2006). Deumert et al. (2005a; 2005b) interviewed 202 international students across nine higher education institutions. This research involved in-depth semi-structured

interviews lasting 30-60 minutes with international students in at least their second semester of study. Research undertaken by Ong (2006) combined interview data using a mix of staff, both academic and administrative, and survey data from international students enrolled across six campuses. Two hundred and thirty three (23%) of the 1,000 international students surveyed responded.

The most significant findings identified from both these studies for staff and students, and which supported previously discussed research, related to English language proficiency and the impact this then had on every aspect of their experience. Lack of linguistic competence impacted negatively on the development of social networks increasing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Poor language skills also impacted employment opportunities, access to and understanding of social protection rights and contributed to feelings of discrimination (Deumert et al., 2005a; 2005b; Ong, 2006).

In the USA, Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) identified similar issues to those found by Deumert et al. (2005a) and Ong (2006). They examined the relationship of marital status, ethnicity and academic achievement in relation to adjustment strains amongst 149 graduate international students attending five universities. The survey instrument included demographic information and the use of a modified version of the Inventory of Student Adjustment Strain (ISAS) developed by Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington and Pisecco, (cited in Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Correlation and multiple regression analyses indicated a link between English proficiency, degree status and academic achievement and that helping students improve English skills is associated with academic development. Asian students were found to have higher levels of strain, lower levels of English proficiency and were identified as less likely to seek help than European students.

Shock of arrival has also been found to contribute to high levels of anxiety and to impact on language competence (Brown, 2008a; 2008b). In research completed by Brown (2008a; 2008b) in the UK the experiences and issues faced by international

students remained of concern, regardless of the support programs introduced by education institutions. In particular, she examined the emotional life of 13 postgraduate international students using ethnographic methodology. Students were interviewed at regular times across the 12 months of enrolment and study experience. In addition, the researcher recorded daily observations of 150 international students over a 12 month period. International students in this research had entered the study program with an International English Language Test Score (IELTS) of at least 6.0. This meant they had achieved the required minimum language entry level score for that institution in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Four themes emerged from the interviews and observations: shock of arrival which produced high levels of anxiety; practising spoken English, speaking in class and progress in language development.

The most significant issue according to Brown (2008a; 2008b), was language competence. In particular problems relating to comprehension, discussions, grammar, vocabulary and day-to-day conversation were identified and, like the findings of previous studies by Burns (1991), Mullins et al. (1995), Choi (1997) and Wang (2004), these inhibited class participation. The problems were more intense for students at the time of arrival and reduced over the 12 months as students' language developed and they became more confident and hence their anxiety reduced. Clearly, the level of language competence of international students has a strong relationship with successful academic and socio-cultural adjustment and that provision of support is essential to managing the experience.

Supportive learning environments have been identified as important to international student success. In recent Australian research funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, the ongoing English language growth of international students was examined across five different higher education facilities (Rocheouste et al., 2010). The results of this research, which involved the collection of data via an online survey and a small number of interviews with students and academic staff, supported the view that students use a number of different strategies to develop their

English language and to manage their academic studies. Strategies were either of a social nature, or related to cognitive or metacognitive perspectives. Social strategies involved interaction with others, such as students and academics and friends, while cognitive strategies included those such as memorising, repeating and summarising. Metacognitive strategies involved self regulation such as time management, identifying gaps and seeking information to help with improvement. Fifteen recommendations flowed from this research and these were focused on the need for the learning environment to be supportive of students. This support centred on providing an environment with a supportive culture, strengthening interactional links at all levels and across all activities, academic and social, and between the university staff and students.

A plethora of research exists which supports the view that lower levels of English language proficiency impacts adversely on academic integration and successful achievement of learning outcomes. Research findings consistently indicate that low levels of language competence affect all aspects of the academic journey for international students including class participation, social interaction, written assignments, and study skills. There is evidence that language competence and learning difficulties were significant issues prior to the introduction of the *ESOS Act* in 2000 and that ensuring institutions provide services to assist with the development of these needs may not necessarily mean the problem is managed appropriately. The important role of staff, both academic and administrative, in supporting language development cannot be over-estimated. Students indicate poor relationships with academic staff, absence of mutual expectations, particularly academic, impacts on their academic performance and ability to integrate into class through learning activities and social discourse. Staff, however, appear unsure of their role, expecting students who arrive with the required English language entry scores to be competent with language and learning skills, be able to communicate and integrate into the classroom environment and to manage socially, without difficulty.

The research evidence, however, strongly supports the view that the majority of international students face significant language and learning issues which impact on their experiences regardless of having achieved the English entry requirements for their course of study. Understanding the language and learning issues faced by international students is of great importance for educational institutions as this will impact on how they manage these students and potentially what support services they provide. The research findings also suggest that language competence impacts on social integration and cultural adjustment. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section

### ***3.2.2 Socio-cultural Issues***

Although language competence has been identified as the most significant single issue which impacts on the experience of international students, it is essential to also understand other aspects of the experience. This section discusses the issues faced by international students from a social and cultural perspective. A considerable amount of research has been undertaken examining the social and culture experiences of international students and the impact this has on their overall study experience. Studying in an overseas context typically removes an individual from established social networks, predominantly family and friends, and cultural frameworks. As a result, international students are required to establish a new set of relationships and to adjust to differing cultural norms and values.

Research indicates that the social and cultural experiences of students vary and are often associated with their level of language proficiency (Choi, 1997; Deumert et al., 2005b; Ong, 2006; Poyrazli, McPherson, Arbona, Pisecco, & Nora, 2002; Wang, 2004) and the development of social networks (Bartram, 2007; Deumert et al., 2005a; Myburgh et al., 2002; Ong, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Low levels of integration and limited development of social networks increase the likelihood that students will experience feelings of isolation (Burns, 1991; Ong, 2006; Wang, 2004) loneliness (Deumert et al., 2005a), insecurity and homesickness (Myburgh et al.,

2002). This, according to Poyrazli and Grahame (2007), is especially so for those international students whose cultural background is Asian or from a collectivist background and who are attempting to adjust to an essentially individualist Western culture.

Research by Myburgh et al. (2002) examined the experiences of international students and the coping mechanisms they used to adjust to study and living conditions. They examined a similar topic to that of Burns (1991) using in-depth group interviews, lasting one and one half hours with a purposive sample of 18 students. The students, all enrolled in PhD studies, were asked ‘how is it for you to be in this country?’ The sample was drawn from three different universities in three different states of the USA. Four dimensions to the international student experience were identified: social/interpersonal/cultural issues including insecurity, isolation, loneliness and invisible cultural barriers; climate and living conditions; study conditions and personal wellbeing. Experiences varied from what students described as ‘excellent’ to ‘not too good’ with some suggesting they were ‘kept at arms length by local students’ and that any such contact lacked sincerity (p. 117).

Coping mechanisms identified were grouped under either external or internal resources. External resources were predominantly those provided from their home country through friends and family and local networks of established friendships. Internal resources resulted from active engagement with locals who provided support. Students in this research indicated that they felt confused and had a sense of being lost between two worlds, especially because they moved backwards and forwards between their home culture and the sojourn culture. The overwhelming picture to emerge was one of loneliness, confusion, insecurity and discouragement, which impacted on their wellbeing. This was similar to the findings of Burns (1991) and Deumert et al. (2005a) who identified the impact of stress and loneliness on the overall wellbeing of the student and the study experience.



In research undertaken in the USA about the same time (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002), 640 international students spread across three campuses of UCLA were surveyed to examine their needs and the implications of this for policy and practice. Findings from this research identified that international students had experienced social and emotional concerns but these were lesser issues compared to those related to immigration and visa, career, academic aspects and communications, which were rated as the top four issues to dominate their experience. Culture was rated fifth of the nine categories identified, followed by personal issues, discrimination and psychological issues.

The researchers found that undergraduate students had higher levels of need than graduates, and females more than males, across all nine categories. Geographically, African and Asian students had the highest levels of need overall. For international students involved in this research, the main goal was to succeed academically because this impacted on their career prospects and ability to maintain their visa. Although social and cultural issues, including discrimination, were identified by respondents in this research, these did not rate as the most significant areas. A number of possible reasons exist for this, including issues related to cultural background and reluctance to disclose information. This research is important in that it supports previous research identifying that issues faced by international students are multiple (Burns, 1991; Choi, 1997; Deumert et al., 2005a; Myburgh et al., 2002), and include social and cultural factors.

Assertiveness has been found to positively impact adjustment and levels of loneliness. Poyrazli et al. (2002) examined the relationship of assertiveness and academic self-efficacy to psychosocial adjustment among international graduate students. The underlying assumption was that students with positive levels of self assertion and academic self-efficacy were more likely to access and use support and services if needed and experience low levels of loneliness, depression and physical health problems. One hundred and twenty two international students were included in the research conducted in the USA. Respondents completed two questionnaires.

English proficiency, assertiveness and academic self-efficacy were found to contribute to student adjustment. A positive correlation existed between assertiveness and higher levels of self-efficacy, including speaking, writing and understanding of English and adjustment correlated positively with all aspects of English proficiency. Adjustment involved a student's ability to negotiate their needs and adapt to issues such as education, culture and the establishment of social relationships. From the perspective of support service usage these findings imply students with high levels of assertiveness and self-efficacy maybe more likely to identify a need for support and to seek assistance if needed. For education institutions providing support and support services, it is important to ensure services are designed to foster international students to develop self-efficacy and assertiveness skills which facilitate their adjustment.

More recent research examined concepts such as self reliance/resilience (Bartram, 2007) and persistence (Andrade, 2007) of international students, related to integration and the socio-cultural needs of international students. The hypothesised views underpinning these studies are that personality characteristics such as self-efficacy, resilience and persistence are strongly correlated to successful outcomes and positive experiences. Similar to the research by Poyrazli et al. (2002) this implies that students with these characteristics would be more likely to seek support and to access services if they needed them.

Social networks have also been found to impact positively on social integration and academic success. Bartram (2007, 2008) used a case study approach including focus groups and interviews in a two stage process. The first stage involved 12 focus groups of three to five international students using a short task analysis technique. The second stage involved interviews with four staff members with regular involvement teaching this group of students. All sessions were then transcribed and analysed. Andrade (2007) also examined issues pertaining to behaviour change and integration using ethnographic in-depth interviews and focus groups. Seventeen international students were asked to comment on a range of open-ended questions.

Three areas of change were explored, including becoming a student, religion and their home culture.

In the UK Bartram (2007, 2008) theorised a taxonomy of support needs with the most critical being socio-cultural, followed by academic and then practical. He found that students perceived social support needs were major and this particularly related to support received from staff employed at the institution. Students placed a high level of importance on staff facilitating the development of social networks, which they felt had the potential to reduce isolation and poor social integration. In the USA, Andrade (2007) also strongly supported the view that positive levels of integration related to academic success and personal growth. Persistence was essential in achieving integration, so long as integration did not occur at the expense of the student's own cultural integrity.

A marked difference was identified between the perception of staff about their role and the expectations of students (Bartram, 2007, 2008). Staff indicated they felt a growing expectation amongst students around the extent of support they were expected to provide and this meant they felt they needed to be much more available. According to the staff this negatively affected the students and inhibited the development of self reliance. Although this study was small, it highlights the fact that the development of resilience in students is important and that students and staff have differing views on how this can best be achieved. Students feel that staff and lecturers need to support their social development, particularly in the classroom which is a difficult aspect of integration for students. Staff on the other hand saw this as dependence and not developing the self reliance of students.

According to Wang (2009) developing self reliance is positively linked to academic and social outcomes. In 2003 she examined the concept of resilience and the relationship of resilience characteristics and background variables to the adjustment of graduate international students in the USA. Students enrolled at one university were sent a questionnaire which included questions about background variables,

resilience characteristics and adjustment experiences. Resilience characteristics examined included individual levels of flexibility, self esteem, efficacy, organisation and focus. Resilience was described as ‘the capacity of an individual to manage high levels of change whilst maintaining a functional manner and sense of operation’ (p. 23). A critical task for international students, according to Wang (2009), is to learn to cope with these changes. Although limited to graduate students, the findings indicate a strong correlation between resilience characteristics, English language competence, country of origin, gender and adjustment of international students and their ability to cope with change.

Overall, the social and cultural experiences of international students appear to relate strongly to individual characteristics such as English language competence, self-efficacy, persistence and resilience, and whether as students they are able to establish social networks and friendships with locals. Lack of interaction and social skills increased the likelihood students experienced isolation and loneliness and therefore had adjustment difficulties. University staff and international students agreed that international students face significant challenges when they choose to study in an overseas educational institution and that for the majority English language competence was the most critical issue which impacted on all other aspects of their social and cultural experience. However, there was evidence of a difference in perception of the role, responsibilities and expectation of what each other, staff and students, could or should contribute to the experience.

Staff did not perceive that they had a significant role in facilitating or assisting students to manage issues such as social integration and development of social networks. From their perspective they were either not aware of the issues or did not believe it was their responsibility to provide structured activities which could assist international students to link with other students, particularly local students. They also did not accept that this would assist the development of self confidence for the student which in turn would facilitate integration and the development of social networks. Academic staff perception, in particular, was that it would create

dependence on them by the student. Within the classroom or tutorial context, international students indicated that they believed it was the role of academic staff to facilitate social integration and to provide activities that would assist this to occur. If this was provided students were of the view this would help to reduce the likelihood that they would experience social isolation and loneliness.

In the literature reviewed staff generally, were not clear how their specific role potentially impacted on international students and as a result often did not provide the support students needed. Staff were unsure what the needs of international students were and the important contribution they could make in assisting them to integrate, which in turn could improve student learning outcomes, class participation and the overall student experience. In contrast, students indicated feelings of loneliness and isolation which resulted in adjustment difficulties. These difficulties impacted on learning and social integration as well as also having the potential to create issues in relation to the security, both emotional and physical, and the wellbeing of students. In the next section the broad concepts of security and the wellbeing of students is discussed and key research is described which has considered security and wellbeing issues faced by international students.

### ***3.2.3 Security and Wellbeing***

Early research in the area of international student security focused mainly on discrimination and racism (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2007; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). These studies were undertaken predominantly in the USA, where the majority of international students were enrolled. Since this time there has been a significant increase in the mobility and spread of students globally. While language competence is clearly the dominant concern for international students undertaking a study experience overseas, security and student wellbeing is a significant issue impacting their overall experience. In this section, the focus is specifically on the research and literature pertaining to security and student wellbeing. As already indicated, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) suggest security

is inclusive of physical, social and economic dimensions which relate to concepts such as human rights, cultural difference and relocation. In the context of the discussion to follow, security and wellbeing will include the impact of financial security, housing, health, access to welfare supports, consumer rights, racism, discrimination and exploitation, and economic protection.

Security is a fundamental need for all international students. Clements (1990, cited in Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008) argues from a sociological perspective that without security 'social life would be meaningless and relatively dangerous' (p.182). Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) examined the needs and experiences of international students across nine adjustment categories all of which have the potential to impact on an individual's sense of security, namely immigration regulations and visa requirements, culture, career knowledge, academic and study skills, communication, personal, ethnic and racial discrimination, psychological and drug/alcohol use. The findings from this survey of 640 international students enrolled at UCLA in Los Angeles indicated respondents found that all nine categories presented significant issues. Although immigration and visa issues were the most significant faced by students, episodes of discrimination were experienced by all students, particularly those from Africa and the Middle East. Hanassab (2006) reported more detailed data, from the same study, indicating the extent and degree of discrimination experienced by students. Discrimination was perceived to a higher degree in the local community (33%), followed by among classmates (20%) and in interactions with professors, other university staff and while seeking employment (17%).

These findings were similarly supported in the outcomes of a civil rights project undertaken by The United States Department of Education (2003). This project reported that the discriminatory experiences of international students in the USA result from embedded racist and discriminatory attitudes of the community in which these students sojourn and included both overt and covert behaviours and actions. In the USA this was made more evident after September 11 2001 when international students studying in the USA received verbal threats, physical violence, racial

profiling and discrimination in relation to all aspects of their lives. The research of Lee (2007), Lee and Rice (2007) and Wadsworth et al. (2008) also supports this view.

Lee (2007) and Lee and Rice (2007) examined the experience of international students with regard to perceptions of discrimination. Responses in both the initial survey and follow up semi-structured interviews identified a range of concerns and experiences, both political and educational, including violation of personal freedom, complex visa issues, finger printing, detention without limit, stereotyping, loss or inability to obtain employment, less than objective academic evaluations, stereotyping and difficulty forming relationships. They theorised that these practices were a form of neo-racism which existed within the host community which compromised the ability of an international student to engage in a meaningful experience. These findings are significant in the consideration of how support services are structured and delivered. Education institutions need to ensure they foster a culture of respect and tolerance of diversity and that support and support services are offered in a meaningful way which assists international students to integrate.

Further research in the USA measured the effects of international students' acculturation, perceptions of discrimination and sense of identity, and related this to their level of satisfaction with the educational experience (Wadsworth et al., 2008) and levels of depression (Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007). In this study two differing identity gaps were examined, personal-enacted and personal-relational. The personal-enacted identity gap is defined as the 'difference between an individual's self-view and the self-view expressed or performed in communication' with others (Jung et al., 2007 p. 607). Whereas personal-relational is the 'difference between self-view and the identity ascribed by others' (Jung et al., 2007 p. 608). Perceived discrimination was measured across six items using an acculturative stress scale for international students (Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994, cited in Wadsworth et al., 2008).

The findings of this research support the positive impact of acculturation which enabled students to adapt more easily to the new environment, academically and culturally. Students who perceived discrimination felt greater stress which hindered acculturation and impacted negatively on their level of interactions and ultimate satisfaction with the educational experience. Students identified as having a personal-enacted identity gap were found to be strongly linked with perceived discrimination, predicted depression levels and mediated acculturation, whereas those with personal-relational identity gap were not. Overall, this research indicates that if a student identifies a similar self perception and expressed view, then they are more likely to manage and have a greater sense of wellbeing. This information is important to understanding the impact of acculturation, discrimination in the classroom and its relationship to levels of student interaction and their ability to integrate. It also highlights the potential impact these issues have on the student experience if it is not managed in a supportive environment academically and culturally.

While concerns about discrimination and racism issues continue, the concept of security and wellbeing has been broadened to include physical, social and economic issues. Research in New Zealand in 2005 and 2006 examined the effectiveness of the legislated *New Zealand Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Student*, in relation to student experiences of language difficulties, finances, accommodation, social integration, personal safety and freedom from discrimination (Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Rawling-Sanaei, 2009b). For this research 70 international students were interviewed across two educational institutions. Like Australia, New Zealand is an education exporter and signatory to the GATS agreement (Ziguras, 2003). As a consequence the education export industry in New Zealand contributes significantly to the economy of the country. The legislated code is designed to provide protection for international students at the institutional level by ensuring the provision of appropriate services. This research was a component of a larger project undertaken through the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements in Australia. The project involved interviews with international students



in Australian and New Zealand higher education as well as interviews with policy makers, regulators and academic and support staff.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews involving international students identified that they experienced a range of security based issues including financial problems (36%), language (46%), loneliness and isolation (66%), and discrimination (43%), even though 90% indicated they felt safe in New Zealand. When asked whether they were aware of rules and guidelines about the support services educational institutions were required to provide to protect international students, 63% were unaware of these. The research concluded that although the regulatory framework was in place and the required support services provided, they did not sufficiently protect international students or afford them rights they should have during their study experience (Sawir et al., 2009a). Security and protection against discrimination is extremely important to international students and the international education industry. Perceptions of discrimination can affect student choices about country of study as evidenced in the research by IGI Services (2008), Shanka et al. (2006) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) previously discussed.

The Australian component of the same research project involved two parts. The first examined staff views in relation to international student security and the second examined the students' views of a wide range of different issues and their experiences prior to, and since, their arrival, in Australia. In the context of this research it is asserted that security is a 'basic human right that cuts across culture and location' (p. 198). In the first component of the research 55 staff, academic and administrative, at one large Australian university were interviewed in 2005 and asked to share their experiences of working with international students and the security issues they faced (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Issues such as health, housing, language, culture, racism, abuse, exploitation, religion and sexuality were examined. From the staff point of view, the notion of security was complex. Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) argued that the complexity resulted because 'different cultures interpret security in different ways and that being in a different cultural context

affects students' sense and level of security' (p. 182). As a result issues with regard to security varied for each student. Staff also indicated that from their perspective the Australian government relies on universities to provide a level of support and services which assists students to understand and manage both the internal campus environment and the external community environment and this reliance on educational institutions has, to a degree, contributed to current security concerns for international students.

In the second component of the project involving international students, respondents were drawn from nine Australian universities across three states Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Each of these states of Australia has high numbers of international students enrolled in education institutions and relies on the income generated from international students living in their states. In this research international students were asked about a wide range of issues relating to social and economic experiences that had occurred before they had arrived in Australia and during their study experience to date. The main themes to emerge were: language; loneliness/isolation; work and money pressures; discrimination; and personal safety (Deumert et al., 2005a; 2005b).

English language proficiency was found to impact on their experience not only from an academic perspective, but also from the perspective of individual security. This supports the evidence from the *Language and Learning Styles* section, previously discussed, which stressed the importance and impact of language competence and the impact of poor language skills. From a security perspective, poor language skills are linked to a poor understanding of available social protection services and, according to Deumert et al. (2005a), resulted in limited access and use of available services by international students who could benefit from such services. Limited language skills also impacted adversely on the perception of loneliness and feelings of isolation and this resulted in limited development of social networks. In this research, 60% of interviewees made qualitative comments about feelings of loneliness and isolation. Respondents also made frequent comments about financial pressures (35%) and

discrimination (50%), particularly in relation to seeking accommodation and employment. From a personal safety perspective, little definitive data were obtained, which specifically identified that international students did not feel safe even though they had identified concerns about loneliness, isolation and discrimination. Compared to the results of the research in New Zealand (Sawir et al., 2009a), using the same methodology and previously discussed, international students studying in Australia worked less, expressed higher percentages of discrimination and less difficulty with English language from an academic perspective. However, financial pressure, loneliness and isolation and safety and security were similarly experienced by all respondents.

This is the most significant recent piece of research undertaken in Australia to examine the experiences of international students from a security point of view. The use of in-depth interviews allowed for the collection of rich data and highlighted the fact that English language proficiency impacts on security issues, such as finances and discrimination, and these issues dominate the daily lives of students (Deumert et al., 2005a; Deumert et al., 2005b). When this is added to the fact that this student population manages these issues in a different cultural context, within which they are afforded limited protection and specific individual rights, it is not surprising these students face significant issues and end up in risky and often discriminatory situations, with sometimes limited awareness. Differing aspects of this research are highlighted in greater depth by Forbes-Mewett et al. (2009) who examined the impact of income security and Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Ramia, Sawir and Smith (2009) who considered international students as a vulnerable workforce at risk of exploitation. The consistent theme to emerge from this research is the particular 'at risk' situation of international students and the lack of protection and rights afforded to them within the existing legislative frameworks. Also highlighted were the importance of support service provision and the need for this to be provided so it meets the needs of international students.

In 2009, Universities Australia released a position paper, *Enhancing the Student Experience and Student Safety*. The aim of this paper was to acknowledge and build on the research already undertaken, to respond to recent violent and discriminatory incidences involving international students, in particular those in Victoria and New South Wales, and to signal to the global community, particularly international governments and potential students who would consider Australia as a study destination, that Australia was serious about managing the security and safety of international students. The position paper identified five basic principles to guide good practice in student safety and established an action plan for the implementation of these. The student was affirmed as the central focus of the experience and a safe environment for study emphasised. Information was drawn from a range of different countries involved in the management of international students. From an Australian context, states and universities were represented as managing international students using a wide range of different strategies. Some work more effectively than others and some are more relevant to some States than others. The importance of providing appropriate support services is clearly identified within the principles and the action plan. The five principles and associated action plan focus specifically around creating a safe campus environment, enhancing student awareness of safety, before and after arrival, and also considering safety issues in the external community, in particular related to employment, transport and accommodation.

The evidence from research by Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) suggests that whilst previous mandatory legislation, established by the Australian government, identified standards for the welfare of international students which must be provided by educational institutions, these standards have not been able to ensure their social and economic rights. International students remain vulnerable to exploitation due to poor knowledge and limited English language competence. These factors then contribute toward significant adjustment and health issues which require management by the student and the higher education institution. The health and wellbeing issues are of great importance as they impact academic outcomes and the overall experience.

Little research exists which has specifically examined the health and wellbeing of international students and the impact this has had on their overall sense of security. The majority of studies have considered specific aspects such as stress and anxiety (Burns, 1991; Hellsten, 2002; Stallman, 2008) and how these relate or are linked to the experience of mental health issues such as depression (Wynaden et al., 2010; Yang & Clum, 1994) loneliness and isolation (Hellsten, 2002; Leder & Forgasz, 2004; Mori, 2000; Myburgh et al., 2002; Ong, 2006; Stallman, 2008; Wynaden et al., 2010) suicide ideation (Yang & Clum, 1994) and somatic symptoms (Burns, 1991; Lee et al., 2004; Mori, 2000).

Early research by Yang and Clum (1994) examined the presence of depressive symptoms, feelings of hopelessness and suicide ideation in Asian students. The results, from the 101 international students involved, supported the hypothesis that high stress, loneliness and problem solving difficulties in individuals are related to the development of depressive symptoms, hopelessness and suicide ideation. This research also demonstrated links between those students with weak social support networks and higher levels of suicide ideation. This supports earlier research findings of Burns (1991), previously discussed, and recent Australian research by Stallman (2008) who found that international students had more major stress to manage than local students and that isolation and lack of support networks impacted negatively on stress symptoms and potential mental health problems. More recent research by Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame (2008) also supported this finding. In this research, 440 international students were surveyed across two university campuses in the USA and increased levels of anxiety and depression were found to be experienced by those students with low levels of social support. The research findings from both Yang and Clum (1994) and Sumer et al. (2008) are important in identifying the linkage between social and cultural adjustment issues and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Recent Australian research by Rosenthal et al. (2008) examined the health and wellbeing of international students at one university. They found that the majority (82%) felt there was no difference in their health and wellbeing since arriving in

Australia, although one third of the 979 respondents reported that their health was only fair. There was no evidence to indicate marked changes in risk taking behaviours, self harm or mental health by students. However, those that reported their health had changed said this had affected their studies. This group also reported higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Similarly, Wynaden et al. (2010) examined the mental health of both domestic and international students at one large university in Western Australia. Of the 1471 students who responded to the online survey, 77% reported that mental health issues had impacted university life particularly in relation to assignments (67%) and interactions with fellow students (47%). Whilst international students represented a small percentage of respondents (14%), the most significant issues to emerge for those in this group who responded related to language competence, feelings of isolation, loneliness, homesickness and shame about not coping.

What is evident from all these studies is the fact that international students face more stress than local students due to the sojourn nature of their experience and the need and desire to adjust to their new environment. How this stress is managed and the impact this has on their health and wellbeing will depend on each individual student and the support networks they have established in the new environment. Determinants which impact on the management of this experience have been identified within the literature to include gender (Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2007), age (Rosenthal et al., 2008; Sumer et al., 2008) race and ethnicity (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006), language competence (Burns, 1991; Deumert et al., 2005a; Luzio-Locekt, 1998; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir et al., 2008; Stallman, 2008; Wang, 2004), the availability of social support mechanisms (Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir et al., 2008; Yang & Clum, 1994) problem solving skills (Rosenthal et al., 2008) and self-efficacy (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Rosenthal et al., 2007).

Overall those students with a strong command of English language, who are able to interact, make friends and develop supportive networks, are more likely to have

reduced levels of stress and consequently experience fewer adjustment concerns which manifest themselves into broader health and wellbeing issues, than those who don't. Security in its broadest interpretation is a significant issue for students during their experience as an international student. This experience will of course vary individually according to perceptions of self, command of the language of the country in which students sojourn, support networks, and their ability to problem solve and manage each situation. Impacting on this is community attitude, the culture of the educational institution and the perceptions and attitudes of staff and student colleagues.

Managing all the issues experienced by international students is complex and uniquely different for each student. Within the educational institution in which students are enrolled, it is necessary to embrace a broad view, to provide a cultural context in which these issues are understood and to ensure the focus is on needs identified by students, rather than on staff perceptions of student need. The current structure of support service delivery typically operates in many settings to enforce boundaries in which students need to operate and to only provide those services legally required. Many educational institutions work to engage international students, however concerns over language competence, social and cultural adjustment and security of students remain of significant importance. How students adjust to their experience will be affected by the services and support they are provided and whether students engage with the services in a timely manner to be effective. Understanding the adjustment experience of international students is essential to determining the type and level of support required. The adjustment experience of international students is described below followed by a discussion of the research evidence surrounding utilisation of support services.

### **3.3 International Student Adjustment**

International student adjustment issues have been attributed to different models and theories which support the concept of cultural adaptation (Zhou, Jindal-Snape,

Topping, & Todman, 2008). Chapdelaine and Alextich (2004) and Myburgh et al. (2002) described this as 'culture shock' and found that the degree of shock experienced was based on the degree of cultural differences, family status, cross cultural experiences and social interactions with individuals in host cultures. Brown (2008a) indicates that the degree of culture shock is dependent on the level of stress caused by the need to adjust to the academic culture, which is very different from home, but critical to academic success. Those students with lower language ability had higher levels of stress and as a consequence experienced greater degrees of culture shock and difficulty in adjusting.

Choi (2000) also supports the concept of 'culture shock' being part of the sojourn experience and adaptation to a second culture. According to Choi (2000), the degree of shock relates to the level of support and its appropriateness, plus the individual personality of each student. Wang (2009) supports the view that individual personality impacts on adjustment and this in turn relates to the concept of individual resilience which is impacted by personality traits and background variables. Others describe the experience as 'acculturative stress' (Lee et al., 2004) which arises from the loss of natural social support networks, resulting in psychological distress. According to Luzio-Lockett (1998) culture shock originates from what is known as the 'squeezing effect'. Students in this situation have difficulty adapting because of the transient nature of the experience and the fact they attempt to squeeze one culture, with pre set rules, into another culture with a different set of rules.

Culture shock was first described by Oberg (cited in Chapdelaine & Alextich, 2004 p. 168) as a 'disease suffered by individuals living in a new cultural environment'. Numerous definitions of the concept of culture shock appear in the research literature and depend on whether they were based on a medical perspective or cognitive, behavioural, emotional, social and physiological experiences. Early researchers considered the mental health issues associated with culture shock while later models embraced a wider context encompassing social, psychological and educational theories (Zhou et al., 2008). In the context of research by Chapdelaine and Alextich



(2004), Furnham and Bochner's model of culture shock was used to determine if international students experienced higher degrees of social difficulty than they would in their home country and to examine what variables were linked to social difficulty in cross cultural interactions. The findings from this research conducted on 156 male international students at one Canadian university, indicated that the greater the social interaction the lower the level of culture shock experienced. The greater the degree of cross cultural difference the more likely respondents were to experience high levels of cultural shock and reduced levels of social interaction. This indicates that without meaningful social interaction with hosts, international students are less likely to learn and develop culture specific social skills to reduce the experience of culture shock.

Culture shock was also the overwhelming picture to result from in-depth interviews of 18 PhD students across three universities in South Africa (Myburgh et al., 2002). Respondents identified this as arising from difficulties associated with adjusting to the new environment. These included aspects such as lifestyle, customs and culture and this resulted in feelings of insecurity, loneliness, confusion and discouragement. A major contributing factor to the degree of distress felt was lack of language skills and poor communication. This was especially so because respondents suggested that language and culture are closely linked. Ethnographic research in the UK by Brown (2008a; 2008b), involving interviews with 13 Masters students identified high levels of stress associated with adjusting to both the academic culture as well as the social cultural differences and that culture shock persisted at a high level for students with minimal language ability. Choi (2000) supports this view also indicating that culture shock arose from the process of adapting to a second culture, which produced feelings such as anxiety, depression, annoyance, confusion, disorientation, withdrawal and hostility. The degree this was experienced was dependent on individual personality and the appropriateness of support provided.

Research by Wang (2009) in the USA, which examined the concept of individual resilience and how this impacted on coping, found that those respondents with

resilience characteristics such as self esteem, self-efficacy, being flexible, organisation of self and self focus were able to manage high levels of change whilst maintaining a functional manner and sense of operation. Those students with fewer of the identified resilience characteristics were more likely to experience greater adjustment problems. There was a strong correlation between resilience characteristics, English language competence, country of origin and gender, on adjustment of international students and their ability to cope with change. Early UK research by Luzio-Lockett (1998) found that the issues and adjustment requirements faced by international students resulted from the transient nature of the international student sojourn. In this experience students attempt to accommodate themselves within the frames of reference of the host culture which results in students attempting to squeeze one identity into the constraints of the new culture with an established set of rules and conventions. The flow on effect of this impacts on the students' self concept, resulting in stress as they try to express ideas in a language whose rules of use and appropriateness are unfamiliar in both an academic and social context. Lee et al. (2004) labelled the experience of international students as one of acculturative stress, caused by the process of trying to adapt to the host culture (p. 400).

Causes of stress have been variously described in the literature, but relate to the overarching issues of language difficulties, which impact academic performance and social relationships, and social connectedness, which impacts on daily living and an individual's sense of identity (Lee et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). More recent research by Deumert et al. (2005a) suggests that personal security, inclusive of financial security, is an additional source of stress. Lee et al. (2004) found a strong correlation between mental health problems and the degree of adaptation or acculturative stress experienced and that respondents who reported high levels of support were less likely to report high levels of stress. This specifically involved 74 Korean international students living in the USA and attending one university. Yeh and Inose (2003) also reported that language fluency, social connectedness and social support significantly influenced the degree of acculturative stress experienced. In their survey of international students at one large university in north eastern USA,

respondents were asked to complete a series of questions including an acculturative stress scale, social connectedness scale and social support questions. The results indicated that English language fluency, the feeling of social connectedness and social support networks were all significant predictors of acculturative stress.

In similar research undertaken by Poyrazli et al. (2004) acculturative stress was examined in relation to social support and demographic variables. Acculturative stress was defined as a 'marked deterioration of general health status of an individual; it encompasses physical, psychological and social aspects that are explicitly linked to the acculturation process' (p. 74). A total of 141 international students from four universities in the USA were sent a questionnaire to complete. Core aspects of the questionnaire included personal resources and acculturative stress scale. Students with higher levels of English language competence and social support networks reported lower levels of acculturative stress associated with adjustment and Asian students reported greater acculturative stress.

Sawir et al. (2008) found that the international student experience can be described within the context of loneliness and that different types of loneliness result based on individual circumstances and the need to belong. In this research 200 international students were interviewed across nine university campuses in Australia, covering topics including social and economic security. This focus was on understanding the circumstances of their lives and how this impacted their experience. Loneliness was described as 'resulting from the absence of either intimate personal ties or social ties and social integration of a less intimate kind' (p. 152). Their findings extended the theory of loneliness described by Weiss (1973, cited in Sawir et al., 2008 p. 152) which embraced emotional and social loneliness to include a third type of loneliness, namely that of cultural loneliness. This research is important given its in-depth nature and the breadth of its representation. Of the students who were interviewed, 65% indicated they had experienced loneliness. Previously discussed research (Burns, 1991; Poyrazli et al., 2002; Wang, 2004), has also found evidence of loneliness amongst international students.

Overall the challenges faced by international students are associated with their ability to be able to make the changes which enable them to adapt and integrate sufficiently within their new environment. Those international students with high levels of English language competence, personality characteristics which support a strong sense of self-efficacy and the ability to establish a social network, are more likely to be able to manage the experience of adjustment better. Student perceptions of what they require from support and support services may not necessarily be the same as that of the staff and this may result in services being provided in an inappropriate way. Understanding the concept of support and how this relates to support service provision is discussed below.

### **3.4 Concept of Support and Support Service Provision**

The concept of support provision has changed over time and as a consequence of the paradigm shifts within the higher education environment. Within the context of this research, support services are considered as those provided by the educational institution specifically to support students and do not reflect services which may also be provided in the wider community e.g. sporting facilities. Sufficient evidence exists in the literature to support the view that access to appropriate and supportive services in an environment which facilitates utilisation when they are needed is an essential part of the overall study experience for international students. Hammer (1992) believes that effective support service provision is dependent, to a significant degree, on the attitudes and culture of the community in which they are provided and the core mission of that community.

Thomas (2002) describes the higher education environment as the 'institutional habitus' (p.431) which she suggests is more than the culture of the institution but refers to 'relational issues and priorities which are deeply imbedded and subconsciously informing practice' (p. 431). Smith (2006, 2007) goes further arguing there is a need for greater conceptual understanding of the tensions within the system because they ultimately drive the need for support and the context in which this will

be delivered. Smith (2006) described the tensions as financial, particularly in relation to the level of government funding provided to public universities, student security, high student enrolment numbers, broadening diversity, requirements to increase the participation of marginalised community groups in higher education and the need to ensure the delivery of quality programs of study. From an Australian perspective recent influences have added to the tensions, previously discussed, being experienced in the system. These influences relate to continued concerns about the security of international students in some states of Australia, the high Australian dollar impacting on the cost of study and living and changes in visa regulations which have restricted the potential for international students to gain permanent residency whilst they are international students.

Both Bartram (2008, 2009) and Smith (2006, 2007) believe that there are two very differing conceptual views, as described below, which have emerged in relation to the provision of support services and that these views influence the environmental context of the higher education institution and the ethos of support and support service delivery within the institution. Jacklin and Le Riche (2009) agree, and argue the need for education institutions to move from a view of support as managing individual student problems to one of a support 'culture' which permeates through all aspects of service within the institution. From a student perspective, the context of the environment in which the support and services are provided may also impact on the perception and utilisation of the services by students.

The first conceptual view presents support from a humanistic perspective which is centred on a holistic approach and the belief that nurturing is fundamental to the development of learners. Within this concept, staff members usually academics, have significant input into the learners' support and development (Bartram, 2009; Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) argues that this view arises from the belief that nurturing is fundamental to the development of learners and that staff members, usually academic, have a significant role in providing support and development to learners. Bartram (2009) believes this view is predicated on relatively small numbers of

students and the development of a relationship and environmental culture of support between the academic and the student. Arguably, with the changes in the higher education sector, the increase in student numbers and high staff student ratios, this concept of support is more challenging to sustain for academics and institutions. Smith (2007) argues that regardless of the changes experienced and the current business-like approach to higher education, the holistic approach to the delivery and management of support services is essential and that 'education is a human cultural interaction' and as such should operate outside the corporatised business paradigm (p. 688).

The second conceptual view of support is imbedded in the corporate managerial culture which developed as a result of the global changes to higher education (Bartram, 2009: Smith, 2007). In particular, deregulation, full cost recovery of student fees and the introduction of legislative regulations to manage the quality of education delivered, has resulted in international students being directed away from academic staff to specific support services or available products. Bartram (2009) and Smith (2007) suggest this focus is more about technical solutions and that this approach may result in counterproductive outcomes for students. Pelletier (2003) believes this concept has been driven by the quality assurance agenda which has been embraced in higher education. Smith (2007) argues that the managerial, corporatised approach has significantly changed the context of the relationship between students and staff such that 'students have become consumers and institutions product providers' (p. 688). Smith (2007) describes this as the de-naturing of student support into a 'mechanistic, depersonalised and off the shelf product' which he suggests does not meet student need (p. 688). Forbes-Mewett (2008) suggests this approach reflects homogenised service delivery, where all services are mainstream and there are no specialised services tailored to groups of students with specific needs, such as international students.

In Australian research examining students' perceptions, adjustment and satisfaction with support, respondents indicated they would have liked more support than they

were provided and that they felt they had unmet needs (Ramsay et al. (2007). Local and international students participated in this research. Of the 250 respondents to the questionnaire, 85 (29%) were international students. Support types were grouped under four headings: emotional, practical, information and social companionship. The results indicated international students would have liked higher levels of support in each grouping; emotional (58.9%), practical (54.2%), information (70.5%) and social companionship (55.0%). International students were not as well adjusted as domestic students, and had unmet support needs, as also found by Mullins et al. (1995) and Jou and Fukada (1995). Those international students who perceived they had received support were better adjusted than students who did not. Although this research included only students in their first year of study, the high proportion of international students who perceived they needed more information (70.5%), the significant use of friends as the primary source of support and the acknowledgement by students that more social companionship (55.0%) and emotional support (58.9%) were needed, indicates that engagement of international students into a supportive culture which facilitated emotional and social support as well as practical and informational needs is essential, but not well met.

Jacklin and Le Riche (2009) and Jacklin and Robinson (2007), in their research examining support within the changing higher education environment in the UK, argue that support is a 'socially situated, complex and multifaceted concept' (p. 735). They are of the view that the current structure of support is focused on a deficit model in which the individual (student) has a problem which the institution provides a service to assist. They argue that the changing context of higher education, which has embraced widening participation, a corporatised model of operations and a culture of risk aversion and audit management, has had significant implications for the provision of student support. Their research explored the experience and effectiveness of support from a student perspective using a mixed method of survey and in-depth interviews. In the first stage, 144 international students (64%) responded to the survey and 27 students, from those who had responded, were interviewed as a follow up.

A key theme identified from the students' perspective was the expectation that institutions should provide structure and support systems. Those structures and systems need to focus on support for learning and the provision of a supportive environment. One of the recommendations identified the need to move to a different conceptual understanding of support provision, i.e. away from considering support as problem orientated and reactive, to a supportive proactive model which embraces diversity. This model is aimed at 'improving practice and academic achievement for all students' (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009 p.746), within which interaction between staff and students is critical to success and occurs as part of the support culture rather than within a separate system of service delivery. Jacklin and Robinson (2007) identified four dimensions to the support model: type, who for, context and type of interaction. This model provides a continuum of support which increases the likelihood the service will be accessed and provide effective support for the student. A critical aspect of the findings in relation to this model is linked to the view that support should not just be about its existence, but that the support and support services needed to be made easy to access, from the student's perspective.

Similarly, Kingston and Forland (2008) argued the need for a different approach to the learning environment which is more contemporary and aligned with the corporate environment of higher education. They suggested that culture is at the heart of providing appropriate support and support services and understanding our own cultural values and biases is fundamental to being able to develop an academic and social environment which is supportive. Providing support and services within an organisational culture which embraces their contextual needs is critical for students. In their research, involving focus groups with international students and a survey of academics, student feedback indicated that support was integral to their international study experience. However while students were aware of services provided, usage was low. The main reasons identified were that international students did not have enough time, were too busy with study and the support was not perceived as appropriate. The following section discusses the issue of utilisation of support



services and discusses those barriers as identified students which impact on whether they used a service.

### **3.5 Utilisation of Support Services**

Considerable change has occurred over the last 20 years in higher education and this has impacted significantly on the need for student support and the context of support service provision. Educational institutions, whilst attempting to sustain the nurturing context of support, have had to adopt a compliance framework to their operations in the midst of rapid growth and a move toward a corporatised model of business operations. Research within the higher education environment has examined support service provision and utilisation as either part of broader research objectives (Abe et al., 1998; Burns, 1991; Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Edmond, 1995; Johnson, 1993; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Mullins et al., 1995; Ward, 2001; Wynaden et al., 2010) or from specific specialised services perspective such as health services (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008; Stallman, 2008) counselling (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007; Mori, 2000), and literacy and library support (Sackers, Secomb, & Hulett, 2008; Liu & Winn, 2009; Yi, 2007).

A significant amount of research evidence indicates that support services, for the majority, are underutilised by international students given the known difficulties this group of students encounter during their overseas study experience. Services used the most by international students are generally those which link to successful academic outcomes, such as the library and computing services. While usage is high for these services, how effectively they are used by international students is however open to question. The discussion below describes the key research findings in the literature in relation to international student use of support services. Evidence supporting underutilisation is reported followed by a discussion of the reasons and barriers identified by international students for not using available support services.

### ***3.5.1 Underutilisation***

International students underutilise available support and support services even when generally they are aware of their availability. Underutilisation is considered throughout the research literature as non-use of available support services when there is an acknowledged need which may benefit from using available support and/or services. In early research, previously discussed, the stress and academic problems of international and domestic students were compared in relation to issues of awareness and utilisation of services (Burns, 1991). A high proportion (60-90%) of students knew the location of helping services such as health, counselling and accommodation, but only a small minority (10-30%) of either international or domestic students had used any service offered. This was despite the fact that students self reported academic difficulties and had high levels of perceived stress and other adjustment symptoms. Similar research by Mullins et al. (1995) examining students' perceptions of service use across three university campuses in South Australia found considerable underutilisation. International students used health, counselling and accommodation services to a greater degree than other available services but were less likely to use sporting, tavern or guild type facilities. This is similar to the findings of Burns (1991).

In early USA research by Johnson (1993) the perceptions of international students of the use and effectiveness of support services at one higher education institution was investigated. A cohort of 17 international students were required to respond and indicate a value to the range of questions asked (e.g. strongly agree etc) and these responses were sorted into common groups: dissatisfied nonusers, selective users and satisfied users. There was no relationship between the perceptions of those groups and usage of services or time enrolled at the educational institution. This research revealed underutilisation of services even though respondents indicated the need existed for support.

The influence and effectiveness of peer-pairing on the experience of international students was examined by Quintrell and Westwood (1994) and Abe et al. (1998). As part of the Australian research (Quintrell & Westwood, 1994), survey responses of international students who had been involved in a peer-pairing program were compared with those who had not, at the end of their first year. Those in the peer-pairing program were more likely to have used campus services and have positive views of their experience. Although they had utilised services to a greater degree, services were still underutilised. Those services with significant increased utilisation were counselling (39%, compared to 17%) language and learning (46% compared to 26%) and international student adviser services (46% compared to 22%).

In similar research in the USA, 116 newly enrolled international students at one university were recruited to be involved in a one semester peer program (Abe et al. 1998). At the end of the semester program, participants were sent questionnaires to complete. Seven questions were asked about the frequency and use of campus services and resources, revealing that large percentages of international students had not used many of the services, including the career advisor (72%), counselling (78%), employment officer (72%) and student volunteer programs (83%). Other services not used extensively included health centre (45%) and student organisations (52%). Services indicated as the most used included student recreation centre (50%), bookshop (63%), library (85%) and computing laboratory (87%). Peer program students used the health centre and the recreation centre to a greater degree than the control group. Although the sample size was small, the peer program appeared to have had a positive impact, which is similar to the findings of Quintrell and Westwood (1994).

A review of the educational, social and cultural impacts of international students on domestic students, educational institutions and host communities was commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Ward, 2001). Within the context of this review the impact of support service utilisation was considered and no evidence was found that generic support services were being strained by international student

numbers. However, the review did not consider the effectiveness of services, utilisation and whether the services provided met the needs of international students. Research examining specific support services such as health services, counselling and language support, has similarly identified underutilisation. Russell et al. (2008) investigated health and counselling service usage in terms of need, satisfaction, barriers to seeking assistance and variables predicting usage, at one Australian university.

Of the 979 international students who responded to the survey, 402 indicated they had needed to use the health service and 268 the counselling service. Only 62% had actually accessed the health service and 20% the counselling service. This was similar to the findings of Hyun et al. (2007) of low usage, even though a need had been identified. In this research, undertaken at one university in the USA, most students only made one visit to services. Students from the Peoples Republic of China however were even less likely to seek any assistance or access to health service. Although general satisfaction for both the health and counselling services was indicated by respondents, overall usage of counselling services was low, even when students self identified there was a need. The researchers in both studies found that students underutilised health and counselling services even when they acknowledge they need help.

More recent research undertaken in Australia by AEI (2010) sought feedback from international students across all sectors of the international education industry. This research was undertaken to support the ISAS initiative by the Australian government, and to determine current perceptions related to international students' study experience. The information will provide a basis for comparison when the survey is repeated in 2012 and assist to determine whether the ISAS initiative has been successful. In this research, international students who were enrolled in the higher education sector and had used support services were specifically asked about their satisfaction with the experience. Although 86% of those who had used services were satisfied, the number of international students who had used services was low. Of

respondents 31% had used accommodation services, 36% health services, 34% financial services and 20% counselling services. Unfortunately, the survey did not seek information as to reasons why services were not used. While low usage may imply services were not needed it may also mean that services were needed but not used.

Stallman (2008) examined the prevalence of psychological distress symptoms in both local and international students attending a specific health service and whether they had accessed available support services. These students, who were enrolled at an Australian university and were voluntarily attending the health service, were asked to complete a survey to assess their level of psychological distress and whether they had used other services and to what degree. Higher levels of stress and psychological distress were identified for international students, but only a minority of those students (36%) had accessed other services. Students were more likely to use the health services to manage somatic symptoms rather than seek assistance for psychological distress. This highlights the need for health service professionals to be able to identify students with psychological distress and refer them to appropriate services to facilitate better outcomes.

As part of recent Australian research by Wynaden et al. (2010) and previously discussed, domestic and international students with self-identified mental health problems were asked for feedback about the support service provided by their university. Questions included how easy services were to find and use and what methods students used to seek information about the services. In terms of usage of support services, 64% of respondents had not discussed their individual problems with anybody and 18% did not respond to the question. The most frequently used support services were those provided by counselling and the health service. The individuals who provided the most support were course coordinators and academic staff. The evidence suggests underutilisation of support services even when potential problems, self identified by students, exist.

Use of available counselling services by international students is low even when they are aware the service exists. Hyun et al. (2007) examined the prevalence of mental health needs, knowledge of counselling services and factors that contribute to the use of counselling services, comparing local and international students at one university in the USA. Emailed surveys were sent to 9,231 students of whom 1,794 were international students. Of the respondents 551 (6%) were international students and 445 of these indicated they had experienced an emotional or stress related problem in the previous year which had affected their wellbeing and academic performance. Only 17% had used counselling services, even though 33% indicated they had thought about it. Use of counselling services by international students was significantly lower than use by domestic students ( $p < .01$ ).

Ang and Liamputtong (2008) examined international students' use of university counselling services at one university in Australia. In-depth interviews were used to obtain a deeper understanding of the experience of first year international students and their views of counselling services. Of seven transcribed interviews, three themes emerged as contributing to the experience and impacting their use of counselling services: English language difficulties, continued use of family and friends for support and poor level of knowledge. None of the seven students had used the counselling service and overall there was a lack of knowledge about the services, a similar finding to Russell et al. (2008). They also experienced having difficulty finding information about the service. This was despite the provision of information on the web, via pamphlets and brochures and through talks.

From an information literacy and library perspective, research indicates there is a high awareness of library services, which includes the development of literacy and informational needs, and that international students are satisfied with these services. Abe et al. (1998) found 85% of students were aware of the library and 87% the computing laboratory facilities. Although limited research exists on how effectively international students use the resources available in libraries, students have been found to use the library on an almost daily basis, particularly, according to Liu and

Winn (2009) to study or according to Yi (2007) and Sacker et al. (2008) to access emails and the Internet. In her email survey of international students conducted at a predominantly (80%) female university, Yi (2007) found that 70.5% browsed the library Internet every day and 75.4% checked emails. In this research a total of 61 surveys (72% response rate), were returned and included in the analysis. Usage of other services provided in the library was varied with only 21% of respondents using databases on a weekly basis. About a third of respondents (36%) also indicated that they needed to improve their skills related to information gathering in the library, implying that international students were not utilising the resources provided by the library to their fullest potential.

Sacker et al. (2008) examined international students' perceptions regarding library services and methods of communication and how the library could enhance their learning. This research was undertaken in one Australian university and involved completion of an online survey. A total of 481 responses were collected from the three campus sites, implying a response rate of 22%. The respondent population was representative across the three campuses. Respondents to this survey utilised the library frequently but indicated that existing services could be improved, particularly in relation to information dissemination, the methods used to deliver information and the timing of when information is provided to students. Liu and Winn (2009) reported on a pilot study examining the use of an academic library by Chinese graduate students at a Canadian university. This study explored the perceptions and expectations of students toward library services. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 students. Respondents indicated they did not necessarily use the library as a place of study but did rely heavily on it as a source of access to databases. While awareness of the scope of resources available at the library was evident in the student responses, many of the resources had not been used nor had students attended orientation sessions about resources in the library.

Overall, the research evidence confirms support service underutilisation. The services identified as being used most frequently related more specifically to the

learning requirements of the course of study and the need for successful achievement in terms of study outcomes. The discussion that follows examines the research related to barriers and reason for not using support services provided.

### ***3.5.2 Barriers to Use***

The reasons for non-use of support services are complex and in many respects relate to specific characteristics such as the individual cultural context of students, how they perceive support services within the higher education institution, the core mission of the institution and the contextual setting in which the services are provided. Student awareness of available services provided by educational institutions appears relatively high. In Australian research by Burns (1991) 60% of international and 90% of domestic students who responded were aware of services and similarly in recent, also Australian research by Wynaden et al. (2010), 72% of respondents indicated awareness of a range of services. In considering the results it must be remembered both surveys included domestic students which may have increased the percentage result.

The reasons most often cited for not accessing available services relate predominantly to limited knowledge and difficulty accessing information about a service (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Hyun et al., 2007; Mori, 2000; Russell et al., 2008; Wynaden et al., 2010), knowing how to locate the service (Buultjens & Robinson, 2008; Mori, 2000; Russell et al., 2008; Wynaden et al., 2010), a perception that the service would not be culturally appropriate or that staff do not care (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Johnson, 1993; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Mori, 2000; Russell et al., 2008; Stallman, 2008; Wynaden et al., 2010) and a concern about the time involved (Burns, 1991; Johnson 1993; Mullins et al., 1995; Kingston & Forland, 2008).

In relation to accessing of services, Russell et al. (2008) found that many of those students who agreed they needed to use a service did not in fact do so because they



did not know where to go to access the health or counselling service or how to get an appointment. This was similar to findings by Buultjens and Robinson (2011) who found that although students, both domestic and international, were aware of services they were unaware of how and were to access the services. Mori (2000) found that many students did not access counselling services because they did not think the counsellor could solve their problems, whereas Wynaden et al. (2010) and Ang and Liamputtong (2008) found that students who did not access services when they were needed often lacked knowledge about the service, had difficulty locating information about it or locating the service itself. Mori (2000) and Wynaden et al. (2010) also found that the location of services impacted student usage, particularly if students could not access information about the service when it was needed. Wynaden et al. (2010) found that 41% indicated difficulty locating information even though a wide range of information sources existed in the institution. Jacklin and Robinson (2007) found that accessibility was crucial and meant having appropriate services available, in a context which facilitated a continuum of ongoing support, both structured and unstructured.

Whilst accessing services is important, the reason cited by international students for non usage was because they did not feel the services would be culturally appropriate or that staff from the institution cared about their problems. Ang and Liamputtong (2008) found that students perceived that counsellors would not understand their specific cultural context (46.9%) so would not be able to assist them (47.6%). This was similar to the findings of Kingston and Forland (2008), previously discussed, and earlier research by Johnson (1993) who found that students did not think staff cared because they did not show any interest, so they kept their problems to themselves. Mori (2000) also identified that the reasons for non-use of counselling stemmed from the view that students did not trust the service, did not want to lose face and that counsellors would not be culturally appropriate or sensitive.

Similarly, Russell et al. (2008) found that students felt uncomfortable about using health and counselling services and felt staff in the services would not understand

their problems. Wynaden et al. (2010) found students with mental health problems did not seek help from support services because they were afraid, were embarrassed and were concerned about potential stigmatisation. Liu and Winn (2009) found that cultural differences were a significant barrier to students using library resources to their fullest potential, because they did not understand the role of the librarian, what resources were available, or much of the terminology used. Other additional issues noted as impacting utilisation of support services, to a lesser degree, were students being unaware the service was free (Russell et al., 2008), and the time taken to access or use the service (Burns, 1991; Johnson, 1993; Mullins et al., 1995).

In terms of barriers to the use of available support services, knowledge of and access to relevant information at the time it is needed is highly important and affects whether students use services. By far the most significant reason identified for non-use is the view that services would not be provided in a culturally appropriate manner by staff who understood their particular cultural background and values or who cared about them. This creates a sense of uncertainty and distrust such that students will choose not to access assistance even when they acknowledge they need support.

It is acknowledged international students need access to available support and support services to facilitate their sojourn experience. The evidence indicates that the context in which these services are provided has the potential to impact whether the services are used or viewed as useful by students. Research to date has examined the value of support, models of delivery, specific support services, and aspects of provision, such as use, satisfaction and barriers. Understanding the phenomena from a whole of institution perspective provides the opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of the most effective way to provide support and support services such that international students will utilise services when they are needed.

### 3.6 Chapter Summary

The temporary or transient nature of the international study experience means students are faced with both opportunities and challenges in making the adjustments to help them to integrate on an academic, social and cultural level. Opportunities exist for individuals to engage in an international cultural experience, improve their English language competence and obtain an international qualification. With these opportunities also come significant challenges for international students.

The process of adjustment and integration is individual and complex. Adjustment problems have been highlighted as relating to language competence and learning style, social and cultural differences and more recently in relation to security. This latter issue includes personal safety, health and financial concerns, all of which have the capacity to threaten the security of an individual. Higher education institutions as a result have adopted a wide range of strategies to assist international students with adjustment and integration. Differing opinions exist in relation to the concept of support. One view is driven by an underlying philosophical approach in which support is embedded within the culture of the institution and the learning environment.

The second view has a focus more in keeping with the corporate model of operations. In this model a range of services are provided for students to access to assist them to solve the problem they have. This view is predicated on a deficit model, according to which the student has the problem and the institution provides services to help solve the problem. From an Australian perspective, support and support service provision in recent years has been driven by increased legislation and regulation which has established a set of minimum standards, expectations and services related to international students enrolled in an Australian higher education institution. These standards were introduced in 2000 and titled the *ESOS Act*. Implementation of this Act and the associated code of practice have provided a framework for regulating the quality of educational programs and the level of support international students receive.

The provision of support services and the environment in which they are provided is of critical importance to how useful students perceived a service to be. Students who do not use available support services, even when they self acknowledge a need, have typically found that they are not easily accessed and they form the view that the services will not be culturally appropriate, that staff do not appear to care and/or they fear potential stigmatisation. The culture and environment in which support and support services are provided needs therefore to be supportive, contextual and appropriate. For students this means they need to be culturally relevant, tolerant, diverse, supportive and caring with improving practice and academic achievement for all students as the central theme. To achieve this, universities need to understand the cultural context of their students as well as examine their own cultural views. Without this clear understanding of their own ethos, it is more difficult to ensure the model of delivery of support services will be appropriate and hence effective for international students.

## CHAPTER 4

### EDUCATIONAL SETTING

This chapter describes the educational institution in which the research was conducted. Understanding the context is critical to the interpretation of the phenomena considered in this study because it provides an insight into the organisational structure and the institution's approach towards the management of international students and the provision and delivery of support services. The chapter begins by providing general information about the university, and is followed by a description of its vision, mission and values and associated operational plans, as they relate to support service provision. The subsequent section of the chapter identifies the range of support services provided by the university and their alignment to the legislation governing registered providers of courses of study to international students studying on campuses in Australia. This is followed by a description of specific measures used by the university to evaluate international student satisfaction with support and support service provision. Data provided from audits and reviews of the university are also described and discussed with specific reference to support service provision. The final section discusses the implications of the current strategic approach of the institution.

#### 4.1 Research Site

The main campus of the Curtin University is situated in Perth, Western Australia. At the time of the research, the Perth campus site was selected because it was registered as a provider of courses for international students in Australia, met the *ESOS Act (2000)* regulations and was 'self managed', in that the university was not in a partnership arrangement with another education provider. In addition, this campus has large numbers of enrolled international students and as a consequence provides a wide range of support and support services for international students to access. Apart from the main campus the university has eight additional campuses, two

collaborative international sites; (Singapore and Malaysia), one national collaborative site (Sydney), and five smaller campuses located within the state of Western Australia. In addition, smaller educational centres, located within the state, offer specific programs of study in collaboration with the education institution.

From an international education perspective, the university has a long history of enrolling international students, particularly from South East Asia, commencing initially with scholarship students via the Colombo Plan. Since the status of the education institution changed to that of a university in 1987 and full-fee-paying places for international students were introduced, there has been increased emphasis on international and cross-cultural perspectives in the institution's strategic plan. These changes have been in line with those described in the literature and media commentary about the industry and outlined by Bradley et al. (2008), including internationalisation of the curriculum, student mobility and exchange, transnational education, international linkages and development of programs of study for international students.

From 2004 to 2009 international student enrolment numbers at the university grew significantly with the majority of students coming from China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, India and Singapore (Curtin University, 2010a). The Bradley et al. (2008) review of higher education in Australia indicates that the University has the sixth largest enrolment of international students in Australia and the largest in Western Australia. From 2006 to 2010 the 'enrolled full time teaching student load' (EFTSL) in relation to international students studying at the Perth campus across the academic faculties, grew from 5,510 EFTSL to 6,854 EFTSL (Curtin University, 2010a). In 2010 the total number of students enrolled was 46,634 of which 10,702 were international students studying at the Perth campus of the university (Curtin University, 2011a).

In 2007 fee revenue generated from international student EFTSL accounted for 21% of the total revenue of the university. More recent figures (Curtin University, 2010b)

now indicate that the percentage has risen to 24%, equating to approximately 140 million dollars of income in 2010. This is significant in that international student income now contributes more to the university than the Commonwealth Government contribution of 21%. The total international student EFTSL load grew at the Perth campus, from 8% in 2009 to 10.6% in 2010 (Curtin University, 2010b). Overall the university enrolls a large number of international students and has demonstrated an ability to sustain a strong performance in continued high enrolment numbers. This is particularly important given the adverse circumstances, discussed previously, which have impacted international education and student enrolments in Australia. The university has a recognised long history in international education and is well regarded, particularly in Asia, for providing quality education for international students. Given the reliance on income generated via international student enrolments, ensuring continued high numbers of international student enrolments is critical to the institution's future direction and financial security.

#### **4.2 Organisational Structure and Management**

The university accessed for this research has embraced an overarching strategic approach and operational model that sits within a corporate framework. This approach is evidenced within the university through a complex set of operational plans which are managed and measured using a balanced scorecard approach. According to Aidemark (2001), balanced scorecards are management control systems, most often hierarchical in how they are constructed, which are based on four perspectives: the customer, internal business processes and learning and growth which link to the fourth, the financial perspective. Conceptually, if the first three perspectives are developed with the right focus and direction, then the financial perspective will follow.

The current strategic plan, titled *Our Future in Focus 2009 – 2013*, was developed following consultation with senior managers, heads of school and staff (Curtin University of Technology, 2009). The vice chancellor of the university states, in this

document ‘the aim of the strategic plan is to provide a framework to guide the development of operational plans across the key areas of teaching, research and administration using the identified strategic goals and key initiatives’ (Curtin University of Technology, 2009). Within the strategic plan, mission, vision and value statements are identified to provide direction regarding the desired ethos and culture of the institution. The mission and vision statements embrace the desire for it to be ranked among the top 20 universities in Asia by 2020. Achievement of these aims, the plan suggests, will flow through a specific commitment to innovation and excellence in teaching and research which benefit students and the wider community (Curtin University of Technology, 2009). The value statements embedded within this strategic focus and identified as underpinning the culture of the education institution are integrity, respect, fairness and care.

Within the strategic plan, five key strategies are described and themes for achieving the outcomes are identified (Curtin University of Technology, 2009). The strategies are:

- Develop a culture of excellence and innovation;
- Focus on high-quality courses in areas of strength;
- Strengthen research capability and performance;
- Drive international excellence; and
- Enhance capacity and financial sustainability.

These key strategies provide the framework for the development of six enabling plans which are aligned with the six key management portfolios identified in the organisation chart of the university (Appendix 1). At the time of data collection the portfolios were under the direction of the five deputy vice chancellors and one vice president. The enabling plans developed and managed by the portfolio holders include: Teaching and Learning; International; Information and Communication; Research Management; Strategic Asset Management; and Valuing Staff. Each



enabling plan includes initiatives established to facilitate the achievement of the five key strategies, previously identified. These initiatives have specific performance indicators and established targets to measure progress toward fulfilment of the strategic objectives. Monitoring of the enabling plans is managed using a balanced scorecard framework in four key performance areas: core activities, students and clients, culture, and financial security.

Using the balanced scorecard approach the focus of the enabling plans is to help strengthen staff capacity which in turn supports the development of stronger and more effective internal processes. A flow on effect of this is greater customer, (or in this case, student) satisfaction which in turn contributes to financial security. Each of the identified key performance areas has associated productivity achievements, growth and innovation dimensions and this, according to the *2009 Annual Report* (Curtin University of Technology, 2010b), brings together the planning, budgeting and quality assurance processes within the education institution. According to Aidemark (2001), this should produce more effective management and better outcomes.

Although each enabling plan identifies goals in relation to key performance areas, including students, it is difficult to find a defined linkage between students and support service needs and provision. One of the goals within the strategic plan strategy, to 'develop a culture of excellence and innovation' has as a focus 'to improve the quality of the University environment'. This, according to the plan, is to be achieved through the provision of an environment in which learning takes place that is more satisfying for both staff and students. Aside from this implied desire to provide a supportive environment, there are no strategic initiatives, or specific measures or targets with the specific focus of student support and/or support services.

Each of the six enabling plans is operationalised through the development of plans in each of the academic faculties or in service areas within the university. These plans are monitored on a quarterly basis, and the faculty plan initiatives, targets and

measures are further integrated into the development of school and area plans. The experience of international students is measured via key performance areas using the balanced scorecard framework. The overall approach outlined in this discussion supports a corporate business model of operations involving complex layers of management and reporting, within which it is difficult to identify any specific focus on the culture of support, the need for support for international students or measurement outcomes of support service provision.

At the time the data were collected for this research, support services were coordinated and managed under the banner of 'University Life' through the Director of Support Services. This position reports directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor Education (Curtin University, 2011) and is responsible for the provision, management and delivery of support services. Data collected from annual student surveys are used to monitor student satisfaction with their study experience, including support and support service provision.

### **4.3 Support Service Provision**

The legislated standards in place at the time this research was undertaken were the *ESOS Act (2000)* and the *National Code of Practice (2007)*. The regulatory requirements from the Act were translated by the then AVCC, now Universities Australia, into a minimum set of recommended guidelines and strategies for the management of international students. These guidelines and the implementation strategies are contained in the document *Provision of Education to International Students – Code of Practice and Guidelines for Australian Universities* (AVCC, 2005a). The identified minimum standards include the provision of an appropriate orientation program; a critical incident management policy and management strategy; access to study and welfare support services; access to a designated contact officer and access to staff who are aware of the obligations of the education institution and the students in relation to the *ESOS Act 2000* (AVCC, 2005a).

From the perspective of the university, all the requirements for the provision of support services, as outlined by the legislated standards, are in place and accessible to international students. A specific orientation week for international students, the week prior to the main university orientation week, is provided. In the 2008 AUQA audit of the university, a range of commendations were made, one of which was in relation to the provision of a specific orientation program for international students. Commendations are awarded when a stated goal has been achieved or there is sufficient evidence to suggest it will be achieved (AUQA, 2009). In this instance the commendation was awarded by AUQA on the basis of the comprehensive Orientation Policy in operation at the university, which details the approach, process and standards required to be in place for student orientation. In addition, feedback evidence from students, collected during the audit process, supported the effectiveness of the activity. The week long orientation program for international students provides a range of information about Australian lifestyle, university life, support services provision and accessibility. In addition, the university provides written and web information about orientation and available support services for students.

Within the university, support and support service delivery, for the most part, is centrally managed and services are offered to all enrolled students. A total of 24 support services are provided and are listed in Appendix 2. Of these there are only three services offered specifically for international students, those being the services available through the International Office, via the Student Advisors International Office and as through the International Student Societies. The remaining available services are grouped under the following headings:

- Academic Development, Language and Learning Support
- Administrative Support
- Health and Counselling Services
- Social Support Services

These services can all be accessed and used by all enrolled students including international students. The comprehensive range of services confirms that the educational institution meets those required minimum standards as outlined in the *ESOS Act (2000)* and the *National Code of Practice (2007)*.

#### **4.4 Support Service Effectiveness**

Within the university international student satisfaction with their study experience is measured using data from the annual Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), and the Curtin Annual Student Survey (CASS). The university does not survey international students as a separate sub-group, although some data can be extracted from the surveys which specifically relates to international student responses. Other formal data available to evaluate the effectiveness of student support services includes the AUQA audit of the education institution, which was conducted for the first time in 2002 and again in 2008.

##### ***4.4.1 Course Experience Questionnaire***

The current available data from the surveys suggest varying levels of student satisfaction with their course of study and wider experience. The CEQ is collected four months after course completion as part of the Australian Graduate Survey and investigates the opinions of all recent graduates regarding their course experience. The CEQ data measures student satisfaction with course of study, their graduate qualities and satisfaction with the teaching and learning experience. A 5 point Likert Scale is used to collect students' opinions as to the degree of 'agreement' or 'disagreement' across twenty three items. The items are grouped under five different scales to determine the level of satisfaction. Only those answers indicating 'strongly agree' or 'agree' are grouped under the satisfied ensuring data is not skewed positively. Support is acknowledged as an integral part of the of the overall study experience and students who perceive they have been effectively supported throughout their course of study, whether from an academic, administrative, welfare

or social perspective are, of course, more likely to consider this when they rate their level of satisfaction with the experience. However, if aspects of needed support have not been available, accessible or useful, then students are more likely to have a lower level of satisfaction with the study experience and the quality of teaching and learning (Buultjens and Robinson, 2011).

From a course satisfaction perspective, results from the last available CEQ for 2007-2009 indicate international students rated course satisfaction between 64% (2007) to 65% (2009) a rate which is similar to domestic students: 67% (2007) to 68% (2009) (Curtin University of Technology, 2010c). Satisfaction with the quality of the teaching and learning experience ranged from 48% (2007) to 53% (2009), a figure again similar to domestic students at 50% (2007) and 52% (2009). These figures are, however, below the education institution balanced scorecard target of 70% satisfaction by 2013 and are below the sector average. International student response rates to the CEQ are not specifically detailed in the report. In the balanced scorecard report for the International portfolio, these outcomes are highlighted as an area of concern for the education institution (Curtin University of Technology, 2010c). Qualitative comments in the most recent CEQ report revealed that areas requiring improvement were firstly staff quality, with staff accessibility as the second most required, followed by support as the third. Respondents indicated that there was a need to improve aspects of service provision and support.

#### ***4.4.2 Curtin Annual Student Survey***

The CASS survey was introduced by the university in 2002 to assess students' satisfaction with their study experience, including campus life, the facilities provided and services available. The survey has been modified over that time to accommodate changing dynamics and to better reflect services and facilities provided. A major review of the survey tool was undertaken in 2009 to include a specific question to determine international students' views with regard to support services offered by the International Office. Additional questions about specific services offered by the

university were also added, as well as two open-ended questions related to services that worked well and services that could be either improved or included if they were not currently provided. The survey collects data from enrolled students using a 5 point Likert Scale which identifies degree of 'agreement' or 'disagreement' with statements. These are then grouped into agree, disagree and neither. The 'neither' responses are disregarded for each question ensuring there is no skewing of data positively. The available reported results for the time period 2007-2009 (Curtin University of Technology, 2010a), are discussed below. In 2009, when the first survey with the changes was undertaken, 23% of the respondents were international students. The survey results are reported in terms of overall satisfaction with their experience at the education institution, overall satisfaction with their course, then satisfaction with specific facilities and services provided. From the perspective of overall satisfaction with their experience at the education institution during the three years, 2007-2009, scores ranged between 84% (2007) to 87% (2009) while course satisfaction ranged between 81% (2007) to 83% (2009).

From the perspective of specific support services, respondents reported a wide range of views. The top three support services identified by respondents, which rated consistently above 80% satisfaction during 2007 to 2009, were the library and associated services, bookshop and the centralised student administrative services. Those support services which rated between 70% to 80% satisfaction were security, the Learning Centre, English language support, medical and health, sport and recreation, accommodation and student guild. Those support services which rated below 70% consistently were the careers advisor, counselling, campus bus, some aspects of social justice and equity and orientation, from the perspective of whether it assisted students with their studies. From an international student perspective, specific questions about the International Office and International Student Advisors were added in 2009 and these services rated 78% and 73% satisfaction respectively (Curtin University of Technology, 2010a).

Responses to the two open-ended questions provided information about the ‘best aspects’ of their experience and what they perceived could be improved. The top five most commonly identified ‘best aspects’ were the social aspects of university life including making friends, the lifestyle and environment, the teaching staff and facilities, and equipment. The most commonly cited areas needing improvement were parking, campus facilities, services and resources and sporting and social activities (Curtin University of Technology, 2010a).

While the CEQ and CASS surveys provide important information about the satisfaction and quality of the student experience, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the views of international students in relation to the provision and use of support services at the university. The research instruments for both surveys are different and while valuable information has been provided the results may not be comparable over time as both approaches have been modified.

From a support service perspective, respondents highlighted specific services and made general comments which imply a need for review and improvement. The identified international student response rate in the 2009 CASS survey was low at 23% (Curtin University of Technology, 2010a).

Both the CEQ and CASS surveys are focused mainly toward determining levels of satisfaction with the services and do not request detailed information about students’ views of support and support services, either in terms of awareness, how they found out about services, whether they have actually used a service and how useful the service was. In addition information about importance, ease of access and barriers to use of services are not sought, therefore restricting the potential to identify desirable changes or improvements which could be made and to evaluate the services overall to determine whether the strategic organisational view with regard to the provision and delivery of services is effective and meeting the needs of international students.

#### ***4.4.3 Australian University Quality Agency***

The university has undergone frequent external reviews. In 2002, it was one of the first tertiary institutions in Australia to take part in an AUQA audit. The aim of the audit was to consider and review the procedures the organisation had in place to monitor and achieve the established objectives. The overall audit report outcomes were positive, identifying areas of commendation and recommendations for improvement (AUQA, 2002). The audit did not specifically examine international students or support service provision. In 2005 the university underwent a further audit to specifically test compliance with the additional requirements of the *Education Providers (Full Fee Overseas Students) Registration Act 1991*.

The education institution was registered as a provider of courses to full-fee-paying students. In the report compiled following the audit review process, the university was highly commended for its management of international students. In particular, the audit report identified the quality of the promotional and information materials provided to international students, the extensive range of support services, recruitment and marketing resources and the knowledge and expertise of staff who deal with international students on a daily basis (AUQA, 2002). In terms of the recommendations, two concerns were raised which involved international students and these were identified as requiring further management by the education institution. The first was the monitoring of academic performance to comply with student visa requirements and the second was the duty of care processes in place to manage underage students, particularly in relation to accommodation and home stay arrangements. Overall the audit outcomes, whilst identifying areas requiring further management, confirmed compliance of the education institution with the requirements of the *Education Provider (Full Fee Overseas Students) Registration Act (1991)*.

In accordance with the AUQA audit cycle of five years, the education institution underwent a second audit in 2008. In this cycle, the audit group had two specific



themes, 'Internationalisation', as determined by AUQA itself, and 'Ensuring the Quality of the Student Experience' as determined by the university. The AUQA audit identifies that in 2008 a key strategic objective identified within the documentation submitted by the institution was to enhance the quality of the student experience to ensure a student centred approach in how it operated and delivered programs of study and services (AQUA, 2009). Achievement of this objective was focused around the development of a specific student survey and the redesign of curricula. The student survey was implemented to enable students to provide feedback, on a semester by semester basis, with regard to the quality of teaching and learning. Both initiatives were instigated by the education institution with the aim of providing high quality teaching and learning experiences for all students. The initiatives did not specifically identify, from a student perspective, a comprehensive student centred approach which encompassed the total experience, although this was the objective identified.

From an internationalisation perspective the focus of the 2008 audit was to examine the management of international students, student mobility and exchange, as well as the coordination and management of transnational programs of study. Similarly to 2002, the audit report commended the education institution for the management of international students. In particular, mention was made of the university's responsiveness to issues of security, the positive impact of orientation, the international office within the faculty of business and the active role of the Student Guild. The main focus of the recommendations related to improved management of risk by the university across a range of activities, including those relating to reputation, teaching and learning, academic protocols and transnational activities. In the context of the 2008 audit report (AUQA, 2009), the performance of international students enrolled at the Perth campus was noted as very slightly lower (85.7% overall pass rate) as compared to 86.9% for domestic students. Access to the range of available support services was noted to be the same as for domestic students and overall comments from international students involved in the audit process were noted in the report as positive in relation to the range of support services available and their quality.

In addition to the recognised survey data methods, the most recent survey conducted by IGI Services (2010) included international students from the university. This research is undertaken on a worldwide level and is designed to gather information to enable institutions to benchmark their position against other education institutions. In this instance, comparisons on a national level were accessible with a total of 32,800 international students in Australia responding to the survey. While respondents from the university indicated a high level of satisfaction with many services, the questions in relation to support and support service provision did not cover all services provided by the university. In addition, the report indicates a response rate of 36% (1075 responses) for the university, however many questions had responses of fewer than 200. In the section on support, response rates were particularly low and a low usage of services was indicated. The measures used in the survey to assess students' views of support provided namely, satisfaction, usage and importance were not comprehensive. To gain a comprehensive understanding of students views of service provision it is necessary to understand what services are required, what services are used and whether they are useful, what services are provided effectively and if services were not used what the barriers were to that use and how the services can be improved.

#### **4.5 Implications and Relevance to Research**

The balanced scorecard approach to managing and monitoring international students' views of their study experience has resulted in the measures and targets related to enrolment numbers, market share and overall satisfaction being seen as determining success in the International portfolio and by the university as a whole. While international student enrolment numbers have remained high, the available data suggests the experience of international students is varied. The audit reports from AUQA (2002, 2009) indicate the university provides a wide range of support services which meet, and in some instances exceed the minimum required standards, as determined by the *ESOS Act (2000)* and *National Code of Practice (2007)*, and that international students are noted to have a pass rate of around 86%. However,

these audits did not comprehensively assess support and support services across a range of measures to ensure a thorough understanding of international students' views were obtained.

Feedback from data collected via the CEQ and CASS surveys indicate a very varied view with regard to effectiveness of support and support service provision. In addition, feedback is limited due to the style and extent of questions asked and the low response rates. The CEQ collects information on satisfaction with the: student experience, expectation, quality of teaching and graduate qualities. In addition, qualitative questions seek comment in relation 'best aspects' and those needing improvement. Over the last three years, international student respondents have indicated satisfaction levels lower than the sector average with each area of measurement. Limitations exists with this survey in terms of its comprehensiveness, as questions predominantly focused on levels of satisfaction and do not explore areas such as relevance, usefulness, access, importance and awareness. This suggests there is a need for a more in-depth study to examine students' views of support and supports service provision.

The CASS survey is university specific and does seek broader information in relation to student experience whilst at the university. The feedback data is not comprehensive in that it does not provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of international students in relation to support and support services within the university. Up until 2009, the CASS survey did not seek feedback from international students about specific services available to only international students. The focus of this survey remains in relation to satisfaction measures only and does not consider support services in terms of e.g. use, usefulness, awareness and barriers to use.

This study is therefore critical as it addresses the gap in the available research literature by examining in more depth, the context in which support and support services are provided as well as international students views of the effectiveness of

support and services provided. Understanding how international students view support and the support services provided and what their needs are will provide valuable information on what is required to ensure support and services will have more meaning for students and enhance their use and usefulness. Prior to this research there was no feedback mechanism which specifically examines support service provision and international students' views about whether the services meet their needs.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

The university in which this research has been undertaken is a significant contributor to the international education industry, with a long history of involvement in enrolling international students. The move to full-fee-paying international student enrolments at campuses within Australia has been embraced by the university which as a result, has a high percentage of enrolled international students. The university relies on this external funding source to contribute to its financial sustainability. The governance model in place embraces a corporate business approach to achieve the key strategic goals and the established performance measures and targets identified in the balanced scorecard.

A wide range of support services are provided which meet the legislative requirements in place at the time of the research. Current survey data available for this university suggests that international students often perceive limitations in their study experience and the quality of the teaching and learning they receive. Insufficient data, in the sense of low response rates and the limited style and depth of questions asked, means understanding this phenomena, from the international student perspective, is not well understood. Surveys have predominantly sought students' views in relation to satisfaction with their experience. They have not sought more in-depth information about awareness, use, usefulness, importance, access and barriers to use which would assist to better understand how support services could be provided to better meet the needs of international students. This research will address

this gap in the understanding of international students needs in relation support service provision with the aim to develop strategies to improve the effectiveness.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Chapter five presents the methodology and conceptual framework used to guide the research and is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the research strategy, justification for the methodology selected and an outline of the research process. Section two details the three stages of the research process and describes the research instruments, the sampling techniques and the data analysis process. The final two sections identify the ethical issues taken into account and the conceptual framework used to guide the study.

#### **5.1 Research Methodology**

This investigation sought to determine which support services international students considered important, to identify factors that enhance or inhibit student use of support services and to recommend strategies to improve the effectiveness of the support and the support services provided by the university. Since the design and delivery of support services for international students is complex and context specific, in that each mode of service delivery is different and institutionally specific, it was decided that the overall approach that would most effectively elicit the data required would be that of case study. Case study investigates specific circumstances or contexts which occur within a population. Yin (2003) describes case study as a comprehensive research strategy encompassing design logic, multiple data collection techniques and specific approaches to analysis. Stake (1995) is of the view that it is a process of examining the particularity and complexity of a case which results in a deep understanding of both the activity and circumstances. Greene (2006) agrees and further suggests the approach also provides 'contextual understanding and meaningfulness' to the human experience and the associated circumstances (p. 94).

The use of a case study approach provides the researcher with a methodology to examine the research phenomena in-depth. According to Yin (2003), the use of case study allows the researcher to ‘understand complex social phenomena within the context of real life events and organisational and managerial processes’ (p.13). Stark and Torrance (2008) argue that the case study approach assumes social reality is created through social interaction, this approach therefore allows for a full description of the social context. The strength of the case study strategy is its ability to provide in-depth descriptions of the phenomena which are presented from the perspective of research respondents. Greene (2006) agrees, describing the case study approach as contextual and meaningful in that it guides the inquirer to ‘construct and re-interpret an inside or emic portrait of meaningfulness in that context’ (p. 94). Stake (1995) is of the view that there are three main types of case study, intrinsic, instrumental and collective, and these differ depending on the reason for the study. An intrinsic study provides an in-depth understanding of the case for its own sake, whereas an instrumental case study provides insight into an issue and a collective case study examines multiple cases in an attempt to understand specific phenomena.

The focus of this research was to gain a greater understanding of international students and their utilisation of support services within a specific educational institution. Considering this, the type of case study research approach selected was instrumental. Knowledge and awareness of the specific contextual conditions within the educational institution in which the study was undertaken was critical to understanding the phenomena under investigation. This combined strategy then provides opportunity for triangulation of data. A single site case study design was selected on the basis that the university site operated as a sole education provider, was not reliant on a collaborative partner, was required to meet legal obligations which define accepted industry standards and had, as a result, developed its own specific context in which support services for international students were designed and delivered. In addition, Curtin University had a long history of enrolling international students and has large numbers of enrolled students who had access to support and support services.

Within the overarching case study approach, use was made of a number of different data collection methods since organisations with complex management systems require the use of a variety of data collection strategies to enable a full description of the phenomena under study (Weick, 1979). The use of a number of different data collection methods also assists with triangulation, a process which provides opportunity, according to Campbell and Fiske (1959), for any variances within the research findings to be determined to be the trait rather than due to the method, because potential biases of either method can be offset by the use of the other methodology (cited in Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1998). To facilitate collection of multiple sources of data and to ensure the scope of the research was broad enough to understand the impact of the contextual issues affecting international education and support service provision for international students, a mixed method inductive sequential triangulation process was used.

Sequential triangulation is inductive in nature, according to Morse (1991), when the qualitative methodologies and information collected is used as the foundation to drive the development of the quantitative research methodology. Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark and Green (2006) agree, and argue that this type of methodology should begin with qualitative research, such as interviews or focus groups, and then be followed up with the use of a quantitative instrument, such as a questionnaire. When this occurs the qualitative and quantitative methodologies are sequential, informative to the next stage and one method is not an adjunct to the other method producing, according to Feilzer (2010), a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. In this study, one research method is used in a sequential and complementary way to inform the development of the next stage of the research process e.g. information from focus groups informed questionnaire development. Jick (1979) provides further support for sequential triangulation as a research strategy indicating that examining the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives ‘enriches our understanding by allowing new and deeper dimensions to become evident’ (p. 109). Triangulation, Jick (1979) suggests, allows the research methods to be combined in a study of the same phenomena hopefully resulting in ‘convergent validation of findings thus producing



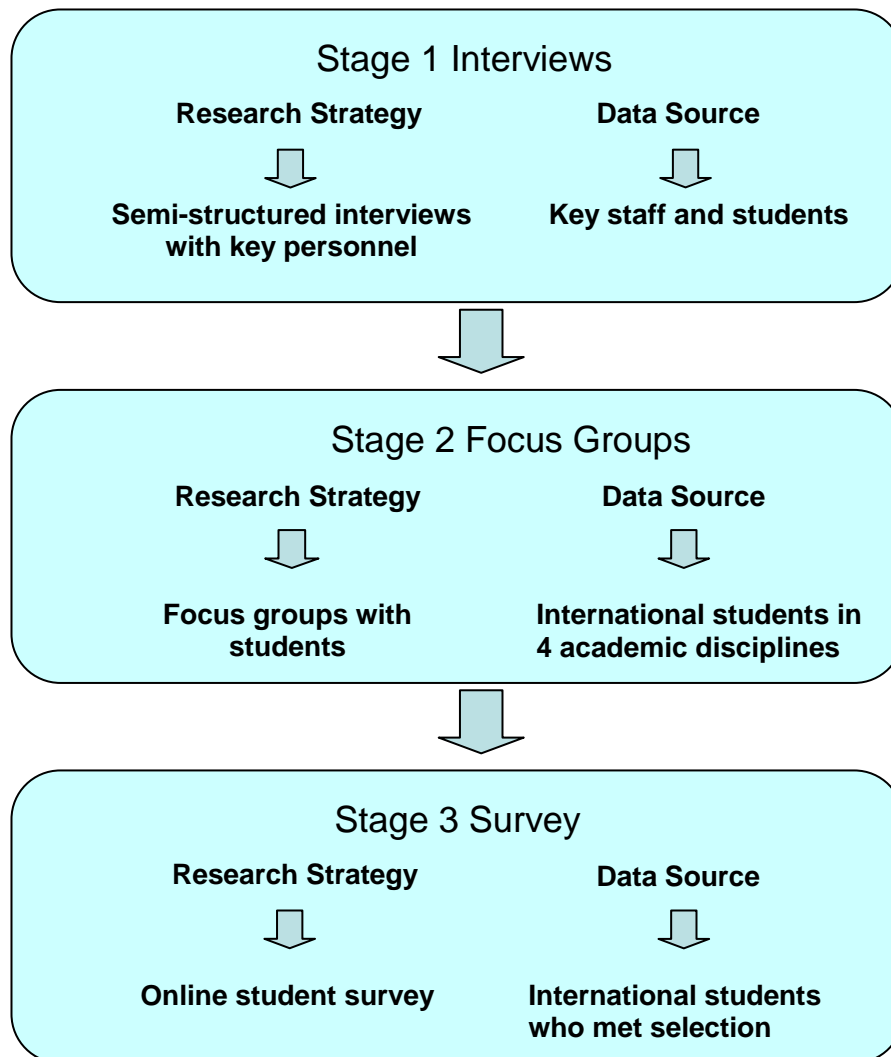
more valid results' (p. 108). When multiple research approaches are brought together, Bryman, 2006; Creswell et al. (2006), Jick (1979), Gardner, (2008), Greene (2006; 2007), and Punch (2005), all agree a more in-depth and robust picture of the phenomena under investigation results and, according to Humble (2009), this increases the rigour of the study. Bazeley (2009) also supports this view suggesting that this approach allows for integration of different approaches during the study and not just at the conclusion.

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative information and evidence was used to examine the phenomena within the case study approach. When qualitative and quantitative methods are used in research, they reinforce each other and produce comprehensive outcomes (Feilzer, 2010; Gerber; 1999; Humble, 2009). Using a mixed method should produce converging evidence which can provide more compelling outcomes than a single method (Yin, 2006). The premise on which these views are held is that greater confidence is felt with research findings when a research design using qualitative and quantitative methods is used as compared to a single method (Feilzer, 2010). Fawcett and Downs (1992) conclude that qualitative and quantitative methods are mutually supportive and provide, when used in a sequential process, a deep understanding that one method alone cannot.

Whilst some researchers raise concerns about potential differing assumptions and paradigms using two different methods within one research project, Jick (1979) believes that the main issue is bringing together the results into a coherent framework which has relevance to the initial research questions. Yin (2006) supports this view and believes the greater the integration of mixed methods in the research process, the more likely it is that the research outcomes will support the research questions. Greene (2006) suggests that using a mix of methods in social research enables 'multiple mental models into the same inquiry space for the purposes of respectful conversation, dialogue and learning from one another' (p. 17) and this facilitates a collective better understanding of the phenomena being studied. Punch (2005) agrees and reinforces the view that both approaches are important in social research and the

task of the researchers is to ensure both approaches' strengths and weaknesses are understood and the appropriate combination of methods is selected to support the analysis required. The application of the selected methodological strategies, sequencing and data sources used in the research is outlined in Fig 5.1.

**Fig 5.1 Methodological research strategies and data sources**



## 5.2 Research Process

A three stage process using qualitative and quantitative methodologies was used for the research. Ensuring each stage of the research development had a clear linkage to

the overall case study strategy and a logical sequential progression, as per Figure 5.1, was essential to the validity of the research. As a sequential mixed method approach was used, each stage of the research required the use or development of a separate appropriate research instrument. Interviews and focus groups were used to gather the qualitative data in the first two stages of the process. Both quantitative and qualitative data was obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire in the third stage. Sequential analysis of the data from the interviews followed by the focus group questions enabled the identification of categories and concepts which, according to Yin (2003), are critical to the triangulation of information and for this study, the development of the questionnaire. The inclusion of opened-ended questions in the questionnaire provided opportunity to add richness and depth to the data collected in this stage of the research.

Obtaining sufficient background information initially was essential to the contextual understanding of support service delivery for international students and the specifics of delivery for the educational institution. Reviewing the available literature and published research provided background information about international students and support service delivery from an international and national perspective. Archival documents, such as audits and reports, completed in the previous five years, were obtained from the educational institution. Using a wide selection of relevant documents can, according to Bowen (2009), assist the researcher to ‘uncover meaning, develop understanding, and to discover insights relevant to the research’ (p. 29). In this research they provided insight into the organisation’s strategic focus, function, evaluative feedback on the structure and delivery of services plus student feedback on their experiences of studying within the university. Independent assessments by external bodies, such as the Australian Universities Quality Audit, provided valuable insight into the provision of services. Additional information was obtained via the library, and information about the current provision of support services within the educational institution was gathered from available literature and via the university website.

Examining a wide range of evidence was important to the initial stage of the research as it helped to develop an understanding of the research phenomena within the context of the educational institution. Comprehensive data collection strategies are important when using a case study approach. Yin (2003) argues there are three overriding principles which need to be utilised. First, multiple sources of data need to be used. Second there needs to be an organised collation of evidence to support each stage and third, clear and explicit links between questions and data need to be identifiable so final conclusive outcomes can be drawn. Broadly, Yin (2003) suggests there are six main sources of evidence for case studies, namely 'documents, archival records, interviews, direct-observation, participation-observation and physical artifacts' (p. 83). Ensuring the quality of the evidence is also critical. Punch (2005) argues that the two way typology developed by Scott (1990) should be used to assess the quality of the evidence. This framework assesses documents based on authorship and access and suggests that important questions need to be asked about documents which are used in research. These relate to the 'authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning' (p.185) of the evidence and in the case of this research, these were used to help guide the analysis of the background documentary evidence.

In the review of the information gathered from the research literature, documentary evidence and informal discussions, key words and phrases which had relevance to the concept of 'support service delivery' and 'international students' were used to assist the review process. Key words were those which appeared repeatedly in the research literature in relation to international students' views in relation to the effectiveness of support and support service provision and included awareness, provision, utilisation, access, importance, usefulness, barriers and environment. Key phrases expanded on the key words and included barriers to use, provision of support services, utilisation of support services, accessibility of services, awareness of services, usefulness of services, relevance of services and importance of the context and setting. In considering the relevance of background data collected, it was important to take into account that documentary evidence, such as memos or meeting

minutes, reflect communication about specific circumstances or situations and this may not necessarily reflect comment about the current research questions.

A meeting with the Director of Support Services provided opportunity for discussion about the research, clarification of the constructs which had emerged from the review of the background information and additional information with regard to support services as they were currently provided. This background information was seen as essential to developing an understanding of the context in which the research was undertaken and to offset any intuitive knowledge the researcher may have had regarding the educational institution as the researcher was a staff member of the educational institution during the research. Such information was used in framing the discussion topic areas to be used in the interviews.

### *5.2.1 Stage 1. Interviews*

The purpose of the informal semi-structured interviews in Stage One was to explore in greater depth questions about support service provision, and the providers' views about awareness, importance, need for and utilisation of services by international students. Interviews are an important source of data collection in the case study approach (Yin, 2003) and they 'provide opportunity for access to individual perceptions, meanings and contextual understanding of the current situation and as a result it then becomes a powerful way of understanding others' (Punch, 2005 p. 168).

Effective semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the participants to have a guided conversation in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere which, according to Krippendorff (2004), facilitates the flow of information. Ensuring the flow of information results in open communication (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) and provides the opportunity for exchange of important information and insights (Yin, 2003). Minichiello, Madison, Hays, Courtney and St John (1999) agree with this view, adding that interviews need to be informal in style, engaging and intellectual to enable the interviewee to provide relevant and meaningful information. This,

according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) and Silverman (2001), provides an authentic insight into what people think, which enables the researcher to compare their views to others. Both Fontana and Frey (1998) and Yin (2003) see the interviewer's role as critical to the success of the interview process and that the interviewer needs to establish trust and rapport whilst following the line of inquiry needed to ensure unbiased questions are asked in a conversational manner.

Participants for the informal semi-structured interviews were drawn from academic staff, administrative staff and students who were actively interfacing with international students and involved in different aspects of support service delivery. Both the academic and administrative staff selected for the interview were senior staff within Curtin University, had extensive experience in supporting and assisting international students in their areas of expertise and could, as a result, provide in-depth information. The students selected were currently enrolled, had been studying at the educational institution for more than two years and were involved in the provision of support services for international students. This was important to ensure that a representation of the context occurred rather than solely representation of the people which is essential to the qualitative research paradigm (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998). The interview sample of six people included representatives of all levels within the educational institution who interface with international students and are involved in the provision of support and support services.

Each participant was sent an explanatory email describing the research, advising that approval had been obtained from Curtin University to conduct the research, requesting they become involved in the interview stage, explaining what that would entail, providing them with an opportunity to ask questions and indicating that participation was voluntary. All six accepted the interview request and an individual meeting date and time convenient to them was organised. One and one half hours was allowed for each interview to ensure sufficient time was available and interviews were not rushed. Each of the interviews was conducted by the researcher in an environment chosen by the interviewee to assist them to feel comfortable and

relaxed. The face to face interviews took between sixty minutes to seventy five minutes.

Providing a non-threatening environment was critical to the free flow of information (Gaskell, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). The researcher spent considerable time with each interviewee explaining the research, what the interview information would be used for in the research process and clarifying specifically how the data from the interview would be used. Each interview was scribed by the researcher at the time of interview. This allowed those interviewees who were employed by the university to feel comfortable and relaxed, facilitating the free flow of information about their experience of support service provision and use by international students. Silverman (2001) describes this approach as emotionalism related to the desire by the interviewer to discover the subject behind the person being interviewed. In this context respondents who emphasised specific points or highlighted significant experiences were able to have those noted and confirmed at the time. The researcher was also able to pause and allow the respondents extra time if needed or to probe in greater depth information provided or points requiring clarification.

In the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer followed a guide that outlined the main topics to be covered. Divergence from these was encouraged when it enabled the interviewee to provide additional information and expand on concepts, specific points or experiences relevant to the research. Six open-ended questions were used to guide participants in discussions about their experiences and perceptions of different aspects of support service provision. Open-ended questions, according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2008), identify the area to be explored by the questions without suggesting how this should be done. This provides opportunity for open dialogue. A final additional question invited interviewees to provide any further comments. The broad topics used for the interview process are identified in Appendix 3. Interview techniques of funnelling and probing were used. Funnelling is a technique used at the beginning of an interview to open up the interview and establish a broad thinking

context for the interviewee. Probing enables the interviewer to pursue more information about specific comments relevant to the research. Both funnelling and probing are important techniques in facilitating the collection of information. Minichiello et al. (1999) suggests that when they are used in an interview, these techniques can assist disclosure of information by interviewees.

Discussion topics sought views and opinions based on the participants' observations and experiences regarding the most frequently utilised services, factors they viewed as impacting on usage and barriers to greater utilisation they thought existed. Participants were also asked if there were services not provided which they thought were needed, how much the environment and setting of the services impacted utilisation, any concerns or issues they felt existed currently in the provision of services and if there were other issues which they felt impacted support service awareness and utilisation. At the end of the interview participants were thanked for their involvement and assistance and asked if they required any further information. They were also provided with the interviewer's contact details if they had further questions they wished to ask.

Information obtained from the interviews provided valuable data and explanations of why services had developed in their current format. An analytical process based on that outlined by Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) was used to analyse the interviews. Analysis of the content of the communication, according to Bryman (2008), enables this to be quantified into 'predetermined categories using a systematic and replicable approach' (p. 274). Initially, responses to each interview topic were replicated verbatim into an Excel document. The interview topics formed the column headings of the document and the interviewee identification number formed the rows. Interviewee responses to each topic were collated under the relevant column heading. An additional column at the end was added for notes and any initial interpretations identified at the interview or during the transcribing. Structuring the data in this way enables the researcher to gain an overall view of the entire data set so a preliminary understanding of the information could be obtained (Gaskell, 2000). It also enabled



any patterns or connections to emerge clearly in the analysis of the data. Responses were then coded under the key theme areas which had been identified from the review of the literature and relevant documents from the contextual background review. Providing an organised administrative framework to the management of the data, according to Krippendorff (2004), is critical to ensuring the completeness of the data.

The core feature of interview analysis, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), is the coding process. Coding is the grouping of evidence and the labelling of comments into key categories and then themes. Coding involves, according to Bauer (2000) and Clarke (1999) the examination of each word, line and paragraph so as to embrace respondents' meaning. Obvious Words and Phrases were counted and the underlying meaning of sentences and phrases were used together in the analysis of the data. Four key themes were identified from the analysis. Further analysis identified sub-themes within the initial four themes which assisted in refining the data further. Information obtained from the analysis formed the basis for the next sequence of the research, the development of the focus group topics.

### ***5.2.2 Stage 2. Focus Groups***

In stage two of the study, focus groups were used to collect information from international students. Focus groups collect information through group interaction about a topic already determined by the researcher. Although focus groups have been used in social science research for some time, their use had been limited mostly to advertising and market research until recently when greater interest has been demonstrated in the use of group interviews particularly when they are linked with the use of other research methods (Morgan, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998). Their increased popularity according to Morgan (2001) and Barbour and Schostak (2008) relates not only to their ability to assist researchers to understand public opinion and the thoughts and experiences of specific groups within society, but also, according to Streubert Speziale and Carpenter (2003), the fact they are inexpensive, flexible,

elaborative and capable of producing rich data. Focus groups are suited to the collection of this type of data, according to Fontana and Frey (1994), because they have the advantage of obtaining a rich amount of information from a number of participants in a timely and inexpensive manner. Morgan (1988) believes the hallmark of why focus groups are useful as a qualitative research method is 'the explicit use of group interaction produces data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (p.12). Wilkinson (1998) supports this indicating focus groups provide an opportunity to determine participants' 'own meaning' (p. 331) of the situation or experience.

Focus groups were used at this stage of the study to gain an understanding of the students' perceptions, experiences, attitudes and beliefs about support services and support service delivery. Information from the focus group analysis was used to inform the development of the questionnaire. According to Morgan (1988), focus groups are useful for the development of questionnaires for three primary reasons. Firstly, they provide information about how respondents typically talk about the topic; secondly they provide the researcher with a clear picture of the participants' thinking in relation to the research topic; and thirdly they assist the researcher to be sure that no issues are overlooked in the questionnaire development. Participants for each focus group were sought from international students enrolled fulltime in one of the four academic disciplines who had been studying within the educational institution for more than one semester. Conducting a focus group specifically in each academic discipline ensured information was obtained from a broad range of academic and cultural contexts. Morgan (2001) suggests the single most compelling reason for using focus groups is their ability to 'bridge social and cultural differences' (p. 142). In the context of this study recognising and understanding cultural diversity was fundamental to the phenomena being studied and the development of the questionnaire content. Using students from the same population as the future survey respondents would also assist to ensure the validity of the survey instrument.

Accessing the students proved difficult as each academic discipline area had different mechanisms for managing international students and access to database information. This meant it was difficult to identify international students who met the criteria for inclusion in the research at a discipline level. Only one of the four academic discipline areas had a specific person with the designated responsibility to manage international students. An email, provided by the researcher, explaining the research and the aim of the focus group, was sent to either the designated person in the faculty or as many international students as possible who met the criteria in each discipline area. The email asked them to become involved by attending a discipline specific focus group on a specified day and time. Those students who were interested to attend were asked to email the researcher to confirm arrangements. They were advised the focus group would take approximately one and half hours, that involvement was voluntary and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

The recommended size for focus groups varies in the literature from anywhere between three and ten participants, according to Bryman (2008). Lupton (1997) advocates three and five participants while Murray (1997) and Wilkinson (1998) suggest six and eight and Morgan (1988) anywhere between six and ten participants. The most important issue, according to St John (1999) and Bryman (2008), is not the size of the group but rather what is appropriate for the research, in that small or large groups may be equally effective. On the one hand, too few participants may reduce the scope of the information able to be obtained while on the other, too many participants may reduce the opportunity for equal participation by all group members.

Streubert, Speziale and Carpenter (2003) suggest that there are three criteria which improve the reliability of focus groups; stability, equivalence and internal consistency. Stability refers to consistency of issues over a period of time, while equivalence describes the consistency of moderators or coders, and internal consistency the importance of having one team member consistently involved in the whole process (p. 31). In this study each focus group was led by the one researcher,

each audio tape recording of the focus group was transcribed by the same person and each focus group was also scribed by the same administrative assistant. Coding of the transcribed tapes was also completed by the researcher, so that all these activities assisted with establishing the stability, equivalence and internal consistency of the information obtained from the focus groups.

In addition to this, the researcher facilitated an interview with a group of five representatives of the student guild, following completion of the four focus groups. The representatives included four student faculty representatives and the education vice president. These students were all involved with international students enrolled in their faculty. At this interview, the researcher raised each focus group topic with the student group and sought their views. The information obtained from this interview was consistent with that already collected from the student focus groups. No new information emerged from this interview enabling saturation of information to be established (Bryman, 2008) and verification of issues identified via the focus groups to be confirmed.

At the commencement of each focus group, students were provided with an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 4). Each member introduced themselves to others in the group allowing an opportunity for participants to get acquainted prior to the session commencing. Open-ended questions were used as guides and prompts to stimulate discussion (see Appendix 5). Questions for the focus group were derived from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and concentrated on participants' knowledge and experience of support services, whether they had used services or not and why, what their views were on the support services provided and what they thought were the benefits/disadvantages of using services provided. The voluntary nature of the focus groups, and the use of open-ended questions and a less structured approach, helped to provide maximum opportunity for discussion by the participants. At the completion of the focus groups, participants were thanked and provided with the email address of the researcher in case they had any concerns or wished to provide the researcher with additional information later.

Poland (2001) suggests there are a number of strategies which can be used to assure the quality of information obtained from a focus group. For this study new tapes were used and a specific room in a secluded quiet area was booked for each group. The assistant had three years experience with international students as a student advisor and administrative support person. Using a scribe with background knowledge of the student population enabled the researcher to have an additional check mechanism to the verbatim transcribed tapes and to ensure the full intent and meaning from conversations in the focus groups was not lost. It also provided opportunity to clarify any words or sentences which may have been potentially confusing given that English was a second language for all participants. In addition, the researcher made field notes at the beginning and completion of each focus group, in relation to key points, notable quotes, observations about the group plus the date, time taken and the number of students. Verbatim transcription is of critical importance, according to Poland (2001), and essential to the quality of transcription of information. The individual who transcribed the tapes was provided a copy of the questions asked in the focus group and had previous experience in the transcription of focus groups for social science research. Using a person with transcription experience ensures, according to Poland (2001), the interpretive decisions and quality of the transcription and enhances the stability of the transcribing.

There are a number of different strategies which can be used to analyse qualitative information. Content analysis is the most common strategy suggested in most texts as the basis for the analysis of qualitative data. In this research, the 1994 Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Punch, 2005) was used in the analysis of the data for the focus groups. The model comprises three components: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying solutions, which are interwoven and concurrent throughout the entire data analysis. The model, according to Huberman and Miles (1998), suggests that 'social phenomena exist not only in the mind, but in the objective world and as such lawful and reasonably stable relationships can be identified based on sequences which link these phenomena' (p.

182). Constructs can then be developed which account for both the individual and social context of the research phenomena.

In the model, data reduction occurs throughout the analysis and involves reducing the amount of data without losing the context. This occurs initially through editing, segmenting and summarising of the data, then through coding, the use of memos and the development of themes and finally through explaining and conceptualising of outcomes. Data display relates to the organisation, summary and display of data. The coded or themed information is reorganised and displayed such that ongoing analysis and development of themes and concepts occurs, which results in conclusions being drawn. Drawing and verifying of conclusions involves the reduction and display of the data into final propositions which present a meaningful picture, which then must be verified (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Punch, 2005).

In this study, the initial step in the analysis of the information was to read all the transcript data, the scribed focus group information and the field notes. Clarke (1999) believes the initial reading of the data is important as it sensitises the reader to relevant themes and ideas and as a result enables the researcher to better understand the participants' views and frame of reference. This enabled the researcher to gain an overall view of all the information gathered. Information from each of the four focus groups was then collated under each of the main topics discussed in each focus group. During the collation of information, the transcribed version and field notes were compared with the scribed version to confirm and clarify words and sentence meaning. This was important as it promoted the validity of the qualitative data. The initial themes identified from the semi-structured interviews were reviewed to confirm their continued relevance and appropriateness.

In the initial stage of the analysis, coding of all the collated data was undertaken. Coding is the first step in the analysis of qualitative data (Morgan, 2001; Punch, 2005; Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Responses were initially labelled according to whether they fitted into one of the four theme areas which had been

identified from the interviews. Any data remaining were labelled as 'other'. Each of the four themes was individually analysed in greater depth. Sub-theme categories were identified within each theme which provided greater depth of understanding of each theme and direction for the development of questions to be included in the questionnaire. During this stage of the analysis ideas were noted using memos. Memos, according to Clarke (1999) and Punch (2005), ensures ideas are not lost whether substantive, theoretical, methodological or personal, particularly if they relate to concepts or high levels of coding. Data collated under the label of 'other' was reviewed to determine if any additional themes could be identified which were relevant to the study and needed to be added to the focus group analysis for consideration in the development of the questionnaire. The themes and sub-themes which resulted from the content analysis were then used as the basis for the development of the questionnaire.

### *5.2.3 Stage 3. Survey*

The final stage of the research was the development and administration of an online questionnaire to the research population. Questionnaires are a common method when seeking individual views and perceptions of a large population of interest, in this case international students. Theme and sub-themes which emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data were used to identify key concepts that could be measured in the questionnaire. The themes identified and used to construct the questionnaire included awareness, utilisation, usefulness, accessibility, importance of service and barriers to usage.

The developed questionnaire consisted of a total of ten questions. The first was open-ended and asked students to indicate what they thought were the main issues facing international students studying in the educational institution. This set the scene for the research and enabled participants to express their views and thoughts without any prompting. Two questions followed which asked students to indicate their awareness about available services and to rate the usefulness of each of the 24 services offered

by the educational institution. For those services students indicated they had not used, a subset of questions asked them to identify why they had not used the service from a predetermined list. The option of 'other' was also provided so respondents could comment if the reason for non-use was not listed. Two questions sought information about firstly the source of students' knowledge of support services and secondly what five services they felt were the most important. Four open-ended questions followed this, where students could provide additional information about information provided prior to arrival, how support services could be improved and what their overall opinion of services was. The final set of questions asked closed-ended background demographic questions such as age, sex, enrolment and cultural background.

Piloting of the questionnaire was undertaken in two phases. Pre-testing of questionnaires is essential to the establishment of validity and reliability and critical to the response rate (Burns & Grove, 1999; Czaja & Blair, 1996; Jenkins, Price & Straker, 1998; Greenwood, 1999). Selecting a pilot study group with similar characteristics to the target population is essential according to Jenkins et al. (1998) and Bryman (2008) as it replicates as much as possible the potential feasibility of the study therefore increasing content reliability in the final questionnaire. In the first phase it was piloted in hard copy version with a convenience sample of 13 international students who were enrolled at the educational institution. This student group was asked to complete the questionnaire and feedback sheet. Feedback was sought on content, layout and language. In phase two, the questionnaire was developed as an online survey tool using a commercially available product, QuestionPro as the online web platform. The researcher was responsible for developing the online tool into a format which would be easy to use and appealing to the student population. Modifications were made to the hardcopy layout to accommodate the online format and feedback from the hard copy pilot.

A convenience sample of 10 international students was sent an email, asking each of them to be involved in the pilot of the online questionnaire. The email explained the



research and the online questionnaire including the feedback section at the end. Students were advised involvement was voluntary and confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed. All of the 10 students met the selection criteria required to be included in the research. Seven students, 70% response rate, completed the online survey and feedback section. Using small numbers of cases is considered adequate for pilot testing (Czaja & Blair, 1996). Feedback from the pilot group, who had completed the questionnaire online, suggested changes to layout, instructions and some areas of overlap and these were made. Having addressed the content validity of the questionnaire, a test-retest exercise was undertaken to explore the reliability of the survey instrument. Establishing consistency of measurement of concepts in the design of a survey instrument is essential and according to Punch (2003; 2005) and Bryman (2008) a key factor which determines reliability is stability or consistency over time. A test-retest exercise was conducted which involved administering the questionnaire to the same group of students at two different times, two weeks apart.

A group of 20 international students who met the selection criteria were invited to be involved in the test-retest of the survey instrument. These students were enrolled in a specific unit of study which required them to have completed at least one previous semester at the educational institution the same as the target population. Initially the researcher attended the class and explained the research to the students and invited them to be involved. Students were advised involvement was voluntary and that they were required to complete the same online questionnaire twice with a gap of about two weeks in between. Following the meeting an email was sent from the researcher to each student with the link to the online questionnaire for completion. Fifteen students completed the online questionnaire within the first week. Two weeks after the completion of the first questionnaire the researcher sent a second email, to those students who had completed the first questionnaire, so they could complete the questionnaire for the second time. Areas of non-agreement in responses between the first and second survey completion were counted when the 'degree of usefulness' (very useful, some use and not useful) differed between the first test response and the second. Based on this, an overall agreement level of 89% was achieved. This high

figure confirmed that the questionnaire was reliable and could therefore be used with confidence in the research.

The parameters set for the final survey population were that students should be enrolled and attending their course, studying internally on a full time basis, and that they should have completed at least one semester of study. Full time and internal enrolment are a visa requirement for international students studying in Australia. A minimum of one semester of study would ensure potential respondents would have had opportunity to experience life as an international student, gain an awareness of the issues, have had exposure to support services provided and possibly have needed and utilised the available services. Students enrolled in their first semester of study were not included in the survey given they would have been enrolled for only six weeks at the time of the survey, would have had limited exposure or reason to use the range of support services available and as a consequence would not have had time to form a view about the available support services.

Access to the students was managed through the planning department of the educational institution. Students who met the selection criteria were sent an email via their student email account asking them to become involved in the research. The email had two parts, the first was a covering statement from the educational institution advising students the research was voluntary and had been approved by the university. The second part contained information about the research, how to complete the questionnaire, the web link to the questionnaire, how to contact the researcher if they had any questions and how to be included in the incentive offered to those participants who completed the questionnaire. A copy of the final questionnaire is included as Appendix 6.

The total number of students enrolled in the second semester of 2008 who met the selection criteria was 3,105. All students who met the criteria for inclusion were provided with the opportunity to be involved in the research. This increased the likelihood of the respondents being representative of the population and that

information they provided about experiences would be representative of a range of international students enrolled in the educational institution. Because of restrictions imposed by Curtin University relating to potential over-surveying of students for research purposes, access was provided to the total population in two cohorts. In the initial cohort 1,778 students were randomly selected from the total population of 3,105 and surveyed in second semester 2008 as per Table 5.1. In the second cohort those remaining students, totalling 1,327, were sent the surveys in the first semester of 2009. Table 5.1 details the student numbers in each cohort by academic discipline. To assist with the response rate all students were advised in the covering email that if they completed the survey and voluntarily provided their contact details, they would be included in a three hundred dollar cash incentive to be drawn at the conclusion of the allocated response time. The majority of respondents provided their contact details.

**Table 5.1 Total international student numbers in each cohort by academic discipline**

| <b>Academic Discipline<br/>Area of Enrolment</b> | <b>Cohort 1</b> | <b>Cohort 2</b> | <b>Total Number of<br/>International<br/>Students</b> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Business   | 956             | 708             | 1664  |
| Humanities                                       | 209             | 148             | 357   |
| Health Sciences                                  | 262             | 172             | 434   |
| Engineering and Science                          | 351             | 299             | 650   |
| Total  | 1778            | 1327            | 3105  |

Data from the questionnaire were analysed using two different analytical packages. For the quantitative questions, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used and for the open-ended questions SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys (STAfS). SPSS analysis enables description statistics, including frequencies, to be presented for each variable. Using STAfS for the open-ended questions enabled theme categories to be identified and comments with similar meanings to be grouped under these categories. Responses in each of the categories were counted and linkage

patterns with other categories identified. Developing a matrix or linkage pattern allows the researcher to detect patterns of association and to express those associations in a way which describes the theme in more depth (Bazeley, 2009). As a result, key themes were identified from each of the open-ended questions, providing greater depth of understanding to the phenomena of support services provision, utilisation and importance from an international student perspective.

The researcher had multiple interactions with key personnel within the educational institution during the research. It was essential that this occurred as access to students is managed strictly within the university. Regular interaction with key staff ensured that each stage of the research process met the requirements as stipulated. Ensuring the sequential progression of the research enabled linkage between the two different methodologies to be established and a conceptual framework to emerge from the data. The conceptual framework is discussed in greater depth in section 5.4 of this chapter. This is critical to the validity and reliability of the single site case study strategy.

### **5.3 Ethical Issues**

Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants during each stage of the research was guaranteed and confirmed on the information sheets provided to participants in the focus groups and via covering emails sent to participants who agreed to complete each phase of the questionnaire development and deployment. Participation in the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and online questionnaire was voluntary and any of the participants could choose not to be involved in the semi-structured interviews or the online questionnaire or withdrawn from the focus group without concern for any repercussions. The online survey was sent to the students by the strategy and planning area of the university thus maintaining the anonymity of each student involved.

Data collection methods employed during the research included hand written reports of both the semi-structured interviews and focus groups and audio recording of the focus groups. Each audio recording of the focus group was transcribed verbatim. While labelling of comments occurred during analysis, the names of the interviewee or the focus group participants were not included. The audio tapes were cleaned on completion of the verbatim transcribing to ensure no individual could be identified. Verbatim transcripts will be retained electronically in archival storage for a period of five years. A completed returned questionnaire was taken to imply consent by the respondent. Returned questionnaires were managed through the use of the online survey management tool QuestionPro. All responses were loaded directly onto the computer base as responses were received and then transferred to SPSS for statistical analysis and STAfS for open-ended response analysis. The data contained in the computer database and the SPSS file will be maintained for five years. The original data from each stage of the research will not be released to any other parties and will be kept by the researcher in a locked secure environment at all times.

The output of statistical information from all data sources was reported in aggregated terms. All direct quotations or information included in the thesis are not identifiable to a specific individual. Storage of the collected data thus complies with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009).

#### **5.4 Conceptual Framework**

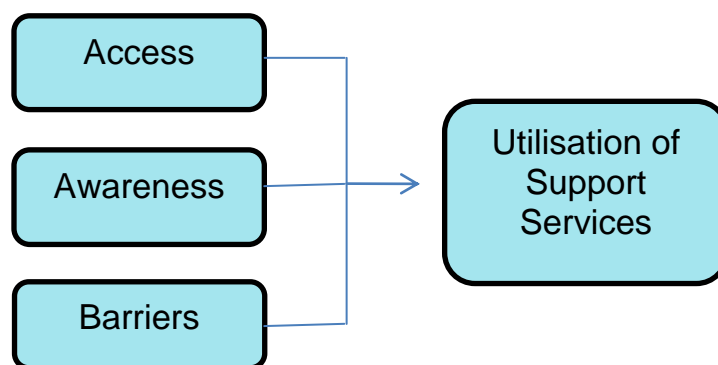
The sequential use of data/information from each stage of the research process provided the basis for the development of the study's conceptual framework. Concepts are defined as actual observations and experiences which according to Fawcett and Downs (1992) appear to relate. The relationship or linkage assists to facilitate understanding of what constitutes a phenomenon. This Fawcett and Downs (1992) is of the view allows us to categorise, interpret and structure the phenomenon.

Four key themes emerged from the data to describe support service delivery these being:

- Awareness of Support Services
- Utilisation of Support Services
- Access to Support Services
- Barriers to Support Services

These four themes link together to describe the constructs of the phenomena of support service delivery as evidenced in Figure 5.2. This framework is developed further in the data analysis framework illustrated in Figure 6.3.

**Fig 5.2 Conceptual framework**



### **5.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the research strategy, methodological approach, the sequential process and the conceptual framework which emerged from the data and which was used to describe the phenomenon. It sets out the overall plan for how the research was conducted and established the approach used for data analysis and reporting. The rationale for using the single site case study approach and subsequent triangulation of data is explained. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the complex social phenomena provided a fuller and richer understanding.

Discussion on each stage of the research process and the methodology employed is provided. The selection of the research sample and the approach adopted has been included in the discussion of each stage of the research. Participants included in the semi-structured interviews provided views on the provision of support services for international students within the university. In the focus groups in Stage Two and the questionnaire in Stage Three data were gathered from international students with knowledge and or experience of support service delivery in the university. A data analysis plan is discussed for each stage of the research. The analytical processes used for the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and open-ended questions, are discussed. Descriptive statistics applied to the quantitative data collected are outlined.

Ethical considerations related to the research are identified and discussed and the Human Research Ethics Committee of the educational institution approved the study. All participants are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity so as to ensure they felt free to provide open and honest responses at each stage. All data and information collected for the research will be maintained with the researcher in a locked secure environment for five years.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RESULTS

Chapter six presents the analysis of the data collected from each of the three stages of the research outlined in the previous chapter. Qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups are discussed and the themes that emerged from the analysis of each of these stages are described in sequential order. Links between the interviews and focus groups and themes and sub-themes led to the development of the online questionnaire. Analysis of the qualitative data for the interviews and the focus groups was undertaken using content analysis. In particular, the Huberman and Miles Interactive Model of content analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Punch, 2005) was used for the focus groups.

The purpose of the content analysis approach used in the first two stages of the study was to identify specific characteristics in the textual data collected and systematically convert these into themes that would ultimately describe the phenomena of support service delivery for international students. This analysis provided opportunity for a wide range of experiences, views and perceptions of staff and students to be highlighted and incorporated into the development of the research instrument to be used in the third stage of the research. With regard to stage three, the online questionnaire, descriptive statistical information and response frequencies were obtained through SPSS. Qualitative data gathered from the open-ended questionnaires added richness and depth to the quantitative data and was analysed using SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys.

#### **6.1 Interviews**

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and students involved in the provision of support services as per Table 5.1. Quantitative content or thematic analysis was used to manage the data collected from the interviews. A total of 174



individual statements were identified initially as relevant to the provision of support services for international students. Key words and phrases in the statements were reviewed and categorised according to whether they related to one of the topics derived from the initial background review and used to develop the interview questions. As a result 137 individual statements were categorised as relating to one of the topics. The topics identified from the initial background review were:

- Importance of service,
- Utilisation of service,
- Barriers to use,
- Context and setting of service delivery,
- Services needed but not provided.

The remaining 37 statements not categorised included comments by interviewees about services offered and administered by their specific areas. These comments provided general rather than specific information about operational aspects of specific services and therefore were not seen as relevant to the development of themes for the focus group questions. An example of this type of information is *'counselling and chaplaincy work closely together.'*

Categorised statements collated under each of the topic areas were analysed further and four dominant themes were identified which describe the overall focus of the statements. The themes are:

- Awareness of support services,
- Utilisation of support services,
- Access to support services,
- Barriers to support services.

Categorising of data under each theme allowed for the data to be reduced and the aggregation of themes to occur which, according to Bryman (2008), enables the

strength of the measure to be assessed. An example of this would be the categorising of comments which indicated access to or availability of relevant services when needed under the theme of *Access to Support Services*.

Quantitative content or thematic analysis was then used to analyse and code the statements in each of the four themes using specific and associated words. As a result sub-themes were identified for each of the dominant themes. For example under the main theme, *Access to Support Services*, two sub-themes ‘information available when needed’ and ‘location needs to be relevant to students’ were identified as a result of the coding process using key and associated words. Key words are those which have an association to the main word, are used across a number of responses and/or frequently within an individual statement (Bryman, 2008; Punch, 2005). This exhaustive process was applied to all aspects of the textual data collected in stage one of the study. Ensuring all aspects and dimensions of the textual data are analysed is fundamental to comprehensive data analysis (Lupton, 1997).

The themes and sub-themes identified were consistent with key words and phrases originating from the initial background review of literature and documents. The process used to analyse the data in each theme is described in more detail below.

### ***6.1.1 Awareness of Support Services***

A total of 19 categorised statements were identified as relevant to the theme *Awareness of Support Services*. Further analysis using key words to categorise statements, resulted in the identification of two sub-themes as displayed in Table 6.1. All six interviewees mentioned awareness of support services as a significant issue for international students. Although students were provided information about support services, particularly at orientation, interviewees indicated that from their experience many students found the amount of information overwhelming and not relevant to them at that time. Subsequently, according to the interviewees, students

often did not understand what specific services involved, when they should use a service, how to access the service or when it was appropriate to use a service.

**Table 6.1 Awareness of support services**

| Sub-theme                      | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements                         | Frequency (N=19) |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Poor Understanding of Services | awareness, understand, poor, clarity, information, ignorance, important | 11               |
| Not Sure How to Use Services   | interaction, peers/friends, availability, how to use, not available     | 8                |

According to the interviewees this impacted whether the service was used and ultimately whether the student sought assistance. Comments below by three of the interviewees illustrate the theme:

*Information overload occurs at orientation so students don't take in all the information or become aware of what is available.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*Too much information is available widely dispersed but not understood.*

*(Interviewee 3)*

*Orientation may have no impact at that time.*

*(Interviewee 2)*

### **6.1.2 Utilisation of Support Services**

A second theme to be identified was *Utilisation of Support Services*. The total number of statements categorised under this theme was 29. Two sub-themes were identified and are displayed in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2 Utilisation of support services**

| Sub-theme                       | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements                                  | Frequency (N= 29) |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Poor Perception of Services     | culture, stigma, visibility, costs, poor, perception, terminology, negative, use | 16                |
| Fragmented Delivery of Services | fragmented, disjointed, non investment, not helpful                              | 13                |

All interviewees commented on issues to do with utilisation of services. One such factor raised by interviewees was the different cultural context of Australia and differing values of Australian students as compared to international students and how this dominates campus life. Culturally for many students there is a negative perception of the need to use a support service (Abe et al., 1998; Bradley, 2000; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Mori, 2000; Wynaden et al., 2010) and this also, interviewees believed, was a significant determinant as to whether students used any of the services.

Interviewees indicated from their experiences that international students believed needing to use or using support services signalled a failure to manage and cope. This, some informants commented, was compounded by the negative way some services were promoted, which created a sense of expectation within students that they were not coping or would not cope. Advertising terminology, for example, is often focused around the language of problems and the need for assistance. In addition, both staff and students interviewed indicated they felt services also did not work in an integrated way, reducing their effectiveness. As a result services were not as helpful to students as they could be because information was disjointed and fragmented in how and when it is delivered and this impacted on utilisation. Comments below by two interviewees provide insight into the theme:

*The network between support services is very fragmented.*

*(Interviewee 3)*

*Certain cultural groups are uncomfortable dealing with how services are delivered so this is very difficult and they don't use the service.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*The terminology used for some services like 'Counselling' is seen negatively. The students believe the university provides the service because it perceives them as not coping or failing.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

### **6.1.3 Access to Support Services**

Accessibility of services when they were needed was identified as problematic for many students, with 28 categorised statements relating to the theme of *Access to Support Services*. Two sub-themes were identified as key issues and are listed below in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3 Access to support services**

| Sub-theme                                 | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements           | Frequency (N= 28) |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Information Available When Needed         | information, time, timeliness, access, accessible, needed | 18                |
| Location Needs to be Relevant to Students | relevant, visible, environment, location                  | 10                |

Informants reported that information and services needed to be accessible at critical times of need for students. Timeliness of information provision and availability of services when needed was seen as critical. Interviewees indicated information was often provided at times when it was not needed, particularly at orientation, and then forgotten. Comments indicated that students needed to better understand how to access services when needed and that the location of services and availability was important in determining whether they were used. More information about services

needed to be accessible in student areas such as schools and faculties, at times that suited students. Two comments below illustrate the theme:

*Environment impacts the service. Services need to be visual and inviting. Service providers need to move out of offices into the student environment at faculty or school level.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*It is critical to have an environment that provides access to services at times which suit students.*

*(Interviewee 3)*

#### **6.1.4 Barriers to Use**

A total of 61 statements were categorised under the theme *Barriers to Use*. Four sub-themes were identified and are displayed below in Table 6.4. It was considered by all those interviewed that campus life should be the ‘hub’ of student life and this was particularly so for international students who look to the campus for a sense of community.

**Table 6.4 Barriers to use**

| Sub-theme                                  | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements                                 | Frequency (N = 61) |
|--|---|--------------------|
| Campus Life is Limited                     | limited, not developed, campus/uni life, interaction, environment               | 15                 |
| Integration into Student Life is Difficult | integration, culture, safety, stress, isolation, skills, critical               | 15                 |
| The Campus is Not Student Centred          | language, not conducive to use, student centred, support, services, integration | 17                 |
| Issues with Staff Student Culture          | culture, staff, attitude, support, assist, interaction                          | 14                 |

Informants believed the development of campus life was limited and this impacted on international students and their use of available support services. Comments below illustrate this sub-theme:

*Campus life should be the hub of university and student life. University life is not developed. It looks ok but doesn't achieve its objectives.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*Campus life is limited. The environment is not conducive to different cultures and values.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*Campus life is dead at sunset.*

*(Interviewee 3)*

Integration into student life is difficult, according to interviewees, and is seen as significant issue for international students. This view is supported by the research literature (Burns, 1991; Deumert et al., 2005a; Ong, 2006; Wang, 2004). Issues such as limited social skills and cultural stigma were raised by informants, as were racial discrimination, diverse cultural values and understanding how to manage their personal privacy and safety. Interviewees indicated that many international students lack social and language skills, which isolated them and impacted on their level of understanding of the available services. This is seen by the respondents as particularly relevant in terms of managing personal safety and is supported by Deumert et al. (2005a). Interviewees felt many students did not understand personal safety and how to be responsible within the different cultural context of Australia. Supporting comments by interviewees are listed below.

*If language problems exist this means there is an increased reluctance to seek assistance so the problem escalates.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*They have no intervention skills evident or process within themselves to identify when they need help and ensure that they seek help so it can be sorted out.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*There is a stigma attached to accessing services for some cultures. South East Asian culture has a big issue with pride while the Chinese don't understand services at all, are hesitant and don't ask questions.*

*(Interviewee 3)*

*International students lack awareness of security and safety issues.*

*(Interviewee 5)*

The majority of interviewees believed that the provision of services within the educational institution is not student centred. Comments included reference to a lack of facilities, the need for services to be available at times accessible for students and the desirability of having services embedded more effectively within schools and faculties. A greater commitment by schools and faculties was seen as important in improving the connection and integration of service delivery. Language used in advertising and promotional materials and formal documentation relating to enrolment was not seen as student focused and therefore it was often difficult for students to understand. This specifically related to the enrolment process and how services are currently provided. Overall, the informants' view was that the educational institution provided resources but these were not delivered in an integrated way that related to student need. Comments below illustrate these issues:

*School and faculty support is critical but the university has not embedded this within the culture of schools and faculties.*

*(Interviewee 1)*



*The University is not student centred. It has not made the connection. Connection is superficial, it appears to have in place relevant resources but not well connected with students.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*Fragmented, inconsistent level of support in different faculties.*

*(Interviewee 4)*

The final sub-theme *Issues with Staff Student Culture* relates to the development of the relationship between staff and students within the educational institution and the impact this relationship can have on student experiences and outcomes. All interviewees made reference to this relationship. Comments ranged from those related to the attitude of staff and support provided to the skill and knowledge level of staff and the impact these factors have in the classroom and ultimately the experience of international students. Comments below by three interviewees highlight the significance of this relationship and the need for this to be a positive experience:

*Academic support is critical, they need to make a friend with an academic.*

*(Interviewee 4)*

*All staff need to interact into the student world.*

*(Interviewee 1)*

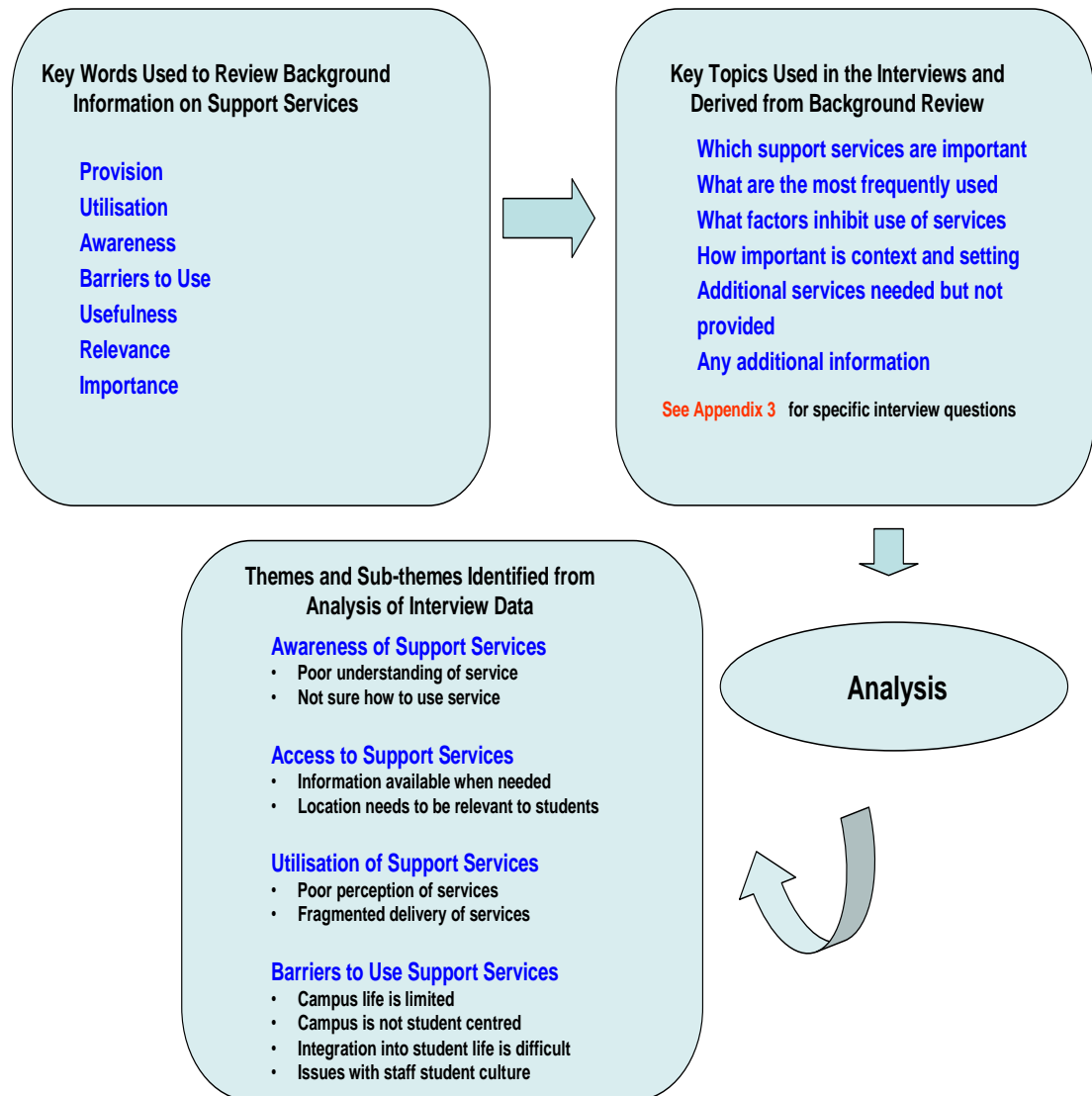
*Attitude of staff is critical.*

*(Interviewee 5)*

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews provided valuable insight into support service provision from the perspective of the providers within the educational

institution. The themes and sub-themes which were identified from the analysis of the interviews and discussed above are presented in diagrammatic form in Fig 6.1.

**Fig 6.1 Themes identified from the semi-structured interviews**



In stage two of the research the themes and sub-themes which had been identified were used to develop the discussion questions for the focus groups. Involving international students in the next stage of the research increased the value of the

information gained and facilitate development of the online survey for the third stage of the study.

## 6.2 Focus Groups

In stage two of the research a total of four focus groups, one in each academic faculty, were conducted with international students. Nineteen students participated in total, as illustrated in Table 6.5. Small numbers ensured that all participants were able to contribute to the discussions in each group. This was important given the cultural and language considerations of each interview group and the need for participants to feel comfortable to speak out.

**Table 6.5 Focus group participant characteristics**

| Faculty                 | Student Numbers | Male | Female | Under-graduate | Post-graduate |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------|--------|----------------|---------------|
| Humanities              | 5               | 2    | 3      | 5              | -             |
| Health Sciences         | 5               | 2    | 3      | 3              | 2             |
| Engineering and Science | 4               | 3    | 1      | 3              | 1             |
| Curtin Business School  | 5               | 3    | 2      | 4              | 1             |
| Total                   | 19              | 10   | 9      | 15             | 4             |

Using the Miles and Huberman analysis model, the transcribed data from the focus groups were categorised into individual statements which related to the provision of support services for international students. A total of 206 individual statements were categorised as relevant to the context of the study. The categorised statements were then coded according to the four major themes identified from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and illustrated in Fig 6.1. A total of 163 statements were coded as relating to one of the four identified themes. The remaining 43 statements were further analysed and coded to determine if another relevant theme, apart from the four identified, was evident from the data. No specific additional theme was

identified as relevant to the study. A further sub-theme however was identified as relevant to the theme *Utilisation of Support Services* and was added. The sub-theme focus related to the experience of students who had made comment on the usefulness of support services they has used. This was an important contextual addition to the theme as it added depth to the information collected and a different perspective from that of the providers. Identifying the different perspective and ensuring these were included in the development of the online survey was important to the overall understanding of the phenomena of support service delivery and utilisation by international students.

Thirteen statements were coded to the additional sub-theme ‘usefulness of support services’. This initial coding of all statements and the categorising of these statements into themes and sub-themes was an important component of the data reduction process in the analysis model. As a result of the addition of the sub-theme, a total of 176 statements were categorised at this stage of analysis as relevant to one of the four themes. The remaining 30 statements not categorised included comments by focus group participants about the operations and general management of services. The comments did not relate specifically to a view or opinion about support service delivery and as a result they were not included in analysis. An example of this type of comment is ‘*Do you know that there is a counter for DIMIA in the student service central...last semester they opened a counter in student central.*’

All coded statements in each of the four themes were then reviewed and allocated, if relevant, to one of the sub-themes. The coded statements in each sub-theme were then reviewed further to determine whether the focus of the sub-theme remained consistent with the focus that had emerged from the analysis of the interviews. As a result of the further detailed coding, changes were made to the focus of some sub-themes within each of the four themes to ensure the intent and meaning from the students’ perspective was captured appropriately. Using detailed coding, which is an important component of the Miles and Huberman model, enabled greater in-depth meaning and relevance to be attached to the data. Data analysed from detailed coding was used to

facilitate ongoing analysis and the drawing of conclusions (Punch, 2005). The continued analysis, in particular the sub-theme development, is described in the discussion of each theme which follows.

The theme discussions provided insight into how international students view support services and their experiences at the educational institution. Changes to some of the sub-themes ensured the student perspective was included, which in some instances differed from that of the service providers. Key words used for the coding of data are identified in the discussions of the themes to follow.

### ***6.2.1 Awareness of Support Services***

Of the 176 categorised statements 43 related to the theme *Awareness of Support Services*. The two sub-themes identified in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews related to poor understanding of support services offered and uncertainty about how to use them. The view of the respondents was that students were aware of services but had a poor understanding of how to use them. Many of the students in the focus groups, on the other hand, were not aware of services provided and this was significant in them not understanding or utilising them. Students identified what sources they had used to find out about specific services. As a result of the advanced coding, the sub-themes were modified to reflect the focus of the students' comments. The two sub-themes identified from the focus groups and the key words used for categorising statements are displayed in Table 6.6.

**Table 6.6 Awareness of support services**

| Sub-theme                        | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements            | Frequency (N=43) |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------|
| Understanding of Support Service | unaware, aware, not aware, services understand, understood | 23               |
| Knowledge of Support Services    | knowledge, did not know, find out, source, services        | 20               |

Of the 23 comments related to the sub-theme *Understanding of Support Services*, six students indicated they were unaware of any support services for international students while eight indicated they lacked awareness or understanding of specific services. When the respondents were provided a list from the researcher of available support services, 12 of the 23, including two of those who initially indicated they were unaware, acknowledged awareness of specific services currently offered. This suggests that more than fifty percent of respondents in the focus groups had limited awareness about the range of support services provided.

Twenty responses were coded to the sub-theme *Knowledge of Support Services*. Four students indicated they did not know about available services while the remaining participants indicated the ways they had found out about specific services. Table 6.7 is a combined list of identifying how and from whom international students source information about available support services. Information about services was found either through sources such as the website, student email, student diary and orientation pack or via individual people such as friends, colleagues and staff.

**Table 6.7 Source of knowledge of support services**

| <b>Information Sources</b>                  |
|---|
| Other Students / Colleagues                 |
| Sponsor Support Person International Office |
| International Office                        |
| Website                                     |
| Orientation Pack                            |
| Student Email                               |
| Lecturer/ Supervisor                        |
| Friends                                     |
| Student Services                            |
| Guild Diary                                 |

It was evident from the responses that international students had varying levels of awareness of services and that they utilised specific sources to assist them to find information about services. Determining the degree of awareness and information sources international students used to find out about services provided an understanding about the phenomena under investigation. Understanding this aspect of the phenomena confirmed that student knowledge, understanding and awareness of support and support services is essential to service provision. This theme, and the sub-themes which had been identified, were therefore included in the development of the online survey. Comments below illustrate this theme:

*Didn't know they were available so didn't use any services.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*Off campus assistance with housing. I didn't know how to connect electricity, find food, live in the community. If you live off campus there is nobody to assist you. I signed forms to rent a house I didn't understand I was so desperate to have somewhere to live.*

*(Focus Group 4)*

*I would say Curtin does have a lot of resources and support...but perhaps they are not fully or clearly understood...who or where should I go to...and I think that's a major concern because a lot of students come over with the misconception that you can learn easily.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

### **6.2.2 Utilisation of Support Services**

Of the 176 categorised statements 49 were coded to the theme *Utilisation of Support Services*. More detailed analysis of the data categorised into the two sub-themes resulted in changes to the focus of both sub-themes to take into account student responses. Service providers involved in the semi-structured interviews suggested

students viewed support services negatively. In contrast, students involved in the focus groups did not say that they viewed services in a negative way. Comments by students indicated that support services were important and valued even if they did not use them. As a result the sub-theme was changed from *Poor Perceptions of Support Services* to *Perceptions of Support Service* as displayed in Table 6.8.

For the second sub-theme, service providers had indicated that support service delivery was fragmented and this impacted utilisation of support services. Students in the focus groups were broader in their comments about the structure and delivery of support services detailing issues such as inconsistent advice, lack of clarity of how to use a service and poor management and delivery. Fifteen comments were made in relation to the structure and delivery of support services. As a result the sub-theme focus was changed to *Structure of Support Services*. The rationale for changing the sub-theme was to enable a more comprehensive understanding of the broader student concerns about support services to be included rather than the specific focus indicated from the interview stage of the research. The additional sub-theme *Usefulness of Support Services* was incorporated at this point and further coding and analysis undertaken. Table 6.8 below displays the modified and additional sub-themes and the key words used to categorise statements.

**Table 6.8 Utilisation of support services**

| Sub-theme                      | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements                                      | Frequency (N = 49) |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Perception of Support Services | used, support, available, assistance, assist   | 21                 |
| Structure of Support Services  | how to use, orientation, inconsistent information, poor, structure, links, not clear | 15                 |
| Usefulness of Support Services | useful, not helpful, helpful, didn't assist  | 13                 |



Overall, students believed that having support services available was important and assisted students to adapt. Six students commented on how they had used specific support services to assist them. Two students indicated that friends, who were sponsored students, had received better support from the educational provider than they had. A further two students commented that most students try and solve problems with their friends. Comments below by students illustrate this sub-theme:

*Support to assist adjustment and adaption is very important.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*On scholarship we receive so many supports that other international students who arrive didn't experience. They are exposed to huge campus...I think that we experience very different things. We are very supported more supported than other students.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

*Not many students use services. Most try and solve problems with friends or by themselves.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

In relation to the sub-theme *Structure of Support Services*, student comments included not knowing how to use services, inconsistent and poor clarity of information and that some services could be better managed. Students also stated that little feedback was sought about the services from the users and services were not offered on campus in a multi-cultural context. Five comments from students related specifically to the structure of Orientation Week, indicating that the organisation and schedule was not helpful for students, that information provided was vague, not understood and had little meaning at the time. Sessions within the Orientation Week schedule were seen as advertisements for services rather than providing information about when, where and how to use them. Comments below by students illustrate this sub-theme:

*Information overload at Orientation when doesn't have meaning and no need. Need to be able to get information when needed. O week was more telling about services not about helping you. A big advert that does not assist you with immediate need.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*Even if I go to Orientation I can't understand the accent very well. I am struggling with lots of things...a lot of information in English and I am already tired coming here. I am exhausted...got a lot of problems you know. A long way to come here...find a house you know all these things so I need to get this information gradually...not all in one way or one day you can't learn it.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*I was trying to find a house...international office found me a house but they left me there...and I didn't know how to ask for...how to buy a telephone...you know...the water...electricity...I didn't know that I had to call them. I didn't have any idea...and I felt lost...and having a child...no water...no electricity at the house. I called one staff in the school and she called everyone but I couldn't understand the person on the phone. It was really stressful...you need someone to help.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

Under the third theme, *Usefulness of Support Services*, the library was the only service specifically acknowledged by students as very helpful. Twelve comments indicated that specific services used were either not useful, not helpful or did not assist. More than 60% of students involved in the focus groups rated support services as very variable in terms of how useful they had been. Comments provided under this sub-theme are identified below:

*One of the most amazing supports to me is the library support it's so helpful.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

*Orientation package is not useful.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*The international office...from the first day...when I came here they were giving service to me for finding a house and this kind of things...really I didn't find them helpful...I didn't find them very helpful not only for myself...my husband...for my friend...she got referred to them...it happened for all of us that the documents that they were preparing for us...they had big big mistakes and we have troubles because of them and nobody was there to help us you know...nobody was there to solve the problem.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*It wasn't difficult to find services...they just didn't offer the help I needed so they weren't helpful.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*I didn't register for the Guild... benefit is not clear and quite expensive for me...I mean they only support members and fee is expensive.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

Analysis of the content of this theme confirmed the need for it and for the sub-themes to be included in the development of the survey. Student responses provided information to enable a more in-depth understanding of students' perceptions of support services, how services are structured and delivered and whether they are used and useful to students. Developing a deeper understanding of issues students face is critical to building an understanding of the phenomena of support service provision. Ensuring the sub-themes reflected the students' views was essential to ensuring the data used to develop the online survey was relevant. This was critical to the

development of the content validity of the research and the subsequent recommendation and associated implementation strategies.

### **6.2.3 Access to Support Services**

Access to services, and the availability of information about them when they were needed, was identified as important for students. Of the 176 categorised statements 35 related to the theme of *Access to Support Services*. Two sub-themes were identified from the categorised statements, the first being the same as that which had emerged from the semi-structured interviews and related to being able to find available information when it was needed. Sixteen comments were made which related to this sub-theme, *Information Available When Needed*. The second sub-theme related to being able to access services when they were needed. Service providers involved in the semi-structured interviews identified location of services as important to students and impacting whether they used a service or not. Students involved in the focus groups, however, identified access to services when needed as essential and that the location of the services was not the most significant issue. Other issues raised by students included being able to use the service at the time it was needed, finding information on how to access the services and availability. Nineteen comments were made in relation to accessing services. As a result the sub-theme was reviewed and changed to *Access to Services When Needed*, to reflect the broader views provided by students in the focus groups. Key words used to code the statements in each sub-theme are displayed in Table 6.9.

**Table 6.9 Access to support services**

| Sub-theme                         | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements | Frequency (N= 35) |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Access to Services when Needed    | access, find services, facilities, when needed  | 19                |
| Information Available when Needed | information, need, needed, visible, promoted    | 16                |

Sixteen respondents commented about difficulties experienced in relation to finding information about available services when they needed it. Four comments identified the need for greater promotion and visibility of services and four comments suggested this could be achieved if the services and staff were embedded within the faculties and schools and a more integrated approach was taken. Two comments were made about linkage to the community and the lack of information available to assist students to live in the community. Comments from focus group participants illustrating this sub-theme are identified below:

*Well especially for international students who have just arrived...I think to find services is quite hard when you have just arrived...and to manage to get your head around the information...the approach to information...there was no process to saying this is this.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

*Visibility like promotion of services is needed to give people the idea of what it is about, what they do and what kind of help they provide.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*So sometimes it may well be around how the services are presented and structured that is a bit of a deterrent for use...The university...it should not perhaps be so structured...there should perhaps be more human interface...I think if counselling is in every department or within every school then I think would help a lot.*

*(Focus Group 4)*

Student comments in the second sub-theme, *Access to Services When Needed*, provided information about student experiences when they had attempted to use services, the reasons students would not use services and services they considered as needed but not provided. Nineteen comments were categorised into this sub-theme, five of which indicated that students could not find the service when they needed it.

This was particularly the case for out of office hours and at weekends when the educational institution is closed and limited support is available. Six comments were made about the time and cost of services as the reason students did not use some services. Limited access to services at the time they were needed or the fact they were too expensive, meant students would not consider using them. Nine comments were made about services that were needed but students believed were not currently provided by the educational institution. These related broadly to employment, visas, security and mentorship. The comments below from focus group participants illustrate this sub-theme:

*I had a problem during holidays. I was locked in because the only way out of my office was in the lift and the lift wasn't working. I called the security...they were not answering. I was there for one hour and it wasn't good you know. I think these kinds of services during weekends and holidays especially are not good enough.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*Time and availability of services. Hard to be able use them when you need.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*Contact person needed for the first six months to assist to support and advice. It is not easy to find assistance and information about how to live in the community.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

This theme provided valuable information in understanding some of the difficulties students experience in accessing support services and reasons why ultimately they do not use a service. The analysis of the sub-themes provided confirmation of need for this theme to be reflected in the online survey development. It was evident from the data collected that providing opportunity, within the survey, for students to indicate any difficulties they had experienced in accessing services was necessary. The impact

of the concerns raised in relation to accessing services may also impact the usefulness and awareness of support services.

#### 6.2.4 Barriers to Use

In terms of categorised statements *Barriers to Use* was the most frequently raised theme on which the interviewees commented. Of the total 176 categorised statements 49 related to barriers which potentially impact on whether students used support services provided. When the categorised statements were allocated to sub-themes no statements relating to the sub-theme *Campus Life is Limited* were identified. As a result, this sub-theme was removed and three sub-themes retained. The three themes and the key words used to categorise the statements are displayed below in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10 Barriers to use**

| Sub Theme                                  | Key Words/Phrases Used to Categorise Statements                                | Frequency (N = 49) |
|--|--|--------------------|
| Integration into Student Life is Difficult | integration, culture, social, support, adapt, more                             | 11                 |
| Campus is not Student Centred              | difficult, language, assistance, student centred, expensive, cost, student     | 15                 |
| Issues with Staff Student Culture          | culture, staff, lecturers, awareness, aware, assist, assistance, refer, advice | 23                 |

Integration into student life was considered as important by those international students involved in the focus groups. Respondent comments predominantly revolved around the social context of university life and the assistance students need to adapt to the cultural context of the university and the outside community which is very different than their home country. Five comments related to the need for more assistance. Comments to illustrate this sub-theme are identified below:

*It's adaptation which is difficult. I mean down here in Australia...you've got to have confidence to stick up...you have to have the confidence to ask for help.*

*(Focus Group 4)*

*More assistance with how to communicate...how to adapt to Australian culture, religion, Australian food. I didn't know how to mix in the community, how to get a job and how to speak with people. What is polite and ok.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*Human and social aspect of university is very different culturally as is resources and support from what would be expected at home. Not sure how to use them.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

*More information about professional systems. I don't know the system. I don't know how they do that and whatever I say my supervisor says 'no...in Australia it is like this' so I go and think about it and then come back.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

Fifteen statements were made which relate to the sub-theme that the educational institution is not student centred and this, according to the respondents, was a barrier to their use of services. Five comments indicated that services were expensive, while three comments described the language as an issue and that information about services should be available in a multi-lingual format, particularly as the educational institution promotes itself as a multi-cultural campus. Comments below illustrate this sub-theme:

*Services are not offered in a student focused format.*

*(Focus Group 3)*



*This is a multi-lingual country but everything is in English. When you are stressed it would help if some things were available in other languages such as housing forms, policies, tax, driver license and information about services.*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*I think Curtin does not treat international students as well as they should treat them...international students contributes millions around the university each year...if it had only been for local students Curtin would not be able to provide services...and I think that's one of the things I've found as an international student...not badly treated but not been treated the way I should have been for the money I pay and for the acknowledgement of keeping this university almost alive.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

*Cost of Guild is expensive and you can't use it unless you are a member.*

*(Focus Group 2)*

The remaining sub-theme focused on *Issues with Staff/Student Culture* and was commented on 23 times by respondents. Ten comments were made which reflected the lack of staff awareness of support services available for students and as a result staff either provide no support, the wrong advice or did not refer students to those services or individuals that could assist when this was needed. Four comments related to lecturer inconsistency and the content structure of courses and units which focused on the Western Australia context and students who have English as a first language. Comments below illustrate this sub-theme:

*I think there are staff here in the Schools...they are not very aware of the services and systems...so they are not referring us to services or a person who would know..*

*(Focus Group 1)*

*On the whole lecturers seem to be unorganised...in terms of having time to see you...like in terms of treating students...in terms of speaking to the students...in terms of treating international students differently than from local students.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

*Here the course is very WA context...I mean if Curtin wants to be... global...it's crucial that I learn more for example about my own country.*

*(Focus Group 3)*

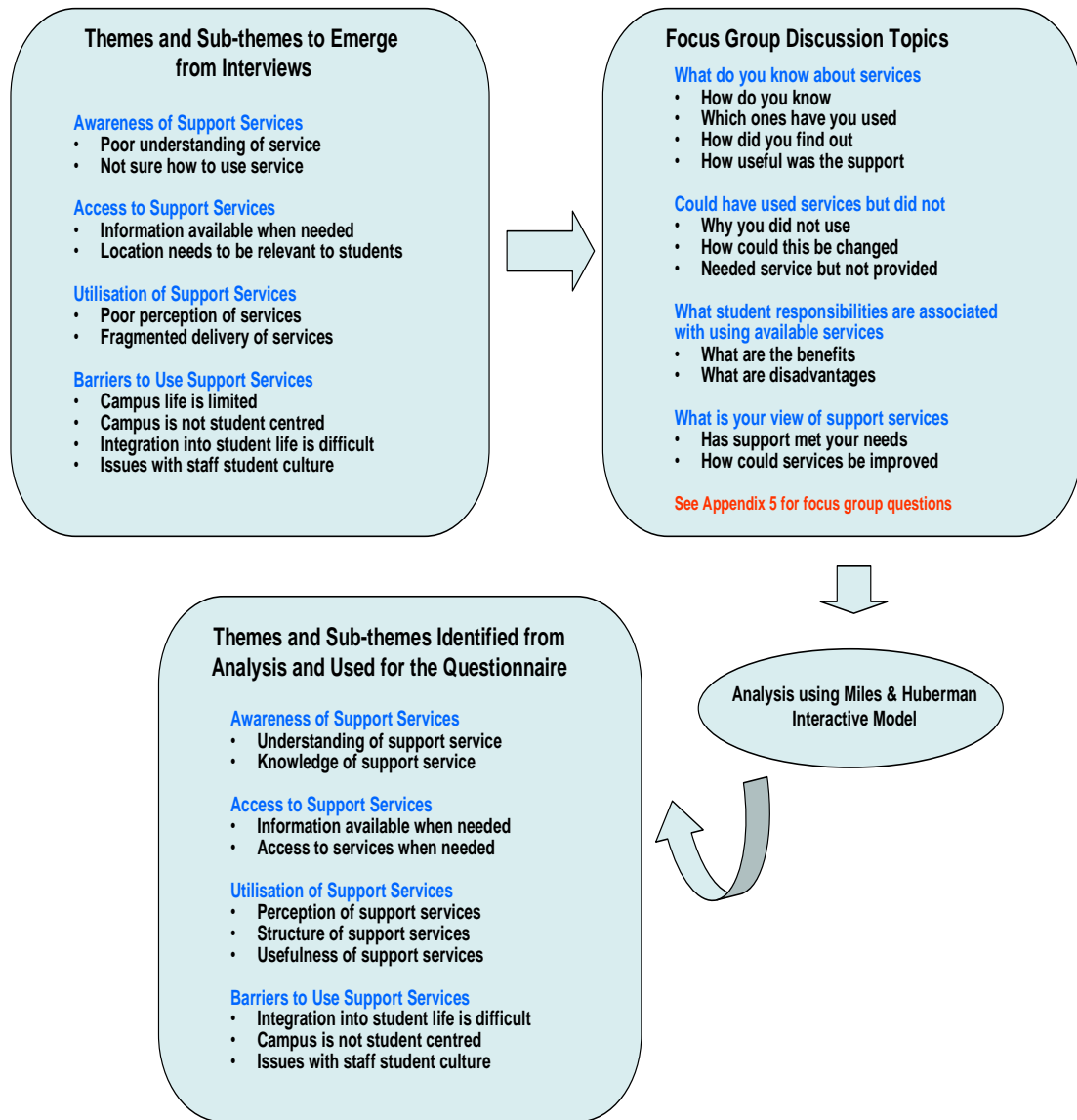
*Friends provide best advice as staff do not seem aware.*

*(Focus Group 4)*

This theme provided further insight into why international students have difficulty accessing and utilising support services and indicated that staff knowledge and awareness of support services are important factors which impact on students accessing the right service at the time needed. Focus group respondents identified issues of cultural adjustment, staff student culture and that the educational institution is not student centred, as impacting on their knowledge and use of support services. Particularly issues related to staff awareness and knowledge and non referral of students to support services. Providing opportunity for students to express their views about issues they believed impacted on international students' use of support services would be important in the development of the survey and critical to understanding the phenomena under investigation.

The themes and sub-themes which emerged from the analysis of the focus group information and discussed above formed the basis of the questions included in the development of the online survey tool used in stage three of the study. This development is summarised in diagrammatic form in Fig 6.2.

**Fig 6.2 Themes identified from focus groups**



### **6.3 Conceptual Changes in Perspective Between Interviews and Focus Group Themes.**

Although the four themes which had been identified from the semi-structured interviews remained relevant after the analysis of the focus group information, it was necessary to make changes to sub-themes. Differences between service providers' views of international students and their use of support services and

views of international students themselves meant sub-themes were changed to ensure the students' perspective was captured. Following the analysis of focus group data, an additional sub-theme was identified and the existing sub-themes were changed to ensure the student perspective was reflected. An illustrative example appears in the theme *Access to Support Services*. Following the initial coding of the focus group information into the existing sub-themes, it was evident that the sub-theme *Location Needs to be Relevant to Students* was one aspect of a broader issue raised by students in the focus groups which was *Access to Services When Needed*. As a result the sub-theme was changed to reflect the broader view. This allowed for identification of other issues, apart from location, and for these to be included in the sub-theme.

Ensuring the student perspective was captured from the focus groups and then included in the questions developed for the survey, ensured the questions were relevant and reflected issues which mattered to students. Understanding the conceptual differences between providers and users of support services was an essential component to understanding the phenomena of support service provision and use. It was evident from the data collected from the providers that their perception of international students' use of support services and reasons they may or may not use support services was not consistent with student views. The results from the deployment of the online questionnaire are presented in the next stage of the research.

#### **6.4 Survey**

The data were collected via an online questionnaire designed to measure international students' views of all 24 support services provided at the educational institution using the themes which emerged from the focus groups as identified in Fig 6.2. Information collected via the open-ended questions is discussed based on categories which were identified from the analysis of the data.

The research questionnaire was distributed, using the student online email system, to 3,105 international students who met the inclusion criteria previously described. Strategies were employed to minimise non-response and to encourage completion of the entire survey. These included a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, a user friendly survey layout in an online format, a follow-up email encouraging those students who had not completed the survey to do so and a financial incentive opportunity for those students who completed the entire survey. A total of 395 questionnaires were commenced and collected via the online web platform Question Pro. This represented a return rate of 13%. Following a review of the returned questionnaires, 62 were deleted, these related to those for whom the majority of questions had not been answered. The background demographic formation and comparisons with the target population are discussed in the following section.

#### ***6.4.1 Demographic Data and Representativeness***

##### *6.4.1.1 Response Rate and Representativeness*

Although 333 responses to the survey were used for analysis, approximately 77 (23%) did not complete all questions in the demographic section of the survey and therefore details in relation to demographic information has missing values. Table 6.11 displays the response rate details by Faculty.

**Table 6.11 Response rate and representativeness by faculty**

| <b>Faculty</b>        | <b>Nos (%) Respondents</b> | <b>Nos (%) Non-Respondents</b> | <b>Total Nos of Students</b> | <b>% Response Rate</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Business              | 101 (40)                   | 1563 (55)                      | 1664                         | 6.1                    |
| Health Sciences       | 53 (21)                    | 381 (13)                       | 434                          | 12.2                   |
| Humanities            | 36 (14)                    | 321 (11)                       | 357                          | 10.1                   |
| Science & Engineering | 65 (25)                    | 585 (21)                       | 650                          | 10.0                   |
| Total                 | 255 (100.0)                | 2850 (100.0)                   | 3105                         | 8.2                    |

There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution by Faculty of respondents (chi-square = 23.759 (3 d.f.),  $p = 0.000$ ). Although the greatest number of responses was received from students in the Business faculty, the response rate compared to the total number of surveys sent was low at 6.1%. The response rate from students in Health Sciences was the greatest 12.2%.

The majority of students who responded (78%) were in the age group 20-29 years, with the response rate increasing by increasing age group (see Table 6.12). The difference in response/ non-response by age group is statistically significant (chi-square = 16.815 (3d.f.).  $p = 0.000$ ).

**Table 6.12 Response rate and representativeness by age profile**

| Age           | Nos (%) Respondents | Nos (%) Non-Respondents | Total Nos of Students | % Response Rate |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| < 20 years    | 7 (3)               | 105 (4)                 | 112                   | 6.2             |
| 20 - 29 years | 201 (78)            | 2430 (85)               | 2631                  | 7.6             |
| 30 - 39 years | 36 (14)             | 250 (9)                 | 286                   | 12.6            |
| > 39 years    | 13 (5)              | 63 (2)                  | 76                    | 17.1            |
| <b>Total</b>  | 257 (100.0)         | 2848 (100.0)            | 3105                  | 8.3             |

Of the respondents who completed the demographic data, more than half, 140, were females (55%) compared to 115 males (45%), see Table 6.13, proportionately more females responded (9.8%) than males (6.9%) and the difference in response/non-response by gender is statistically significant (chi-square = 8.560 (1d.f.).  $p = 0.003$ ).

**Table 6.13 Response rate and representativeness by gender**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Nos (%) Respondents</b> | <b>Nos (%) Non-Respondents</b> | <b>Total Nos of Students</b> | <b>% Response Rate</b> |
|---------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Male          | 115 (45)                   | 1557 (55)                      | 1672                         | 6.9                    |
| Female        | 140 (55)                   | 1293 (45)                      | 1433                         | 9.8                    |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>255 (100.0)</b>         | <b>2850 (100.0)</b>            | <b>3105</b>                  | <b>8.2</b>             |

*6.4.1.2 Demographic Data*

Table 6.14 identifies the enrolment profile of respondents by level of course. Undergraduate students contributed the greatest number of respondents to the survey (71%) which is reflected in the high percentage who were in the age group 20-29 years.

**Table 6.14 Enrolment profile**

| <b>Enrolment</b>       | <b>Nos of Respondents</b> | <b>% Response</b> |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Undergraduate          | 181                       | 71                |
| Postgraduate           | 42                        | 17                |
| Higher Degree Research | 31                        | 12                |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>254</b>                | <b>100.0</b>      |

The majority of respondents to the survey (81%) were self-funding students who relied on private means for their tuition fees. The remainder (19%) were funded either through sponsor sources such as their home government, aid agencies or through scholarship systems (see Table 6.15).

**Table 6.15 Funding source for study**

| Funding Source             | Nos of Respondents | % Response |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Self funding               | 204                | 81         |
| Government in Home Country | 8                  | 7          |
| Sponsor Aid Agency         | 4                  | 2          |
| Scholarship                | 26                 | 10         |
| Total                      | 252                | 100.0      |

Most respondents to the survey had commenced their study after 2004 with the greatest number having started in 2007. The majority, 203 (89%), had more than one year of exposure and potential opportunity to use support services provided by the education institution. Table 6.16 provides the breakdown of the year studies commenced.

**Table 6.16 Year commenced study**

| Year Commenced Study | Nos of Respondents | % Response |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Prior 2005           | 8                  | 4          |
| 2005                 | 44                 | 19         |
| 2006                 | 57                 | 25         |
| 2007                 | 94                 | 41         |
| After 2007           | 25                 | 11         |
| Total                | 228                | 100.0      |

Respondents to the survey originated from 46 different countries with 51(15%) coming from Malaysia, 29 (9%) from Indonesia and 28 (8%) from Singapore. Overall, a substantial number of respondents were from the South East Asia region (see Table 6.17). Many respondents indicated that multiple languages were spoken in their home, with English being the most frequently spoken 85 (34%). A form of



Chinese was spoken as the dominant language in 59 (24%) of homes followed by Indonesian 27 (11%). Across the remaining respondents, as many as 29 different languages were spoken.

**Table 6.17 Country of birth**

| Country   | Nos of Respondents | % Response |
|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| Malaysia  | 51                 | 15         |
| Indonesia | 29                 | 9          |
| Singapore | 28                 | 8          |
| China     | 23                 | 7          |
| Mauritius | 16                 | 5          |
| Hong Kong | 11                 | 3          |
| India     | 11                 | 3          |
| Other     | 163                | 50         |
| Total     | 332                | 100.0      |

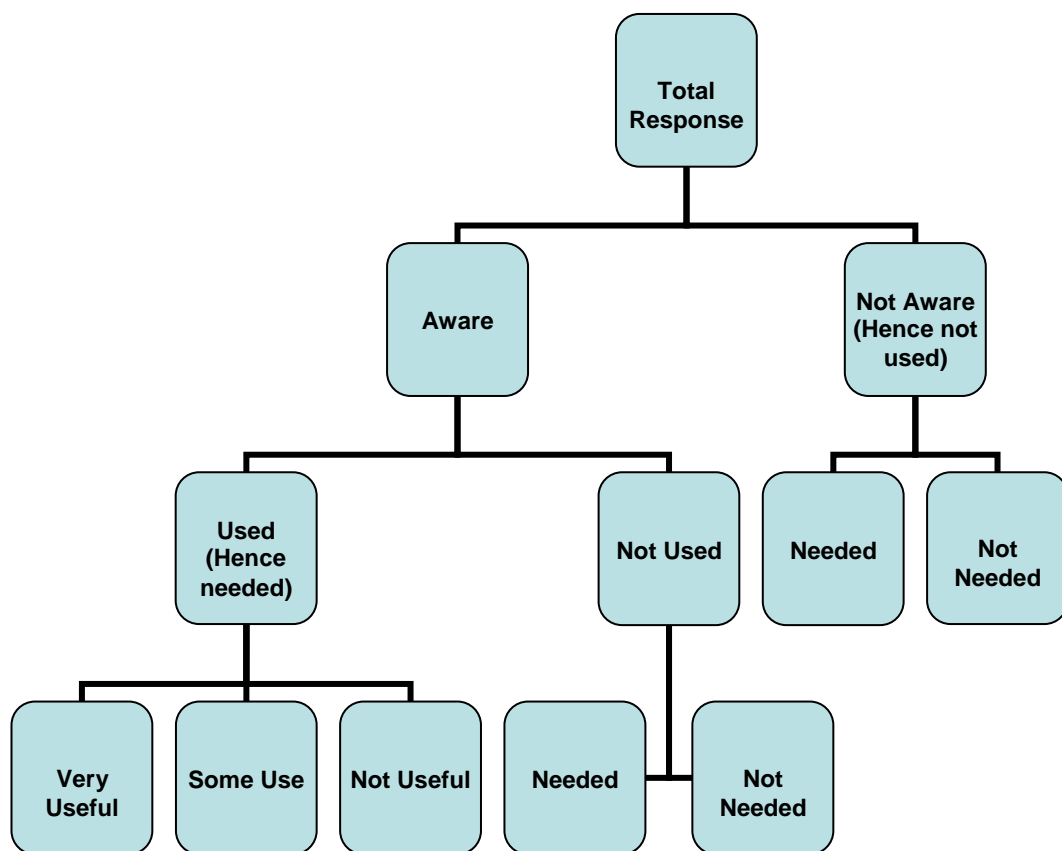
In summary, the largest number of respondents came from Curtin Business School although Health Sciences had the higher response rate. The majority of respondents were female, studying undergraduate courses, in the age group between 20-29 years and were self funding in terms of their education. The largest number of respondents came from South East Asia, in particular Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, and spoke predominantly English in their home.

#### **6.4.2 Theme Results**

The analysed survey data is reported initially under the four themes identified from the research question and the focus group analysis, as displayed in Fig 6.2. Figure 6.3 below illustrates the framework used to gather and analyse the data collected from a theme perspective. The breakdown of the questionnaire into themes was managed by

asking students to indicate their awareness of each service, whether they had used or not used services, the usefulness of the services if used and the reasons they had not used services. Additional questions, asked the respondents to rank the services they considered the most important and to identify how they found out about the services available. This provided important contextual information about each service and assisted to describe the phenomenon of support service delivery for international students.

**Fig 6.3 Framework used to analyse data collected from the survey**



#### 6.4.2.1 Awareness of Support Services

Student awareness of each of the 24 support services offered by the educational institution is identified in Table 6.18.

**Table 6.18 Awareness of support services**

| <b>Service</b>                        | <b>% Aware of Service</b> | <b>% Not Aware of Service</b> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Library                               | 100                       | -                             |
| International Office                  | 99                        | 1                             |
| Campus Security                       | 99                        | 1                             |
| Student Guild                         | 99                        | 1                             |
| Residential Assistance                | 99                        | 1                             |
| Bookshop                              | 98                        | 2                             |
| Careers Service                       | 97                        | 3                             |
| Health Service                        | 97                        | 3                             |
| Sporting and Fitness Facilities       | 97                        | 3                             |
| Counselling Service                   | 97                        | 3                             |
| English Language Support              | 93                        | 7                             |
| Sporting Clubs                        | 91                        | 9                             |
| Student Advisors Student Central      | 90                        | 10                            |
| Volunteers                            | 90                        | 10                            |
| Student Advisors International Office | 89                        | 11                            |
| Disability                            | 88                        | 12                            |
| The Learning Centre                   | 83                        | 17                            |
| International Student Societies       | 83                        | 17                            |
| Alumni                                | 73                        | 27                            |
| First Year Experience Coordinator     | 70                        | 30                            |
| Student Equity                        | 64                        | 36                            |
| Multi Faith Officer                   | 62                        | 38                            |
| Mentoring Support                     | 51                        | 49                            |
| Buddy System                          | 46                        | 54                            |

A high level of awareness of services is demonstrated by respondents for the majority of services. More than 90% of respondents were aware of the first 12

services listed. The services respondents were least aware (27% or more) of were Alumni, First Year Experience Coordinator, Student Equity, Multi Faith Officer, Mentoring Support and the Buddy System.

#### *6.4.2.2 Utilisation of Support Services*

In response to questions about utilisation of the support services, students were asked to identify, which services they had used or not used, as illustrated in Fig 6.3. If they had not used a service even though they were aware of it, they were asked to identify whether they had *'needed'* the service but not used it or whether they had *'not needed'* the service. Table 6.19 presents the results.

Responses identified four services with usage of over 80%: the Library (100%), Bookshop (98%), International Office (95%) and Campus Security (89%). Those services used the least, by less than 40% of respondents, were the Buddy System, Disability, Alumni and Multi Faith Officer. Those services particularly identified as needed but not used included the Buddy System, Sporting Clubs, Sporting and Fitness Facilities and Mentoring Support (25% or more in each case). This confirms that there were services that were not well used and services that were needed but not used.

**Table 6.19 Use and non-use of support services**

| Service                               | % Used Service | % Aware of Service But Not Used |            |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|------------|
|                                       |                | Needed                          | Not Needed |
| Library Service                       | 100            | -                               | -          |
| Bookshop                              | 98             |                                 | 2          |
| International Office                  | 95             | 1                               | 4          |
| Campus Security                       | 89             | 2                               | 9          |
| Student Advisors Student Central      | 79             | 6                               | 15         |
| Student Guild                         | 78             | 6                               | 16         |
| Careers Service                       | 78             | 10                              | 12         |
| Health Service                        | 77             | 7                               | 16         |
| Student Advisors International Office | 70             | 7                               | 23         |
| Residential Assistance                | 68             | 5                               | 27         |
| International Student Societies       | 66             | 16                              | 18         |
| Volunteers                            | 64             | 9                               | 27         |
| The Learning Centre                   | 62             | 16                              | 22         |
| First Year Experience Coordinator     | 58             | 19                              | 23         |
| Student Equity                        | 48             | 11                              | 41         |
| Sporting and Fitness Facilities       | 48             | 25                              | 27         |
| Mentoring Support                     | 42             | 25                              | 33         |
| Sporting Clubs                        | 41             | 25                              | 34         |
| Counselling Service                   | 40             | 15                              | 45         |
| English Language Support              | 40             | 14                              | 46         |
| Buddy System                          | 34             | 30                              | 36         |
| Disability                            | 30             | 2                               | 68         |
| Alumni                                | 29             | 21                              | 50         |
| Multi Faith Officer                   | 28             | 10                              | 62         |

The most used and useful service identified by respondents was the Library. Table 6.20 indicates the views of respondents about the usefulness of services used.

**Table 6.20 Usefulness of support services**

| Service                               | % Very Useful | % Some Use | % Not Useful | N = Total Number Used Service |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Library Services                      | 78            | 20         | 2            | 311                           |
| Bookshop                              | 41            | 53         | 6            | 293                           |
| International Office                  | 38            | 54         | 8            | 282                           |
| Campus Security                       | 33            | 46         | 21           | 255                           |
| Student Guild                         | 21            | 60         | 19           | 242                           |
| Health Service                        | 42            | 48         | 10           | 248                           |
| Careers Service                       | 25            | 59         | 16           | 220                           |
| Residential Assistance                | 40            | 45         | 15           | 220                           |
| Student Advisors Student Central      | 36            | 54         | 10           | 210                           |
| Student Advisors International Office | 34            | 52         | 14           | 187                           |
| International Student Societies       | 22            | 57         | 21           | 171                           |
| Volunteers                            | 29            | 52         | 19           | 166                           |
| The Learning Centre                   | 47            | 45         | 8            | 158                           |
| Sporting and Fitness Facilities       | 25            | 56         | 19           | 150                           |
| Counselling Service                   | 36            | 55         | 9            | 129                           |
| First Yr Experience Coordinator       | 26            | 56         | 18           | 122                           |
| English Language Support              | 45            | 43         | 12           | 112                           |
| Sporting Clubs                        | 15            | 57         | 36           | 108                           |
| Student Equity                        | 33            | 52         | 15           | 88                            |
| Disability                            | 48            | 39         | 13           | 75                            |
| Alumni                                | 22            | 47         | 31           | 64                            |
| Mentoring Support                     | 28            | 40         | 32           | 63                            |
| Multi Faith Officer                   | 33            | 43         | 24           | 49                            |
| Buddy System                          | 9             | 60         | 31           | 45                            |

The three most useful services after the Library (which had by far the highest usefulness rating) were the Disability Services, The Learning Centre and English Language Support, although none of these services had a higher than 48 percent rating as very useful. The least useful were the Sporting Clubs, Mentoring and Buddy Support and the Alumni.

#### 6.4.2.3 Importance of Support Services

When students were asked to identify the five most important services, the Library was most often mentioned (see Table 6.21) followed by Campus Security. These services were identified by students as amongst those most used by students in Table 6.19.

**Table 6.21 Support services rated as important**

| Service              | How often mentioned as most important<br>N (%)* | How often mentioned as amongst five most important<br>N (%)* |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Library              | 54 (16)   | 153 (46)   |
| Campus Security      | 42 (13)   | 103 (31)   |
| International Office | 24 (7)  | 93 (28)  |
| Health Service       | 22 (7)  | 101 (30)   |
| The Learning Centre  | 14 (4)  | 51 (15)  |

\* percentage of total respondents

#### 6.4.2.4 Access to Support Services

Table 6.22 provides information about the sources used the most often to find information about support services. The most frequent response (184 - 55%) was to ask friends. The website was the most important source of information provided by the educational institution.

**Table 6.22 Source of information about support services**

| Source of Information | Total Responses | % of Respondents<br>(N =332)* |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Friends               | 184             | 55                            |
| Curtin Website        | 163             | 49                            |
| Orientation Week      | 108             | 32                            |
| International Office  | 87              | 26                            |
| Orientation Pack      | 79              | 24                            |
| University Staff      | 67              | 20                            |
| Guild Diary           | 44              | 13                            |
| Other                 | 15              | 5                             |
| Total                 | 747             |                               |

\* missing values excluded

#### 6.4.2.5 Barriers to Use

Respondents who had indicated they were aware of a particular support service but had not used it were asked to identify any of the reasons they had not used services. The most dominant response was that the student ‘had not needed to use the service’. For those students who identified they needed a service, seven options were offered as possible explanations as to why they had not used a specific service. An option of ‘Other’ was also provided to enable students to list any additional reasons. Table 6.23 displays the reasons each service was not used. Other than ‘not needing to use the service’, the most common reasons were ‘did not know how to access the service’ and ‘couldn’t find any information about the service when I needed it’. Comments provided by students under the section ‘Other’ provided a range of additional reasons for the services not being used. The most frequently suggested reasons were time associated with using services and the cost.



**Table 6.23 Reasons support services not used**

| <b>Key Reasons*</b>               | <b>1*</b>   | <b>2*</b>  | <b>3*</b> | <b>4*</b> | <b>5*</b> | <b>6*</b>  | <b>7*</b> | <b>8*</b>  | <b>9*</b>  |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| <b>Service</b>                    |             |            |           |           |           |            |           |            |            |
| Counselling Service               | 143         | 17         | 6         | 2         | 4         | 4          | -         | 11         | 44         |
| Disability                        | 173         | 2          | -         | -         | 1         | -          | -         | 2          | 5          |
| English Language Support          | 132         | 15         | 6         | 1         | 8         | 5          | -         | 6          | 41         |
| Sporting Clubs                    | 99          | 23         | 9         | 1         | 5         | 10         | 1         | 23         | 72         |
| Sporting and Fitness Facilities   | 84          | 22         | 6         | 1         | 10        | 6          | 10        | 23         | 78         |
| Alumni                            | 108         | 31         | -         | 1         | 2         | 4          | 2         | 4          | 44         |
| Multi Faith Officer               | 110         | 12         | -         | -         | 3         | 2          | -         | 2          | 19         |
| Residential Assistance            | 87          | 4          | -         | 1         | 3         | 2          | -         | 4          | 14         |
| The Learning Centre               | 58          | 20         | 8         | -         | -         | 8          | -         | 3          | 39         |
| Student Equity                    | 76          | 16         | -         | -         | -         | 2          | -         | 1          | 19         |
| Volunteers                        | 71          | 8          | -         | 7         | -         | 2          | 1         | 4          | 22         |
| International Student Societies   | 47          | 21         | 2         | -         | 4         | 4          | 1         | 11         | 43         |
| First Year Experience Coordinator | 48          | 16         | 7         | 1         | 2         | 5          | -         | 10         | 41         |
| Buddy System                      | 48          | 29         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 4          | 2         | 2          | 41         |
| Mentoring Support                 | 49          | 26         | 2         | -         | 2         | 3          | 1         | 2          | 36         |
| Student Advisors IO               | 61          | 12         | -         | -         | 2         | 3          | -         | 1          | 18         |
| Health Service                    | 50          | 7          | 2         | 2         | 1         | 4          | -         | 6          | 22         |
| Student Guild                     | 49          | 3          | 3         | -         | 2         | 3          | 1         | 7          | 19         |
| Careers Service                   | 34          | 14         | 3         | 1         | -         | 7          | 1         | 1          | 27         |
| Student Advisors SC               | 40          | 8          | 1         | 2         | 1         | 4          | -         | -          | 16         |
| Campus Security                   | 26          | 2          | -         | -         | 1         | -          | 2         | 1          | 6          |
| International Office              | 13          | 2          | -         | -         | -         | 1          | -         | -          | 3          |
| Bookshop                          | 5           | -          | -         | -         | 1         | -          | -         | -          | 1          |
| Library                           | 1           | -          | -         | -         | -         | -          | -         | -          | -          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>1612</b> | <b>264</b> | <b>56</b> | <b>21</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>158</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>124</b> | <b>670</b> |

**Key Reasons (1-9)\***

1. Have not needed to use service
2. Did not know how to access the service
3. Service was not offered at a time I could attend
4. Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
5. I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is offered
6. Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
7. Service is not conveniently located
8. Other
9. Total not used but needed (i.e. sum of reasons 2-8)

### ***6.4.3 Additional Theme Analysis***

Further detailed discussion of the results is presented using five broad headings which reflect the type of service provided. Services grouped under each of these headings are further analysed across the four main themes used in the development of the questionnaire and the previous presentation of the results in this chapter. Information is sequentially discussed as per Fig 6.3 commencing with awareness of services, followed by use and usefulness then access and barriers to use. This enabled a deeper contextual understanding for each service grouping to be identified which included the students' views on the importance and need for each service. The five headings used are:

- Learning Support Services
- Administrative Support Services
- Social Support Services
- Security and Wellbeing Support Services
- Academic Development Support Services

The qualitative information gathered from the open-ended questions is reported separately at the end of the discussion.

#### ***6.4.3.1 Learning Support Services***

Services grouped under this heading reflect those which can impact on student learning outcomes, and include English Language Support, The Learning Centre, Library, Bookshop and Student Equity. Awareness services in this grouping, with the exception of Student Equity (64%), was high, ranging from 83% to 100%. Use of the services, in particular the Library (100%) and the Bookshop (98%), was also very high as per Table 6.19. Although only 62% of students had used The Learning Centre, 16% of students suggested they needed to use the service but had not. The Learning Centre was also identified by students as the fifth most important service

and needed by more than 78% of international students who responded. Usage was low for English Language Support (40%) and Student Equity (48%) with a high portion of students (more than 40%) indicating they did not need to use the service.

The services provided by the Library were the most useful with 78% of students who used services rating them as 'very useful'. The remaining four services in this grouping all rated less than 50% as 'very useful' with Student Equity at 33%. Between 43% and 53% of students rated the four services, other than the Library, as of 'some use' as indicated in Table 6.20. When asked to identify the five most important services provided by the educational institution, respondents rated services provided by the Library as number one and The Learning Centre as number five. The main reason learning support services, other than the Library, were not used when they were needed related to 'not knowing how to access the service' as per Table 6.23. Overall student awareness of learning support services is high which may relate to students' perception of how important these are in achieving successful outcomes as an international student. Information about how to access English Language Support and Student Equity seem to have impacted their utilisation. The services provided by the Library were identified by students as the most important, most used and most useful at the educational institution.

#### *6.4.3.2 Administrative Support Services*

Services grouped under this heading were International Office, Residential Assistance and the Student Advisors in both Student Central and the International Office. These services provide administrative support and advice and student awareness of all five services was high ranging from 89 - 99%. Usage of all services was rated 70% or above, with the exception of Residential Assistance, which was 68%. The majority of students who were aware of the services used them if they needed, as illustrated in Table 6.19. However, these services were rated 40% or below in terms of 'very useful' with high numbers of respondents suggesting all five services were of 'some use', as shown in Table 6.20. In terms of importance of

services within this grouping, students ranked International Office as the third most important service on campus - see Table 6.21.

The International Office was identified as an important resource (Table 6.21), being used by students to find out information about available support services. The main reason all services in this grouping were not used when needed related to students 'not knowing how to access the service'. However, these numbers, as illustrated in Table 6.23, were small. Overall administrative support services are considered by international students to be an important part to their experience.

#### *6.4.3.3 Social Support Services*

Four services were allocated to this heading, these relating to those which provided opportunity for students to get involved in social aspects of student life in a different cultural context. As a result they do not directly impact on the course of study students are enrolled for. The four services included were Volunteers, International Student Societies, Sporting Clubs and Sporting and Fitness Facilities. Respondents reported a high awareness of these services ranging from 83-97%. Usage and usefulness of these services received low ratings overall. The service rated the most useful was Volunteers at 29% with the least useful the Sporting Clubs at 15% as illustrated in Table 6.20.

Sporting Clubs and the Sporting and Fitness Facilities were identified by 25% of respondents as needed but not used even though they were aware of these services. The reason students gave for not using the services was, 'not knowing how to access the service'. Sporting Clubs and Sporting and Fitness Facilities were the two services most cited by students as presenting barriers to their utilisation. Aside from those reasons identified in Table 6.23, the most frequent reasons cited by students for not using these services were the amount of time involved in using the services and the expense of the activities.

Social support services grouped under this heading whilst not directly impacting on student enrolment and course of study are still important to the majority of students who responded to the questionnaire. The use and usefulness of these services suggests that a review of how they are delivered is needed to improve their use and usefulness for international students. In particular, the barriers identified which include not knowing how to access the service, the cost and time commitment involved, require further discussion.

#### *6.4.3.4 Security and Wellbeing Support Services*

The five support services considered under this heading provided opportunity for support which impacted on the students' sense of security, health and wellbeing. Services include the Campus Security, Health Service, Counselling Service, Disability Support and the Multi Faith Officer. Awareness of four of these services was high, ranging between 88 – 99%. For the Multi Faith Officer however this was relatively low at 62%. Use of the services was variable. The most used and useful was the Health Service, with students ranking this as the fourth most important service provided on campus – see Table 6.21. Campus Security, although ranked as the second most important service, was however considered as 'not useful' by 21% of respondents. Only small numbers of students used the remaining three services, the majority indicating they were only of 'some use' – see Table 6.20. Counselling was the service most acknowledged by respondents as not being used. The overwhelming reason given was that it was not needed. For those that needed the service, but had not used it, the main reason was, 'not knowing how to access the service'.

Security and wellbeing is important to international students and awareness of relevant services, apart from the Multi Faith Officer, was high with Campus Security and the Health Service rating as the most important in relation to managing their security, health and well being. Although there is high awareness of Counselling, the use and usefulness of this service is relatively low. The most common reason given

was that they ‘had not needed to use the service’ or that they ‘did not know how to access the service when needed’. Both Disability Support and the Multi Faith Officer were not services needed or used by a large number of students, with users rating the usefulness of both services as low.

#### *6.4.3.5 Academic Development Support Services*

The remaining group of services include those which could potentially impact the academic development of students. Services included in this grouping are First Year Coordinator, Alumni, Careers Service, Student Guild, Buddy Support and Mentor Support. Awareness of both the Student Guild (99%) and Careers Service (97%) was high, with the Mentor System (51%) and the Buddy System (46%) relatively low – see Table 6.18. Use of the services was very variable ranging between 78% (Student Guild) and 29% (Alumni). Alumni was not seen as needed by 50% of students while the Buddy System (30%) and the Mentoring System (25%) were seen as needed but not used by students. The usefulness of services in this group was low, as illustrated in Table 6.20. The Buddy System was the least useful of all with 60% indicating it was of ‘some use’ and 31% indicating it was ‘not useful.’ The most frequent reason cited for not using this service, other than not needing it, was ‘not knowing how to access the service’. Naturally, the academic development of students is important in facilitating successful outcomes. However, services in this group are not well understood and as a result, usage is very low even though a need is often acknowledged.

#### *6.4.4 Responses to Open-ended Questions*

Seven open-ended questions pursuing in greater depth issues to do with support service delivery and utilisation by international students, were included in the questionnaire. Data obtained from these questions were analysed using SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys. The package analyses comments by identifying and counting common words. Words generated from the analysis are then used to develop

emergent categories to describe the phenomena. This section presents the results of the analysis of the data gathered from each of the questions.

Students were asked to *Briefly indicate what you think are the main issues faced by international students studying at Curtin* at the commencement of the questionnaire. Of the 333 students, 287 (86%) made comments. Table 6.24 lists the main issues raised in the student responses. Language and communication were the most frequently mentioned (24%) with many respondents suggesting that this was linked to other issues as illustrated in Fig 6.4.

**Table 6.24 Main issues faced by international students**

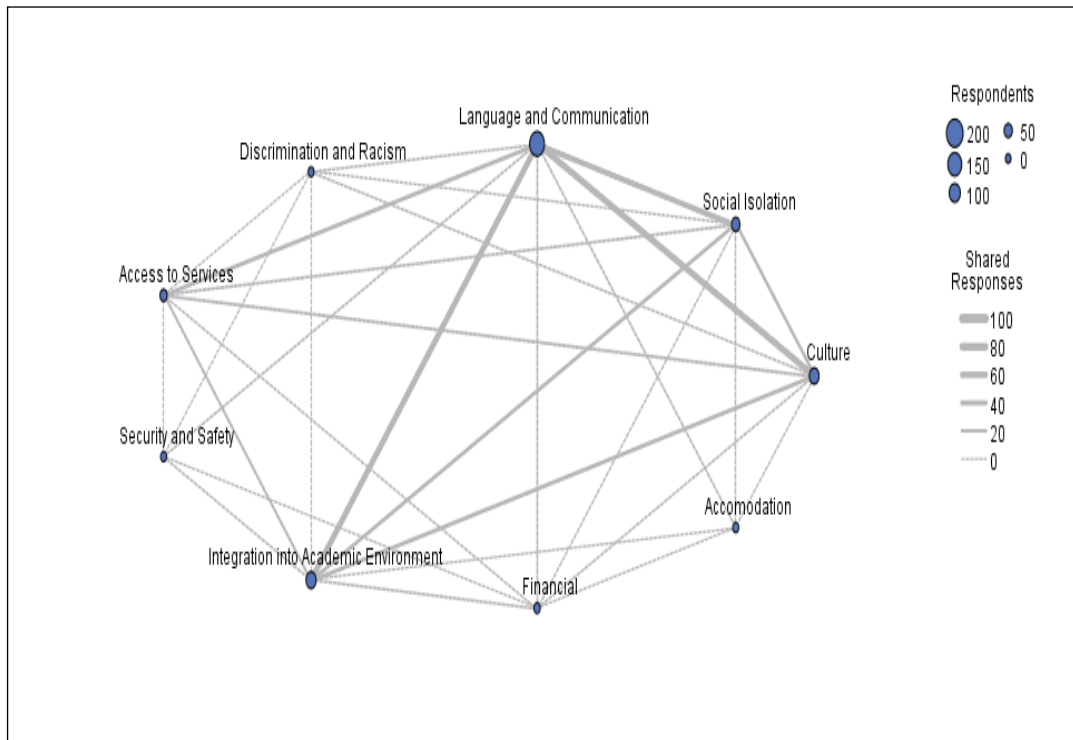
| Main Issues Faced by International Students | Nos of Responses | % Responses |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| Language and communication                  | 166              | 24          |
| Integration into academic environment       | 118              | 17          |
| Culture                                     | 109              | 16          |
| Social isolation                            | 80               | 12          |
| Financial                                   | 59               | 9           |
| Access to services                          | 54               | 8           |
| Security and safety                         | 35               | 5           |
| Accommodation                               | 32               | 5           |
| Discrimination and racism                   | 28               | 4           |
| Total                                       | 681              | 100         |

\*Multiple responses were made

The remaining issues identified were financial (9%), security and safety (5%), accommodation (5%) and racism and discrimination (4%). In this thesis these issues are categorised under the broader heading of security and wellbeing as described by Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) and previously discussed. Many identified multiple issues and Fig 6.4 illustrates the shared responses and links between categories. This suggests there are relatively strong links between issues related to 'language and communication' and 'integration into academic environment'.

Relatively strong links are also evident between the former and ‘culture’ as well as those issues which encompass the broader concept of security and wellbeing.

**Fig 6.4 Shared responses to main issues faced by international students**



The remaining six open-ended questions were located after respondents had commented on each of the 24 support services. The responses to these questions are discussed below.

The first of the six questions asked students *If support services were to be improved at Curtin what would you suggest?* Although 154 respondents made no comment and 7% indicated they were satisfied, the remaining 179 respondents (54%) suggested a number of strategies for improving the quality and delivery of the current services. Table 6.25 identifies the number of responses received to each category in this question. Improvement in safety and security was specifically identified by 15% of respondents and this was also identified as an issue by



international students in the first open-ended question. Better promotion (21%) and access to services (17%) was also identified by respondents as necessary to improve the services currently offered

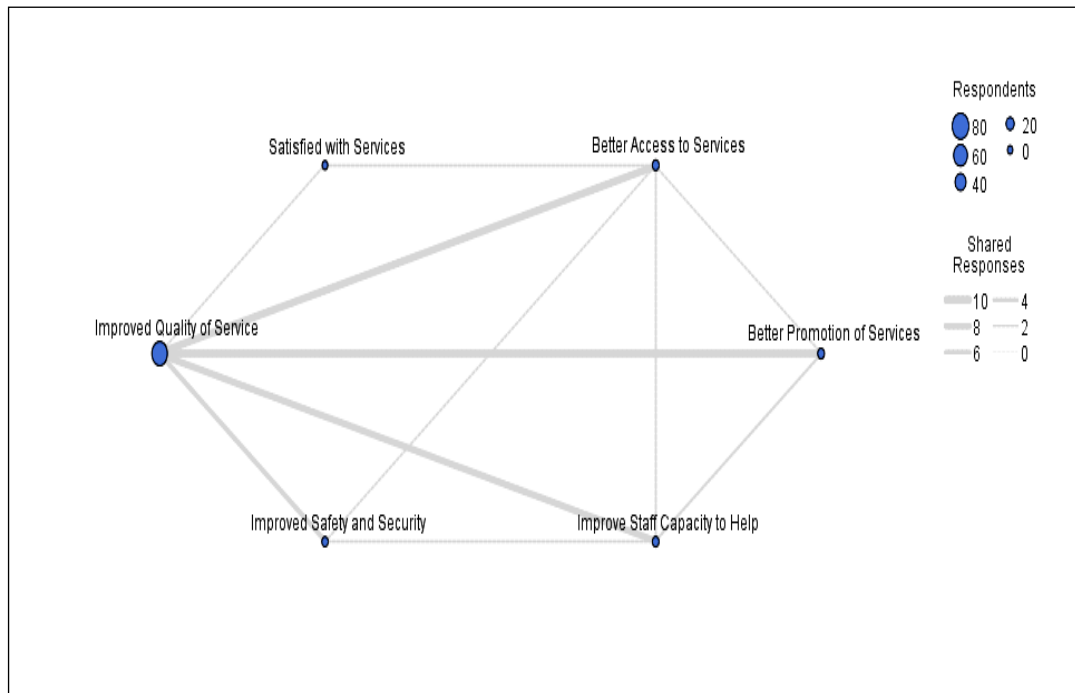
**Table 6.25 Suggested improvements to support services**

| Suggestions for Improvement    | Nos of Responses | % Responses |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Improve quality of services    | 71               | 30          |
| Better promotion of services   | 49               | 21          |
| Better access to services      | 40               | 17          |
| Improve safety and security    | 34               | 15          |
| Improve staff capacity to help | 23               | 10          |
| Satisfied                      | 16               | 7           |
| Total                          | 233              | 100         |

\*Multiple responses were made

Figure 6.5 illustrates the relatively strong relationship between ‘improved quality of services, and separately ‘better promotion of services’, ‘better access to services’ and improved staff capacity to help’. Other weaker relationships are also evident.

**Fig 6.5 Shared responses to suggested improvements to support services**



*Are there any services not currently available at Curtin but should be?*

Of the 333 respondents the majority, 191 (58%), made no comment, while a further 56 respondents indicated that they were not able to think of any additional services which were needed and not currently available. This equates to 74% of respondents who could not identify any additional support services that were needed and not already provided by the educational institution. The remaining comments, as listed in Table 6.26, indicate that improvements to current services are needed. This supports the information from the previous open-ended question in which respondents provided suggestions about how support services could be improved. It also implies that the breadth of services offered broadly meets their needs.

**Table 6.26 Support services not currently available**

| <b>Support Services Not Currently Available</b> | <b>Nos of Responses</b> | <b>% Responses</b> |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|
| None at the moment                              | 56                      | 36                 |
| Improve existing services                       | 39                      | 25                 |
| Improve language and writing support            | 9                       | 6                  |
| Improve information about services              | 9                       | 6                  |
| Assistance with living in community             | 8                       | 5                  |
| Better sporting opportunities                   | 8                       | 5                  |
| Better accommodation                            | 6                       | 4                  |
| Better food access                              | 6                       | 4                  |
| Financial assistance                            | 6                       | 4                  |
| Security  | 5                       | 3                  |
| Equity support                                  | 3                       | 1                  |
| Visa and migration                              | 2                       | 1                  |
| Total   | 157                     | 100                |

\* Multiple responses were made

The next question asked *Overall how would you describe the support services offered by Curtin?* Of those that responded, 57% were satisfied with the services, only 3% indicated they were not satisfied while 40% indicated that improvements were needed. Table 6.27 displays the responses. There were no true shared responses to this question. This information supports the findings of the previous questions, both of which identified the need for improvement in services rather than the need for additional services.

**Table 6.27 Views of support services currently offered**

| <b>How Would you Describe Support Services</b> | <b>Nos Responses</b> | <b>% Responses</b> |
|--|----------------------|--------------------|
| Satisfied with service                         | 122                  | 57                 |
| Satisfied but needs improvement                | 55                   | 26                 |
| Needs improvement                              | 29                   | 14                 |
| Not satisfied                                  | 6                    | 3                  |
| Total  | 212                  | 100                |

\* Multiple responses were made

The fifth open-ended question sought respondents' views about the adequacy of pre-arrival information by asking *In your view, in what way could Curtin improve the information you receive prior to arriving at Curtin?*

A number of strategies were suggested and are displayed in Table 6.28. They mainly revolve around improved quality of information (42%) and improved communication (7%). It was suggested that this could be achieved through an internet specific link on the home page of the Curtin website (31%) which provided information about the issues students raised in the first open-ended question and enabled students yet to enrol the opportunity to email questions and to better link with people prior to arrival. Other suggestions included the further development of orientation (8%) so that the benefits of this were clearly articulated to new students, perhaps via the internet link, prior to arrival and linkage with current students e.g. from their own country, who they could email. The main relationship linked improved quality of information with internet specific service and communication access.

**Table 6.28 Improvements to pre-arrival information**

| <b>Improvements to Pre Arrival Information</b> | <b>Nos of Responses</b> | <b>% Responses</b> |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Improve quality of information                 | 90                      | 42                 |
| Internet specific service                      | 65                      | 31                 |
| Further develop orientation                    | 17                      | 8                  |
| Satisfied with current information             | 15                      | 7                  |
| Communication access                           | 15                      | 7                  |
| Link to current students                       | 10                      | 5                  |
| Total  | 212                     | 100                |

\* Multiple responses were made

The final question asked respondents about the most effective way to inform students about services.

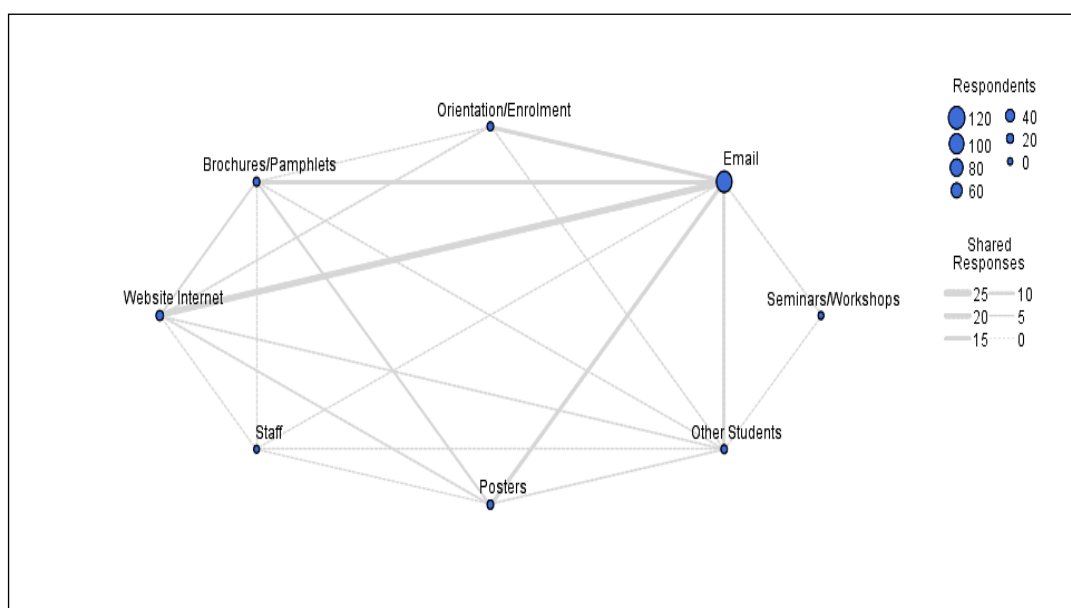
*In your opinion what would be the best way to inform students about the support services available at Curtin?* Although 38% of respondents made no comment in relation to this question, the remaining respondents provided a wide range of different communication strategies (Table 6.29). Fig 6.6 displays the shared responses. Both imply that the preferred communication method revolved around email (35%) and internet (18%). Although the remaining responses were all 11% or less, together they contributed 47% of the responses and this implies that although electronic media were the most frequently suggested modes of information dissemination, a wide range of methods are needed. Acknowledgement is also made that the survey used to collect the data in this research used email and therefore it is likely that this result is skewed to favour email as the best way of communicating.

**Table 6.29 Preferred communication strategies to inform students**

| Preferred Communication Strategies to Inform Students | Nos Responses | % Responses |
|---|---------------|-------------|
| Student Email   | 108           | 35          |
| Web internet  | 55            | 18          |
| Brochure/pamphlet                                     | 35            | 11          |
| Orientation/enrolment                                 | 32            | 10          |
| Posters   | 30            | 10          |
| Other students  | 27            | 9           |
| Staff   | 14            | 5           |
| Seminars/workshops                                    | 7             | 2           |
| Total   | 308           | 100         |

\* Multiple responses were made

**Fig 6.6 Shared responses to preferred communication strategies to inform students**



The final open-ended question asked respondents for additional comments about support services at the educational institution.

*Are there any other comments you would like to make about support services offered here at Curtin?* The majority of respondents (73%), made no additional comments in response to this question. Of those that did respond, 51% suggested that improvements were needed. The main areas commented as needing improvement involved better access to services, greater awareness of all services offered and improving the helpfulness of staff. Table 6.30 below summarises the responses. The comments are consistent with responses to the previous open-ended questions.

**Table 6.30 Additional comments about support services**

| <b>Other Comments About Support Services</b> | <b>Nos of Responses</b> | <b>% Responses</b> |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Improvement needed                           | 47                      | 51                 |
| Satisfied with services offered              | 32                      | 35                 |
| Satisfied but improvement needed             | 9                       | 10                 |
| Not satisfied                                | 4                       | 4                  |
| Total  | 92                      | 100                |

## **6.5 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the results from the data analyses have been presented in three stages demonstrating the sequential linkage of the findings. Stage one involved the analysis of qualitative data from semi-structured interviews which informed stage two of the study, the focus groups. Analysed data from the focus groups informed the final stage, namely the development and deployment of a questionnaire to international students enrolled in the educational institution.

Analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews revealed the views and opinions of key staff and students involved in the provision of support services to international students. Four main foci emerged in describing the phenomena of support service delivery: student awareness of and access to services, utilisation of available services and perceived barriers to their use. These four foci formed the

conceptualisation of the thesis which accommodated the findings of the study. Participants in the interviews suggested that student awareness of support services was limited and this related to a poor understanding of services and being unsure as to how to use them.

Student access to services was affected, according to the interviewees, because information about services was not easy to find when it was needed and services were not located in settings where students found them easy to interact with. As a result, the perception students had about available services was poor and the delivery fragmented. Interviewees indicated that the main barriers to the use of support services by international students were that the campus was not student centred, problems existed with staff-student culture and this resulted in limitations to campus life, as well as difficulty with integration into student life.

As indicated previously, the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the semi-structured interviews were used to develop the focus group questions used in stage two of the study. Four focus groups were conducted with international students who met the selection criteria. Analysis of the data confirmed the four themes as reflecting those which had emerged from the interviews. However differing sub-themes emerged, which provided important contextual information in understanding the phenomena of support services delivery and use by international students. As a result, changes were made to the focus of sub-themes in each major theme, to reflect the views and opinions of the students.

Participants involved in the focus groups indicated that they were not aware of many of the support services provided and they did not know how to find out about services, which impacted adversely on their usage. This differed from the views of those involved in the semi-structured interviews who were of the opinion students were aware of the services, knew how to find them but did not use them. As a result the sub-themes were changed to reflect these differing views. In terms of utilisation, it was evident from a student point of view that services were viewed positively, seen



as important and that their availability was valued. These views differed from those involved in the interviews. Other issues that arose in this theme related to difficulties associated with the structure, management, delivery and usefulness of the services that were available. These comments also differed from the interviewees' views and as a result both sub-themes were changed to ensure the student perspective was included. In relation to access, finding information about services and accessing them when they are needed, were the main concerns voiced by participants in the focus groups and this impacted on their use of many of the services. Promotion, visibility, information availability and access were critical from the focus group participants' perspective. The final theme sought to understand the barriers or reasons services were not used from a students' point of view. Issues which arose from the focus group information on barriers to the use of support services mainly revolved around the view that the campus is not student centred, staff and student have different expectations in terms of service delivery and students experienced difficulty integrating into student life.

As previously indicated, the themes and sub-themes which emerged from both the initial review of the research questions and the analysis from the focus groups, were incorporated into the questionnaire development to ensure the students' perspective was captured. Analysis of the data in stage three was structured and reported under: background demographics, quantitative analysis of each service currently provided using the key themes which had emerged from focus groups analysis and information from the analysis of the open-ended questions. The findings essentially relate to the first two key research objectives (see section 1.1) and contribute to an increased understanding of the phenomenon of support service delivery. Respondents to the questionnaire generally valued support services and indicated broad satisfaction with the range and variety currently provided. The main concerns for international students related to the quality of services currently delivered. Issues to do with awareness, provision of information and access were seen as impacting use of the services by students while the usefulness of the service determined their level of satisfaction and whether improvements were needed.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISCUSSION and RECOMMENDATION**

Chapter seven presents a discussion of the findings associated with each research objective. Where appropriate, reference is made to relevant literature and research to enrich the discussion and allow for the results to be placed in context. The discussion is followed by an overarching recommendation and identification of associated implementation strategies, which are brought together in a conceptual model which articulates the phenomenon of support services delivery from the perspective of the student. The final section of the chapter addresses the limitations of the study and its implications for further research.

The study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the challenges and issues international students contend with, what support services they know about, need, think are important, use and find useful and to identify barriers which exist and impact on students using services. It is important to gain insight into what services are needed, why international students do not use the support and support services available and to learn how these could be improved to encourage increased use. Previous research has acknowledged the challenges international students face when they choose to study in a different country and cultural context. Providing appropriate support services in a way which is supportive of their study experience has the potential to have a positive impact on their study outcomes and ultimate success.

This research has explored the phenomenon of support service provision for international students at one educational institution. The research approach obtained the views of both students and staff regarding the awareness of, importance, use and usefulness of services, together with and the key reasons for non-use of services. Previous research, discussed in the literature review, has examined specific aspects of the international student experience such as: adjustment; individual support

services, e.g. counselling; differences between undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts of students; comparisons with local students; students studying at a number of universities with differing models of service delivery and specific cultural groups and their adjustment concerns.

This research is innovative and contemporary in that little prior Australian research had investigated in-depth the full range of support service provision in one university using a ‘whole of service approach’; namely taking into consideration the culture of support service provision within the institution, the legislation underpinning the requirements of support service for international students, the views of those who provide support services and those who use the services. Identifying the culture of the organisation in which the services are provided has enabled a thorough examination of the potential impact the setting could have with regard to students’ experiences and perceptions of the services provided.

The three research objectives, as stated in chapter one, are to:

- identify what international students perceive as the main issues they face studying in an overseas educational institution and their relationship to the range and appropriateness of services provided;
- identify factors that enhance or inhibit the use of support services by international students;
- recommend strategies to improve the delivery of support services to international students.

The broad outcomes relevant to each of the research objectives are summarised and displayed in Figure 7.1. In the following sections, those issues identified as faced by international students at the educational institution in which the research was undertaken are outlined (see Table 6.24). This is followed by a discussion of the

range and appropriateness of support services provided and factors identified as enhancing or inhibiting their use by students. The final objective identifies one key recommendation to flow from the research and the strategies necessary for their implementation.

### **7.1 Research Objective One.**

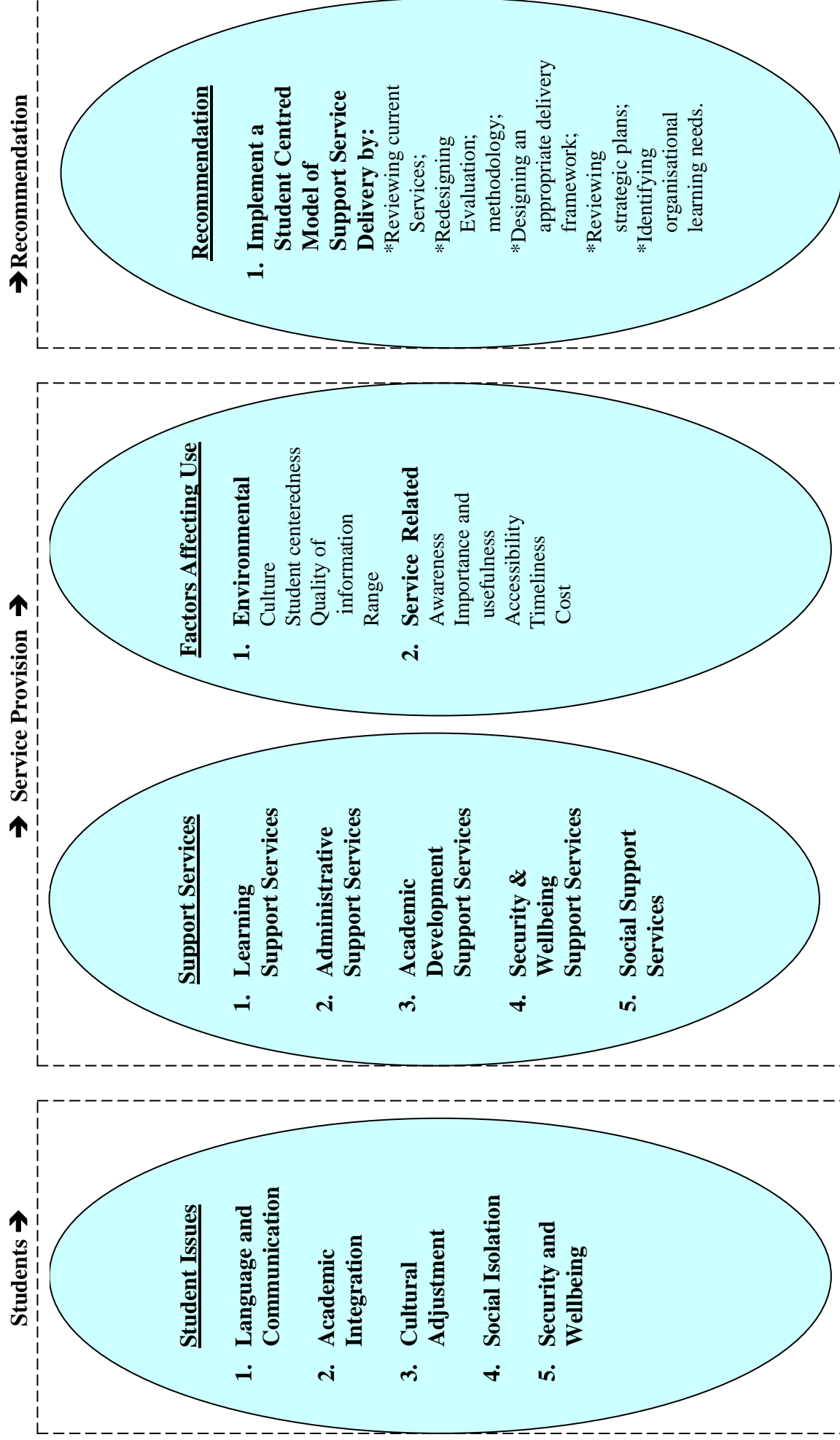
*Identify what international students perceive as the main issues they face studying in an overseas educational institution and their relationship to the range and appropriateness of services provided.*

There is a considerable body of research that has investigated the issues and challenges international students face when studying in a different country and culture. This research study identified the issues of specific concern for international students enrolled at one university. To understand the phenomena under investigation it was essential to explore what students had experienced and were continuing to experience, the context in which those experiences occurred and the individual student perceptions of that experience. From the analysis of the student responses five major issues were identified:

- Language and communication;
- Integration into academic life;
- Cultural adjustment;
- Social isolation;
- Security and wellbeing.

Strong links were identified between language and communication and integration into the academic environment. For both of these, cultural adjustment was also a contributing link. This indicates that the development of language and associated communication skills are of critical importance for international students, and correlates with other issues such as integration into the academic environment, social

**Fig 7.1 Research outcomes and recommendation**



and cultural adjustment, social isolation and an individual's sense of security and wellbeing. These findings are consistent with those of research described earlier (Brown, 2008a; Burns, 1991; Deumert et al., 2005a; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Rochecouste et al., 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir, 2005; Wang, 2004).

As a consequence of recent events connected with security and wellbeing of international students, researchers have focused particular attention on issues such as financial problems, health, welfare, employment, discrimination and racism, personal safety and security, and accommodation. Respondents in this research study raised particular concerns about issues they faced which related to their sense of security and feelings of wellbeing, with 23% of the comments in Table 6.24 being related to this theme. The following section describes the multiplicity of issues which students perceive they must contend with and manage (see Table 6.24) and how these relate to the range and appropriateness of services provided by the university.

### ***7.1.1 Language and Communication***

Language and communication skills were identified (see Table 6.24) as the greatest areas of concern for international students enrolled at the university, which is consistent with other research findings (Burns, 1991; Choi, 1997; Deumert et al., 2005a; Myburgh et al., 2002; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Rochecouste et al., 2010, Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir, 2005). The university has a range of services in place to support students requiring development of language and communication skills; the key ones, as previously discussed under the grouping 'learning support services', being the Library, Bookshop, Student Equity, Learning Centre and English Language Support.

Respondents indicated a high awareness of the services in this grouping with the exception of Student Equity. Services provided by the Library were identified as the most important, used and useful at the university. The use and usefulness of the

remaining services was rated considerably lower, with more than 50% of respondents indicating the services were either only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. The most common reason cited for not using services provided in this grouping was, 'not knowing how to access the service' when it was needed (Table 6.23). These results indicate that apart from the Library, services in this grouping, whilst important, are not offered in a way which best meets the needs of students. The findings from the study clearly illustrate that the model of service delivery implemented by the Library is the most student centred and therefore should be considered as the benchmark standard in any review of services.

### ***7.1.2 Integration into Academic Life***

Induction into academic life is closely linked with language skills and the ability to communicate in a meaningful way (Fig 6.4). Many services provided by the university are designed to support the process of student integration. In particular, the grouping 'academic development support services' is focused toward assisting students to develop an understanding of how to manage in an academic environment. This grouping consists of Student Guild, Buddy Support, Mentor Support, Alumni, Career Service and First Year Coordinator. The research literature supports the view that these types of services can be very successful in supporting students to integrate into the academic environment and access services when needed (Abe et al., 1998; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994).

Respondents identified high awareness of services in this grouping with the exception of the Buddy Support (46%) and Mentor Support (51%). Usage of the services provided by the Student Guild and Careers Service was high, but usage of each of the remaining services was relatively low. The usefulness of all services in this grouping was poor, with respondents rating 70% or more as only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. The most common reason cited for non-use of the services was 'not knowing how to access the service' when it was needed (Table 6.23). Given that students considered these services to be important for their induction into academic

life, the services need to be reviewed to ensure they are offered in a way which students will find useful.

### ***7.1.3 Cultural Adjustment***

Respondents confirmed the findings of previous research studies that cultural adjustment is an important issue and one which has the potential to affect successful study outcomes for international students (Burns, 1991; Myburgh et al., 2002; Deumert et al., 2005a; Wang, 2004). All services contribute in different ways to cultural adjustment. In particular, the grouping 'administrative support services' can facilitate greater awareness and understanding of the Australian cultural context for international students. Services in this grouping are the International Office, Residential Assistance, Student Advisors International Office and Student Advisors Student Central. Respondents indicated a high level of awareness of all these but usage was variable with more than 60% of respondents who had used them indicating that they either were only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. The services provided by the International Office were rated as the third most important on campus for international students even though they were not always seen as useful.

### ***7.1.4 Social Isolation***

Social isolation often results because students' cultural adjustment has been limited, language skills are not well developed and induction into the academic environment has not been successful. If language skills are strong and students feel confident about communicating, it is less likely they will feel isolated (Andrade, 2007; Bartram, 2007, 2008). All the services provided by the university can assist to reduce feeling of isolation for students. The grouping 'social support services' is particularly important in supporting the social context of campus life and can be instrumental in contributing to students meeting people, making friends and adjusting to the culture. The literature confirms that the provision of these types of services is successful in encouraging mixing, the services providing an avenue for integration and adjustment



to a new culture (Chapdelaine & Altextich, 2004; Choi, 1997; Myburgh et al., 2002; Wang, 2009).

Services considered within this grouping were the Volunteers, International Student Societies, Sport Clubs and Sporting and Fitness Facilities. While students indicated a high awareness of these services, usage was low. For those who had used them, more than 70% indicated they were either only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. For those respondents who had not used a service, 25% indicated they would like to have used one of these services, but had not. As Table 6.23 indicates, these services received the widest range of reasons for non-use. The reasons cited for non-use related to 'not knowing how to access the service', 'not feeling comfortable to use the service' and 'not being able to find information about the service when it was needed'. In addition respondents indicated via the 'Other' category that cost and the amount of time involved in using the service impacted on their decision to use the service or not.

#### ***7.1.5 Security and Wellbeing***

International students are increasingly concerned about their security and sense of wellbeing. Providing an environment in which students feel safe, and in which their personal rights are valued is essential to positive academic outcomes and satisfaction with their study experience. The research literature increasingly supports this view and has in more recent times broadened the concept of security and wellbeing to include more than physical issues (Deumert et al., 2005a; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Ong, 2006; Sawir, 2009). In this study, support services considered under this heading are Campus Security, Disability Services, Multi Faith Officer, Counselling and Health. Students had a high awareness of all services except the Multi Faith Officer. With the exception of Campus Security and the Health Service, use of the remaining services in this grouping was low and all services when used had a less than 50% rating as 'very useful'. The Counselling Service was identified as needed but rarely used (Table 6.23). The service provided by the Multi Faith Officer had very low usage and usefulness, and the need for the service was not evident from

student responses. This does raise a question as to whether such a service should continue to be provided by the university, and if it were to continue, in what form and context it would be most usefully provided.

Toward the end of the survey, in question 53, students were asked to identify if there were any support services not currently offered by the educational institution but which they would like to see provided. The services identified as needed were financial assistance and visa and migration services (see Table 6.26). These types of services are important aspects of student security and wellbeing and may already exist as part of other services offered. However, this was not clear to survey respondents.

In relation to discrimination and racism, 4% of respondents reported this as an issue within the educational institution (see Table 6.24). Comments were not related to a specific service, but the issue was raised as one which exists, albeit to only a limited extent, and from the student perspective needs management by the university, particularly as the university has indicated in its strategic vision and balanced scorecard targets a desire to sustain high enrolment numbers of international students. If students experience discrimination and/or racism within the learning environment then this adversely impacts their overall outcomes (Hanassab, 2006; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Lee, 2007). Comments made by respondents included issues involving staff (academic and administrative) and other students. Managing the cultural context of the educational institution's environment is an essential element in reducing student concerns about safety and security, discrimination, racism, integration, cultural adjustment and social isolation.

### **7.1.6 Summary**

Support services provided by the university appear to be of a sufficiently wide range of type and function to potentially address most of the issues students identified as having to face. Overall the respondent comments indicate that the existing services

provided by the university are sufficiently diverse in range to meet the majority of student needs based on the issues they indicated they face. Whilst respondents were of the opinion the range of services are for the most part sufficient, issues that they raised strongly support an urgent need to review the way in which services are organised and delivered.

The findings demonstrate an underutilisation of many services even though students are aware that they exist. This supports the need for a review, to determine whether there is a continued need for the service. In addition, a large percentage of students indicated that services when used were either only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. When asked about suggested improvements to services (Table 6.25), support services not currently available but needed (Table 6.26) and views of current support services (Table 6.27), the overwhelming number of comments related to the need to improve the services already offered so they are more appropriate and meet the needs of students. The main areas identified as needing improvement were promotion, access, quality of information and the ability of staff to provide assistance. These are discussed under research objective two.

## **7.2 Research Objective Two**

*Identify factors that enhance or inhibit the use of support services by international students.*

The perception of the service providers, in the interview stage of the research, was that international students were aware of services provided by the university and understood how to use the services, but did not, nevertheless, use many of them. Reasons identified by service providers for student non-use included poor understanding by students of how the service could help them, stigmatisation associated with using services, fragmented delivery of services, difficulty accessing services, location of the services, the view that the campus is not student centred and the lack of a culture of assistance with respect to international students.

Students in the focus groups, however, clearly indicated that, contrary to service providers' views, there were many services that they were unaware of and so did not use. Other reasons which students indicated inhibited utilisation included stigmatisation, a view that students who used services were not able to cope, poor quality of information about services and the current unclear structure of services. In addition, most students who had used services viewed them as unhelpful, so they did not use them again or recommend them to others. The culture of the university, including the relationship between staff and students, was not seen as centred on the needs of students. Services were provided but were often expensive and information supplied was believed to be inaccurate. Important documents were only available in English and this was not seen as supporting a diverse multicultural student population. Overall, in the international student context, the research findings highlighted the differing views and perceptions of the providers of services as compared to the users.

Although no specific reference was made in the first two stages of the research about the current range of services not being sufficient, there were comments about the underutilisation of services, the lack of awareness of services and the need for services to be broadened, better understood and further developed to provide improved access and usefulness. Issues such as the quality of information, access, usefulness and staff capacity to provide assistance, were identified as adversely impacting support service use. Those factors which influenced their decision to use services are identified in Figure 7.1 and discussed below under the headings of environment and service related.

## ***7.2.1 Environmental Factors Influencing Use of Support Services***

### *7.2.1.1 Culture*

Many comments were received from respondents about the culture of the university, the staff and how these related to the perceived level of assistance. Respondents indicated cultural adjustment, social isolation and to a lesser extent, discrimination

and racism as issues they faced as enrolled students (Table 6.24). The culture of the university is perceived by respondents as leading to issues which manifest themselves, in the students' view, as contributing to isolation, discrimination, intolerance and racism. If students experience or perceive these issues as being evident then they are more likely to also have concerns about their security and wellbeing as a whole, as also highlighted by respondents.

Other comments that contributed to respondents' views of the culture of the university and support service delivery related to a lack of staff knowledge about international student issues and service needs with respondents indicating that this adversely impacted their capacity to access relevant and accurate information when it was needed. Services are provided in a manner perceived by the staff as meeting student need but this view is not held by the respondents to the study. This view was supported in the open-ended responses, where students particularly identified the need to improve the capacity of staff to help, to improve the quality of the services as well as improving promotion and access to services (Table 6.25). This closely links with the student comments about the need to improve information about services (Table 6.26) and the quality of information provided (Table 6.28). This confirms the view that students believe staff, both administrative and academic, do not fully understand the issues they manage, and therefore do not provide services centred on student need. As a result consistent or helpful assistance, resulting in students viewing services they have used as either only of 'some use' or 'not useful' or deciding not to use the service.

Bartram (2009) and Smith (2007) argue that the current corporate managerial culture within higher education has adversely impacted the delivery of support services. Service provision has shifted from academic staff to either support staff who provide information to all students or to generic services which are not individualised to cater for specific student needs and circumstances. As a result, relationships between students and staff have moved from one of support to that of consumer and provider and this has produced counterproductive outcomes for students. Forbes-Mewett

(2008) agrees and further suggests that the move to more mainstream generic support and support service provision has resulted in students with special needs, such as international students, not receiving the support and services they need. Smith (2007), Kingston and Forland (2008) and Jacklin and Le Riche (2009) argue that culture is at the heart of providing support and support services and the corporate environment of higher education needs to be aligned more with the need to provide a culture that is centred on supporting the learning needs of students.

Respondents identified a need for the university to develop further the culture of support. This is particularly important given the increasing concerns raised by international students within Australia about racial intolerance, employment exploitation, episodes of violence and concerns about security and individual wellbeing. In addition, the university has through its strategic plan indicated an expressed wish to maintain international student enrolment numbers at current levels and to support a culturally diverse campus.

#### *7.2.1.2 Student Centredness*

The Library service is the most important, used and useful service on the university campus. While this is an essential service for all students and hence usage would be expected to be high, it is also rated as the most useful (98% 'very useful' or 'some use'). Respondents did not perceive any barriers to the use of this service (see Table 6.23) indicating that the strategies used to deliver services within the Library are delivered in a way which is student friendly.

For the remaining services, although respondents indicated a high level of awareness and use of the majority, they believed that the usefulness of many was limited (see Table 6.20). A number of factors were identified by respondents as barriers to use which indicated that services were typically not offered with a student centred focus. These included limited accessibility, poor quality of information and promotion of services, timing of and time taken to use services, and the cost (Table 6.23).

Providing support services which are accessible, useful and effective is an essential part of the study experience (Buultjen & Robinson, 2011), but is dependent on the culture of the educational environment, and attitudes of the people within the service environment to the delivery of support and support services (Hammer, 1992). According to Thomas (2002), priorities and issues about support service delivery are embedded in how people think and this ultimately impacts how they are designed and delivered. Respondents in this study indicated strongly a need to improve the current services so they better meet their needs.

### *7.2.1.3 Quality of Information*

Students indicated the reasons they did not use a service when they needed it related primarily to not being able to find information about the service (Table 6.23). Not being able to find information when it was needed implies that respondents, even though they were aware of the service, did not know how to use it or how it could assist them. Information quality is an essential aspect of support service provision (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011). Responses to open-ended questions confirmed that the quality of information currently available about a service was inhibiting the use of services. When asked what improvements could be made, respondents suggested better promotion of services (Table 6.25). When asked to identify services that were needed but not available, rather than identify any such services, most respondents instead raised the issue that current information about existing services should be improved (Table 6.26).

When asked the best way to inform students about services, email was identified as the most preferred option by respondents (see Table 6.29) and that better promotion of services was needed (Table 6.25). When asked how they found out information about support services, students indicated that their main source was friends, followed by the university website and orientation week (Table 6.22). If the quality of information obtained via friends or other sources is poor, then this results in students potentially not using a service even though it may have been of assistance.

Information quality was also raised as an issue by respondents when asked about pre arrival information (Table 6.28). It was indicated that this information would best be provided via a dedicated internet site, which could provide those who had accepted offers to study more information about support service delivery and purpose. Respondents indicated that obtaining this information prior to arrival would prepare them better. Ramsay et al. (2007) found that in the first year 70% of international students perceived they needed more information and that this had affected the degree of support received. The evidence suggests that students have a high awareness of the majority of support services but that the quality of information currently provided is one barrier which is impacting whether they understand how to use a service.

#### 7.2.1.4 Range

The university provides a wide range of services for all students. With the exception of three services, all are mainstream, in that they are available to all students enrolled at the university. The only services specifically for international students are those associated with the International Office, the Student Advisor in the International Office and International Student Societies. From the perspective of the university, both the 2002 and the 2008 AUQA audit reviews confirm that the university meets the requirements, as determined by the *ESOS Act 2000*, in relation to the range of services required to be available to international students. The university also meets guidelines outlined by Universities Australia, namely the *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Australian Universities* (AVCC, 2005a).

From a student perspective, respondents overall indicated the current range of support services provided by the university were for the most part appropriate and they valued having access to them. There was, however, evidence of underutilisation of services and perceived poor quality of service delivery. When students were asked in the open-ended questions about current services, comments centred on the need to



improve these (Table 6.25 and Table 6.30). A few comments about specific services not being available (see Table 6.26) were also documented. Although the university provides a wide range of services in accordance with legislated requirements, the effectiveness of many of these services is questionable. Respondents indicated an overwhelming desire for improvement in nearly all of the current services.

## ***7.2.2 Service Related Factors Influencing Use of Support Services***

### ***7.2.2.1 Awareness***

Even though students in the focus groups indicated they were not aware of many of the services offered by the university, respondents to the online survey identified a high awareness of the majority of services offered by the university (Table 6.18). This difference in perspective may have resulted from the fact that in completing the online survey every individual support service was identified and each student was asked specifically about their use of each service. In the focus groups students were asked what they knew about support services and then were provided a list of available support services to consider. This variation in information provision and support service identification between focus group participants and survey respondents may have contributed to the degree to which students indicated they were aware of available support services. Those services with high awareness also had had high rates of usage and were considered as the most important services on campus (Table 6.18, 6.19 and 6.21).

Those services with low rates of awareness also experienced low rates of use, less than 50% for the Buddy System, Mentor Support and Multi Faith Officer (Table 6.19). As one would expect, awareness of a service increases knowledge and understanding about the service and this increases the likelihood it will be used by students. While it is not expected that all students will use every service, it is essential that all students are aware of, and understand how to access all the services available, in case a need arises.

Mentoring Support and the Buddy System have been identified in the research literature as important in having the potential to contribute to successful academic outcomes. Students who utilise these types of support are more likely to manage course requirements than students who do not (Brown, 2008a, 2008b; Deumert et al., 2005a; 2005b; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Rochecouste et al., 2010). The low rates of awareness and use of these services (see Table 6.24), may have contributed to students also identifying language and communication, and academic integration, as the two most important issues they faced as international students (Abe et al., 1998; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994). Not knowing how to access the service was the most common reason cited for not using the service when it was needed (Table 6.23). The services offered by the Multi Faith Officer had low responses across all measures and 62% of respondents indicated they did not need the service.

#### *7.2.2.2 Importance and Usefulness*

When students were asked to identify the five most important services (Table 6.21), those selected also had high rates of awareness and usage, as would be expected. Library services were rated by students as the most important, used and useful services provided at the university (Table 6.20). Research indicates that services such as those provided by the Library assist students to develop language and communication skills and to manage their academic environment (Liu & Win, 2009; Sacker et al., 2008; Yi, 2007). Similarly, the Learning Centre provides services which assist students to manage these issues. Services provided by the Learning Centre however, had low usage, with more than 50% of the view that their services were only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. The most common reason for not using this service related to 'did not know how to access the service' (Table 6.23).

Campus Security was the second most important service identified by students and had high rates of awareness and usage. International students also identified safety and security, and discrimination and racism, as two particular issues they faced (see Table 6.24). Ensuring that students can study in a safe environment, both physically

and emotionally, is critically important to successful study outcomes (Deumert et al., 2005b; Forbes-Mewett et al., 2006; Nyland et al., 2009; Sawir, 2009). Usefulness of the services provided by Campus Security was low (Table 6.20) and in the open-ended question about improvements, 10% of respondents indicated security needed improvement (Table 6.24).

The services offered by the International Office specifically for international students were identified as the third most important, as an overall service, providing essential help in areas such as enrolment, support for scholarship students, visas, accommodation and living in the community. Students identified social isolation, accommodation, and financial concerns as significant issues they had to manage. Those students who had obtained a scholarship to study were able to access staff specifically allocated to assist scholarship students in the International Office. These staff provided advice and guidance about managing any issues in relation to their study experience and respondents who were scholarship holders indicated they were provided a high level of support as compared to other international students. Usage of all the services available through the International Office was high, but 62% of respondents rated such services as only of 'some use' or 'not useful'.

Although health was not identified by students as a specific issue they faced, the research literature indicates good health as important to successful study outcomes (Sumer et al., 2008; Wynaden et al., 2010; Yang & Clum, 1994) and respondents indicated the Health Service was the fourth most important service on campus. Usage of the Health Service was in the low range and 58% indicated that the services were only of 'some use' or 'not useful'. Reasons cited for non-use were minimal but centred on 'not knowing how to access the service' and 'not being able to find information about the service when it was needed'. This suggests the services provided by the Health Service need to be offered in a more user friendly way considering their importance

Even though safety and security is an issue for international students, Campus Security was identified as one of the least useful, along with international student societies, sporting clubs, alumni, mentoring and the buddy system. These are all services which could contribute to assisting international students to manage their security and wellbeing, language and communication concerns, integration into the academic environment, cultural adjustment and social interaction, all of which were identified as of great importance. Responses to the open-ended questions overwhelmingly supported the need to improve services (Tables 6.26, 6.27 and 6.30). If services are not as useful as expected or they are advised a service is not useful by friends, then this will impact adversely on further use.

#### *7.2.2.3 Access*

Accessing services was a significant issue raised by respondents. When asked to identify why they had not used a service when it was needed, respondents indicated 'not knowing how to access the service' as the most significant reason for non-use (see Table 6.23). This was supported by comments made in the open-ended question when improving access was identified as a way current services could be improved (Table 6.25). Understanding how to access services also relates to the quality of information and the promotion of services.

When asked about services that were needed, but not provided, issues to do with accessing food outlets after hours, better sporting opportunities and accommodation were raised which suggests that improved access to these services is needed or a better understanding of the services currently offered is required. Overall comments by respondents about improving the services currently available (Tables 6.27 and 6.30), include the need for access to be improved.

#### *7.2.2.4 Timeliness*

Respondents indicated that one of the reasons services were not used when needed related to the time they were offered and the time taken to use some of them. This

particularly related to those services which required students to make appointments or where services were only offered at specific times. Counselling, sporting clubs and sporting facilities were specifically identified by respondents in terms of the time associated with using the services. Respondents indicated these three services were also needed (Table 6.19). Providing services at times when they are needed obviously also relates to accessing services when needed and having a student-centred focus to service delivery.

#### *7.2.2.5 Cost*

Respondents indicated that cost was a factor which impacted the use of some services by some students. This was raised as an additional reason to those listed in Table 6.23 as to why they did not use services. This was particularly related to sporting clubs, sporting facilities and the Student Guild.

### *7.2.3 Summary*

Overall, there were a number of factors which enhanced or inhibited the use of support services by students. Providing support services that students need is obviously essential. Those factors which contributed to enhancing support service usage included the range of services available, level of awareness, perceived importance, and whether services were offered in a student centred manner. Whilst there was little evidence to suggest new services are needed, there is evidence to support the need to review how services, with the exception of the Library, are currently offered.

Factors which inhibited the use of support services were the limited usefulness of most of them as they were currently provided, the perceived level of assistance provided by service providers, the underlying culture and context in which services were offered, deficiencies in the quality of available information, including the promotion of services, problems with accessibility of services, and timing issues associated with the use of the service. Developing a supportive learning culture

within the university will require those factors which are identified as positively influencing the use of services, such as those provided by the Library, to be considered as the benchmark standard in the review of services.

### **7.3 Research Objective Three.**

#### ***Recommend strategies to improve the delivery of support services to international students.***

Within the current Enabling Plans of the university, there are only a limited number of strategies and outcomes identified to support the development of the goal ‘to improve the quality of the University environment’ and none of these relate specifically to support service delivery. This suggests there is a disconnection between the strategic vision of the university and how the vision is operationalised by staff within the university. This disconnection results in the university having a vision and view about itself which is different to those expressed by the respondents in this research in terms of the culture and quality of the university environment and more specifically the delivery of support services. Kou (2009) argues that unless the strategic vision and the culture of management interrelates effectively with the staff, academic and administrative, who deliver the educational experience then quality from a student perspective will not be evidenced in outcomes. The research findings confirm that the majority (more than 50%) of students value the services provided and see them as appropriate, but believe improvements in how the current services are provided is needed to improve the culture and context of support, the use and usefulness of the services provided, and to maximise their impact and effectiveness.

The overarching recommendation to flow from this research centres on the need for the university to implement a student centred model of support service delivery which is cognisant of the issues international students face and has, as its central focus, the needs of students. Embedded within this conceptual model would be a culture of support with a value system of respect, tolerance and diversity. Figure 7.2

illustrates this conceptual model and its essential elements. Discussion of the model is provided below.

### ***7.3.1 Student Centred Model of Support Service Delivery***

The focus of the student centred model of support service delivery is to develop a culture which fosters closer educational and personal relationships between students, staff, and the provision and delivery of support and support services. Within this relationship, students would be the central focus of the service delivery model. Factors identified in Fig 7.1 and incorporated into Fig 7.2, which influence the use and usefulness of available support services, would become embedded in the delivery framework of all such services provided. The university would foster an organisational culture which supports learning and promotes and values tolerance, diversity, respect, social justice, integration, support, helpfulness, safety and security. An organisational culture which has these as its core values will be able to provide assistance to international students in managing the issues which they face studying at the educational institution.

Developing an organisational culture in which services are offered in an environment which is supportive is essential for students. In relation to research objective one, respondents indicated the issues they faced and in research objective two, those factors which enhanced or inhibited their use of support services were identified. The key features of the environment needed within a student centred model of support service delivery are illustrated in the conceptual model of Fig 7.2. Within the University's current strategic plan 2009 – 2013 (Curtin University of Technology, 2009), one of the five key strategies is to 'develop a culture of excellence and innovation'. One of the goals within this key strategy is 'to improve the quality of the University environment' through the provision of a more satisfying learning environment for both students and staff. The student centred model of support service delivery, (Fig 7.2), is focused on the development of a supportive learning

culture based on student need and which articulates the critical underpinning values required.

**Fig 7.2 Conceptual model of student centred support services**



The outcomes identified within the conceptual model of Fig 7.2 would facilitate a focus for achieving the goals identified by the university and would enable issues raised by respondents in this research to be managed within an organisation wide



strategy. The ideals expressed within the model would need to be embraced and incorporated in the university's strategic planning. Staff development needs associated with the implementation of such a model would need to be managed through the professional development area of the university. The development of an educational strategy with the aim to improving the culture of the learning environment for international students and staff is imperative to improving the use and usefulness of support services and developing the staff capacity to understand and assist international students to maximise their study experience.

The recommended strategies are:

- Conduct an overarching review of current services that takes into account the findings of this study. Each individual service needs to be reviewed in relation to those factors identified in Fig 7.1 as influencing use of services such as awareness, importance, culture, quality of information, access to services, usefulness, timing and student cost of services. This review needs to include a careful examination of how the Library service is offered as compared to other services.
- Redesign existing evaluation methodology to take into account factors identified in Fig 7.1 which impact the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Design a framework for the delivery of support services which embraces the Conceptual Model of Student Centred Support Services (Figure 7.2). Included within this framework would be the coordination, management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of support services for ongoing quality improvement.
- Review strategic plans so that they align with the model of service as captured in Figure 7.2.

- Identify organisational learning needs which flow from the adoption of the model to be incorporated into an education strategy to be developed and managed by the professional development area of the university.

#### **7.4 Future Research**

This study has the capacity to be replicated in other higher education institutions because it provides a model for understanding the culture of support that exists, and is able to identify what issues students specifically face at their institutions, what support services are perceived as valuable to students, why they may or may not be viewed as useful and how they could be improved for the benefit of students.

Additional research needs to be undertaken to review the relationship and effectiveness of strategic plans and associated implementation strategies. It is essential that any differing views existing between senior staff within educational institutions who identify strategic visions and those responsible for achieving these are examined and recommendations made to bridge any differences. This research also provides a platform to establish future research studies on the effectiveness of support service provision which could be used by any educational provider with international students enrolled on its campus. In particular it is recommended that future research includes a focus on exploring the rationale behind any differences in views held by support service providers and their uses.

In summary this study has resulted in the development of an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of support service delivery for international students and how the effectiveness of these services is impacted by the underpinning culture and context of the environment in which they are delivered. Understanding this interrelationship is critical to the development of an overarching recommendation to adopt a model of support service delivery which is centred on student need so as to assist the education institution to align its strategic vision and operational activities to achieve quality student outcomes.

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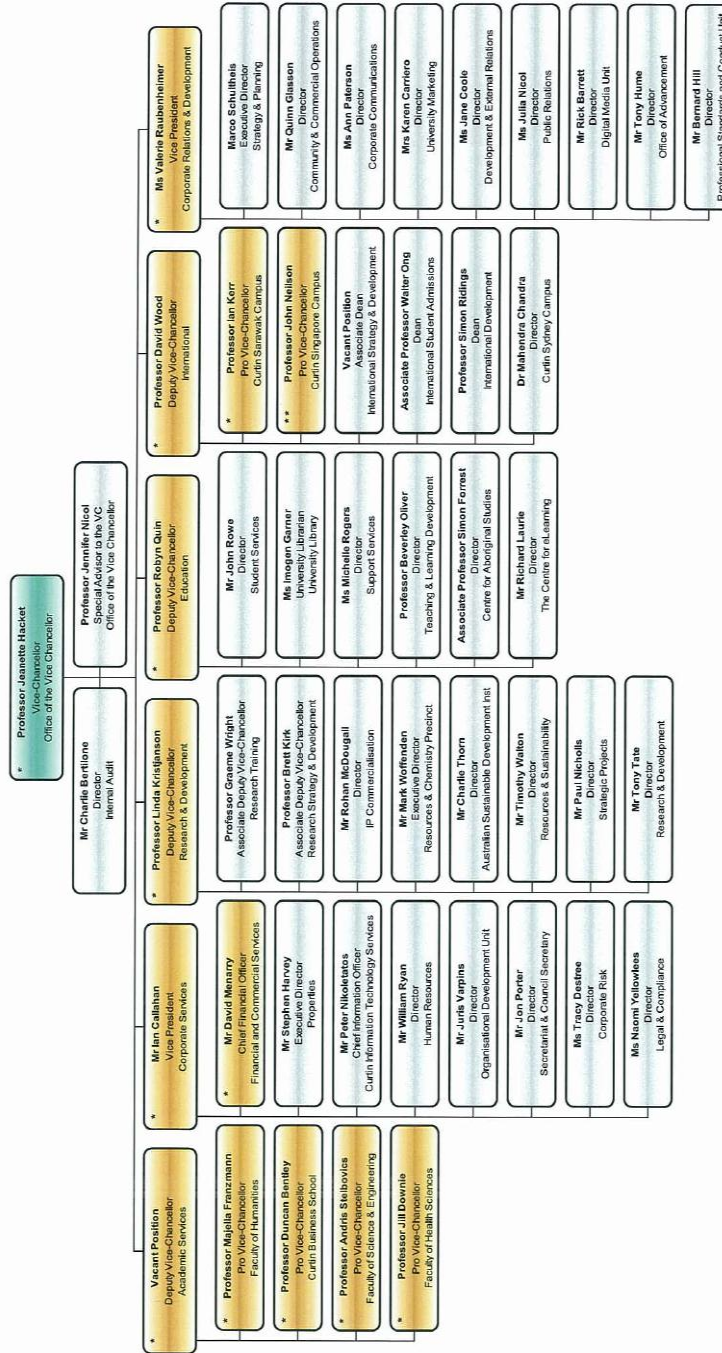
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

CURTIN UNIVERSITY ORGANISATIONAL  
CHART

# Curtin University Organisational Chart



\* Executive Managers  
\*\* Seconded to CEC (Singapore Campus)

Last Updated 1st March 2011

APPENDIX 2

SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED AT THE  
UNIVERSITY



## **AVAILABLE SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED AT THE UNIVERSITY**

### **Specialised Support Services Available for International Students**

- International Office
- Student Advisors International Office
- International Student Societies

### **Mainstream Support Services Available for All Students**

- Academic Development, Language and Learning Support
  - Library
  - Bookshop
  - English Language Support
  - The Learning Centre
  - Mentoring Support
  - Buddy System
  - Student Equity
  - Career Service
  - Alumni
  - Student Guild
  - First Year Experience Coordinator
- Administrative Support
  - Residential Assistance
  - Student Advisors Student Central
  - Campus Security
- Health and Counselling Services
  - Health Service
  - Counselling Service
  - Disability Services
  - Multi Faith Services
- Social Support Services
  - Sporting and Fitness Facilities
  - Sporting Clubs
  - Volunteers

APPENDIX 3

SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Q1. From your experience which support services do international students consider important?

Q 2. From your experience what are the most frequently used services?

Q3. What concerns do you believe impact on whether a student uses services?

Q4. What factors assist or inhibit use of facilities?

Q5. Are there services we don't provide that you believe would assist them?

Q6. How important is the environment/context/setting in determining whether services are used?

APPENDIX 4

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET  
AND CONSENT FORM

**Curtin University of Technology**  
**Department of Language and Intercultural Education**  
**Information Sheet**

**Title:** *An investigation into the provision of university support services and their use by international students in one Australian university.*

My name is Pam Roberts, and I am completing my Doctor of Philosophy through the Department of Language and Intercultural Education, Curtin University of Technology. The aims of the study are to determine which support services international students consider as important in improving their study experience and to identify factors that enhance or inhibit the use of support services by international students. Following on from these findings recommendations will be made about possible strategies tertiary institutions can use to deliver services in the future.

I invite you to participate in this stage of the study which involves a focus group of 8 – 10 international students from the division in which you are enrolled at the university. The focus group will last 45 – 60 minutes and involve me asking a series of questions about your experiences as an international student at the university and your views about the support services provided by Curtin. The focus group will be tape recorded and then transcribed. The transcribed information will be used to assist me to develop a questionnaire which will be sent to international students enrolled at the university. Following the development of the questionnaire all transcribed information will be erased to avoid voice identification. Participating in the focus group is voluntary and you may withdraw from the focus group at any time with out question or penalty. Your involvement in the focus group will not affect your study at the university. If you sign the consent form, you are consenting to:

1. Be a focus group participant.
2. Having the focus group interview tape recorded.
3. Having the information from the focus group used to assist the development of a questionnaire.

At all times your confidentiality will be maintained by using codes to de-identify the data. Your name will not be used. I will be the only person in the research to know your identity. If you have any questions or need further information about the study, please contact me on 9266 2096. If you prefer, you can contact my supervisors Dr Katie Dunworth on (08) 9266 4227 or Dr Saras Henderson on (08) 9266 2070. If you have any concerns or complaints about the way in which the study is being conducted, please contact the secretary of the Curtin University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee – Sinead Darley on (08) 9266 2784. Ethics approval number Curtin University of Technology: FELSSW – 164 – 08.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this sheet of information.

**Curtin University of Technology**  
**Department of Language and Intercultural Education**  
**Informed Consent Form**

**Title:** *An investigation into the provision of university support services and their use by international students in one Australian university.*

I.....have read the information sheet accompanying this consent form relating to the study on the provision and use of university support services by international students. I understand that by signing this consent form I am agreeing to participate in a focus group conducted by Pam Roberts, to having the focus group tape recorded and to that information being used to assist the development of a questionnaire.

I understand that I may leave the focus group at any time without question or penalty. I am aware that the information from the focus group will be coded to de-identify the data and my name will not be used. I am aware the only person in the research to know my name will be Pam Roberts. I have been given a copy of this consent form and am aware I can contact Pam Roberts on 9266 2096 or the supervisors Dr Katie Dunworth on (08) 9266 4227 or Dr Saras Henderson on (08) 9266 2070 if I have any questions or need further information about the focus group or the study. If I have any further concerns or complaints about the way in which the study is being conducted I am aware I can contact the Secretary of the Curtin University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee – Sinead Darley on (08) 9266 2784.

I agree to participate in the focus group for the study as outlined to me

Signed.....Participant

Signed.....Researcher

Date.....

APPENDIX 5

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

## **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

Q1. What do you know about support assistance (services) offered at Curtin?

Q2. Could you share with me a time you could have used support but didn't?

Q3. As a student what do you see as your role at Curtin is with regard to the support services that are provided?

Q4. What is your view of support and support services provided at Curtin University of Technology?

Q5. Is there anything else you would like to add?



APPENDIX 6

SURVEY

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# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT SERVICES

INTRO

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**This survey seeks information from you about support services provided for you by the University. As an international student studying here at the Bentley Campus of Curtin your input is valuable as it will contribute towards ensuring that appropriate support services are available to international students. Your responses will remain confidential.**

**The survey will only take 20 - 25 minutes to complete.**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q1

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**Briefly indicate what you think are the main issues faced by international students studying at Curtin.**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Q2

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**In the following questions you will be asked about each individual service provided by Curtin. There is about 25 questions in this section.**

***Please answer each question by clicking on the circle which best describes your experience.***

**How useful have you found Curtin's Health Service?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

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Q3

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**With respect to Curtin Health Services, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service?**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Q4

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**How useful have you found Curtin's Counseling Service?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question 

Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q5

|   |  |   |
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**With respect to Curtin's Counseling Service, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it

- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
 Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q6

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**How useful have you found Curtin's Residential Assistance (Housing Support Service) service?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
 Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q7

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| ReOrder | Settings | Preview |
|---------|----------|---------|

**With respect to the Residential Assistance (Housing Support Service) at Curtin, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q8

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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Sporting and Fitness Facilities offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use



- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q9

|   |  |   |
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**With respect to the Sporting and Fitness Facilities, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q10

|   |  |   |
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Sporting Clubs offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q11

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**With respect to the Sporting Clubs, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it

- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q12

|   |  |   |
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the International Student Societies offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q13

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**With respect to the International Student Societies, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q14

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| ReOrder | Settings | Preview |

**How useful have you found the Student Guild?**

\*

- Very useful

- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q15

|   |  |   |
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**With respect to the Student Guild, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

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Q16

|   |  |   |
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|  Edit    |  Delete   |  Copy    |
|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Library services offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

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Q17

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**With respect to the Library at Curtin, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend

- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q18

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**How useful have you found The Learning Centre (previously LSN) services, offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

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Q19

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**With respect to The Learning Centre (previously LSN), please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q20

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**How useful have you found the English Language Support services (eg. UniEnglish) offered by Curtin?**

\*



- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
 Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q21

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**With respect to the English Language Support services please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
 Add/Update Logic

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Q22

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**How useful have you found the Bookshop service offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q23

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**With respect to the Bookshop, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q24

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**How useful have you found the First Year Experience Coordinator service, offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q25

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**With respect to the First Year Experience Coordinator, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

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Q26

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**How useful have you found the services offered by International Office?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q27

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**With respect to the International Office, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered

- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q28

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**How useful have you found the service provided by the Student Advisors in International Office?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q29

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**With respect to the Student Advisors in International Office, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
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Q30

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**How useful have you found the Student Advisors in Student Central?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful





- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q31

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**With respect to the Student Advisors in Student Central, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q32



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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Alumni service offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q33

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**With respect to the Alumni, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it

- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

Q34

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**How useful have you found the Buddy system of support offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

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Q35

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**With respect to the Buddy system of support, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

Separator PageBreak

Page Break

Q36

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**How useful have you found the Mentoring support (other than the buddy system) offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful

- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

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Q37

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|  Edit    |  Delete   |  Copy    |
|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**With respect to the Mentoring support (other than the buddy system), please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q38

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Careers@Curtin service offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q39

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|  Edit    |  Delete   |  Copy    |
|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**With respect to Careers@Curtin, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service

- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q40

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found Curtin Volunteers service, offered by Curtin?**

- \*
- Very useful
  - Some use
  - Not useful
  - Have not used the service
  - Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q41

|   |  |   |
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**With respect to Curtin Volunteers, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- d) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- e) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- f) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- g) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- h) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q42

|   |  |   |
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found the Campus Security service, offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q43

|   |  |   |
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**With respect to the Campus Security, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other



 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q44

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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**How useful have you found Student Equity Services, offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q45

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**With respect to the Student Equity Service, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q46

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**How useful have you found the Disability Service, offered by Curtin?**

\*

- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic †

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q47

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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**With respect to Disability Services offered by Curtin, please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered
- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q48

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| ReOrder   | Settings  | Preview   |

**How useful have you found the Multi Faith Officer (Chaplaincy), offered by Curtin?**

\*



- Very useful
- Some use
- Not useful
- Have not used the service
- Was not aware of the service

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic ↑

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break | Automatic Logic Break

Q49

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**With respect to the Multi Faith Officer (Chaplaincy), please indicate the reason why you have not used this service**

\*

- a) Have not needed to use the service
- b) Did not know how to access the service
- c) Service was not offered at a time I could attend
- d) Unable to obtain an appointment when I needed it
- e) I did not feel comfortable using the service in the way it is currently offered

- f) Couldn't find any information about the service when I needed it
- g) Service is not conveniently located
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q50

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**Please list what you consider are the 5 most important support services provided by Curtin by placing the most important as number 1.**

**1 - Most Important**

**2**

**3**



Empty question box with navigation arrows.

4

Empty question box with navigation arrows.

5

Empty question box with navigation arrows.

Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

Separator PageBreak

Page Break

Q51

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**How did you find out about the services that are provided at Curtin?**  
*(Please click all that apply)*

Friends

- International Office
- Curtin website
- Orientation week
- Orientation pack
- University staff
- Guild diary
- Other

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

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Page Break

Q52

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**If support services were to be improved at Curtin what would you suggest?**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q53

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**Are there any support services not currently available at Curtin but should be?**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q54

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**Overall how would you describe the support services offered by Curtin?**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak



Q55

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**In your view, in what way could Curtin improve the information you receive prior to arriving at Curtin?**



 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

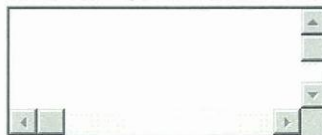
 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q56

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**In your opinion what would be the best way to inform students about the support services available at Curtin?**




 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q57

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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**Are there any comments you would like to make about support services offered here at Curtin?**

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Page Break

Q58

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**To help understand why responses may vary, can you please complete the information below about your background by *clicking the relevant circles and answering the questions.***



- Male
- Female

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q59

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|---|--|---|
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|  ReOrder |  Settings |  Preview |

**My age is**

- Under 20 years
- 20 - 29 years
- 30 - 39 years
- 40 years or over

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q60

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**Country of Birth**

Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

Separator PageBreak

Q61

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| ReOrder | Settings | Preview |

**Language spoken at home**

Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

Separator PageBreak

Q62

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**Faculty in which you are enrolled for your course of study**

- Business
- Engineering and Science
- Humanities
- Health Sciences

 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic



 Separator  PageBreak

Q63

|   |  |   |
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**Level of enrolment for the course you are studying**

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate coursework
- Higher Degree by Research

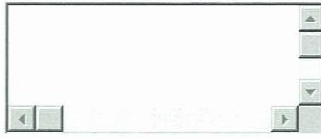
 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q64

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**Year in which you commenced your current course of study**



 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

 Separator  PageBreak

Q65

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
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**Form of Enrolment (Who is responsible for your tuition fees)?**

- Self funding
- Government in my home country
- Sponsored Aid Agency
- Scholarship

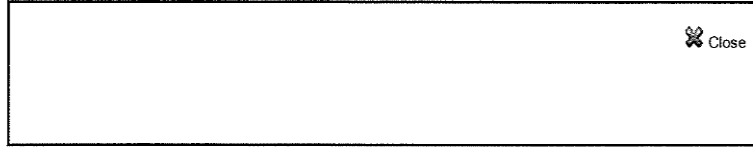
 Add New Question   
Add/Update Logic

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Page Break

 Edit Footer  Thank You Page

Please contact <mailto:cresswell@amnet.com> if you have any questions regarding this survey.



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