

FACT SHEET 13

INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS

Introduction

Registered Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) enrolling international learners into Fiji based qualifications delivered wholly or in part within Fiji are required to ensure that these learners are supported prior to enrolling and throughout their studies. These learners are entering Fiji on a student permit [visa], based on enrolment in a registered HEI qualification.¹ Student Permit means a permit granted under Section 9(2)(d) of the Immigration Act, 2003 authorising a person to study at local Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, Vocational Institutions or Universities.

Basis of quality assurance

The basis of higher education quality assurance is the Quality Assurance Standards for Fiji Higher Education (2019), which includes the Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions. These Quality Standards outline the expectations for all HEIs and for all learners. When meeting these quality standards, HEIs need to consider their learner cohort and how it affects their approach to meeting the quality standards.

When meeting the Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions, HEIs need to take into consideration international learners and their specific needs and take reasonable steps to include information in any documents or actions.

Considerations

Marketing material

The Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions require:

- 8.1 The HEI represents itself and its offerings with accuracy and integrity.
- 8.2 Accurate and relevant information for applicants is accessible and made publicly available to enable informed decisions and includes a range of requirements [which are not listed here in this Fact Sheet].
- 8.3 Information must be provided prior to enrolment, to payment of fees and, to signing any agreement.

In meeting this Standard, HEIs should seek to understand the needs of the prospective international learners and what they will require regarding marketing materials. International learners will be travelling to a new country and may have no understanding of the Fiji Islands and its education system, or of living within the Fiji community.

Additional information to be provided to prospective international learners could include:

- Language of instruction
- Accommodation options and estimated accommodation costs
- Estimated living costs in Fiji (on an annual basis)

¹ Student Permit means a permit granted under Section 9(2)(d) of the Immigration Act, 2003 authorizing a person to study at local Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, Vocational Institutions or Universities, accessed at <http://www.immigration.gov.fj/index.php/student-permit>

- Estimated study costs (for things such as textbooks, uniforms, field trips) for the duration of the programme of the Qualification
- Departure information, such information on what to pack or what may be required in Fiji; banking details
- Travel opportunities and support on arrival in Fiji
- Specific orientation requirements, e.g., attend a particular orientation session
- Link to Fiji immigration information, at <http://www.immigration.gov.fj/>.
- Link to FHEC and the list of registered providers and accredited programmes, <https://www.fhec.org.fj/>.

The HEIs must not promise international learners any possible migration outcomes from undertaking any Qualification.

Agents

The Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions require HEIs to quality assure any services provided by other parties related to programmes leading to a Qualification (such as agents recruiting learners or other organisations delivering education and training) undertaken partially or wholly on its behalf through a third party (QS 2.1e).

HEIs are also to:

- Have in place an agreement with the third party (QS 3.2)
- Include in marketing information details about third party arrangement (QS 8.2).

HEIs who have agents recruiting international learners on their behalf, and with which they have an agreement, should have a list of these marketing agents on the HEI's website. HEIs need to ensure that they monitor third party agreements and services provided by these agents.

HEIs need to ensure that agents provide accurate information about studying and living in Fiji and that they act with integrity and professionalism. Agents must uphold the reputation of Fiji education and quality assurance systems.

The HEI should demonstrate due diligence in the selection of their agents, including:

- Carry out and record reference checks
- During the term of the agreement, monitor agent actions, and,
 - Terminate agreements if or when it is found that the agent has been involved in a serious and deliberate breach of the contract or aspects of the Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions, or ongoing conduct that is false and misleading
 - Take corrective actions to address conduct or omission of an agent
 - Cease accepting international learners from an agent if the HEI knows or suspects that the agent is engaging in unethical recruitment processes.

HEIs must ensure that agents are provided with current and up-to-date information about Fiji, the education and training system in Fiji, and studying at the HEI.

Refer to Fact Sheet 12 Third Party Arrangements.

Selection, enrolment and entering into an agreement

Quality Standard 9.1 and 9.2 requires HEIs to apply learner admission policies and procedures and to provide academic counselling opportunities for the selection of components within programmes where options exist.

HEIs should have in place appropriate processes to screen international applicants to ensure that they have the appropriate entry requirements (such as pre-entry qualifications or experience, the appropriate level of language, literacy and numeracy skills) to maximise their chance of success. HEIs may need to put in place language, literacy and numeracy tests; as well as protocols for validating international qualifications, as part of the selection process.

HEIs are to enter into an agreement with ALL their learners, including international learners (Quality Standard 8.3). The agreement should include (but is not limited to):

- The Qualification to be provided, its completion rules, and expected start and finish dates
- Clear identification if the Qualification offered is accredited and listed on the National Register for Fiji Higher Education, or if the programme offered is not quality assured through FHEC processes
- Details of fees and charges, and refund policy and the process for requesting refunds
- Summary of the HEI's grievances processes and how to access
- Other services or support that the HEI has committed to providing to the international learner.

For international learners, the agreement should also include:

- Any attendance or academic progress requirements
- The requirement to update personal contact details every six months, including that of a parent, legal guardian or nominated person
- Agreeing to abide by requirements for younger learners (if that applies).

Orientation

Quality Standard 9. 2 requires HEIs to provide an orientation programme which is tailored to meet the specific needs of the learner, including international learners, to enable a successful transition to study in Fiji.

HEIs should take all reasonable steps to provide additional information that international learners might need, such as:

- Information regarding personal safety in Fiji

- Contact details for accessing police, health care and emergency services
- Information in relation to social and cultural expectations
- Links to immigration requirements, labour laws and minimum wages
- Explanations about legal rights and responsibilities while living in Fiji, and any relevant weblinks
- Nominated support staff members and contact details; at least three staff members are to be nominated
- Cross-cultural communication information.

Support and well being

As mentioned in the Quality Standard 9.2, support services could include:

- Academic support services
- Counselling and mental health support
- Career services
- English language support
- Tutoring support
- Study skills programmes
- Housing and rental services
- Financial support services
- Health and disability services
- 'Look out' committee or group to support international learners who are finding it hard to adjust or who are identified at risk.

As international learners are far from home and may also be studying in another language, they may be faced with different support and academic needs. HEIs need to consider the various support needs and provide reasonable support services to international learners. HEIs need to monitor the provision of these services.

Providing support includes having and implementing documented processes for supporting and maintaining contact with overseas learners, including those undertaking any components online or distance units of study.

Where an international learner requests access to services included in the orientation program, HEIs must give information or referrals at no additional cost to the international learner.

HEIs needs to provide a range of services on campus or be able to refer international learners to affordable services.

Monitoring attendance and academic progress

Quality Standard 9.2 refers to HEIs monitoring 'participation and assessment outcomes to evaluate progress and implement strategies that promote successful completion, including during any structured workplace learning'.

HEIs should have a process in place to:

- Monitor international learner attendance (on-campus, on-line or through distance contact) and have a process to contact absent learners (who are absent for more than three days). If attendance for each study period falls below an acceptable level, the HEI is to implement an intervention strategy to maximise their chance of success. Learner attendance data must be provided to FHEC on request. A study period is a term or a semester depending on the HEI. The HEI is to determine the acceptable level for each Qualification, but it should not be below 75% attendance.
- Monitor international learner progression so that international learners can complete within the duration of their student visa and have a process to provide an intervention strategy to maximise their chance of success and completion within the expected duration. Learner progress data must be provided to FHEC on request.
- Implement a process to identify international learners at risk of not completing and provide reasonable support for their specific needs to maximise their chance of success.
- Monitor international learner enrolment and implement a process for learners to seek permission to change their enrolment, e.g., change of programme. Provide data to FHEC on request.

Critical incident

The Quality Standard 9.4, notes that a critical incident is a traumatic event or threat inside or outside Fiji, which causes distress, fear, injury or extreme anxiety. A critical incident may be non-life threatening. A critical incident is not limited to, but may include:

- Death or serious injury or any threat of these
- Severe abuse, including sexual abuse, verbal abuse, domestic violence, psychological aggression
- Natural disasters
- Missing learners.

For international learners, this may also relate to such incidences happening in their home country, which causes extreme stress, fear or injury.

HEIs should ensure that for each international learner, they maintain the current contact details (including phone number, email and accommodation address; as well as a parent, legal guardian or nominated person. The HEI should have in place a process to update this information every six months.

Complaints and appeals

The Quality Standard 9.3a requires HEIs to have in place a grievance policy that fairly and efficiently deals with learners' complaints and appeals.

When developing a process, the HEI needs to take into account the needs of international learners and ensure that all reasonable steps are made to implement the process in a professional and timely manner. International learners are in Fiji for a limited amount of time, and complaints or appeals need to be dealt with efficiently.

If the international learner appeal relates to a decision to terminate an international learner enrolment, then the HEI must ensure that the learner's enrolment is maintained until the internal process is complete.

Younger age learners

As mentioned previously, HEIs are to enter into an agreement with ALL its learners, including international learners (Quality Standard 8.3). If HEIs accept applicants who are not yet 18 years of age on application and enrolment, HEIs should have in place a process for the parent or legal guardian to sign all documentation.

In relation to Quality Standard 9.2, HEIs are to provide support and welfare services to maximise learners' chances of successful completion of studies. Quality Standard 6.1 also indicates that HEIs should ensure that accommodation (if relevant) is fit for purpose.

HEIs should consider what other strategies can be deployed to protect international younger age learners. The following are suggested strategies for the HEI to deploy in relation to the support and welfare of international younger learners.

HEIs need to have a process to ensure that contact is made with the legal guardian or parent on a monthly basis.

All international younger learners (those younger than 18 years of age) who are not residing with a parent or a legal guardian must be in an agreed accommodation arrangement. Both the HEI and the parent or legal guardian are to agree on accommodation arrangements.

HEIs should have in place a process to:

- Identify suitable accommodation appropriate to the younger international learners' age and physical needs.
- Undertake initial checks of accommodation and ensure that the younger international learner has a bedroom of their own which includes a desk and chair.
- Regularly confirm that younger international learner accommodation is appropriate to the learner's age and physical needs; this should be no longer than every two months.
- Undertake police checks of all residents over the age of 18 years of age (to be updated every two years) and immediately once any resident reaches 18 years of age).

- Notify the police and any other relevant agencies as soon as practicable if unable to contact a younger international learner and where there are concerns for the international learner's welfare.
- Make all efforts to contact a younger international learner's parent or legal guardian immediately if they can no longer contact or cannot approve the international learner's accommodation arrangements.
- Ensure that there is a process in place for younger international learners to request a change to their accommodation arrangements.
- Meet at least monthly with the younger international learner to monitor well-being and accommodation.

Final comment

HEIs need to be aware of any immigration requirements and any child welfare and safety requirements within Fiji.

This fact sheet should be read in conjunction with:

- The Evidence Guide to the Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions
- Fact Sheet #12 Third-party Arrangements.

Related documents

- *The Evidence Guide to the Quality Standards for Higher Education Institutions*
- Fact Sheet #12: Third-party Arrangements

References

Australian Government 2017, National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000.

Fiji Higher Education Commission 2019. Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education, Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji.

NZQA 2019, Guidelines for the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016 (including 2019 amendments), NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA 2019, Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016 (including 2019 amendments), NZQA, Wellington.

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