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Good Practice Series



**UKCOSA**  
The Council  
for International  
Education

# Internationalising students' unions

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet considers the specific role of students' unions in relation to their international student members, in terms of both representation and provision of services. It provides guidance on how to carry out an international audit, identifying services that can be offered, possible barriers and implementation strategies. It also gives guidance on the core services and activities which may be provided for international students. Finally, it explores the relationship of the union with the institution.

Students' unions vary enormously in size, political make-up and resources. This booklet reflects the author's own experiences of working as the International Student Adviser in a large students' union at the University of Sheffield. In 1997/98 there were just under 3000 international students from more than 100 countries registered at Sheffield, representing about 17% of the total student population of the institution. It is hoped that these observations, however, will be helpful to students, elected officers and staff in a range of students' unions. The ideas presented and structures described are intended for any students' union that wants to improve its provision for international students.

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## THE ROLE OF A STUDENTS' UNION

A students' union is defined in section 20 of the Education Act 1994. It refers to a students' union as *"A body representing or promoting the general interests of students at a university or at a college or hall or a university."* (See *Students' Unions: A Guide*, Department for Education and Employment, 1995.)

Broadly speaking, the role of a students' union is to represent the interests of all its members and to provide services and activities such as bars, catering, entertainment, welfare, clubs and societies. What an individual union decides to provide in terms of services and activities is largely dependant on the membership profile, available resources and its policies. Many students' unions have experienced significant change in their membership profile over the past decade, in part due to the massification of higher education and increased recruitment of international students.

In many organisations, including Sheffield Union, home undergraduates in the 18-21 age range are now in a minority, with increased numbers of non-traditional groups, including international, mature and postgraduate students. It is important, if students' unions are to be responsive to all sections of their membership, including international students, that they are able to set up structures to address the collective and individual interests of all their students.

Sheffield Union's mission statement says quite simply that the union exists:

*"To act in the interests of all students in our union."*

In addition to the mission statement, Sheffield Union has identified key values which reflect the ways in which it has determined the organisation will act to:

- Recognise the diversity of our membership and ensure equality of opportunity
- Involve students in democratic decision making at all levels

- Represent the interests of all our membership at local, regional, national and international levels
- Be accountable to our membership
- Anticipate and respond to student needs and demands to ensure continuous improvement
- Treat all our staff fairly and empower them to achieve organisational goals through training and development
- Operate efficient, high quality services and activities
- Promote constructive relations between students and the wider community
- Act professionally and responsibly to all external bodies

## Perceptions of the Union

Many international students may come from countries in which student unions either do not exist or have a very different role from that of students' unions in the UK. As a member of staff in a large union states:

*"On the whole international students don't get involved in the political activities of the Union and don't stand for office - perhaps because they do not see many of the issues as being of great relevance to them."*

International students may also be deterred from using the Union as, in the words of an International Student Adviser, *"their perception is one of an alcohol obsessed environment and many feel nervous of the rowdy atmosphere."*

Student unions need to conduct their own market research to find out the views held by international students of the union. For example, this can be done by surveys, feedback from international student representatives and national societies. If international students are not using the union, this suggests that it is seen as having little or no relevance to them. Unions therefore need to consider how to develop a range of services and structures to encourage all international students to become involved in the organisation. See the section on the International Audit for further discussion of this issue.

It is essential to provide prospective and newly arrived international students with clear information about the role of the union. This can be done in the form of introductory magazines, talks during orientation and posting information on the Internet. Where possible, unions should persuade the institution to use the publications as part of their promotional materials. This will ensure that international students are informed at all the key stages - pre-arrival, arrival, post-arrival - of the existence of the union. For example, Sheffield Union publishes the following :

**Introducing your union** - This is the main guide to services and activities offered by the union. It provides a general overview of promotional and welfare services, activities for specific groups, a listing of all clubs and societies and an introduction into the way the union works. There is also a publication for postgraduate students.

**Introducing your union for International Students** - This is produced by the International Student Committee and outlines the full range of their activities, together with information on welfare and other services of specific relevance to international students.

**Web pages:** <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~union/index.html>

## Representation

At the heart of a students' union's mission is its role to represent the interests of all its members within the institution and at national and international levels where appropriate. Whether a union has 30 or 3000 international student members, it is essential that democratic structures are in place to enable the voice of international students to be heard. It is important to remember that many of the concerns of home students will be shared by international students, such as succeeding academically, managing limited finances, finding affordable accommodation and coping with leaving home and developing support networks. Wherever possible, international students should be integrated into the existing union democratic structures, avoiding any possibility of isolation or ghettoisation. However, this does not negate the fact that many

international students will have specific needs which should be addressed.

### Organisational commitment

It is critical that the whole union is committed to the process of internationalising democratic structures, services and activities. For example, it is desirable that all home student sabbaticals and elected representatives are given training to raise their awareness of the diversity of the membership, to consider ways in which international students can be encouraged to participate, and to develop appropriate services and activities.

### Organisational change

In 1991 a far-reaching Strategic Review was conducted at Sheffield Union. It recognised that the union was no longer a homogeneous organisation comprised mainly of 18-21 year old undergraduate students. The existing structure of a central executive, comprising of a small number of mainly home undergraduate students was found no longer to be responsive to large groups of students including international, mature and postgraduate students. In its place a large number of representative and standing committees were established to cover all aspects of the union's activities. Overnight the number of elected representatives increased from 10 to 100.

The effect of the reform was to devolve responsibility, decision-making and, importantly, financial control to the largest possible number of students . The aim to involve international students in all areas of decision-making was a guiding principle of the reform. As a result a sabbatical post for International Secretary was established, still only one of two in the UK. In addition, an International Student Committee was set up to replace the Overseas Students Bureau, which lacked decision-making and budgetary powers. In an effort to ensure that international students' interests were adequately represented, two reserved places were established on all other committees.

### Let international students speak for themselves...

Wherever possible unions should encourage international students to elect their own representative, ideally to a sabbatical post. As observed

by a member of staff in an institution, *"without a sabbatical post, it is very hard for the elected officer concerned, as they often end up being finalists and cannot really spare the time"*. It may be difficult in some unions to achieve this, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of international postgraduate students have work and family commitments. It is noticeable, for example, at Sheffield that in the seven years the post of International Secretary has existed, all incumbents have been undergraduate. This is despite the fact that over 50% of our international students are postgraduate. Where there are small numbers of international students, it may be preferable to allocate responsibility for international student matters to an existing sabbatical officer.

International students should be given the opportunity to influence decision-making through an International Student Committee or International Society. Sheffield's International Student Committee welcomes new students arriving in Sheffield, organises social activities, offers language support, provides newspapers from around the world, funds national societies, runs trips to visit different parts of the country. Through their multi-cultural club, Globalspan, they provide opportunities for people from different backgrounds to share cultures through dance, fashion, food, sport, music and conversation.

Students' unions should seek to ensure that international students are able to establish their own national societies. This will enable international students to meet together with other students from their home country or region. A well established network of national societies will provide essential support to newly arrived international students. Ideally the national societies should be able to report directly to the International Student Committee as a way of ensuring that their interests are represented.

Wherever possible international students should be encouraged to stand as student representatives on staff-student committees. It is important that training for student representatives is developed which encourages participants to consider the specific needs of international students. There should also be support for international students to stand as international representatives in accommodation provided by the institution.

### **Bringing home and international students together**

In many institutions home and international students do not often socialise together. This may be due to cultural factors that set up barriers to participation. For example, an alcohol-based entertainment culture in the union may exclude students who wish to avoid alcohol.

Whenever possible the union should provide opportunities for home and international students to meet. This could include reserving places on the International Student Committee for a home student representative, as is the practice at Sheffield Union. In addition, consideration should be given to developing a range of events and activities which may be of interest to both international and home students. See the section on 'Services and activities for international students' (p.18) for further examples.

### **Recognising diversity**

One of the core values held by Sheffield Union is to:

*"Recognise the diversity of our membership and ensure equality of opportunity."*

This is an important statement in that it encourages the Union to consider the diversity both in the total membership and also within the international student community in relation to equality of opportunity. It recognises that international students are not a homogenous group. Indeed, there are as many differences between international students in terms of culture, language and social background as there are between international and home students. It may also be the case that postgraduate international students with families may have more in common with their home student counterparts than with undergraduate international students. This recognition of diversity within the union membership should inform all policy decisions in the development of services and activities. It does not, however, imply that all services should be equally accessible to all students. For example, the union recently developed a new continental style cafe-bar which aims to provide a more relaxed environment than the typical student bar. A union publication says:

*"Through the range of places to eat and drink, we aim to provide something to suit all parts of our diverse membership. We recognise that what's right for an 18 year old undergraduate from Birmingham might not be so attractive to a 30 year old postgraduate from Malaysia, so we offer alternatives for both."*

## **Staff support**

Given that the constitution of a Union requires that annual elections take place, it is important that consideration is given to resourcing a member of staff with responsibility for international student matters in order to ensure continuity. Without this it is difficult to deliver and develop a wide range of services.

Sheffield Union has a full-time equivalent International Student Adviser (ISA) based in the Student Advice Centre. The role of the ISA is to provide a specialist advice service to all international students particularly in the areas of immigration and finance. The ISA also provides policy guidance to the International Secretary and the other sabbatical officers. Before the start of each academic year the sabbatical team is provided with a training session by the ISA to consider their respective roles with regard to international students. In addition the ISA liaises with university staff via the International Student Advisory Group.

## **Training**

Training should be provided for all staff who come into contact with international students in the union. The training programme should ensure that all staff are aware of the problems common to international students and the availability of appropriate support services. It should also include cross-cultural communication.

## **Budget**

Internationalising the union requires not only political commitment but financial commitment. At Sheffield Union, in accordance with the devolution of decision-making, the majority of money spent in the interests of international students is controlled by the International Student Committee. However, as mentioned above, all committees have two international student representatives, thereby ensuring that no decision to allocate resources is taken without considering the impact on international students.

## **UKCOSA: The Council for International Education**

All unions should consider joining UKCOSA: The Council for International Education, in order to access its excellent support services, publications and training events. UKCOSA operates a telephone advice service for member unions, covering key areas of concern to staff working with international students, including immigration, fees and awards regulations and welfare benefits.

## **Summary points**

- The Union exists to act in the interest of all its members.
- Conduct market research to determine perception of Union by international students.
- Provide clear information at pre-arrival, arrival and post-arrival on role of union.
- Integrate international students into existing democratic structures.
- Involve international students in all areas of decision-making.
- Encourage international students to elect their own representative, ideally to a sabbatical post.
- Establish International Student Committee.
- Encourage international students to establish national and regional societies.
- Provide training for home student sabbaticals and elected representatives.

- Unions should diversify to provide a range of services and activities to a diverse membership.
- Consideration should be given to resourcing a member of staff with responsibility for international student matters.
- Ensure that no decision to allocate resources is taken without considering impact on international students.
- Join UKCOSA.

## **THE INTERNATIONAL AUDIT**

All unions should seek to internationalise their structures, services and activities. Internationalisation is a process which ensures that the interests of international students are considered in all areas of decision-making and in the provision of services and activities. A key tool for achieving this is the international audit. The international audit enables an organisation to be aware of the barriers preventing international students from participating in specific services and activities; to identify the gaps in service provision; and to identify positive steps and financial implications. It can act as a checklist for an organisation to review its current provision and a plan for future actions. The audit should not be viewed in isolation from other initiatives such as developing an organisational policy with regard to international students. It should also be viewed as an on-going process rather than a one-off activity.

The audit needs to be co-ordinated preferably by a sabbatical with responsibility for international student matters together with a member of staff in a senior position in the organisation. Ideally an international audit group should be established, comprising student and staff representatives from all the key service and activity areas in the union. The findings should be reported to the Union Council or suitable alternative.

### **More than a 'wish-list'**

If the international audit is to be more than a wish list, it needs careful preparation and commitment from all parts of the organisation. The organisation needs to clarify its primary aims and objectives in carrying out the audit.

It is likely that the audit will raise expectations amongst international students with regards to the development of services and activities. The union must therefore consider the levels of both human and financial resources it is prepared to allocate to implementation. It will also be important to consider the time span within which the audit will be conducted. This will be affected by decisions as to whether the audit will be carried out in relation to specific service areas or as a global audit.

Ideally the audit will be carried out within a timetable which enables proper consideration of any recommendations by the appropriate committees or decision-making bodies.

## Policy development

The importance of having a clear organisational policy with regard to international students is addressed by Geddes (1995) and in the British Council's Code of Good Practice (1995). As part of the audit there needs to be an assessment of the following:

1. What is the current policy of the organisation?
2. To what extent does the policy meet the aspirations of international students?
3. What changes need to be made to the policy?

The audit can therefore become a very useful tool in policy development.

## Know your students

The starting point for an international audit is to collate basic data on the following:-

- Total number of international students
- Breakdown of students by gender, student status, academic department, and nationality
- Number of students with dependants

In addition, it may be useful to collect information on other factors such as religious affiliation, disability and so on. Most of this information should be readily available through the institution's central records.

## Scope of the audit

As suggested in Rogers (1994):

*"The aim of any evaluation of welfare provision should be to seek the views of international students on those areas which impinge on their social and educational experience. Their views can highlight deficiencies or endorse good practice."*

The international audit should seek the views of international students on all aspects of union activity. These will typically be covered by the broad areas of :

- Representation
- Welfare
- Commercial services - for example, union shop, bars and catering, entertainments
- Clubs and societies
- Sport

For each of these areas the following questions need to be posed:

1. What is the current level of provision for international students?
2. What are the views of international students on current provision?
3. What are the barriers preventing greater participation?
4. What are the gaps in service provision or policies?
5. What positive steps can be taken to overcome barriers or fill gaps?
6. What are the resource implications - financial and human?
7. What is the timetable for delivery?

## Methods for carrying out audit

The methods for carrying out the international audit will vary depending on whether qualitative or quantitative data are to be collected. Rogers (1994) discusses the range of methods that can be used in evaluating welfare provision. The audit could make use of surveys, usage statistics or the results of focus or discussion groups.

SERVICE	BARRIERS OR ACTIVITY	GAPS STEPS	POSITIVE	RESOURCES	DEADLINE
Freshers/Intro Week	Too many events based	No activity for spouses around alcohol, comedy, etc.	Introduce day trips for international or partners of international students	No cost if charge for students and partners	Decision by 1 August tickets
Union catering	Survey indicates international students do not like union catering.	No international food provided in union catering outlets.	Introduce daily international dish.	May be extra cost if sourcing specialist products, e.g. halal meat.	
Bars	Too alcohol centred and rowdy.	Lack of quieter alternative.	Re-designate meeting room as an international student lounge or quiet room for all students. In long term consider developingcafe-bar.	For first option no cost implication. Second option - considerable cost, but will be attractive to home mature and postgraduate students.	
Shop	No products of specific interest to international students.	No international newspapers or magazines available.	Survey international students to identify demand and order accordingly.	Possible loss if demand not accurately established.	

## Proforma

The proforma overleaf could be adapted by any union intending to undertake an international audit and gives examples of the types of comments that could be incorporated.

## Implementation strategies

The audit should help the organisation to identify a series of action points. It will be essential for the organisation to draw up a programme for implementation, identifying the resources required and specifying partnerships where appropriate (see the section on ‘Working with the institution’). Internationalising the organisation will also require a cultural change in the way that services are delivered. Consideration should therefore be given to developing training programmes for key staff to assist in the process of change towards an international union.

## Monitoring and evaluation

It is important that the international audit group continually monitors and evaluates the audit process. Staff and student commitment will be enhanced if the audit is not seen as a one-off event.

## Summary points

- The international audit is a key tool in achieving the internationalisation of the Union.
- The audit will identify barriers to participation, gaps in service provision, positive steps and resource implications.
- The union must consider the level of human and financial resources it is prepared to allocate to implementation.
- The audit should seek the views of international students on all aspects of union activity.
- The audit can be a useful tool in policy development.
- A range of methods can be used to gather qualitative and quantitative data.
- Training should be provided for key staff to facilitate internationalisation.
- Monitoring and evaluation is essential to the success of the audit.

## SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The previous section looked at the role of the international audit in assisting Unions to internationalise their democratic structure, services and activities. This section considers the range of services which a Union may decide to deliver in the best interests of its international students. It is not possible or desirable to produce an exhaustive checklist of services and activities for international students. Each union must develop appropriate facilities which best meet the needs of its own membership. What follows, therefore, is an indication of core services and activities which most unions, irrespective of size, should consider.

When deciding whether to provide a specific service, the organisation needs to consider whether it alone can provide the service or whether, for example, a partnership with the institution would be preferable (see section on 'Working with the institution'). In addition, consideration should be made as to the availability of local services from the local authority and non-statutory bodies. In developing services it is recommended that unions consider codes of practice, such as that drawn up by the British Council's Education Counselling Service. There are a number of useful publications in the UKCOSA Good Practice Series which should be consulted, including *Welfare Provision for International Students* and *Have Dependants - Must Travel*.

### Welfare

Most Unions have a strong commitment to providing welfare services to their membership. Where possible it is desirable to have the following:

#### **Advice, representation and advocacy for individual students**

At some time during their stay, international students may face a difficulty with which they need some assistance. This could be anything from problems with a landlord, extending leave to remain, a dispute with a supervisor, child care facilities or a financial crisis. Ideally, the Union should have well-trained permanent staff to deal with these issues and where possible, an adviser specifically for

international students. Where this is not possible it is essential that all those dealing with matters of international student welfare are adequately trained by, for example, attending the appropriate UKCOSA courses.

At Sheffield Union a purpose-built Student Advice Centre was established in 1991. There are currently five full-time equivalent advisers, each specialising in one of the following: International and Nursing and Midwifery students, Housing, Finance and Academic issues. Specific leaflets are produced for international students, mainly covering immigration and financial matters. (These are published on the Web Pages - see above for further information.)

**Language support for dependants** ( The specific needs of dependants are covered in another booklet in this series - see *Have Dependants - Must Travel*.)

The union should consider providing free English language classes for the dependants of students. Sheffield Union, for example, provides classes at beginner and intermediate levels with the support of two trained members of staff. In addition, student volunteers provide an advanced conversation group. A crèche is provided for all children over the age of one year. The classes are held twice weekly during term-time. Such classes can act as a useful focus for other activities, such as the development of toddler groups.

#### **Affordable child care**

As a high percentage of the international student membership may be mature students who are often accompanied by their families, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that international students and their families have access to affordable child care. This may be provided directly by the union, as is the case at Sheffield which runs a 64 place nursery. If this is not feasible, information should be provided on alternatives in the state and private sectors.

## **International student facilities**

### **International Student Lounge**

Where possible there should be a meeting space for international students. This can act as a focal point for international students on a daily basis. For example, Sheffield Union has an International Student Office where the International Secretary is based. In addition, consideration should be given to providing national newspapers and magazines from students' home countries.

### **Provision of space for worship**

Consideration should be given to the needs of groups of students who may require space to worship on a daily basis, such as Muslim students. Another booklet in this series, Meeting religious needs, looks at this topic in much more detail. At Sheffield Union, following requests from the Islamic Circle, two rooms have been designated for use as prayer rooms. Each room has washing facilities.

## **Social activities**

### **Clubs and societies**

International students should be encouraged to establish their own national/regional societies through the provision of financial support and meeting spaces. Sheffield Union now has 34 national and regional societies. Clearly, many international students may choose to be involved in other Union clubs and societies, depending upon their own interests. Some consideration should be given, however, to identifying barriers to possible participation from international students in the wider range of clubs and societies. For example, Sheffield Union is aware that there is a low level of participation by international students in the union's sports clubs. This may in part be due to the drinking culture associated with membership of many of these clubs. Efforts have been made, therefore, to facilitate other modes of participation in sport through an Intra-Mural Programme, which does seem to be popular with international students.

### **Bringing together home and international students**

International students may find it difficult to meet home students, particularly if they do not go to pubs or bars. Consideration needs to be given to developing ways in which home and international students can meet. Peer-pairing schemes can be successful, provided that they are well resourced in terms of staff support. Sheffield Union has developed the following initiatives:

#### **Lingua Club**

This is an English language conversation club bringing together groups of 8-10 international students with two home student volunteers. The aim of the club is to provide opportunities for international students to develop their knowledge and understanding of British cultures and colloquial English. In return the home students are given specialist training and an opportunity to discover more about the diversity of cultures in the Union. The club is co-ordinated by a member of staff who has responsibility for the overall administration and organisation of group events.

#### **Home student representatives**

Just as all other committees have an international student representative, the International Student Committee has a home student representative. The aim of this post is to develop awareness in home students of the specific needs of international students.

#### **Cultural events**

Many Unions celebrate the diversity of their membership through events such as an international cultural evening or a food evening. Ideally these should be organised by international students themselves. For example, at Sheffield Union, the International Students' Committee co-ordinates the events with most of the input coming from the national societies. These events can be an excellent way of bringing home and international students together. Other initiatives, such as an international students' week, should also be considered. Wherever possible alcohol-free events and events for families should be incorporated into the union's entertainments programme.

## **Daytrips**

Unions should consider arranging a variety of day and weekend trips to popular destinations for international students. This can be an affordable way for international students to get to know the country. Home students could be encouraged to host trips to their home towns and to provide an alternative view to the tourist guides. Sheffield Union is endeavouring to encourage European international students to invite other international students to go to their home countries over the vacation period.

## **Summary points**

Unions should seek to provide:

- Advice, representation and advocacy for individual students
- Language support for dependants
- Affordable childcare
- International student lounge
- Provision of space for worship
- National and regional societies
- Initiatives to bring together home and international students
- International cultural events
- Daytrips

## **WORKING WITH THE INSTITUTION**

Students' unions have perhaps a unique role to play: representing the interests of international students to the institution. The institution has a primary function of delivering quality educational services. Often there is a grey area in relation to a whole range of support services and facilities, some of which are provided by the institution and some by the union. What is provided by each organisation may be as a result of historical accident or the recognition that the union is best placed to run, for example, the entertainments programme.

With international students representing a vital in-flow of fees income to British universities, many institutions have recognised the importance of developing support services for international students.

This may take the form of designated staff such as an International Student Officer with responsibility for international student matters, including pre-arrival information, orientation, staff training, welfare advice and policy development.

Working with the institution in a non-adversarial manner can reap great benefits in terms of sharing information and co-financing specific projects. This does not negate the fact that at times the relationship between the union and the institution may be one of conflict.

## **Networking**

It is essential to develop effective channels of communication between the institution and the union. Increasing numbers of institutions and unions are coming together on a regular basis to discuss matters of common interest with regard to international students. These groups promote wider union-institutional co-operation and understanding.

For example, at Sheffield there is an International Student Advisory Group which brings together key support staff and international student representatives. Its current membership is the International Student Officer and representatives from Housing, Careers Counselling, the English Language Teaching Centre, the International Office, the International

Student Adviser, the International Secretary and an international student representative. The group meets every 3-4 weeks and acts as a forum to exchange information and ideas. It provides an opportunity to identify gaps in service provision as well as potential overlap. It is vital during the preparation for orientation to ensure that all support services are fully briefed as to their respective roles. At its most creative the group acts as a brainstorming session to tackle issues of common concern, free from the constraints of a committee agenda. One such session led to the co-production of a video "They look at my face and see a flag", for use in staff training and orientation.

The importance of regular networking is particularly important in the provision of welfare advice to international students. For example, the institution may provide pre-arrival information on immigration, financial and housing matters. The Union's Welfare Office or Advice Centre may provide leaflets on such matters. Whatever the division of labour, it is important to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure consistency of approach. The Sheffield Union endeavours to achieve this through contributing directly to the university's pre-arrival information. In all organisation-specific publications, international students are always made aware of the most appropriate source of assistance, be it the university or the union.

## **Financial partnership**

Where possible it is helpful to identify projects and activities that can be co-financed by the institution and the union. This has the advantage of developing services which might otherwise be financially prohibitive. More importantly it can engender a sense of joint ownership of an area of service provision. It is advisable to have a clear agreement as to the operational and management responsibility for any co-financed projects. At Sheffield Union the following international projects are co-financed:

- English language classes for spouses of international students
- Lingua Club - English conversation club for home and international students
- Intro party
- Meet and Greet (at the local railway station during orientation)

## **Co-operation**

When considering possible areas for co-operation with the institution, the Union will need to prioritise according to its own policies, financial and human resources. It is possible to identify core activities which unions should seek to initiate or to which they can make a significant input.

## **Orientation**

Many institutions now recognise the importance of providing a comprehensive orientation programme for new international students. Guidance on establishing and running an orientation programme is provided in Making the adjustment: Orientation programmes for international students, published by UKCOSA. Wherever possible the institution should be encouraged to take the lead in co-ordinating the orientation programme with the union taking an active role in the planning, preparation and delivery of specific events. Sheffield Union does the following:

- Meet and greet at local rail station
- Intro party for new international students
- Introductory tours and talk on the union
- Information sessions, e.g. Managing Finances in UK, Accommodation, Immigration
- Information stalls at the Intro Bazaar

## **Publications**

### **Pre-arrival information**

The provision of comprehensive pre-arrival information is essential. Ideally this should be co-ordinated by the institution with considerable input from the union. The information should cover a wide range of relevant topics, including support services, academic regulations, immigration, finances, life in Britain and so on. At Sheffield, the institution produces two A4 bound handbooks which are sent to all

international students in July. Sheffield Union has responsibility for providing copy and updating information on its services and activities. This is an extremely efficient way of reaching all new international students and is complemented by a number of the union's own pre-arrival publications (see section on 'Perceptions about the union').

### **International newsletter**

A newsletter which covers topics of interest to international students should be considered as an ideal joint venture. It is, however, important to agree whether editorial control will be joint or rest solely with the institution or the union. International students should be encouraged to contribute to the newsletter. The newsletter should ideally be produced as a paper version and on the Web. With the increasing use of e-mail as a key medium of communication, consideration should be given to establishing an e-mail list of all international students. This can complement the newsletter and other forms of written communication. The University of Sheffield has recently set up such a list to include all 3000 international students.

### **Summary points**

- Working with the institution in non-adversarial manner can reap great benefits.
- Develop a networking group to bring together key staff and students dealing with international student matters.
- Identify projects and activities which can be co-financed.
- Areas of co-operation can include orientation, publications, pre-arrival information and an international newsletter.

## **CONCLUSION**

This Good Practice booklet has outlined the role of student unions in relation to the international student membership. It has considered the value of the international audit as a tool for evaluating current provision as well as a guide for future activity. It has provided on specific activities and services for international students together with a consideration of the merits of joint working with the institution.

Internationalising our Unions is a process which requires the organisation to be open to change, to listen to our international students and, most importantly, to give international students a voice.

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