

BREAKOUT SESSION A: SYNERGIES BETWEEN INDIAN STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THE NEW COLOMBO PLAN

Session Facilitator: Ms Kate Fitzgerald, Assistant Director, New Colombo Plan secretariat, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Recommendation 1: Strengthen institutional partnerships

Australian and Indian universities should continue to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan and Indian Government programs to increase Australia-India student mobility and deepen their engagement and cooperation.

Recommendation 2: Start with short-term mobility programs

The New Colombo Plan involves a scholarships program for study of up to one year and internships or mentorships, and a flexible mobility grants program for both short and longer-term study, internships, mentorships, practicums and research.

Students are often limited by financial and work considerations in Australia, making shorter courses more accessible to some. Shorter-term mobility programs could be used to attract larger numbers of Australian students to study in India over the next few years. These programs could also encourage students to return for longer-term study after an initial positive experience – a trend which can be seen following short-term mobility programs from other countries such as the UK.

Recommendation 3: Pursue credit transfer agreements

Recognising the value of study in the region to Australian students, New Colombo Plan scholarships and mobility programs must provide academic credit or be a mandatory element of an Australian undergraduate's course. Accreditation can be best achieved through institution-to-institution credit transfer agreement. Credit transfer agreements will help to facilitate large-scale mobility as they ease administration requirements and are sustainable over the long-term. Building mobility experiences into undergraduate qualification requirements and recognising these experiences on academic transcripts could also encourage students to undertake a mobility program. Bridging courses could also be used to augment any additional content in order to attract credits.

Recommendation 4: Take advantage of flexible mobility program arrangements

The New Colombo Plan has been designed to give universities the flexibility to explore effective and innovative mobility models and delivery systems. A flexible approach can be taken when arranging mobility programs to accommodate differences in operating structures, course requirements, course duration and academic years of both countries. For example, there may be opportunities to offer summer courses under the Australian timetable which fit into the winter semester times of Indian universities.

BREAKOUT SESSION 2: SESSION B: INBOUND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY GOVERNMENT/UNIVERSITIES/COLLEGES

Facilitator: Professor Talat Ahmad (Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia University)

Recommendation 1: Build in experiential/practical learning

Even for short-term courses, meaningful practical or 'out-of-classroom' experiences are beneficial to mobility experiences. Examples already exist, such as explanatory tours of manufacturing processes for engineering students or site visits to Bollywood studios for film students. It is also important to take every opportunity for experiential cultural learning. This can include creative mechanisms such as arranging accommodation for students with an Indian family during their stay.

Recommendation 2: Include opportunities to interact with domestic students

It is important to ensure that international students are not isolated from the general student body, as they will miss an important opportunity for interaction during their program. The host institution should take proactive steps to ensure that these opportunities exist, such as creating an international students' association to run activities with the domestic student body.

Consideration should also be given to involving international students in the mainstream coursework of the university. Although this can prove difficult with short-term mobility courses, it may be possible to incorporate segments of the broader semester into their shortened units to give them exposure to the rest of the student body.

Recommendation 3: Make use of leading schools at the host institutions

Host institutions should consider which schools or centres at their campus are undertaking leading work in their field. Pro-active efforts could be made to incorporate these centres into the mobility program, to give students a taste of the university's strongest fields and academics.

Recommendation 4: Consider the time of year for running the program

Timing is important for courses, in terms of student's willingness to travel and also the compatibility with Australian semesters. For example, short courses run during the Indian winter would be attractive to Australian students looking for 'summer courses' during their longer break, when they are more willing to travel. They would also not interfere with semester-based courses that the students are undertaking.

Conversely, courses undertaken during the peak of Indian summer may attract less Australian students who are not used to the conditions, depending on the courses in question. Semester-based courses would also be more attractive if aligned to Australian semesters.

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BREAKOUT SESSION C: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Session Facilitator: Professor Sue Elliott, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Engagement), University of Melbourne

Recommendation 1: Key elements of student support services

Basic parameters need to be in place which host and home institutions have a key role in facilitating. These include pre-departure briefings; on-arrival reception and orientation; assistance with accommodation; familiarisation with medical, transport, financial and legal facilities; and support for cultural and academic adjustment.

Recommendation 2: Buddy programs and orientation

Involving students with prior international experience in briefings and facilitating individual connections through a buddy program can help ease the transition and accelerate integration of international students. Host institutions may consider assigning the first few days for international students to settle into their surroundings and acquaint themselves with their new lifestyle.

Recommendation 3: Cultural sensitisation

Enhancing the cultural experience and minimising cultural disorientation should be a significant focus of support services provided by institutions. Sensitisation is needed on India's diverse culture and students would benefit from an understanding of acceptable social behaviours. Home stay options are one of the best exposures to a new culture and can ease cross cultural adjustment. Partnering institutions should consider offering this option to students in their international mobility programs.

Allocating a staff member at the host institution who acts as a cultural interpreter and an advisor can help international students to become culturally, academically and linguistically integrated in their new environments.

Recommendation 4: Safety and security

Safety and security issues need to be a genuine concern in pre-departure briefings and arrival orientations. Emphasis should be given to legal safety measures which international students tend to pay less attention to, such as registration with police authorities in India.

Recommendation 5: Third party providers

The use of third party service providers for international student support by institutions is currently not common in India, although there are credible service providers in the industry. Institutions should undertake due diligence on the integrity of these providers before utilising their services.

BREAKOUT SESSION D: PREPARING STUDENTS TO STUDY IN INDIA

Session Facilitator: Dr Ian Woolford (Head of Hindi program), La Trobe University

Recommendation 1: Adequate orientation

It is important for institutions engaging in student mobility to provide adequate orientation not only prior to the students' departure but also shortly after arrival. The instructions should focus on important issues involved with living and studying in India. In the case of India, it was considered best to have a state or an institution specific set of instructions due to the country's vast diversity.

Recommendation 2: Student support services must also be available in the host institute

On-going student support services of the host institute are vital to help international students develop trust in the home institution and feel comfortable in the new environment.

Recommendation 3: Key topics to cover in pre-briefings

Areas of attention identified were sensitisation to gender specific issues in India; cultural diversity; gaining cultural knowledge and cultural fluency; developing motivation, respect and commitment towards living and studying in India.

Recommendation 4: Personal interaction should form part of the pre-briefing and orientation upon arrival

The participating Australian institutes should orient the students not only through textual material but also introduce them to Indian families, Indian students studying in Australian institutes and other Australian students who have been to India.

Interaction with an Indian buddy/family/friend will facilitate Australian students' cultural immersion and give them first-hand knowledge of opportunities, expectations and concerns that they should be aware of.

Recommendation 5: Feedback mechanisms

It is important for institutions to have appropriate feedback mechanisms to further refine pre-departure and on-arrival instructions and mitigate unrealistic expectations. Input should be sought from students after they utilise the preparatory services, to ensure that they match the experience on the ground.

BREAKOUT SESSION E: BEST PRACTICE INTERNSHIP MODELS

Session Facilitator: Dr Wendy Martinec (Head of La Trobe Abroad, La Trobe University)

Recommendation 1: Ensure internships consist of meaningful work that is relevant to the student's course

Providing interns with meaningful work is critical to ensuring a program's success. Interns should be doing work related to their major that is challenging, recognized by the organisation as valuable, and fills the entire work term.

Institutions arranging internships should work with the interning organisation to ensure that these considerations are reflected in the job descriptions. They should emphasise them during manager/mentor orientation sessions, and communicate with interns frequently throughout the work term to determine whether the goals are being met.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that the correct visa arrangements are in place for internships

There was a discussion on the duration of the internship, as foreign students visiting India for longer than 180 days must register with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office.

Student visas include restrictions on internship activity while the holder is in India. This may necessitate a new visa, particularly for students wishing to undertake an internship at the end of their studies. Clarification should be sought from the Indian Government when designing any new program, to ensure that visa obligations are well understood by the institutions and students.

Recommendation 3: Ensure provision of adequate support services for students undertaking internships

It is important that the following support services are provided as part of internship programs for students:

- Orientation
- Coordination between students and an internship advisor
- Preparatory briefings for students on local cultural considerations
- Provision for adequate housing, including situations where the internships continues after the study is complete
- Mentoring arrangements
- 24/7 pastoral care

Recommendation 4: The internship should attract credit recognition

Prior to the beginning of the program, home institutions should also consider what credit arrangements are in place for internships that they organise. These should be spelled out in the program materials and made available to students before they register. Where a student organises their own internship, an arrangement – including credit arrangements –

should be agreed by the student, host organisation and home institution before the internship placement commences.

Recommendation 5: Consider extra scholarships for internship participants

Additional scholarships were also suggested as a way that institutions could attract more recruits for internship programs. They may be particularly useful in attracting specific cohorts of students or skill sets that are hard to target. For example, an internship grant is available to Australian students participating in semester-based New Colombo Plan mobility programs.

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