

**Talking to international students:
what can we learn from them that a survey can't tell us?**

The PIE's interactive session with international students at the AIEC Conference 2015

Delegates sat at tables and had an opportunity to speak directly to at least 1 international student about their experience studying in Australia. The student journey was split into 6 different stages and each table focussed their discussions around one particular stage:

Table 1: Choosing where and what to study – country/city/institution/course

Table 2: Application process – including using an agent or not, visa application, other resources

Table 3: Pre-departure information and support – from offer to enrolment period

Table 4: Arrival and settling in - welfare, housing and support (social and academic)

Table 5: Feet on the ground - culture shock, surprises? Thoughts on life in a new country.

Table 6: Graduation and post-study considerations

Following are the handouts we put on the tables - questions for the delegates to ask their student(s) about the stage of the student journey they were discussing.

A full report of the session will be available on www.thepienews.com.

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Table 1: Choosing where and what to study – country/city/institution/course

- a. Did you consider studying in any other countries? If so, which?
- b. What was most important to you – the country, the city, the institution or your course? Which decision did you make first and why?
- c. Who had more influence on your decision – parents, agent, friends, or something else?
- d. What was it about your institution that made you choose it? Offer of a scholarship? Opportunity to do an internship?
- e. Did you attend a study abroad event/fair before you studied here?
- f. Who or what influenced your choice to use an agent or not? How did you choose your agent?
- g. How quickly did the institutions you considered respond to your enquiries? How important was the response time for you?
- h. How big a concern to you was safety?
- i. Did you look at league tables? If so, which ones? How important was this to you?
- j. What kind of interactions did you have with your institution before you applied? Were these useful? What form did the interactions take? Would you have liked to have had other kinds of contact from your institution?
- k. Did you seek out students via social media to find out what it was really like there, or rely upon official information given to you by the institution?
- l. How important was the tuition cost to you?
- m. Did you meet anyone face-to-face from your institution before you applied, and how important was that?
- n. How important was the institutions' website/brochure/official social media presence to you, and why?

Table 2: Application process – including using an agent or not, visa application, other resources

- a. How quick was the turnaround on your enquiry from the institutions you considered? – both after submitting a general first enquiry, and after submitting your application? How much influence did that have on your decision?
- b. Did you use an agent? How did you select your agent? How helpful was their service? What was the most useful piece of help they gave you?
- c. Would you recommend to other students that they use an agent?
- d. If you didn't use an agent, did you get any support from your institution with your application? Retrospectively do you now wish you had used an agent?
- e. What did you find most difficult about the application process?
- f. Which resources did you find the most helpful when applying to your chosen institution?
- g. How nervous were you about the visa process? Did you have any idea which countries' visa application process was easier and did this influence your decision?
- h. How did you find the visa application process? Did you have an in-person interview?
- i. What information were you given about accommodation at the application stage? Was this enough?

Table 3: Pre-departure information and support – from offer to enrolment period

- a. After your offer was made, how many interactions did you have with your institution? Was this enough? What else would have been helpful?
- b. How were you communicated with? Email, letter, phone call, social media? Which form of communication did you prefer and why?
- c. What kind of content were you given? Was it appropriate/adequate?
- d. If you had offers from more than one institution, what was it that made you enrol where you did?
- e. Did you look at the institution's social media pages and if so, which? Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, others? What content were you looking for here?
- f. How did your agent help you during this phase? Did they organise a pre-departure briefing? Did you meet any alumni?
- g. Were you given the opportunity to make contact with other students going to the same institution/studying the same course during this phase?
- h. What information were you given about your accommodation and was this sufficient? What else would have helped?
- i. Do you feel the information you were given was tailored enough to your level of study?
- j. What were you most nervous about and what could the institution have done to ease that for you?
- k. Were you given any language support during this period?

Table 4: Arrival and settling in - welfare, housing and support (social and academic)

- a. What were your first impressions of your country and institution?
- b. Were you met at the airport? How was that experience?
- c. How were your first 24 hours after you arrived? How did you feel and how could your experience have been improved?
- d. Accommodation – your thoughts. Were your expectations met? Did the location of your accommodation enable or hinder your opportunities to integrate and make friends?
- e. Did your institution have a buddy system? Did you make use of it?
- f. Was there an official orientation programme? Did you go? How was it?
- g. Extra-curricular and welfare – did you feel well looked after? What support did you find the most useful?
- h. Did you find it easy to meet other students, either from Australia, your country, or international students?
- i. Did you feel your language level was adequate?
- j. Was there a welcome programme offered to your parents? If so, did they do it and did they enjoy it/find it helpful?
- k. Other concerns or highlights?

Table 5: Feet on the ground - culture shock, surprises? Thoughts on life in a new country.

- a. How long did it take for you to feel assimilated?
- b. What helped you get over homesickness, if you had it?
- c. Who are your friends? International students, students from your own country or Australian?
- d. English language support – did you have any? Did you feel you needed it?
- e. Did you try and find a job? If so, how easy was it?
- f. What do you like most about your new life? How has it changed you?
- g. Did you suffer from culture shock?
- h. What is strange about life here?
- i. How could your institution and agent better interact with you, or did you not need added support once you had settled in?
- j. Have there been any things about life here that you weren't expecting, that would have been useful to know before you arrived?

Table 6: Graduation and post-study considerations

- a. What are you planning on doing after you finish your course?
- b. How have your ambitions changed since undertaking this period of study? What has influenced you the most?
- c. Are you concerned about finding work if you are planning on returning home?
- d. Would you like to work in Australia?
- e. Do you feel supported by the careers office at your university?
- f. Do you know if there will be any career support offered to you once you graduate?
- g. Did your course give you enough chances to enhance your employability and if so, how?
- h. Do you think studying in Australia was a worthwhile investment?
- i. What are the top 3 skills you feel you have gained through studying here that will help you with your career ambitions?
- j. Do you know much about your institution's alumni network? Are you interested in joining? What kind of contact would you like to have with your institution post-graduation?