

o r y
g e n

EDUCATION SERVICES FOR
OVERSEAS STUDENTS (ESOS)
REVIEW 2022

ORYGEN SUBMISSION

EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS (ESOS) REVIEW 2022

ORYGEN SUBMISSION

Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework, including the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code). Orygen has previously consulted over 650 international students and education providers across Australia, identifying experiences of social isolation, loneliness, bullying, harassment, racism, perceived and actual safety risks, and difficulty accessing services on and off-campus.(1) This project has informed our response. In addition to this feedback, Orygen can provide further detail and support on request.

ABOUT ORYGEN

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Orygen conducts clinical research, runs clinical services (five headspace centres), supports the professional development of the youth mental health workforce and provides policy advice relating to young people's mental health. Our current research strengths include: early psychosis, mood disorders, personality disorders, functional recovery, suicide prevention, online interventions, neurobiology and health economics.

SUBMISSION

There is an increased national focus on the mental health of international students, particularly in ensuring that educational institutions provide access to appropriate mental health and wellbeing services. In the recent Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030, the Australian Government noted that international students are vulnerable to experiencing mental ill-health, experience exploitation and discrimination in their homes and workplaces, and committed to supporting the capability of all providers to deliver student support programs.(1)

Identifying a need to provide additional support to university students, the Productivity Commission's inquiry into mental health noted that educational institutions should ensure that counselling services meet the language and cultural diversity needs of international students.(2) Previous research reported that 21 per cent of international students indicated that a language barrier prevented them from seeking help.(3) Students also reported experiences of discrimination when communicating with services both on and off-campus. There is an opportunity to update the National Code to ensure that services meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of international students and reflect the priorities of national policy documents.

Recommendation

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment update the National Code to adopt the Productivity Commission's recommendation (Action 6.2) that ensures counselling services meet the language and cultural diversity needs of their international students.

The National Code currently requires registered providers to provide access to services that ensure the mental and physical wellbeing of overseas students. Despite this requirement, a number of service access barriers continue to exist for international students. When surveyed about barriers to accessing mental health services, over a third (36.2 per cent) of international students noted that they did not know where to go.⁽³⁾ Additionally, 29.7 per cent of international students reported the cost of services as a barrier, with education providers noting that many international students were not accessing health services due to real or assumed costs, and that students were unsure about what was covered by their health insurance. One in five (20.0 per cent) consulted education providers also reported that international students do not access support due to a concern that it will impact their visa status or educational record. While education providers may currently be meeting the requirements of the National Code, a number of known service access barriers remain unaddressed. Changes to the National Code are needed to address service access barriers and meet the mental health needs of international students.

Recommendation

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment update Standard 6 of the National Code to require registered providers to document and implement processes for accessing counselling and mental health support services, which should include:

- **simple and easily accessible information online, including information about out-of-hours supports;**
- **ensuring that international students are aware of the free or low-cost services that they are eligible for;**
- **addressing and reducing concerns that accessing support will impact student visa status or academic records; and**
- **the delivery of information about counselling services and external supports at key periods, such as in the lead up to assessment and exam periods.**

A whole-of-institution approach is needed to support the mental health and wellbeing of international students. Whole-of-institution approaches ensure that wellbeing is considered across learning environments and campuses. Section 6 of the National Code utilises this approach for security and safety, requiring that registered providers take all reasonable steps to provide a safe environment on campus or premises, and advise overseas students and staff on actions they can take to enhance their personal security and safety. Similarly, the National Code should be updated to ensure that registered providers document and report on the reasonable steps taken to provide a mentally healthy campus or premises. The Australian University Mental Health Framework supports universities to develop mentally healthy environments.⁽⁴⁾

Recommendation

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment update Standard 6 of the National Code to require that registered providers take all reasonable steps to provide a mentally healthy campus or premises.

REFERENCES

1. Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030. Government of Australia; 2021.
2. Productivity Commission. Mental Health, Report no. 95. Canberra; 2020.
3. Orygen. International Students and their Mental Health and Physical Safety. Melbourne: Orygen; 2020.
4. Orygen. Australian University Mental Health Framework. Melbourne: Orygen; 2020.



ORYGEN.ORG.AU
+61 3 9966 9100
35 POPLAR ROAD
PARKVILLE VIC 3052
AUSTRALIA

MELANIE DUNCAN
MELANIE.DUNCAN
@ORYGEN.ORG.AU

**REVOLUTION
IN MIND** *ory
gen*