Key stakeholders’ experiences of international education at one Australian university

Sophia A. Harryba

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Key Stakeholders' Experiences of International Education at one Australian University

Sophia, A. Harryba (10016809)

Bachelor of Arts (Psychology with Honours)

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology and Social Sciences)

Faculty of Computing, Health & Science

Edith Cowan University

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to explore the experiences which influenced the perceptions of three key groups of stakeholders: academic and support staff, international students, and their domestic peers, when engaging in International Education at one Australian university.

The original research questions for this study were:

1. What experiences influence staff members’ perceptions of International Education at one Australian university?

2. What experiences influence international students’ perception of their education at one Australian university?

As directed by theoretical sampling, the views of domestic students were then also sought, to shed light on the following research question:

3. What experiences influence domestic students’ perceptions of International Education at one Australian university?

Conceptual Framework: A Social Constructivist theoretical framework was employed within a Case Study approach for a number of reasons. First, institutions have their own specific characteristics, budgets and student populations and so can be studied separately in order that the researcher might develop a detailed critical understanding of the intricacies of the single case. Since International Education is a complex phenomenon, the researcher also needed to include the multiple realities of the different stakeholders involved. The researcher’s personal philosophy aligned with Social Constructivism, which argues that perceptions of reality are subjective to the person experiencing them. As such, Social Constructivist Grounded Theory allowed for the interpretation of both the participants’ views of reality as well as the researcher’s. Finally, this approach allowed for a co-construction of reality through the interactions of the participants and
the researcher during the data collection process. This was important since the researcher, too, is an international student.

Data collection strategies associated with Grounded Theory (GT) were used to obtain a more holistic understanding of the complex issues at play, and allowed for theoretical sampling, such that the researcher could follow up new directions as they arose during data analysis.

**Methodology**: The study evolved in three interwoven stages, during which 25 international students, 38 staff members (academic and non-academic) and 10 domestic students were interviewed using semi-structured, face-to-face interview techniques. Theoretical sampling allowed new issues to be addressed in subsequent interviews as the study progressed.

**Participants**: Data collection ceased after 38 interviews for staff members. This group comprised of 28 females and 10 males, most over 45 years of age, and an approximately equal mix of academic and non-academic staff. For international students, data collection ceased after 25 interviews. This group included both undergraduates and postgraduates, with only two having English as their first language. Length of stay in Australia varied from 2 months to 9 years. Data collection for the third group of participants, the domestic students, ceased after ten interviews, due to the difficulty of recruiting more students.

There was an important gap in the sample of staff members, with no representatives from the SSC (Student Services Centre) responding to the numerous invitations to participate in the research. Ironically, SSC staff reported there was a policy based deterrent by which any staff working in the SCC were technically unable to participate in this (or any) research within the course of working hours.

**Procedure**: The sampling process was carried out using snowball and volunteering techniques. Invitational emails, flyers and website posts were used to inform staff members,
international and domestic students about the research. The participants then contacted the researcher to arrange for an interview date and time suitable for all parties. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes in length and data were transcribed immediately after each interview, so that a constant comparison with previous data could be carried out. Data were analysed using Constructivist Grounded Theory techniques.

**Findings:** Perceptions of the key stakeholders were influenced by experiences both at the university level as well as at student and staff levels. It was observed that experiences of International Education depended on staff members’ roles and how much experience they had had with international students; how they perceived their international students; questions about the motivation of some students; and concerns about some students’ communication skills. At the university level, staff experiences were influenced by frustration with existing services and multi-level miscommunication across the university. These factors led to a number of implications for the staff, the students and the university. Issues such as lack of time to work with students, heavy workloads, lack of training or incentives to participate in training, and tensions around student assessment led to some staff members feeling “frustrated” or “resentful” about working with international students.

International students’ perceptions of their education were influenced by concerns about the adequacy of their own communication skills, a lack of confidence in participating fully in the academic and social life of the university; and their perceptions of staff roles and responsibilities. Their broad experiences of their education were also affected by concerns about the services provided, which were either not specific enough, not familiar enough, or poorly coordinated. They also perceived some negative responses from their domestic peers. These combined factors resulted in a reluctance to access available services; some level of withdrawal from full
participation in classroom activities, and feelings of being treated as the ‘other’ by some staff and students.

Domestic students were recruited to the study using theoretical sampling after issues surrounding culturally-mixed group work were raised in the interviews with staff members and international students. Domestic students’ perceptions of International Education were influenced by concerns about some international students’ communication skills; in-group favouritism; and their belief that teachers did not facilitate group work to the extent required. At the university level, some commented that limited promotion of both the benefits of diversity, and of a sense of community on campus, influenced their experiences of working with individuals who were culturally and/or linguistically different.

**Conclusions:** The study highlighted the importance of the university’s Value Position in influencing the International Education experiences of staff and students. The findings of the study supported the view that the model of service provision did not acknowledge that different student cohorts had, to some extent, different needs. This stance then influenced how staff and students responded to those they deemed as different. The contributions of the current study, its limitations and directions for future research are also discussed, along with a set of recommendations for the current Case aimed at enhancing the key stakeholders’ experiences of International Education.
This thesis is dedicated to Naville:

For standing by me
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Glossary

**Academic staff members**: Staff employed to undertake research and teaching, including research only staff. From highest to lowest: Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer, and Senior Tutor/Tutor.

**CALD**: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

**CRICOS**: The Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students established under the ESOS Act lists all providers registered to offer courses to people studying in Australia on student visas and the courses that are approved for offer.

**DIAC**: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (formerly Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs).

**Domestic students (DS)**: Domestic students are Australian citizens, New Zealand citizens (including a diplomatic or consular representative of New Zealand, a member of the staff of such a representative or the spouse or dependent relative of such a representative) or holders of a permanent visa of the host country (DEEWR, 2008, p. 18).

**ESOS Act**: The Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000, revised in 2007, which regulates the delivery of education services to international students.

**Equity**: Ensuring that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions (Cobbold, 2011).

**Equality**: Prescribing equal treatment of all people regardless of circumstances, on the understanding that all have the same rights and entitlements (Substantive Equality Unit, 2005, p. 6).

Go8: (Group of Eight) Group of vice-chancellors of Australia's eight leading universities.

HDR (Higher Degree by Research) candidate: A person enrolled in a Masters or Doctoral postgraduate program, where two-thirds or more of the program's assessable component is by research.

Higher Education Provider (HEP): universities and higher education institutions as determined by the Higher Education Support Act.

IELTS: International English Language Testing Skills

Internationalisation: “The process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education” (Knight, 1999, p. 16).

International Curricula: IDP Education (1995) defines international curricula as: “curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context.” (p. 1)

International Education: “International education is a dynamic concept that involves a journey or movement of people, minds, or ideas across political and cultural frontiers” (Hayden and Thompson, 1995 as cited in Moran Hansen, 2002, p. 5).

International students: also called “overseas students” (see Samuelowicz, 1987) are individuals studying in a country where they do not hold permanent residency or citizenship. In some previous research, the term ‘international student’ has been used interchangeably with
Non Native English Speaker (NNES), English as Second Language (ESL), and English as an Additional Language (EAL) student.

**Neo-Liberalism**: a contemporary political movement which advocates for economic liberalisations, free trade and open markets and where individuals are held responsible for their own welfare (Lynch, 2006).

**Non-Academic staff members**: All staff not classified as Academic.

**Plagiarism**: Using another person's ideas and or manner of expressing them and to pass them off as one's own by failing to give appropriate acknowledgement.

**Service**: a process, activity or action that is intangible, as it is often abstract in nature; perishable, as they can only be consumed as long as the activity/ process continues; and inseparable, as a service is consumed at the same time as it is produced (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007).

**Substantive Equality**: Involves achieving equitable outcomes as well as equal opportunity. It takes into account the effects of past discrimination. It recognises that rights, entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout society. Substantive equality recognises that equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results (Substantive Equality Unit, 2005, p. 6).

**TOEFL**: Test of English as a Foreign Language
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Broad purpose of the study

The original purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that affected the provision and utilisation of services by international students at an Australian university through interviews with a sample of students identified as such, and some of the staff that supported them. Interviews with members of these two stakeholder groups made it clear that domestic students’ views of interactions with their international peers were important in understanding International Education, therefore a sample of domestic students was recruited to investigate their experiences of International Education at the university.

Subsequent analysis of the data emerging from all interviews revealed that the research was reflecting much broader experiences than those associated only with service provision and utilisation. Therefore the purpose of the study was revised to explore the experiences which influenced the perspectives of three key stakeholder groups: academic and support staff, international students, and their domestic peers, when engaging in International Education at one Australian university.

1.1 Background and context

According to Australian Education International’s research snapshot (2012a):

International Education activities contributed $15.3 billion in export income to the Australian economy in 2011-12, a 4.9 per cent decrease from the earnings recorded in the financial year 2010-11 and down 2.7 per cent on calendar year 2011 ($15.7 billion).
International Education (IE) has become one of the most significant exports for many countries, including the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, which make up the top three Anglophone countries exporting education (Pimpa, 2003). The UK has predicted a £16 billion income by 2020 from International Education (Halpin & Buckley, 2004) and in 2007-08. IE brought $15.5 billion to the U.S economy (IIE, 2008). In Australia, International Education was the third highest export after coal and iron ore (DEEWR, 2008) (see Figure 1.1).

Enrolment of international students\(^1\) increased in all three countries from 2007 (DEST, 2007). In the UK in 2009-2010, there were more than 405,000 new international students, a 10% increase from 2008-2009 (UK CISA, 2010). In the US, international students enrolments increased by 7% to 623,805 in the 2007/08 academic year (IIE, 2010). Over the same period in Australia, international students’ enrolment increased by more than 25% (AEI, 2007).

\[\text{Figure 1.1: Australian exports (DEEWR, 2008)}\]

\(^1\) The label ‘international student’ is assigned to students who are on student visas by the Australian immigration department. When students enrol in Australian universities, they are automatically assigned the label ‘international’ or ‘domestic/local’ which impacts on study load and fees. This label was not chosen by students, but was allocated. Further discussions on the effects of this label are included in the thesis.
1.1.1 The development of International Education in Australia

Historically, the Australian IE sector developed in two distinct phases, moving from an “education as aid” paradigm (1950s through to 1980), to an “education as trade” paradigm (1980 onwards) (Adams, Banks, & Olsen, 2011; Meadows, 2011). Currently, Australia is in the third phase of IE, referred to as the ‘internationalisation’ phase, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

**Education as aid**

International Education in Australia started with the Colombo plan in 1950, which aimed to facilitate regional collaboration (Cuthbert, Smith, & Boey, 2008) by offering free scholarships to individuals from countries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, especially those countries that could not afford to send students for HE (Auletta, 2000). Dissatisfaction with the Colombo policies resulted in two enquiries into Australian overseas students’ policy, both published in 1984, led respectively by Goldring and Jackson (Davis & Mackintosh, 2011; DEEWR, 2008). Jackson suggested an end to the Colombo plan.

**Education as trade**

A new scheme was therefore introduced whereby international students paid for their courses and the number of enrolled international students would be unrestricted. By 1990, all international students were required to pay full fees for their courses.

The non-restricting policy led to an increase in the numbers of enrolled international students in higher education in Australia. This increase brought a number of benefits to the Australian economy and the host institutions, and prompted the industry to develop specific legislation to manage this surge of international students.
To protect international students as full-fee paying students, and to set up national guidelines for the delivery of courses, the National Code was developed in 2000, and revised in 2007 (DEST, 2007). It is a set of standards, falling under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, which all providers listed on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRISCOS) are required to follow. The National Code emphasises the importance of consumer satisfaction, with students being seen as consumers of International Education. However, despite the existence of the ESOS Act, institutions can provide the bare minimum in terms of support to its enrolled international students, and still be compliant with the legislation. For instance, in Standard 6 of the Act, it is stated: “A contact officer or officers must be appointed as the official point of contact for students” (DEST, 2007). The ESOS Act however, does not explicitly mention what ratio of connect officers should be provided, which means that one connect officer could be appointed to a university with thousands of IE enrolments, and still comply with the Act. The effects of reduced staff: student ratio will be discussed in Chapter 2 as a factor impacting upon both students’ and staff experiences of IE. According to the Baird report (2010), “the current environment has decisively shown that ESOS needs to be strengthened and applied by regulators more consistently and rigorously” (p. 2), especially in light of the fact that:

[International] Students who return to their countries with negative experiences could become poisoned alumni, conveying critical attitudes in other countries about Australian society and poor impressions about Australia’s reputation as an education provider. They could ultimately destroy a strong export product. (Wesley, 2009 as cited in Baird, 2010, p. 2)
1.1.2 Factors affecting choice of host country and institution

Economic, political and societal forces in both the host and home countries influence a student’s decision to study overseas. These factors have been broadly classified into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ categories (Pimpa, 2003). Push factors originate in the students’ home countries, whilst pull factors are those in the host country that appeal to international students (Pimpa, 2003). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argue that the economic and social circumstances existing in the students’ home cultures, such as a lack of higher education in certain African and Asian countries, push the student to seek overseas education, but the choice of the destination in certain cases depends on historical or colonial relationships between home and host cultures. Other factors include proximity of host country, commonality of language (Racine, Villeneuve, & Thériault, 2003), availability of preferred course, and cost of living and tuition in the selected higher education institution (Cubillo, Sánchez & Cerviño, 2006; McMahon, 1992; cited in Pimpa, 2003). Additionally, Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery (1997) suggested that knowledge and awareness of the host country were further pull factors. Many universities use recruiting agents to promote their institution and facilitate student access to their courses (Pimpa, 2003). However, there is evidence that other influences are also important. The final decision about which institution to attend often depends on the amount of persuasion and encouragement the potential student receives from peers, parents and relatives. Cost, proximity, social support, and type of lifestyle in the host country were also factors identified as affecting students’ choices (Mazzarol et al., 1997).

In a study carried out in two French-speaking universities in Quebec, it was found that the geographical and social context of institutions, as well as connections between the governments of the host and home countries, and relationships between the university staff and the home
country, played important roles in recruiting international students (Racine et al., 2003).

Additional factors emerged from the International Student Barometer (ISB), administered to international students across Australian universities in 2009, which showed that the most important factor in choosing the country of study was the reputation of the education system. The ISB was initiated by Universities Australia to provide information on how Australian universities were performing compared to other universities (AEI, 2010). In a recent study carried out through the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP, 2012) with online IDP students, it was found that *quality of education* and *international recognition of qualifications* were the two major factors which influenced students’ choice of host country. Thus it would appear that there are different and quite complex combinations of influences that affect international student choice of institution.

Whatever the eventual choice of university, it is important for institutions and host countries to be aware that word of mouth reports are very important in promoting a university, especially in collectivist cultures (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; University of Edinburgh, 2012), such as those in many Asian countries, where extended families are close, and family and friends play a major role in a student’s decision about where to study (AEI, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Simpson & Tan, 2009). If one student does not perceive his or her university experience to be positive, negative reports in the home country are likely to result in the loss of potential students (Simpson & Tan, 2009). Alternately, having a positive IE experience results in positive reports, and also enhances the commitment of international students to the host country, which should secure the economic and reported cultural benefits of enrolling international students (Simpson & Tan, 2009).
1.1.3 Reported benefits of International Education to the host country

Once international students have chosen a host country and university, benefits at both the economic and socio-cultural levels follow. As stated by Access Economics (2009):

Each international student (including their friends and family visitors) contributes an average of $28,921 in value added to the Australian economy and generates 0.29 in full-time equivalent (FTE) workers. Overall, this sees international students, and the associated visitation from friends and family contribute $12.6 billion in value-added. This is based on student expenditure of $13.7 billion and visiting friends and family expenditure of $365.8 million. (p. i)

International student fees are an integral part of Higher Education, as income from international students’ fees are needed for a number of purposes: to fund infrastructure and research; to cover staff salaries; to subsidise the enrolment of domestic students; and to pay for other goods and services used by onshore students (Beaton-Wells & Thompson, 2011; McKenzie, 2008). As pointed out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2011) “many educational institutions rely on the income from full-fee paying international students to assist in the provision of quality education to all students, both international and domestic” (p. 1). As can be seen from Figure 1.2, different institutions depend on international students’ income to varying degrees.

As Higher Education is a competitive industry, universities that rely heavily on international student income need to compete with each other, as well as with other host countries, to attract international students to guarantee the continued income stream for the institution (Paige, 1990).
International student fees have also helped bridge the gap between base funding for Higher Education provided by the Australian government and the individual institutions’ total expenditure (see Figure 1.3) (Group of Eight, 2011). In their report, it was argued that current funding has created a situation “where quality standards are determined by available funds” (p. 9). Current funding, it was argued, covers only teaching and learning activities and is not enough...
to provide all the services and infrastructure required for Universities to provide a positive student experience. Therefore, many Universities have been using the fees from enrolled international students to supplement base funding in order to cover expenditure, and to meet quality standards. Group of Eight (2011) further added that “by 2009, international student fees were equal to half of total base funding and 80 per cent of Commonwealth contributions…international fee income has been above 100 per cent of [domestic] student contributions since 2004” (p. 17).

![Figure 1.3: Student fees and base government funding (Group of Eight, 2011, p. 17)](image)

A change in this market would have a significantly detrimental effect on universities that rely heavily on revenue from international students (Group of Eight, 2011). In Australia in 2009, there were more than 600,000 onshore international students, of whom more than 200,000 were enrolled in Higher Education. By 2010, there had been a decline in commencement and enrolment numbers (see Table 1.1) (Phillimore & Koshy, 2010).
Table 1.1:

Data Showing Number of International Students’ Enrolment from 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Enrolments, Year-to-date</th>
<th>Commencements, Year-to-date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YTD July 2009</td>
<td>YTD July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Edu</td>
<td>194,707</td>
<td>214,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>196,554</td>
<td>199,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>97,009</td>
<td>80,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>25,999</td>
<td>23,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other2</td>
<td>28,032</td>
<td>28,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in Aus</td>
<td>542,301</td>
<td>545,414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Phillimore and Koshy (2010)

This decline has been attributed to several factors, including:

- A stronger Australian dollar;
- The impact of the global financial crisis on demand for places;
- Increased competition from other countries seeking international students, in particular the USA;
- Reputational damage caused by highly publicised attacks on international students;
- The collapse of some private colleges;
- Significant changes to student visa rules and skilled migration; and
- The [then] current election campaign discussion about immigration and population issues. (Phillimore & Koshy, 2010, p. 5)

This decline in numbers has meant that IE is currently Australia’s *fourth* export, “from $17.995 billion in 2009/10…to $14.711 billion in 2011/12” (Connelly & Olsen, 2012, p. 1), which impacts upon the Australian economy in several ways. According to the Deloitte Access Economics (2011) report, “the downturn of international student enrolments over time and
estimates that in net present value terms the reduction in GDP over the 2010-2020 modelling period will be $37.8 billion... Australian employment will fall by over 45,000 through to 2020 due to the direct and spillover effects from international student enrolments” (p. vi).

Apart from the economic benefits of having international students, there are also reported cultural and academic benefits of international students in Higher Education. These include bringing a cultural mix to the university student population: many different individuals who can act as cultural carriers of resources and links between cultures, which can lead to decreased hostility, discrimination and prejudice amongst cultures (Bochner, 1986; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; de Wit, 1995; Gudykunst, 1998; Kell & Vogl, 2008; Mahat & Hourigan, 2007; Sam, 2001). Trice’s (2003) study reported a number of benefits of international student enrolment, including work experience, overseas connections for research partnerships, high academic quality, and an enhanced reputation for the university internationally. Similarly, research conducted by Whitt et al. (2001) found that international students brought increased cultural awareness and opportunities for domestic students to understand how to work in a multi-cultural world. This finding supported earlier research by Fallon and Brown (1999), who reported that 96% of their participants agreed that international students helped staff and UK domestic students to learn about other cultures. A total of 22% of the participants also agreed that international students provided them with overseas business links and 33% reported that international students provided them with overseas research links. Many studies have also supported the view that international students reportedly help domestic students learn how to work in a multi-cultural society (Trice, 2003; Volet & Ang, 1998), an invaluable skill in a globalised world (Brustein, 2007; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Trice, 2005).
1.1.4 Proposed causes of student attrition

According to Gabb, Milne and Cao (2006),

Attrition refers to the loss of students from something, retention refers to the students staying within something, completion refers to the conclusion of something by the students and progress refers to progress of students through something. That “something” may be a unit, a module, a subject, a year of a multi-year course, a whole course or, in the case of attrition and retention, a sector within an institution, an institution, a sector of the tertiary education system or the tertiary education system as a whole. (p. 3)

As there are “new government funding strategies that place an emphasis on completion rather than enrolment” (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2003, p. 3), there is a growing need to understand why any students fail to complete at any level of their studies.

Research in this area reports a range of interacting factors that affect university retention rates at personal, social and institutional levels (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Tinto, 1975 and 1988). These include issues relating to finance and employment (Sinclair & Dale, 2000; Wessel et al., 2006; Zhai & Monzon, 2001); prior academic achievement (McMillan, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Simpson, 2003); course preference and course fit (Callan, 2005; Hillman, 2005; Krause et al., 2005; McMillan, 2005; Queensland Studies Authorities, 2004; Summers, 2003); quality of teaching (Callan, 2005; Polesel et al., 2004); language background (James et al., 2004; McMillan, 2005); student engagement (Tinto, 1975); peer assistance (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005); family support (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1997); institutional habitus (Thomas, 2002); and background characteristics (Dobson, 1999; McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000; Shields, 1995).
These factors can be grouped into five broad categories that explain student attrition from sociological, organisational, psychological, cultural and economic perspectives. The sociological explanation, which incorporates Tinto’s (1993) Model of Student Departure, argues that first students must detach themselves from the groups they formed before university - friends, family - and go through a transition period “during which the person begins to interact in new ways with the members of the new group into which membership is sought” (p. 93). For Tinto, students who drop out are those who cannot successfully separate themselves sufficiently from their previous attachments and adapt to their new learning environments and new groups. Tinto argues that the students’ academic and social integration are also important to student retention. According to Kuh et al. (2011) “social integration is often measured as a composite of interactions with peers and interactions between faculty and students, while academic integration reflects satisfaction with academic progress and choice of major” (p. 29). Research carried out to test Tinto’s model has shown that social integration is a more robust predictor of student persistence than academic integration (Kuh & Love, 2000).

The organisational perspective argues that a university’s structure, size, resources and student-staff ratio influence student retention. This perspective uses Bean’s (1980) student attrition model to describe the belief-attitudes-behaviour-intent loop, where the dashes between words represent ‘is shaped by’. Thus, students’ experiences with staff and the institution shape how they feel about the institution and that “students’ perceptions of the fairness of institutional policies and the responsiveness of faculty and staff presumably affect decisions to persist or leave the institution” (Kuh et al., 2011, pp. 30-31).

The psychological explanation of student retention focuses on students’ personality traits to explain the likelihood that students will drop out. Individuals with higher self-efficacy, higher
confidence in their academic abilities and internal loci of control tended to persist through their course (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Dweck, 2000). The psychological perspective further relies on psychology contract theory (Rousseau, 1995), which postulates that students have an expectation about the staff-student and institution-student relationship and when these expectations are not met, students are more likely to drop out (Rousseau, 1995).

The cultural explanation of student retention argues that students who come from under-represented groups might not be able to benefit from the university’s resources (Fischer, 2007; Tierney, 1992). The cultural perspective argues that “minority students’ cultural backgrounds often differ from the Eurocentric frameworks upon which the norms and values at predominantly White institutions are based” (Guiffrida, 2006, p. 451) and as such, interactionist models such as that proposed by Tinto, arguing that a separation from one’s previous groups is necessary to integrate into the new university groups, is culturally biased. The cultural perspective argues that for many cultural groups, the bond that exists between student, family and friends cannot be broken; and that in fact support from those bonds increases the chance that students succeed (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1992 and 1999). Thomas (2002) argues that:

If an institutional habitus is inclusive and accepting of difference, and does not prioritize or valorize one set of characteristics, but rather celebrates and prizes diversity and difference, students from diverse backgrounds will find greater acceptance of and respect for their own practices and knowledge, and this in turn will promote higher levels of persistence in HE (p. 431).

Institutional habitus was defined as “the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation” (Reay et al., 2001 cited in
The cultural perspective thus maintains that the ways in which universities cater for students’ cultural values play an important role in student retention.

Finally, the economic explanation looks at the cost-benefit equation of undertaking higher education. If the costs of pursuing HE is higher than forgoing this education, a student might drop out (Sinclair and Dale, 2000; Wessel et al., 2006; Zhai & Monzon, 2001).

Student retention is a complex phenomenon, most probably influenced by a combination of the above factors. For some international students, it could be a mixture of cost, course/institution fit, being valued at the institution (i.e. institutional habitus) and the students’ backgrounds. For those international students whose cultural backgrounds are not valued and promoted through the institutional practices, attrition rates might be higher (Thomas, 2002).

Whatever combination of factors is relevant in different individual situations; the research has clearly indicated the important role that the institution plays in supporting students throughout the course of their study (McLaughlin, Brozovsky & McLaughlin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Thomas, 2002). It has been argued that “it is more cost effective to strive to retain the students we enrol than to recruit new students and ultimately more beneficial for both the university community as a whole and for our students” (Gabb, Milne & Cao, 2006). Thus, institutions which rely heavily on international student fees need to be aware of the factors that influence retention, and aim to provide appropriate services for this student cohort.

1.2 Rationale for current study

The income from international student enrolments has been critical for a significant number of universities in light of reduced government funding for Higher Education. In an environment of declining numbers of international students and the reduced revenue stream which has
occurred as a consequence of this, a clearer understanding of the university experiences of this cohort is critical. Insight gained into the experiences of a sample of international students would be broadened by the views of both academic and support staff, and of the domestic students who share their university environment. The views of these key stakeholder groups are important when considering how best to meet the needs of international students in this important area of national endeavor. The study was also conducted as a centralised model of service provision was being implemented to replace a range of services designed to meet the specific needs of international students, and therefore was both timely and important in assessing the impact of the change.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The research developed in several phases, as represented in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.4.

![Figure 1.4: The Thesis’ Conceptual Framework](image-url)
1.3.1 Research Questions:

The research originally sought to address two research questions focusing on both staff members’ and international students’ experiences of IE at an Australian university:

**RQ.1 What experiences influence staff members’ perceptions of International Education at one Australian university?**

**RQ.2 What experiences influence international students’ perception of their education at one Australian university?**

As a result of interviewing a sample of international students and staff members, it became clear that domestic students needed to be recruited to shed light on some of their experiences of interacting with international students. The following research question was added as the result of theoretical sampling.

**RQ.3 What experiences influence domestic students’ perceptions of International Education at one Australian university?**

1.4 Significance of the study

The current study is significant in that it explores the perspectives of three key stakeholder groups involved in IE - staff members, international students and domestic students. Further, one university was targeted so that staff and students from multiple services and roles could participate (see *Figure 1.5*). If research looks at services or groups of individuals in isolation, there is a lack of understanding of how these groups and services operate together. There is also a lack of understanding of how the system as a whole affects or supports specific sub-groups and services. International Education is a complex phenomenon, and so a holistic approach is
required. The current study looked at significant components of the university as a system in order to examine how its interacting parts influence specific services and individuals.

The findings from this study will add to the literature about how staff members work with international students from a whole-of-university perspective. It will also examine how a centralised, generic model of service provision impacts upon staff members and international students, which has received relatively scant research attention to date. The current study was undertaken at the precise moment when the Case University was moving from a specialised model of service provision to a centralised, generic model. Although many universities have gone through similar changes, this study will highlight the issues that arose in the period between moving from one model to the other and the effects of this move on the IE experiences of staff and students.

The current study sought to include the experiences of both academic and non-academic staff across all faculties. This allowed for in-depth comparisons of experiences between and within groups of staff. Further, using one university facilitates understanding of the relationships between the institution and its staff, and institution and its students. Experiences can then be understood at the university level as well as the individual level.

*Figure 1.5: Key stakeholders sharing the university experience*
1.4.1 Delimitations of the current study

For the purposes of the current study, the focus was on International Education at one Australian university (referred to throughout as the Case University), including key stakeholders’ experiences when interacting with each other as well as their experiences when engaging in International Education. The experiences of samples of on-shore international students and on-campus domestic students; as well as on-campus staff members who worked with these students were considered.

Although some of the experiences of international students may be similar to other student cohorts, including refugees and migrants during cross-cultural adjustment, but also other domestic students, the current study focused specifically on the experiences of international students because this cohort has some unique circumstances that can influence their university experiences. Paying full (and significantly higher) fees for university tuition and abiding by strict visa conditions can impact upon their university experiences. According to Marginson (2010):

As people, international students live in the shadows. … Four in five are from Asia. Most are non-white. Though Australia is moving away from its old identity as a bastion of the ‘British race’ in Asia, and our public culture is tolerant and cosmopolitan, non-white people can still face extra problems. ... International students in Australia have a poorly defined legal identity and unclear presence… As globally mobile people, international students fall between two national jurisdictions. They cannot gain access to citizen protections and entitlements while away from home, but they lack the rights of citizens in Australia. (para. 2-4)

The experiences of three major stakeholders were investigated: samples of the staff involved; a sample of international students and a sample of domestic students. This was
necessary to make the research manageable within the timeframe, and with the available resources. It is acknowledged, however, that there are other stakeholders whose views were not sought, including potential employers in both the home countries and Australia, and the families of the students.

1.4.2 The label of ‘international student’

The definition of ‘international student’ and ‘domestic/local student’ in this thesis follows Fotovatian’s definition (2012):

Administratively, the ‘international’ label is used to refer to students who do not live permanently in Australia and have entered the country as students. They come from both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries… The ‘local student’ label, administratively, refers to permanent residents and citizens of Australia. This includes recent immigrants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, refugees and non-English speaking background students who have entered Australia to live permanently. (p. 13)

However, the ‘international student’ label has been assigned rather than consciously chosen by these students. As such, ‘international students’ are often viewed and treated as a homogenous group; and according to (Sawir et al., 2008), “international students must establish themselves as foreigners staying for a time, as neither inside nor outside” (p. 149). This label can bring with it numerous negative connotations, including lack of English proficiency and diminished capacity to think critically, neither of which would be chosen if the label were self-assigned.

In the current study, the researcher used the label ‘international students’ when promoting the study so that different cultures and countries could be represented, instead of focusing on only one ‘type’ of international student. Although the researcher aimed to understand the
experiences of different international students, some staff and domestic students automatically assumed that international students meant students with English as an additional language who were studying in Australia. For them, students from UK, US and other native English speaking countries were not perceived as international students. The repercussions of such an assumption are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

1.5 Outline of thesis

Chapter 2 of the dissertation reviews the literature surrounding the phenomenon being studied: International Education (IE) at one Australian university from the perspective of staff and students (see Figure 1.6).

The design and chosen methodology for the current study is the focus of Chapter 3. The epistemology used was Social Constructivism since this allowed for exploration of multiple participants’ subjective realities. This guided the theoretical framework, which was Constructivist Grounded Theory applied to a single complex case, that is, the Case University.

The fourth chapter presents the ‘case’, outlines and discusses the context-specific sampling techniques employed, and the decision-making processes used in recruiting participants.

Research findings are discussed in three chapters: Chapter 5A relates to the experiences of staff members; Chapter 5B to the experiences of the international students; and Chapter 5C to the experiences of domestic students as they interacted with their international peers.

Chapter 6 discusses the key findings and implications of the study.

Chapter 7 of the thesis discusses the contributions that the current study makes to knowledge on IE. It also acknowledges the limitations of the current study and identifies directions for future research. The chapter then offers a set of recommendations that have been
constructed to be case-specific, since the purpose of this research was not towards generalisations. The chapter concludes with a section written two years post-data collection, which provides an account of how the research journey shaped the researcher’s beliefs and sense of self.
Chapter 2
A Review of the Literature

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the development of IE in Australia, summarized important national benefits that have arisen from IE, and explored various explanations of student attrition. A rationale for the study led to presentation of the three research questions that guided the research, and a statement of its significance.

This chapter reviews literature relating to the changing nature of International Education in Australia, and the ways in which this phenomenon is experienced by different stakeholders: the staff who teach and support students in an “internationalised” context; their international students; and the domestic students who share their learning environment. Both individual factors, and those that operate at the broader university level, are explored from the perspective of each cohort.

2.1 The Australian university context

2.1.1 Moving towards the ‘Internationalization phase’ of education in Australia

As outlined in Chapter 1, Australian IE developed first in terms of aid, and then developed to become an aspect of trade. The third phase of IE in Australia is the ‘Internationalisation phase’, which according to Adams, Banks and Olsen (2011), involves “an emphasis on quality, positive student learning outcomes, employability and social outcomes, skilled migration, increased international collaboration and research links, and outbound mobility” (p. 13). The third phase has been influenced by decreased public funding and a decline in international student numbers, which is putting IE in Australia under pressure (Gallagher, 2011). To “stand
out prominently in the crowded marketplace” (Maringe, 2011, p. 28), some universities have declared themselves to be ‘International Universities’ or more recently, ‘Global Universities’ (Arkoudis, Baik, Marginson & Cassidy, 2012). Numerous studies have been carried out to explore Internationalisation strategies at different universities (Caruana & Hanstock, 2008; Jones & Brown, 2007; Leask, 2009; Sanderson, 2007; Yang, 2010). Arkoudis et al.’s analysis of Australian universities’ websites (2012) found that 39 of the universities noted that internationalisation was important. However, although these universities have declared themselves to be ‘International’ through their marketisation strategies, policies and curricula, a lack of clarity remains as to how Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) is being, or should be, implemented (Arkoudis et al., 2012; Chan, 2004; Knight, 1999). According to Clifford (2010):

Whereas the meaning of this initiative is clear in many areas, the concept of ‘Internationalising the Curriculum’ causes consternation. For some, the presence of international students in the class constitutes Internationalisation of the curriculum, for others adding overseas case studies…and others focus on the induction of international students into ‘How the west is done’. (p. 169)

Gallagher (2011) further argues that IE in Australia is currently in its “corrective phase” (p. 140), where policies are being changed “amid concerns about the unreliability of Australia as a study destination” (p. 140). There is a need therefore to understand how the changing IE environment is being experienced by key stakeholders in Australian Universities to gain a better understanding of how to secure future students and staff.
2.1.2 The changing nature of Higher Education

The emergence of a neo-liberal approach to International Education

Neo-liberalism is a political orientation that focuses on economic growth. When neo-liberalism is applied to HE, “education is ideally integrated into the system of production and accumulation in which knowledge is reduced to its economic functions and contributes to the realization of individual economic utilities” (Morrow, 2006, p. xxxi). The effects of neo-liberalism in HE has received significant research attention (Apple, 2000; Chomsky, 1998; Jauhiainen, Jauhiainen, & Laiho, 2009; Kezar, 2004; Lynch, 2006; Lynch & O’Riordan, 1998; Marginson, 1997a, 1997b, 1999 and 2006; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2010; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rhoads, 2003; Stromquist, 2002). According to Morrow and Torres (2003), “neoliberal governments promote notions of open markets, free trade, reduction of the public sector, decreased state intervention in the economy, and the deregulation of markets” (p. 97).

Marginson and Considine (2000) argue that a new sort of university is emerging as a consequence of adopting a neo-liberal approach to HE. They coined the term ‘Enterprise Universities’ whereby:

The economic and academic dimensions are both subordinated to something else. Money is a key objective, but it is also the means to a more fundamental mission: to advance the prestige and competitiveness of the university as an end in itself. At the same time, academic identities, in their variations, are subordinated to the mission, marketing and strategic development of the institution and its leaders. (p. 5)

The focus of marketisation for some universities brings significant implications for their staff and students, including the potential for a reduction in support services and a reduced staff: student ratio. These implications will be further explored in sections 2.2 and 2.3.
The effects of a neoliberal approach on international education

There has been much debate regarding the use of marketing and business terminology, such as ‘customers’ and ‘service providers’ when referring to HE (Baldwin, 1994; Hill, 1995; Pitman, 2000; Ramachandran, 2010; Scott, 1999; Small, 2008). For most international students, full fees are required for their education, and therefore they may view themselves as customers who expect value for their money (Moodie, 2010). On the other hand, the use of marketing terminologies is not popular with many staff members, who do not see themselves as ‘service providers’. Marketing terminology could suggest that students see themselves as customers, and the perception that ‘the customer is always right’ within the staff/student relationship. Small (2008), suggests “staff members see their roles more along the lines of pastoral care rather than the “transaction-based approach” (p. 176). The adoption of marketing vocabulary and terminologies within HE, however, has allowed the sector to conceptualise itself in terms of the multiple user-groups involved. That is, not only is the customer-student relationship considered, but also the needs of stakeholders, customers and the broader market (Conway, Mackay & Yorke, 1994). Others see difficulties in adopting a marketing approach to HE. According to Ramachandran (2010):

Marketing in the HE sector is not similar to what exists in the commercial sector as “higher education products” are different from “commercial products” and students are different from “customers” who buy commercial products. Moreover, the roles of marketing departments in the HE sector are different from those in a commercial organisation. (p. 544)

Many universities, however, do use marketing strategies to attract and retain students, which suggests that HE is indeed a business. The following section explores this trend further.
Increased commercialization and marketisation

The wide application of marketing vocabulary and metaphors are evident in the now numerous marketing strategies employed to entice students to specific host countries and institutions. These include the use of ranking systems for universities; for example, the Shanghai *Jiao Tong* index, which evaluates universities worldwide based on their research output. At a local level, universities employ the use of survey tools such as the International Student Barometer and *Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instruments* (UTEI) (AEI, 2010), which are diagnostic tools designed to provide insight into students’ expectations and experiences at university (Harvey, 2001; Lynch, 2006). This could be a factor which impacts upon how staff members work with students, considering that at the end of the unit/course, staff members will be evaluated and held accountable for negative evaluations.

In essence, the shift in the HE metaphor to one of ‘market-place’ thinking has facilitated the use of numerous evaluation tools designed to increase accountability in all aspects of tertiary education. Meek (2000) suggests, “accountability measures, performance evaluation and benchmarking are intended to increase competition and ensure value-for-money and efficiency gains” (p. 25).

One such measure used by universities as a marketing strategy is to evaluate *Service Quality* (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Several research projects have used SERVQUAL surveys to investigate student evaluations of service quality at universities (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Oldfield & Baron, 2000; O’Neill & Palmer, 2004; Tan & Kek, 2004). Surveys such as these can increase universities’ awareness of what students consider to be necessary services. In an increasingly competitive industry, these surveys can also serve as benchmarking devices for universities to gauge student satisfaction. Debate continues, however, around the usefulness and
applicability of this type of evaluation, particularly as universities adapt existing protocols to evaluate services for which those protocols were not specifically designed. Because services are different from goods, in that the former are not tangible, perishable or separable from production and consumption, they are difficult to standardise. Evaluating the complex process of educating adults does not fit neatly within this model (Hill, 1995).

Hill (1995) adds that “service productivity and quality depend not only on the performance of the service provider’s personnel, but also on the performance of the consumer, which again can make quality management problematic” (p. 13). In other words, there is something methodologically unsound about asking students—the consumers—to evaluate a service-outcome in which they have not performed well, since this will likely have an impact upon their perceptions of the services and service delivery. Hill further argues that consumers rely on their expectations of the services as well as their previous experience with similar services to evaluate subsequent services, which means evaluations are constructed by the students in the context of their expectations and experiences prior to entering a specific university.

The move from public funding to privatisation of HE is further indication that the sector is operating within a market-place paradigm (Meek, 2000). Not only are fees for international students unregulated, but institutions can now charge fees at the postgraduate level. Scott (1997) adds that “universities have been absorbed into, been taken over by, market relations” (p. 14). This change, according to Buchbinder (1993), means that for academics, “Knowledge becomes a commodity. It can be bought and sold” (p. 344). Importantly, this change to market orientation means that it has become increasingly important for universities to promote and protect their reputations as a source of revenue (Conway, Mackay & Yorke, 1994).
The move to a centralised model of service

Another effect of adopting a neo-liberal approach can be a move away from a decentralised model of university service provision. Decentralisation allows for individual schools, faculties and centres to make decisions which impact upon staff and students in each particular context (Geo-JaJa, 2004). An advantage of decentralisation in relation to student support is tailored service delivery to students. Schools and faculties are aware of the issues they face and decentralisation allows them to offer content- and cohort-specific services. On the other hand, the advantages of centralisation include cost-effectiveness because programs and services are not duplicated but managed centrally (Azfar, Kahkonen & Meagher, 2001; Brown, 2000; Lauglo, 1995; Hanson, 2005; Huisman & Morphew, 1998; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Vidovich, 2002).

In some universities, market-driven approaches have led to support services that do not bring direct revenue to the university being streamlined through centralisation (Field, 2005; Forbes-Mewett, 2008; Harris & Ashton, 2011; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Peach, 2005; Toole, 2005). This can result in job terminations or relocation for support staff. Although the decision about centralisation/decentralisation is made at the university management level, it affects staff members at the grassroots level and impacts upon which services are available for students.

Although it is clear that commercialisation has a flow-on effect on staff members, Codd (2004) argues that “to date, there has been very little research on the educational effects of international commercialisation on teaching methods, curriculum, learning styles, school culture, language needs or ethnic relationships” (p. 30). This is possibly because the debate around how to conceptualise HE in terms of a market-place continues. However, as long ago as 1994, Sines and Duckworth highlighted the reality that, “it’s time for educational institutions to face two facts: they are in a competitive battle for students; and students are customers” (p. 2). So, even if
universities are not operating within a true market-place paradigm, characterised by customer satisfaction, various stakeholders having more input into decision making, and where there is true competition, universities are in fact using business models that conceptualise what they do as providing education as a service (Scott, 1999). The market-place paradigm has been adopted by the Case University where this study took place, as demonstrated by both the naming of the “student services centre” and its purpose - to “deliver services…to meet the needs of graduates, students, faculties, schools, stakeholders and external customers”. This study will therefore be adding to an understanding of the impact of this model on the experiences of staff and students.

2.1.3 Motivation for service provision

As a result of the positive benefits associated with the enrolment of international students, it has been argued that the host country has a moral obligation to understand these students and facilitate their smooth transition (Giroux, 2005; Thornton et al., 2009). This in turn would protect and enhance the students’ commitment to the host country (Simpson & Tan, 2009). Furthermore, some argue that payment of full fees warrants the delivery of high quality service, or the host country and universities could be seen as exploiting international students (Abbott-Chapman & Edwards, 1998; Pelletier, 2004; Simpson & Tan, 2009).

To promote a positive learning experience, many universities provide services to support international students as they progress through their university studies. Initially, many international students need to adjust to a new academic context as well as a new social and cultural environment. The new teaching and learning environment can require greater individual autonomy and adjustment to greater use of a language other than their first (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Kiley, 2003; Lewthwaite, 1997; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Zhang, 2002), whilst the new socio-cultural environment can be influenced by factors such as ‘culture shock’ (Delaney, 2002;
Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Rahman & Rollock, 2004; Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008); the need to adjust to a new physical environment (Searle & Ward, 1990); difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships and relationships with host country individuals (Wang & Shan, 2007); low or no participation in social activities and/ or leisure activities (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005); discrimination and stereotyping (Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Talbot, Geelhoed & Ninggal, 1999; Wei et al., 2007); lack of social support (Burns, 1991; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005); accommodation difficulties (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir & Forbes-Mewett, 2010; Suen, 1998); dietary restrictions (Lin & Yi, 1997); problems with immigration (Mori, 2000; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Wan, 2001); safety issues (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008); and financial stress (Burns, 1991; Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia & Sawir, 2007).

Thus the need for support services to ameliorate the effects of such a wide range of potential socio-cultural and academic difficulties is great. Universities offer different services and in different capacities to support their international students depending on their model of service provision, the numbers of enrolled international students and the available financial resources.

Bartram (2009) claims that there are three potential motivations behind universities’ provision of support services for its students: (1) an instrumental perspective, where the focus is consumerism and is an outcome of marketisation; (2) a humanistic perspective, whereby support services are offered because these can develop individual learners; or (3) a therapeutic perspective, where the focus is on students in need. In terms of international student support, Bartram and Terano (2011) further argue that institutions are moving towards the instrumental view especially in recent times where international student enrolment has plateaued, and with funding from governments focusing on completion rather than enrolment numbers. Under the
instrumental banner, international students are seen as consumers, and institutions have to compete to secure those customers and the economic benefits they bring.

Recently, however, there has been research suggesting the need for support throughout the ‘lifecycle’ of the students’ university studies, because as students progress, their needs change (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2001). According to Thom (2010), “to remain globally successful, universities must demonstrate their responsiveness to their students’ needs and guarantee the quality of the whole experience, not only in relation to teaching and learning, student success and employability” (p. 155). In practice, however, Bartram and Terano (2011) found that universities are moving towards the instrumental view of support; that is, focusing on marketisation and minimizing the number of support services provided specifically for international students.

### 2.1.4 Range of university support services currently offered

The model of service provision adopted by specific universities will dictate which services are offered; with most universities offering a variety of academic, social and personal support services for its students (see Figure 2.1). Although universities might be offering more than the services outlined below, not all have been reported or evaluated (West, 2011), so the current literature review will only discuss those services that have been reported in the literature.

![Figure 2.1: Support services typically offered by Australian universities](image-url)

**Figure 2.1:** Support services typically offered by Australian universities
Academic support

Orientation

Orientation is designed to acquaint new students with university life and the different services on campus. One of the requirements of being a CRICOS service provider is to abide by the (Australian education) National Code (DEST, 2007, Standard 6.1), which states that service providers must provide “an age and culturally sensitive orientation programme”.

Orientation programs prepare international students for university life; inform them of points of contact should help be needed; and help reduce the confusion associated with being a new student (Suen, 1998). A number of universities provide pre- and post-arrival information packs to prepare international students for university transition (Berg, 2003; De Leeuw, Nicholson & Gao, 2009; Kelm, Hult, & Lashbrooke, 2003; Yucas, 2003). However, there are few evaluations of orientation programs tailored specifically for international students to be found in the literature. It is possible that few exist, since for many international students attending orientation is not always feasible, and poor attendance may have led to the view that tailored orientation programs for international students are unnecessary, or a waste of resources. Some may not attend due to lengthy visa processing times, which then lead to late entry to university (Dalglish & Chan, 2005; March, Zeman & Adrian, 2005). Moreover, some students, even if they do attend the orientation program, often cannot grasp this information whilst simultaneously balancing transition issues. As a result, it has been suggested that universities should offer a point of contact post-orientation (Rhoden & Boin, 2002).

Although the National Code specifies that CRICOS institutions should offer orientation for its students, it does not specify the timing or the method by which information should be distributed. The alternative of a web-based orientation has been suggested (AEI, 2012b; Duncan,
According to Murphy, Hawkes and Law (2002), online orientation programs “can initiate, complement, or extend pre-departure training by offering a virtual introduction to a campus and a community and to the cultural mores of a country” (p. 38). As such, online orientation programs can help overcome the spatial and time constraints associated with students having to be present on a particular day. Additional benefits of a web-based orientation for international students with language proficiency issues are the visual cues in an interactive online orientation, and/or the potential for multi-lingual options to be available (Hayakawa, 2000; Smith & Woody, 2000).

**Library services**

It has been argued that a critical marker of international students’ academic success is their ability to navigate and properly utilise the library and its resources (Cuiying, 2007; Wayman, 1984). Some international students can experience difficulties in a new learning environment, especially when required to use unfamiliar technology or equipment (Jackson, 2005). Numerous libraries now offer translated, written material regarding common library protocols because research has shown that EAL (English as an Additional Language) students tend to read at a much slower pace than native English speakers. Being able to access written guides reduces perceived language barriers, and streamlines the process by limiting requests for assistance (Howze & Moore, 2003). Some universities embed their library services within the content of the units, which has been shown to increase both content relevance for students and their attendance and participation rates (Creaser & Spezi, 2012).

Library services have changed significantly with the advancement in technology (Brophy, Craven & Markland, 2006; Thomson, 2009). Librarians are no longer physically needed as much as previously, because students can now access their resources online (Thomson, 2009). Some
libraries disseminate information about their services via social media sites such as Facebook or YouTube, to reach those international students who might be very experienced in the use of social-media, but are reluctant to approach a librarian in person (Saw, Abbott, Donaghey & McDonald, 2010).

*Teaching and learning support*

Other academic supports offered by universities include formal programs such as English and academic writing classes (Silburn, Flack, Bridgeman, & Warwick 2012; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005), as well as informal support provided by the lecturers and tutors (Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2003).

Reviews of programs such as the Curtin Pathfinder (Dawson & Conti- Bekkers, 2002); CBS Communication Skills Centre (Baird, 2012); the Chinese Mentor Guide Program, (Best et al., 2007; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007); and the Learning Support Unit (LSU) at Monash University (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2006) have shown that these programs help international students with essay structuring and report writing, referencing, presentation skills, exam preparation and language skills (Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2006).

**English language support**

English language support is now offered by most universities, as the need for these services has become apparent. This could be seen as an outcome of focusing on marketisation which has seen universities enrolling full-fee paying students, not all of whom have the English language proficiency to successfully access tertiary education, in order to reap the benefits associated with having these students. The issues associated with this practice will be discussed below.

**Defining English language proficiency**
Much of the research argues that there is an issue with low English proficiency with some international students (Borland & Pearce 1999; Burns, 1991; Duffy, Farmer, Ravert & Huittinen, 2003; Hofmeyer & Cecchin, 2001; Phillips 1990), but few actually specify the skills required to access university-level education (Muller, 2011). In an effort to clarify this issue, the Australian Government funded a $100,000 project in 2008 through the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), which aimed to develop good practice principles to develop English language proficiency. These principles were general statements designed to guide universities as to how they could promote English proficiency. For the purposes of the AUQA project, English language proficiency was defined as “the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their university studies” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1). Ten good practice principles for English language proficiency were developed and split into themes, each of which included a description of the theme and an example. The report also included a review of current practice and offered recommendations for universities to take up. Since AUQA audits each university, there was an expectation that universities would comply with these principles.

However, at a symposium of Western Australian universities in January 2011 on the implementation of the DEEWR good practice principles, there was general consensus that the principles were vague, and that it was essentially up to individual institutions to manage English proficiency in their own contexts (Barrett-Lennard, Dunworth & Harris, 2011, p. A100). The fact that the principles are not legally enforceable means that universities can ignore the recommendations altogether, and continue to enrol international students with low English proficiency, but not provide the required support. The impact of this scenario would be felt both at the staff level, because they have to work with these students, and at the student level, because
they might be under the impression that their English proficiency is adequate and therefore might resist suggestions to seek help for their lack of English proficiency.

Assessment of English language proficiency

Also highlighted at the W.A. symposium (Barrett-Lennard, Dunworth & Harris, 2011) was the difficulty of assessing English proficiency given the multiple pathways to university entry; the wide range of accepted English assessments; and the fact that some students can commence university up to two years after sitting for their English test, which can mean that the currency of the result is not guaranteed.

To be eligible for Higher Education in Australia, each university sets its own requirements for English proficiency (Birell, 2006). Coley (1999) observed more than a decade ago that at least 61 ways were used to measure English proficiency for admission into Australian universities from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Some universities accept a combination of these results, which might make it difficult to standardise potential students’ English language abilities.

There has been controversy regarding the appropriateness of tools such as IELTS and similar English tests to adequately frame the complexity of university level language skills. Andrade and Williams (2009) argue that academic language can take up to seven years to develop, and that passing a conventional English test does not guarantee that these students will not experience linguistic difficulties. Ultimately, the tests may prove to be relatively insensitive at predicting how international students might cope with total emersion into an English-speaking environment. Johnson (2008) also argues that even if a student’s level of English is high in his or
her home country, there appears to be a large difference between being students of English in a home country and being taught in English in Higher Education overseas. Different universities have, depending on their model of service provision, developed different strategies and programs to supplement and/or further test enrolled students whose first language is not English.

Public perception of international students’ English language proficiency

The practice of admitting students with low English proficiency has received significant attention in the media, with dedicated articles in the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere documented. Devos’ (2003) analysis of how Australian and Asian (Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong) newspaper articles referred to international students of non-Western origin, found comments in the articles asserting that international students were directly responsible for lowering university standards because of their low English proficiency and the increasing pressure academics feel to pass these students to secure funding. Devos also reported that during the period when the analysis was taking place, a limited number of academics published articles which countered the argument that international students had a lack of English proficiency, but these findings were not well publicised. Devos’ study followed the publication of “Academic Freedom and Commercialisation of Australian Universities: Perceptions and experiences of social scientists” (Kayrooz, Kinnear, & Preston, 2001). One particular finding of this report received extensive public scrutiny compared to the other findings in the report, that “approximately 5 per cent mentioned that they [academic staff] had experienced pressures to admit and to pass full fee paying students” (Kayrooz et al., 2001, p. 38). In support of this, a Sydney academic, in an article titled ‘if at first you don’t succeed, make an offer’, argued that “we’ve passed students… whose written English approximates that of a nine year old, whose
spoken English is so poor it cannot be understood readily in normal day-to-day conversation …” (Elliot, 2001 as cited in Devos, 2003, p. 161).

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that some international students, whose IELTS scores were low when they started their studies, did not show any improvements in their scores when required to sit an IELTS after their studies. Questions were then asked as to how students could graduate without increasing their English language skills (Birell, 2006; Robertson, 2011). This becomes an issue especially for those students who apply for permanent residency and use their degrees for Australian employment. The media focus on ‘international students’ low English language proficiency’ has a number of implications. First, the general public might generalise that all international students cannot speak English and therefore discriminate against this group. This could also have an impact upon employers’ view of international students as well as the views of new students entering university. This negative view could also impact upon some international students’ self-esteem. Reading articles about how they are viewed only in terms of economic value might contribute to cynicism about their hosts, and some resistance to interacting with native English speakers.

Specific programs and services

Different programs and services are offered by universities to deal with the perceived English proficiency issue. One such service is delivered online as an outcome of the English Language Growth Project (Rochecouste, Oliver, Mulligan & Davies, 2010). This project was conducted at five Australian universities in 2008-2009 with around 800 international students. Findings regarding what may or may not assist language development as well as resources for staff members who work with this cohort were analysed to develop an online resource for international students. However, providing such online resources cannot guarantee that staff or
students will make use of them, or that universities will promote such resources and encourage their staff and students to use them.

Another strategy employed by some universities to support English proficiency is the introduction of Post-Entry Language Assessments (PELAs). Reviews of online PELAs reported problems relating to slow computer speeds, insecure computer rooms, and validity issues regarding the instruments being used to measure post-entry language. PELAs that incorporated written materials still attracted low participation rates amongst students (Dunworth, 2009; Ransom, 2009; Read, 2008). Further, there was often no follow-up to ensure that students who scored poorly on a PELA, and were referred to academic language and learning classes, had in fact accessed or benefited from the service (Dunworth, 2009; Ransom, 2009; Read, 2008). Thus the use of PELAs can be problematic and universities must decide whether or not they are useful tools. Additionally, some universities’ PELAs have been conducted only on a small scale and only included specific faculties, rather than university wide.

Embedded academic support

In addition to discrete English language programs, some universities offer embedded academic skills programs (Silburn et al., 2012). Although costly and time intensive, embedded programs allow academic and support staff members to work together to offer course-specific sessions to international students. These can cover referencing and academic writing as well as specific skills required for individual assignments. The Curtin Business School has reported that their embedded face-to-face programs are effective in establishing trust and rapport with the newly enrolled business students, which then increases participation rates (Baird, 2012).

A number of universities are now providing embedded academic skills programs to help students learn content-specific skills (Brooman-Jones, Cunningham, Hanna & Wilson, 2011;
English, Bonanno, Ihnatko, Webb, & Jones, 1999; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001; Stratilas, 2011). These are reportedly more useful and relevant to students’ disciplines and according to student evaluations, are preferred to centralised services (Benson, Hewitt, Devos, Crosling, & Heagney, 2009).

**Social support**

In addition to academic services, universities also offer programs and services aimed at providing social support for students; for example, peer mentoring programs, social and religious clubs, and sporting associations. For international students, such services help build the social networks that have been lost as a result of their relocation (House, Kahn, McLeod, & Williams, 1985); provide a buffer against culture shock (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008); increase positive psychological well-being; and can decrease feelings of loneliness and of homesickness (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004). Such services are therefore important considerations for international students.

Peer mentoring programs

Social support can be offered through peer mentoring programs. According to Farrell et al. (2004), peer mentoring refers to “organised groups where experienced and trained students facilitate group interaction in relation to university study activities amongst small groups of less experienced students. The primary goal is to improve educational outcomes and student experiences of their education” (p. 2).

Peers are seen as powerful influences on cognitive and affective development. Peer mentoring can help lessen feelings of isolation and associated psychological problems such as
depression, by bringing students closer to each other, and strengthening their engagement with their courses, as well as with their universities (Calder, 2004; Shotton, 2007). To promote social connectedness and adjustment, numerous universities have used direct and indirect peer mentoring (Baron & Carr, 2008; Calder, 2004; Colvin & Jaffar, 2007; DuBois, 2007; Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008; Kisch, 2012; Lassegard, 2008; Leask, 2010; Olivas & Li, 2006).

Peer mentors are usually volunteers who are either untrained or have no previous experience of mentoring, which can further complicate the delicate task of pairing mentors and mentees. Both parties’ backgrounds and characteristics play a major role in the relationship and this is especially true for international students, whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds may differ significantly from that of the mentor (Spencer, 2006). Time constraints and limited resources to support both mentors and mentees throughout the program can present challenges to the effective implementation of peer mentoring programs (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Limited funding also means that programs might not be comprehensively evaluated (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008), making it difficult to ascertain their true effectiveness.

Another source of social support occurs through informal friendships with other students. Furnham and Bochner’s (1982) functional model of friendship reflects three types of friendships that are relevant to this study. *Co-national friendships*, those formed with peers who are encountering similar experiences, provide a sense of cultural identity, increase self-esteem and can help reduce the stress associated with transitioning to a new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Maundeni, 2001). In the long term, however, co-national friendships have the potential to hinder language acquisition and general adaptation to the new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Kim, 2001; Maundeni, 2001).
Multi-national friendships are those formed with other international students who are not co-nationals. These provide opportunities to learn about other cultures while sharing the new experiences of the host culture. Like co-national friendships, however, they can hinder language acquisition and adjustment to the new culture (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yum, 2001).

Friendships with host-nationals have been associated with lower levels of homesickness and loneliness, higher levels of satisfaction, increased ability to navigate in the new culture, fewer social difficulties and better language competency (Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Sam, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995). It is not surprising therefore that such friendships have also been associated with higher grades and higher retention rates when compared with international students who did not have any local friends (Lulat & Altbach, 1985; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Westwood & Barker, 1990). Although studies since the 1980s have revealed the benefits of host-national friendships for international students, they are relatively uncommon, and bring with them their own difficulties. These are discussed further in Section 2.4.

Personal support

Universities also offer personal support services for students. Counselling is available to help students with a range of personal problems. At the Case University, counselling is offered to “provide [students] with emotional support, help [students] understand the problems [students] have and assist [students] to find new solutions and new ways of coping” (source withheld). Health services are also available for university staff and students. At the Case University, “the primary function of the service is to provide [students and staff] with psychosocial and physical health support, so that [they] may achieve an optimal academic performance in the shortest possible time” (source withheld). The experiences of international students when accessing these services will be discussed in sections 2.3.
On-line support services

Most universities also provide a range of services such as technology support, recruitment services, library assistance, counseling services, academic support and general administration support using information and communication technologies (ICT) (Ally & Needham, 2012; Bell, Keegan & Zaitseva, 2007; Bollington, 2001; Jenness, 2011; Leece, 2011; Leece & Campbell, 2011; Mallett, 2011; Pfeffer, 2012; Reeves & Reeves, 2012; Silburn, Flack, Bridgeman & Warwick, 2012; Tokatlidis, Kinna, Rousseau, Lulla & Wilson, 2011). Online delivery of services is cost-effective in terms of infrastructure and time, reduces the amount of face-to-face contact between staff and students thus reducing staff costs, and can potentially reach more students in less time. Academic services offered online at the Case University include the use of the teaching/learning platform Blackboard, Turnitin (for checking plagiarism) and Skype (for distance learning).

Although recent research has found that most students are now well-versed in the use of social media and the Internet when they begin university (Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012), it has also been found that ICT use is to some extent culture-specific. Some international students experience difficulties using ICT, especially if the content is not in their first language (Tour, 2009; Walsh, 2007), and so prefer face-to-face services. Therefore, online services might play a more useful supplementary role, rather than providing stand-alone services for international students.

In addition to using ICT, and other formal services as described previously, some universities and individual staff members also provide ad-hoc, informal support to students. Leask (2009) describes how the University of South Australia (UniSA) developed a framework as part of its informal curricula, which aimed to promote a culturally-sensitive campus. The
framework included an online peer mentoring program; a guide for staff and domestic students which covered pronunciation of Chinese, Hindu and Malay names; conversation groups with learning advisors where students could ask questions about English language skills; and the provision of cross-cultural lunches which encouraged both domestic and international students to attend. Further, UniSA offered a prayer room, Halal food, displayed international art work on campus, funded social clubs for international students and provided spaces specifically for international students’ activities.

The previous sections discussed how the IE context is influenced by market-driven approaches and how these inform the type and availability of services available to international students. In light of the changing IE context for some Universities, it is important to consider the experiences of staff members who teach and support students in this diverse and changing environment, and both international and domestic students who undertake their studies in this environment. The experiences of staff members that affect their perception of IE will be discussed in section 2.2, followed by international students’ experiences in 2.3 and domestic students’ experiences in 2.4.

2.2 Experiences affecting staff perceptions of International Education

Recent research suggests that the move towards a more market-driven operational model has impacted upon both teaching and support staff in a number of ways. Issues including a perceived loss of academic freedom, a reduction in full-time staff members, increased accountability for both academic and non-academic staff, and a reduction in the staff: student ratio are discussed in the following sections.
2.2.1 Effects of a market-driven approach to International Education

A market-driven approach to IE will, by definition, focus on courses, research areas and student populations that will generate an income stream. Academics can find themselves under pressure to produce research and/or teach in areas that are more likely to be funded. These pressures can then impact upon how staff members work with and view their students. Olssen and Peters (2005) articulated the effect of this approach on academic’s work in the following way:

Targets and performance criteria are increasingly applied from outside the academic role that diminish the sense in which the academic—their teaching and research—are autonomous. The rising importance on ‘managed research’, and the pressures to obtain ‘funded research’ constitute further evidence that academic freedom, at least in terms of the academics’ determination over research are concerned, are increasingly ‘compromised’, or at least ‘under pressure’. (p. 326)

The term ‘commodified curriculum’ (Welch, 2002) is used to reflect the effect of allowing market-driven approaches to influence the development of curricula. A focus on maintaining a competitive market advantage for some universities can leave little space for meeting the individual needs of its students (Welch, 2002), as “management and their perceptions of customer needs and wants [are placed] at the centre of organisational focus and strategy” (Sappey, 2005, p. 496). That is, the curriculum is developed by what management perceives the market is demanding.

Loss of academic freedom

Loss of academic freedom was explored in a study carried out by Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston (2001), who concluded that “academic freedom now operates within a financial
environment characterised by increasing reliance on industry research funding, fee-based courses and consulting services” (p. viii). In this study, *commercialisation*, a concept tied to *marketisation*, was defined as the “pressure to market academic work” (Kayrooz, Kinnear & Preston, 2001, p. ix). Academics pointed out that there was higher value placed on courses that attracted “high student enrolments and fee-paying students over other courses” (p. ix). A great majority of the respondents (81%) reported that a perceived loss of academic freedom was related to commercialization, which in their opinion had the following effects:

The emphasis on fee-based courses benefited disciplines that were vocational, rather than speculative and critical, and sometimes redirected academics’ teaching focus to areas tangential to their expertise;

The drive to market flexible fee-based courses, particularly on-line courses and distance packages, challenged the ownership of course material and had the potential to erode academics’ intellectual capital; and

The emphasis on ‘market’ demand required more corporate management structures in universities which, in turn, eroded collegial decision-making structures. (p. ix-x)

As pointed out by Devos (2003) and Kayrooz et al. (2001), some staff members tended to associate international students with commercialisation, and commercialisation with their loss of academic freedom. It is therefore possible that blaming international students for ‘lowering the academic standard’ was not entirely because of the students per se, but as a result of the pressures they feel to produce research and teach courses which would bring more economic revenue, rather than in areas where they have true expertise. The lowering of standards could be related to their teaching.
Some academic staff also felt that the focus on market-driven approaches impacted upon what courses were on offer, the nature of the services provided, and on modes of course delivery. University policies and procedures which increase pressure on academic staff can then have a flow-on effect on the ways in which staff members work with their students.

The loss of academic freedom was also described in a case study by two academic staff members teaching an Internationalised Curriculum at an Australian university. The terms ‘Taylorization’ and ‘deskilling of academic work’ were used to explain some of the effects of neo-liberal policies (Schapper & Mayson, 2010). Taylorization, a set of scientific management policies, was used by the authors to explain the situation in their departments, where decisions were made by management and passed onto teaching staff. Thus, “academic teaching staff in this context are no longer valued for their intellectual contribution to student learning, but for their ability to deliver pre-packaged education with efficiency and economy” (p. 188). According to the authors “the erosion of academic freedoms, alienation from university decision-making processes, accompanied by large class sizes, student diversity and the administrative and pedagogical demands of new modes of curricula delivery, characterize the academics’ everyday working environment” (p. 181).

With universities increasingly reliant on finding additional sources of funding, pressure may be exerted not to offend existing or potential donors by manipulating data, the timing or manner in which research findings are released, or in fact whether results are released at all. As pointed out by Bruce Ross, the Vice-Chancellor of Lincoln University, New Zealand during the 1996 Graduation address:

With government funding an ever-diminishing share of the total expenditure of universities, the pressure is on to find alternative sources. It is not difficult to imagine situations in which a totally commercially focused council or board might exert at least
subtle pressures to ensure that the university staff or students did not in some way offend major donors. Having already seen some major potential donors walk away from the university after failing to prevent the publication of some research work, I do not make this suggestion merely as a piece of idle speculation. (Cited in Kayrooz, Kinnear & Preston, 2001, p. 1)

More than 15 years later, the potential for a similar scenario in Australia is real.

**Reduction in full-time tenured staff**

Another reported effect of marketisation for some universities has been a reduction in full-time tenured staff, and an increase in part-time, sessional or full-time non-tenured faculty staff. This is “creating a small core group of academics who receive higher pay and benefits and, in turn, a much larger group of contract workers (more often women) who receive lower pay and have insecure appointments with no benefits” (Currie & Newson, 1998, p. 5). Staff members with both research and teaching roles experience additional pressure because of the need to secure external funding, which could impact upon time and resources devoted to their teaching (Anderson & Sugarman, 1989; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Slaughter, 2001).

Umbach (2007, 2008), in a study of the impact of faculty appointments (full time versus part time) upon student experience, found a negative relationship between part-time status and job performance. Compared to their full-time tenured counterparts, part-time staff interacted less with their students, used less active and fewer collaborative teaching techniques, and spent less time preparing for class. The author noted that this was especially true in research-intensive universities. One explanation for this finding was that because part-time staff received less support and were often under-paid, they tended to display less commitment to the institution. Umbach (2007) added that universities should “attempt to balance efficiency and effectiveness when deciding who should
deliver instruction on their campuses” (p. 111), especially considering that government funding depended on the number of students graduating, rather numbers enrolled. Further, institutions where staff members are not committed to the institutions are likely to experience a higher rate of staff turnover, thus reducing the effectiveness and efficiency of university operations. The author concluded that this situation impact negatively upon student outcomes, especially with research showing the importance of faculty engagement on student success (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

**Increased accountability**

A third reported effect of adopting market-driven approaches is the increasing accountability of staff members. Kandiko (2010) reported that:

Faculty are measured by hourly productivity, number of students and classes taught, and amount of external research dollars brought in to the institution. The shift to market-like behavior by faculty and institutions is altering the relationships between higher education and society, institutions and faculty, and faculty and students (p. 160).

This situation has significant implications for support staff, whose job descriptions often now prescribe how many students per hour should be served. This can increase pressure if one student’s needs require more time than that prescribed.

Therefore, a focus on ‘cost-effectiveness’ (Welch, 2002) influences how both academic and non-academic staff members work with their international students as well as within the broader context of the university, with market-driven approaches increasing the daily pressure to work in prescribed ways for some staff members.
Reduced staff: student ratio

A final effect of marketization which influences how staff members work with international students is the staff-student ratio. This ratio is continually decreasing; and in many universities, as more international students are enrolled, the number of staff remains the same (Dunstan, 2007). Support services may be particularly vulnerable to staff-student ratio reductions as they do not directly bring revenue into the universities. This can lead to funding cuts in times of crisis and funding neglect in times of growth. Dunstan (2007) stated that at Monash University in 2001, the ratio of advisors to international students was around 3:6200, a situation that had not improved by 2007. According to the Group of Eight (2011), “due to inadequate funding, universities have had to allow teaching infrastructure to deteriorate and student-staff ratios to rise, and student support services have not been provided at a level sufficient to meet international benchmarks” (p. 6). The Australian Vice Chancellor’s Committee (AVCC) also released figures showing that there has been an decrease in the staff to student ratio, with 12.9% of students to each university teacher in 1990 rising to 18.8% in 2000 (AVCC, 2001). This can lead to heavy workloads for the advisors, and frustration for the international student population who encounter delays when trying to access services (Seow, 2006).

Tran (2011) argues that, due to the increasing number of international students and decreasing amount of direct funding from the government, many HE institutions in Australia are dealing with a decreasing staff to student ratio which is resulting in larger tutorial and lecture groups, making it difficult for academic staff to balance the students’ needs in the classroom with the institutions’ academic standards (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Tran’s argument agreed with The Review of Australian Higher Education-the Final Report (Bradley, 2008), which pointed out that:
An increase of 10 per cent to the base grants from the Commonwealth for teaching will begin to reduce student-to-staff ratios to a more reasonable level and have some effect upon casualisation of the academic workforce. Such changes will have an effect upon the quality of provision and, thus, on the student experience. (p. xv)

The decreasing staff to student ratio can also lead to staff members performing multiple roles outside of their job descriptions (Calder, 2004). Some universities do not have clear guidelines regarding the role descriptions of staff who work directly with international students (Calder, 2004), and this lack of clarity can mean that staff members are performing the roles of counsellor, academic advisor and friend. This may not only be a problem for a staff member who is not professionally trained to handle such issues, but it is also problematic for international students who are not offered the necessary or appropriate services. It can also lead to international students having unrealistic expectations about the role of certain staff members, and feeling rejected and confused when these are not met (Dunstan, 2007).

Lack of infrastructure can also be a frustration for staff members working with increasing numbers of international students. Moon’s (2003) study at the University of New South Wales involved both students and staff who reported that there was a lack of space, both for study and support service purposes. Availability of staff members was limited, especially outside normal office hours. Moreover, staff members reported organisational difficulties in providing services due to lack of resources from the university (Moon, 2003). Such added stressors have the potential to impact upon staff members’ ability to work effectively with students, and thus negatively affects some international students’ learning experiences.
2.2.2 Staff understandings of International Education and their responsibilities towards international students

Although ‘Internationalisation’ (Knight, 1999), has been defined as “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (p. 16), Caruana (2010) found that there was no unanimous understanding of this term among new academics. Caruana argued that “Internationalisation of the Curriculum cannot take place in a monocultural classroom in isolation of the wider world and where the student body, staff, curriculum content and supporting materials all reflect a single dominant culture” (p. 34). In faculties where there was low enrolment of international students or domestic students with diverse backgrounds, there were few ‘enablers’ – those whose presence might prompt a need to internationalise the curriculum - and this could affect staff members’ views of the importance of internationalising their curriculum.

That staff members’ understanding of internationalisation is dependent upon their particular discipline has been well documented (Becher, 1989; Bell, 2004; Clifford, 2009; Ellingboe, 1998; Sawir, 2011). Those teachers in the ‘hard’ disciplines (engineering and science) felt that their disciplines were already ‘internationalised’ and were more reluctant to change than those in the ‘soft’ disciplines (faculties of arts, economics and business). This could be the result of the fact that those from the soft disciplines were more likely to have had an increase in international student enrolment in their classes and so had ‘enablers’, as suggested by Caruana (2010). Teachers in the hard disciplines were possibly less open to changing the content of their curriculum because there were fewer international students in their classes.

Another challenge for staff in universities that are ‘internationalising’ is the “gap between rhetoric and practice” (Green & Mertova, 2011, p. 69). These authors found that academics in
leadership positions at one Australian university were both uncertain about the ‘correct’ definition of IoC and uncertain about who was responsible for its implementation. Their findings supported previous research, in that some staff, particularly those focussed on research, did not see curriculum design as their responsibility and therefore were not interested in IoC. Moreover, those staff members who were actively engaged in some form of IoC reported a lack of support from the university. Participants felt like the ‘neglected group’ (p. 87), since policies were put in place without ‘strategic talk sessions’ (p. 85) with those responsible for the actual implementation of the curriculum. Green and Mertova concluded that the gap between policy and practice would continue if those responsible for implementing the curriculum were not consulted and supported. These findings were also supported by a case study by Barker, Hibbins and Farrelly (2011), who found that top-down guidance and support from the university policy makers played a major role in whether or not staff members at the implementation level accepted and implemented internationalisation strategies. As outlined by Chang (2007):

Is it any wonder that people feel frustrated when: Academics\(^2\) and Teachers are told to be aware of cultural needs with no training provision or recognition of the importance of training; Academics and Teachers are asked to mark according to the potential they see in students’ work as well as submission, with leeway for English (sometimes) without any cogent explanation or discussion about what the needs are for the sector, industry or discipline; Academics and Teachers are told they should go for Professional Development when there are no support structures (including recognition for promotion), and have little or no ownership over the international education program. In short, the worst way to try

\(^{2}\) Academics and Teachers were capitalized in original text
and get an Academic or a Teacher to do something is to tell them to do it, when they have no ownership over the project. (p. 4)

Having international students in their classes might therefore be seen as challenging for some staff members who have to be catalysts to ‘internationalise’ their course content, course structure and course form. Particularly challenging is the fact that this must take place even while some academics hold the view that internationalisation is damaging to their courses and programs; when evaluation of its effectiveness is still undetermined; and while there are gaps between university policies and what is being implemented in everyday practice (Anyanwu, 2004; Back, Davis, & Olsen, 1996; Barker, Hibbins & Farrelly, 2011; Becher & Trowler 2001; Bell, 2004; Crosling, Edwards & Schroder, 2008; Leask, 2009; Sawir, 2011). Decisions made at the management level clearly influence how staff members view and interact with their students.

2.2.3 Requirements of relevant legislation

Staff members involved in IE not only have to be knowledgeable about the policies adopted by their universities, but are also under pressure to keep abreast of legislation relating to the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) regarding international students (Dunstan, 2007). According to the National Code (2007) in the Australian legislation (DEST, 2007, Standard 6.5):

The registered provider must designate a member of staff or members of staff to be the official point of contact for students. The student contact officer or officers must have access to up-to-date details of the registered provider’s support services.

Further, the National Code (DEST, 2007, Standard 6.7) specifically states that:
The registered provider must ensure that its staff members who interact directly with students are aware of the registered provider’s obligations under the ESOS framework and the potential implications for students arising from the exercise of these obligations.

Staff members who ‘interact directly with students’ could include teaching, administration and support staff. Some staff members also need to be aware of the many federal and state legislative requirements, which include the Education Services for Overseas Student Act (2000) (ESOS); the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (2001); and the Migration Act (1958). Maintaining currency across such a range of legislative requirements can add significantly to an already heavy workload (Dunstan, 2007).

Staff members working directly with international students also need to be knowledgeable regarding the different reports, recommendations and audits which relate to this cohort. These are regularly reviewed and amended in accordance with the changing landscape of International Education (IE). Three recent reports - the Bradley Review of Higher Education, (Bradley, 2008), the Baird Report: Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students (2010) and the Knight Review: Strategic review of the student visa program (2011) - have informed changes that Australia and host universities need to make to ensure that a viable and economically significant IE “industry” continues, and so directly affect the broader IE landscape and specific service provision at university. Recommendations emanating from the Knight review have made it easier for international students to apply for student visas and to stay in Australia after degree completion. The Baird and Bradley Reports also suggested changes in relation to support offered to students by universities in order to enhance students’ experiences and to increase the likelihood that positive reports to their home countries will encourage further
enrolments. Additionally, the Council for Australian Governments also developed the *International Students Strategy for Australia 2010-2014* (the ISSA) which aims to “support a high-quality experience for international students, in order to ensure a sustainable future for quality international education in Australia”. The Australian Government has developed a number of initiatives under the ISSA including holding round table meetings with international students and IE support staff, funding ISANA and Universities Australia to develop good practice guidelines for those involved in IE, and funding TAFE directors (Lawson, 2012). However, since these reports and audits contain recommendations and guidelines which are not necessarily enforceable by law, there is flexibility regarding those that are adopted by universities. Staff members who work with international students need to be knowledgeable about which recommendations have been endorsed and how their universities propose to act upon the chosen recommendations. Thus, staff members need to be constantly updated on changes that might impact their role descriptions.

Importantly, although the reports are arguing for a student-focused university, what has been discussed in this literature review is that some universities are steering towards cost-effective, neo-liberal policies and practices. It is clear therefore, that universities can choose to offer the bare minimum of services that is required of them as CRICOS institutions, which might not meet all the international students’ ‘lifecycle’ needs.

Apart from the above institutional practices which impact upon how staff members work with international students, literature has also identified individual level factors which influence how staff members approach working with international students. These will be discussed in the following section.
2.2.4 Individual beliefs about teaching and learning

According to Burch (2008), staff members are now required to adapt their teaching methods when working in diverse classrooms. In his review, Burch (2008) commented on how student composition had changed in Accounting courses, from a majority of domestic students to a majority of international students. It was argued that this shift came about due to the Australian Skills Occupation List (SOL), which made it easier for students to gain permanent residency if particular courses were studied, one of which was Accounting. The challenge then, according to Burch, is for teaching staff to accommodate the fusion of learning styles and different contextual experiences found within a diverse classroom, while also meeting the standards associated with accredited content. One way to understand how teaching staff members manage this is by exploring their individual beliefs about teaching and learning.

A number of researchers have argued that teaching quality is a direct result of teachers’ perceptions of teaching and their attitudes towards teaching (Arenas, 2009; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, & Benjamin, 2000; Ramsden, 2003; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) found a direct link between teaching staff members’ presumptions and beliefs about teaching and the manner in which they taught. The authors identified seven beliefs about teaching that were then clustered into two broad categories: student-focused teaching and teacher-focused teaching. The first category emphasises the central role of the student, where the teacher is a facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge; the latter category emphasises the role of the teacher as the bearer or transmitter of knowledge. The two different categories would result in quite different approaches to teaching, with the former much more likely to accommodate differences in background knowledge and education experiences.
Biggs’ (2003) Levels of Teaching model provides a more complex conceptualisation of approaches to teaching, while still accepting the centrality of the notion that teaching styles are directly related to teachers’ beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. According to Biggs (2003) and Biggs and Tang (2011), teachers at Level One place responsibility for learning on the student:

At Level 1, teaching is in effect held constant – it is transmitting information, usually by lecturing – so differences in learning are attributed to differences between students in ability, motivation, what sort of school they went to…cultural background and so on. Ability is usually believed to be the most important factor in determining students’ performance. (p. 17)

A Level Two theory of teaching, places more responsibility for learning on the teacher, with the focus on transmitting concepts and understanding rather than just transmitting information as with Level One (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Level Two teachers are still seen, however, as somewhat deficit because the focus “should not be on the skill itself, but on whether its deployment has the desired effect on student learning” (p. 20).

Level Three teaching focuses on the desired learning outcomes, and the strategies and teaching/learning context that will assist the students to meet those outcomes. Biggs and Tang (2011) argue that this level of teaching:

Is not just about facts, concepts and principles to be covered and understood, but also requires us to be clear about:

1. What it is the students are to learn and what are the intended or desirable outcomes of their learning;
2 What it means for students to ‘understand’ content in the way that is stipulated in the intended learning outcomes;

3 What kind of teaching/learning activities are required to achieve those stipulated levels of understanding. (p. 20)

The Level of Teaching that university teachers adopt is drawn from their beliefs about how learning takes place, and about what is important in the learning context. This will therefore influence how they work with international students. Lecturers and tutors adopting the Level One teaching style see students who perform poorly as lacking ability. This level of teaching does not take into account that 1. it could be the style/method of teaching that is encouraging poor performance; 2. some international students are not used to the teaching styles and assessments employed and need extra support to perform better; and 3. the colloquialisms, jargon and even the Australian accent, especially when accompanied by local examples, might be confusing for some international students. These factors do not reflect individual students’ academic abilities but they might contribute to students’ poor performance. This level of teaching is also not consistent with the aims of the Teaching International Student (TIS) project, which highlighted the need to turn “the ‘gaze’ not on the individual learner but to the social and cultural learning context within which they are situated [which] avoids ‘problematising’ international students by expecting them alone to change and adjust to fit the institution” (Higher Education Academy (HEA) and UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA), n.d.).

Trahar (2010) supports the view that teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning influence how they view and work with international students:

It is our [academics’] beliefs about learning and teaching that guide the way we work, that influence whether we position ‘international students’ as needing to acquire a set of skills
to assimilate with the dominant pedagogical approaches or whether we position ourselves as local academics and students needing to learn and be open to change. International students are no more a homogenous group than any other group of people. (p. 145)

Homogenising the international student cohort can further impact upon these students’ confidence and identity (Ryan, 2010) and can lead to some staff members focusing more on the students’ ‘deficits’ when compared to the Western way of doing. Ryan (2010) adds that:

Many academics and educational developers appear to have been selective in the messages that they have taken away… focusing on the skills or qualities that international students lack, without any examination of their own cultural biases. Rather than recognizing the possible diverse practices and perspectives found in (all) students’ previous educational experiences, or examining their own failings, they turn these into deficits that their students are lacking and need to develop in order to pass the test of Western academic virtues. (p. 42)

Biggs and Tang (2011) argue for a student-centred approach, where teachers adopt a Level Three model of teaching and focus on how students can learn rather than on what students are, or are not.

2.2.5 Individual staff perceptions of international students’ English language proficiency

Another individual factor which might affect how staff members work with international students concerns individual beliefs about the students’ English proficiency. Many staff and faculty members assume that the English tests are standardised and stringent, which results in flawed assumptions and expectations regarding levels of English skills and academic writing (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). When international students are admitted into Australian universities
with limited English language skills, problems arise, both for the students, who assume that their language skill is adequate, and for the teaching staff, who assume that the students have the level of English required for university study. Both parties can become profoundly disappointed if academic performance is not consistent with the expectation that university-entrance implied. Phillips (1990) and McGowan and Potter (2008) argue that as a result of this, teaching staff can either: (1) lower the level of teaching to suit the students’ needs; or (2) ignore the problem. Both are unsatisfactory responses which can lead to frustration and ultimately affect a university’s standards and reputation (Phillips, 1990).

A related problem is the assumption held by some faculty members that the vast majority of international students’ problems are caused by their lack of English proficiency (Biggs, 1997). Some twenty five years ago Ballard (1987) wrote “it is well established that if overseas students have any problems with their studies both they and their teachers will automatically assume the fault lies with their inadequate control of English” (p. 115). A decade later Biggs’ (1997) research confirmed that this attitude still prevailed. Biggs found that students failed or attained poor grades because staff had preconceived ideas about their lack of English language skills, rather than examining the teaching methods they used. The development of greater teacher responsibility for student learning and the use of new pedagogical methods, however, is slow, with Holmes (2005) finding that a lack of English proficiency is still perceived as the primary reason why international students do not achieve academically. Also, according to Benzie (2010), a number of the academics who blame low university standards on international students’ lack of English proficiency teach in business courses where most international students are enrolled in Australia. In such courses, assignments and tasks are more oriented towards other
skills rather than English language and the teachers themselves, while “good with numbers” may be unable to identify language problems in their students, or help them address them.

**2.2.6 Individual staff members’ qualifications and skills to work with international students**

Individual staff members’ qualifications and skills also have an impact upon how staff members work with international students. Both Teekens (2000, 2003) and Sanderson (2006), explored the ‘profile of an ideal lecturer’, outlining the skills, qualifications, knowledge and attitudes that an ideal lecturer in an international classroom should possess in order to maximise learning for all students. Teekens (2003) discusses these characteristics within eight different clusters, but noted that the list of characteristics is not an empirically validated instrument; rather, it should be used to initiate a discussion about whether or not staff members who are already teaching international students possess the listed skills; the feasibility of up-skilling staff to meet the profile’s descriptions; and whether or not using these skills relates to student outcomes.

In an investigation of the usefulness of this profile, Sanderson (2006) used it in his Doctoral study of six lecturers in an allied health department of an Australian university. An outcome of his study was a revision of the profile relating to how ideal lecturers should handle cultural differences in their classrooms. Sanderson (2006) indicated that interviewed staff members were aware of and appreciated their students’ cultural backgrounds, but cautioned staff against the use of cultural theories such as Hofstede’s five dimension theory - which defines characteristics of different cultures along five dimensions - as these can lead to stereotypical views of students (see 2.3). In his study, lecturers commented that they dealt with culture informally, that their prime concern was to help students “achieve the learning objectives” (p. 431) and that “the assessment
criteria were non-negotiable for all students” (p. 431). This study, however, only interviewed staff members who were teaching small classes. Focusing on individual students might be difficult for staff members teaching large classes, and who might therefore be more inclined to rely on stereotypical traits associated with some cultural backgrounds.

Although the profile discusses individual characteristics required to work with international students, more research is needed to understand whether the characteristics of the profile holds true in different organizational cultures, across different disciplines and with different staff members.

2.2.7 Use of available resources

A number of resources are available to support academics in their teaching of students from a diverse range of backgrounds (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Biggs, 2003 and 2007; Biggs & Tang, 2007 and 2011; Carroll, 2002; Hunt & Chalmers, 2012; Ryan, 2000; Sanderson, 2008). Individual differences in the use of such resources can also influence how staff members work with international students. Some resources are web-based; for example, those available through the Teaching International Students (TIS) Resource Centre and the ‘Making Connections’ project (heacademy.ac.uk), whilst others are in printed format, but all outline best practices and offer guidelines to help staff working with diverse student populations (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Hellmundt, Rifkin & Fox, 1998).

Sanderson (2004) found in his study that although some staff members reported using “good practice” strategies with their international students, others expressed a lack of confidence in using these strategies. He argued that this could be because some staff members were new to teaching international students and were unfamiliar with those strategies regarded as most successful. Arkoudis (2006) also found in her interviews of academic staff at the University of
Melbourne, that although aware of the learning needs of their students, they were not aware of how to best address these needs. These two studies highlight the fact that, although resources are available, not all staff access them. Interestingly, these studies were carried out in departments with high enrolments of international students – or ‘enablers’, to use Caruana’s (2010) term – but still staff members were ‘unaware’ or ‘lacked confidence’ in using strategies associated with best teaching practices.

Thus, even if universities provide online resources for staff members teaching international students, there is no guarantee that staff members will access them. Further, there is a lack of evidence regarding whether or not the skills outlined in these resources are put into practice by staff members. Additionally, professional learning workshops related to developing skills in teaching international students are not always compulsory, and attending such workshops might provoke the response that they are yet another thing to attend for international students (Barker, Hibbins & Fannelly, 2011), especially if staff are not rewarded for attending. Although these programs are offered with the best of intentions, some staff members could feel that international students are ‘problematic’, which can further fuel negative stereotypes (Chang, 2007). Resources, instead, should emphasise a student-centred approach to teaching (Arkoudis, 2006; Cannon & Newble, 2000; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003), which benefits all students instead of focusing on one student cohort.

The use of reflective practices by staff can also help reduce a ‘deficit’ view of some international students (Biggs, 2003; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998; Ramsden, 2003). This involves self-analysis on the part of staff members, which includes planning, observing and analysing their techniques as well as evaluating the effectiveness of using different techniques/methods/styles to optimise students’ learning. Again, while the intent of such
recommendations is admirable, their implementation may be problematic. Convincing academics with high workloads and/or a preference for research unrelated to their pedagogy will not always be easy, particularly if this is neither supported nor rewarded. Reflective teaching requires time to plan, implement, evaluate and re-adjust teaching styles and subject content. Reflective teaching is also difficult to align with the use of ‘commercialised curriculum’ which is encouraged for the purposes of standardisation and efficient rollout to wide markets. The prescribed content and methodologies associated with many, although not all, of these packages is inconsistent with a reflective teaching approach. Thus many tensions exist around the use of pedagogies that best suit a diverse student cohort.

Having discussed the factors that influence how staff members respond to IE, the chapter will now discuss the factors which influence international students’ experiences of IE. Such a discussion is necessary to understand how the experiences of international students can be maximised, an outcome which would have a positive effect not only on international students, but also their domestic peers, their teachers and others who support them, and eventually the wider economic future of the university.

2.3 Experiences influencing International Students’ perceptions of International Education

According to the Australian International Student Barometer (ISB) Report (2010), of the 36,308 surveyed international students, 86% were satisfied with their Australian education experience; 86% with the arrival process; 84% with their learning experience; 86% with living and 86% with the support they received (AEI, 2010). This represents quite a high level of satisfaction, but the fact that 14% were not reporting satisfactory education experiences can
reduce potential student enrolment. It is important to understand the factors that influence this group’s experiences, which will allow universities to better cater for this cohort.

2.3.1 English language proficiency

For a significant proportion of, but not all, international students, limited English language proficiency influences all aspects of their experience. Navigating a new social context, in addition to a new learning environment, requires much more than a formal understanding of the language: it also demands familiarity with the pragmatic aspects of language that facilitate both communication of critical information and social interactions. Because of its overarching impact, further review of the impact of international students’ English language facility is embedded where relevant throughout the following discussion.

2.3.2 Addressing the practicalities

Research reports that international students face a range of practical challenges when relocating for university studies. These can relate to finding suitable accommodation (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Novera, 2004; Marginson et al., 2010; Scheyvens, Wild & Overton, 2003); concerns around personal safety (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett & Marginson, 2010); and managing financial issues (Mori, 2000). These issues would also affect domestic students who are relocating for university study, but would in many cases be exacerbated for the international student. These factors may influence an overall willingness and capacity to engage in broader university life.

Sourcing suitable accommodation

According to the Australian Education International survey (AEI, 2009), only 64% of international students were satisfied with the housing arrangements in their new setting.
Accommodation is an issue for many international students worldwide, with lack of availability of housing (Christie, Munro, & Rettig, 2002; Marginson et al., 2010); overcrowding (Marshall, 2007, as cited in Marginson et al., 2010); and exploitative landowners and estate agents (Gough, 2004, as cited in Marginson et al., 2010) being some of the main concerns. Vissing and Diament (1997) found that 20% of international students were living in accommodation that could predispose them to homelessness.

Finding suitable accommodation can also be problematic for domestic students who have relocated for university study, especially if their home environments are much smaller. They, too, would be very vulnerable as they negotiated in a very different environment.

Reasons for the above difficulties, according to Marginson et al. (2010), included the students having insufficient information regarding housing options; safe locations that were close to campus or on regular transport routes; and their rights and responsibilities as a tenant. These findings were supported by Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003), who reported that postgraduate international students were unaware of how to access basic needs such as housing and food. Incidences of international students being either unaware of their rights or vulnerable to exploitation have been widely publicized in Australia, with newspaper articles reporting incidents such as house fires (Perkins, 2008), poor work conditions (SIFYnews, 2008) and physical assaults on international students (Healy, in The Australian, 2009). Poor English language proficiency would make negotiating safe and accessible accommodation even more complex, and the likelihood of exploitation greater, particularly when dealing with legal documents associated with rental agreements.
Maintaining personal security

Safety is one of the most important considerations for international students when choosing the host country for their education (Marginson et al., 2010; Universities Australia, 2011). Until recently, student safety had not been publicly discussed in Australia, since it was taken for granted. More recently, it is possible that discussion was limited because public discourse about safety might undermine Australia’s ‘safe’ reputation, potentially reducing international students’ numbers and the associated revenue (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett & Marginson, 2010). According to Mason (2012) “exposure of Australia's denial [of racial abuse or violence] by the Indian media may operate as a form of counter-discourse from an emerging superpower whose citizens refuse to tolerate the failure of Western nations to take responsibility for the injustice of racial violence” (p. 1). In relation to the public debate around international students’ safety in Australia, Nyland, Forbes-Mewett and Marginson, (2010) argue that “fear of being stigmatised as an unsafe study destination helps explain why the international education sector and its regulators embraced a debate on international student safety only when their reputation was put at serious risk” (p. 90).

A study conducted to explore personal safety in Australia asked 200 international students “do you feel safe and secure in Australia”. Nineteen students (nearly 10%) responded “no” (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia & Sawir, 2005). Reflective of assaults on international students around that time, the demographic of those students responding “no” were largely female Muslims, males from India or students from East Asia. Even if only a minority response, word of mouth reports of safety concerns in a particular university or host country would be very damaging for international students: the adverse publicity emanating from 19 negative responses could lead to decreased economic benefits from potential students. Paltridge, Mayson and
Schapper (2010) believe that in order to protect international education in Australia, a reputation as a safe study destination is paramount.

Other issues raised in the Australian media include the Western Australian Corruption and Crime Commission’s (CCC) report that drew attention to (particularly) female Asian international students’ safety. It cited the case of a university lecturer reportedly asking for sexual favours in exchange for better course results (CCC, 2010). Sexual exploitation was also reported by Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008), who recounted incidences of female international students succumbing to landlords’ sexual demands to settle their rent. In those cases, students with low English proficiency would be at higher risk as they may struggle to articulate these incidences or understand their legal rights.

Concerns around personal safety are not unique to the Australian context. Research conducted in the United States has also found that international students were threatened at personal, emotional and cultural levels (Lee & Rice, 2007). Studies carried out on ethnocentrism in the United States found that emotional and cultural safety were found to be at risk because of general attitudes towards international students. Ethnocentrism would also be higher for those students who lack English language proficiency, as language becomes the identifier of cultural others and a basis for ethnocentrism (Leong & Ward, 2000; Paige, 1990; Pedersen, 1991; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002; Williams & Johnson, 2011).

Threats to personal safety, especially in instances where the threat is based on their ethnicity, would certainly have an impact upon the overall experience of international students.
Managing financial circumstances

International students are often referred to as “sojourners”, that is, individuals who temporarily live in another country (Adler, 1975; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Brein & David, 1971; Church, 1982; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn 2002; Sam, 2001; Swagler & Jome, 2005; Townsend & Wan, 2007; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). As such, they are often on temporary visas, and have strict limits placed on the extent of paid employment they can undertake. Full-fee paying students have significant financial commitments, and avenues of financial support may be limited (Mori, 2000). Studies carried out in both Australia and U.S have found that some international students experienced financial concerns which affected them in a number of ways: financial concerns had an adverse impact upon their academic progress if they were unable to pay their university fees (Dorough, 2006); preoccupied them to the extent that study and social interactions suffered (Dorough, 2006); and feelings of guilt about the financial burden placed on their families and/or their capacity to meet the needs of dependents, particularly when living in countries with high living costs (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2007).

Forbes-Mewett et al.’s (2007) study concluded that since international students bring such economic benefits to the host country, both the host country and the university should offer financial assistance to help them manage their living costs. These conclusions have been repeated across numerous studies (Dorough, 2006; Dunne, 2009; Mori, 2000; Wang & Shan, 2007; Leonard, Pelletier, & Morley, 2003). The exclusion of international students from the Australian University Finance study in 2006 makes it difficult to determine with any accuracy the prevalence and scope of financial difficulties faced by international students in Australia (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2007). Nevertheless, a range of negative consequences would occur for
those international students experiencing financial stress, including avoidance of services they fear may incur further costs, whether or not that was the case.

The points discussed in this section demonstrate that some international students face a range of practical challenges when studying in another country, which would be exacerbated by poor English language proficiency. Many of these issues would also be relevant for domestic students, including language difficulties for some refugees and migrants, and even for some students who were raised in Australia, particularly if they entered university through a non-traditional pathway. The sheer number of different issues relating to the successful navigation of daily life is likely to add to a feeling of being overwhelmed for any student experiencing them, which would further detract from their overall experience of International Education.

2.3.3 Adjusting to a new academic context

Adjusting to a new teaching and learning environment is a demand placed on all students in their first year of university (Brown, 2008), but for some international students, the demands may be more complex, and have more significant consequences. This section explores adjustments associated with academic protocols, and with student-teacher interactions typical of a Western university (Agyirey-Kwakye & Abaidoo, 1995; Blunt & Li, 1998; Brown & Peacock, 2007; Campbell-Evans & Leggett, 2007; Chiste, 1997; Darab, 2006; Durkin, 2008; Green, Williams, & Kessel, 2006; Hellsten, 2002; Holmes, 2005; Huang, 2006; McClure, 2005; Selvadurai, 1991; Sheridan, 2011; Walker, 1998; Wang & Shan, 2007).

2.3.4 Lack of familiarity with academic protocols

In some cultures, being able to replicate an authority’s work is praised, rather than punished (Handa & Power, 2005). Lack of familiarity with the protocols of academic scholarship can therefore lead to unintended plagiarism (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011; Campbell-Evans &
Leggett, 2007; Darab, 2006; Green, Williams, & Kessel, 2006; Huang, 2006; McClure, 2005; Walker, 1998; Sheridan, 2011). Further studies have found that some international students tended to plagiarise because of inadequate academic skills (Chanock, 2003; Handa & Power, 2005; Flint, Clegg & Macdonald, 2006). While this is not unique to international students, insecurity with levels of English language proficiency could increase the likelihood that international students engage in this practice. While universities have developed services to address this difficulty, including specific programs for students whose first language is not English, and applied consistent penalties for continued offences, plagiarism continues to be a problem across the whole student population (Bailey 2007; Chen, & Van Ullen, 2011; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Insley, 2011; Walker, 1998; Song-Turner, 2008).

Differences in learning contexts

Some researchers have attributed the lack of familiarity with academic protocols to the differences in learning contexts for some international students. One of the first studies to shed light on the effects of different learning contexts was carried out by Samuelowicz (1987). Teaching staff reported that international students were overly-reliant on them, did not use effective study methods, relied on rote memorization instead of conceptually understanding content, expected lecturers and tutors to provide ‘correct’ answers, and were unwilling to participate in the interactive style of learning. In this study however, the international students were regarded as one cohort, and the results generalised to all international students, which calls the results into question. Nevertheless, more recent research has also argued that international students respond best in ‘passive learning’ situations (Braddock, Roberts, Zheng & Guzman, 1995; Chan, 1999; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Kember, 2000; Liu, 1998; Sawir, 2005)
suggesting that differences in learning contexts continue to pose challenges (Andrade, 2006; Burch, 2008).

This generalised and simplistic perception of international students has been questioned by Biggs and Watkins (1996). They refer to the ‘paradox of the Chinese learner’ (p. 269): the phenomenon of students who are said to rely on rote learning and memorisation, but who consistently achieve high marks in challenging assessment tasks (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Chalmers and Volet (1997) suggest that what is perceived as rote memorisation, results in fact in *deep learning* (Chalmers & Volet, 1997). It could be that the deep processing that occurs with regular rehearsal (as opposed to “rote learning”) of conceptual material results in core knowledge being stored in long term memory, and being available for integration with new material, or being retrieved and viewed in original ways, as is demanded by higher level cognitive tasks.

*Differences in understandings of core concepts and terminology*

The perception that some international students do not possess critical analysis skills has also been challenged by Richards and Pilcher (2011), who argued that the meanings of some key terms, such as ‘critically evaluate’ ‘analyse’ and ‘discuss’, could not be agreed upon, even among academics. This suggests that their explanations for students could easy lead to misinterpretation of these English terms, resulting in the perception that the students lacked these capabilities. An interesting finding, however, was that when the Chinese students and lecturers were grouped together and speaking Chinese, there was a high level of critical thinking and analysis observed. The authors concluded that the misinterpretation seemed to occur when English terms were used, and that either there is a misunderstanding on the part of the staff themselves of what ‘critical’ really means, or a misunderstanding occurs when the English terms
are used without explicit definition and explanation. It appears that the notion that some international students are unable to critically think and evaluate, is simplistic.

It would be reasonable to conclude then, that international students can employ critical analysis skills, but that they have to be promoted through clear definition of terms, and appropriate teaching strategies. Therefore, studies which argue that all international students from Asian backgrounds are passive learners and cannot use critical thinking have to be interpreted with caution.

Additionally, some researchers have argued that the teaching strategies used also influence the level of student learning, with the use of interactive strategies such as in-class discussions and online support, fostering deep learning instead of rote memorisation (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Boughey, 2002; Chen, Bennett & Maton, 2008; Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Kettle, 2011; Marton, Dall’Alba, & Tse, 1996; Ramsden, 1998; Sachs & Chan, 2003; Qian, 2011).

Adjusting to the informality of interactions in a Western university

The informality of the student-teacher interactions typical of the Western university might also impact upon students’ ability to adjust to their new academic contexts, especially for those international students who are more familiar with teacher-directed learning. Hellsten (2002) interviewed international students from China and Korea who explained that they were used to accepting the teacher as the expert, and discussion and critical debate with their teacher would be perceived as rude. These international students described the classrooms in their home-countries as being very formal: for example they were expected to address the teacher by a title such as “miss” or “sir”. Adjusting to a new, less formal environment, which required critical thinking
and active discussion, was very difficult for them (Hellsten, 2002), leading to varying degrees of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), a mental state known to interfere with the capacity to learn. This would have a direct impact upon the quality and success of their experience as an international student.

**Difficulties with supervisory relationships**

The adjustment required in interpersonal interactions can be heightened for students involved in supervisory relationships (Agyirey-Kwakye & Abaidoo, 1995; Blunt & Li, 1998; Brown & Peacock, 2007; Chiste, 1997; Selvadurai, 1991; Wang & Shan, 2007). Many international students engaged in higher research degrees (HDR) progress directly from undergraduate studies into a research program, and struggle with the type of communication and partnership required in the student/supervisor relationship. Numerous studies have indicated that some international students find it difficult to adjust to this type of learning (McClure, 2005; Trice, 2003; Trice, 2005; Zhao & Han, 2007). Further, according to Hofstede (1986), the power differential that exists between student and supervisor can be problematic for some international students from cultures which have assigned roles for males and females or from cultures with large power differences between individuals in certain roles (see section 2.3.4).

Research has shown that the supervisory relationship can be further complicated by the differing expectations of students and academic staff (Guilfoyle, 2006; Major 2005). Adrian-Taylor, Noels, and Tischler (2007) found that supervisors and students had conflicting expectations of the roles each would play, an experience often shared by domestic students. The authors concluded that open discussion about individual roles and responsibilities should occur before supervision commences to reduce the likelihood of misunderstanding.
Zhao and Han’s (2007) study of Chinese international students in HDR programs found that the supervisory relationship was further complicated by the considerable differences in the use of language in English and Chinese (Huang, 2006). Formal Chinese language often conveys its message in a veiled and ambiguous manner (Zhao & Han, 2007), whereas English is more direct and explicit. Supervisors can therefore have difficulty reading student assignments, which in some cases have been written in Chinese (because students can construct their thoughts better in their first language), before being translated into English for submission. The direct translation from Chinese language to English can reduce the clarity of communication (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007; Kuteyi et al., 2009). Thus adjusting to the supervisory relationship might be exacerbated for students with a perceived, or actual, lack of English language proficiency.

2.3.5 Dissatisfaction with academic support services

As discussed in Section 2.1.4, academic services of different types are offered by universities to support students. There is evidence, however, that some international students experience barriers when accessing these services. Reported problems include insufficient contact time with support staff, and the fact that some staff seemed unapproachable (Chung et al., 2006). Other services were seen to be inappropriate, such as English support classes which were a repetition of known material, or required an unreasonable time commitment in addition to that of their actual degree or course (Bordia, 2007).

Li (1998) and Lu (2001) found that some international students did not attend library orientation and information services. Curry and Copeman (2005) suggest this is because international students are unfamiliar with the Western library systems, which is then further complicated by English language difficulties (Burns, 1991; Ogbonnaya, Singh, & Ohakwe,
2011) and cultural barriers (Conteh-Morgan, 2001). Other reasons include lack of awareness of the services (Allen, 1993), not having the confidence to request help (Burns, 1991), and anxiety accessing the library, specifically for those international students whose educational systems in their home countries relied on teachers providing resources and students not accessing the library themselves (Baron & Strout-Dapaz, 2001; Hughes, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Jiao, Onwuegbuzie & Bostick, 2004; Shaffer, Vardaman & Miller, 2010).

When orientation programs or library services are provided online in home countries prior to arrival, problems can still occur: inconsistent or slow internet access; little capacity to download large files; and lack of support for some sites or interactive software (Ognonnaya, Singh & Ohakwe, 2011; Sam, Donovan & Rumble 2005). Thus a range of factors relating to service provision can affect the IE experience of international students.

### 2.3.6 Adjusting to a new cultural and social context

While negotiating a new academic context, many international students are simultaneously navigating their way through an unfamiliar cultural and social context. This section examines the notion of cross-cultural adjustment, relating “recuperation models” and “culture learning models” to the experiences of some international students.

**Recuperation models**

Coates (2004) argues that recuperation models are “commonly represented by a U-curve and focus on recovery from ‘culture shock’ as the mechanism by which life in a foreign land is accommodated” (p. 2). Advocates of these models have argued that cross-cultural adjustment starts off with a “honeymoon” period, characterised by excitement with entering a new culture, before moving into culture shock. The term “culture shock” was first used by Oberg (1960), who
identified six underlying characteristics of this construct: (1) stress relating to psychological adaptation; (2) a sense of loss resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions; (3) fear of rejection by, or rejection of, the new culture; (4) confusion in role definition; (5) unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences; and (6) feelings of helplessness, including confusion, frustration and depression. In recovery models, the stage of culture shock is then followed by adjustment to the new culture and finally mastery, where the newcomer can successfully function in the new culture (see Figure 2.2) (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Townsend & Lee, 2004; Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998).

![U Curve model](image)

*Figure 2.2: U-Curve of cross-cultural adjustment (adapted from Black & Mendenhall, 1991)*

The U curve model was extended by Adler’s (1975) cross-cultural adjustment theory, which incorporates five stages of adjustment: (1) ‘initial contact’, similar to the first stage of the U curve model; followed by (2) ‘disintegration’ where individuals experience confusion about the new culture; then (3) ‘reintegration’, which is characterised by a strong rejection of the new culture and a reintegration with their original culture. In this phase individuals may seek out relationships with others from the same culture as they wrestle with the negative feelings for the
new culture and positive feelings of their original culture. Individuals who then choose to accept their new culture, move into (4) the ‘autonomy’ phase, during which they become independent as they overcome negative feelings towards the new culture; and finally they move to (5), ‘independence’, whereby individuals accept and learn from the new culture and display behaviours and attitudes which are “independent but not undependent of cultural influence” (Adler, 1975, p. 18).

The U curve has been further expanded into a W curve to explain the adjustment experienced when individuals return to their home country and readjust to their former life and culture (Best, Hajzler & Henderson, 2007).

There has been some critique of recuperation models. In their longitudinal study, Ward et al. (1998) found that newcomers often do not experience euphoria when first entering a new culture; that in fact adjustment problems are maximised at the start of the journey and decline with time. Ward et al.’s study was, however, conducted at an institution which catered mainly for Japanese students pursuing an English degree at a New Zealand university, and may reflect highly contextualised factors that cannot be generalised more broadly. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001), who conducted longitudinal research in the 1990s, have also argued that the “U curve hypothesis appears to be largely atheoretical, deriving from a combination of post hoc explanation and armchair speculation” (p. 81). This was supported by Coates (2004), who added that “identifying mutually exclusive indicators for each stage is difficult; the expression of each stage may vary by culture” (p. 3). Bochner and Furnham (2001) contend that the U-Curve theory is still popular because “the field has not produced a critical and credible mass of research findings that consistently support an alternative theory” (p. 83).
Culture learning models

Perhaps to address this gap, other models have been developed to explain how individuals adjust to a new culture. Some research has focused on Furnham and Bochner’s social skills and culture learning model (Alexitch & Chapdelaine, 2004), which purports that international students experience adjustment issues because they are unaware of the social norms of the host culture and so adopt inappropriate interaction practices. Using this model, cultural adjustment is seen as a reflection of the difficulty experienced when navigating socially in the host culture.

Another model used to explain cross-cultural adjustment is Hofstede’s (1986) four dimension theory, which presents cultures as differing along four dimensions: (1) the Individualist-Collectivist dimension; (2) the Power Distance dimension; (3) the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension; and (4) the Masculinity-Feminity dimension. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) then added a fifth dimension (5), the Long versus Short Term Orientation (LTO), making it a five dimension theory. Culture shock, in this model, can be the result of individuals moving into cultures which differ greatly from their native culture in any of these dimensions.

1. Individualist-Collectivist dimension

Individualistic cultures (for example, some “Western” cultures), tend to focus their primary interest on the individual and their immediate family, which usually comprises a partner and children. Conversely, collectivist cultures’ (for example, some “Eastern” cultures) primary interest lies with the group, with group needs being regarded as more important than those of individuals. International students who move from a collectivist culture to an individualistic one, such as the transition of Asian or Indian students to an Australian context, might experience difficulties accessing services that are associated with personal weakness in their cultures (see
section 2.3.7); and difficulties accepting the ability to question authorities such as their lecturers (Bailey & Dua, 1999; Seo, 2010).

(2) Power Distance (PD) dimension

According to Hofstede (1986) “all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others”. Power distance (PD) addresses the degree of equality within a culture and how power difference is accepted among its members. Countries such as Australia are considered to be relatively egalitarian and so have a low tolerance for PD, whilst Eastern countries such as China are viewed as hierarchical in nature, and so have a high tolerance for PD. International students from high PD countries may find it difficult to approach people in authority to seek help, to challenge ideas, or to advocate on their own behalf.

(3) Uncertainty Avoidance dimension

Countries with strong uncertainty avoidance rely on structured and ordered environments. Individuals from these cultures may find it difficult to handle ambiguous situations and in the case of international students moving from high to low uncertainty avoidance countries, may be viewed as not having an appropriate level of independence and maturity.

(4) Masculinity-Femininity dimension

This dimension refers to the social roles that males and females are supposed to play in different cultures. Masculine cultures have more defined roles for men and women and clear expectations regarding how each should behave and contribute to society. Such cultures expect men to be strong, competitive breadwinners, whilst women are expected to bear children and be submissive. However, feminine cultures have less defined roles for men and women (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). International students whose roles as defined in their home cultures are highly
inconsistent with the roles they are expected to play in the western context may face difficulties. Further, moving to a culture with less defined roles can also raise problems with the development of personal autonomy and identity (Erikson, 1963; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978).

(5) Long versus Short Term Orientation (LTO vs STO) dimension

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), LTO “stands for fostering virtues oriented towards future rewards” whilst STO refers to “fostering virtues related to the past and present _ in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of ‘‘face’’, and fulfilling social obligations” (p. 210).

The applications of Hofstede’s (1986) and Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) ideas to international students’ socio-cultural adjustment recognises that the larger the distance in the five dimensions of culture, the more difficulties they are likely to face when adjusting to the host culture (Alexitch & Chapdelaine, 2004). Studies have shown that when international students from collectivist cultures study in individualistic Westernised cultures, they experience greater culture shock as the two cultures are very different (Pines et al., 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). In a study conducted by Yanhong and Kaye (1998), 155 international students at a UK university were surveyed. Significant differences were found between Asian (45.8%) and Western European (54.2%) students, with the former experiencing more difficulties adjusting to a Western culture, in which values and beliefs were different from those of their original culture. Conversely, students who came from the UK and decided to study in the United States found it less difficult to adjust culturally since the cultures of the two countries are similar (Feldman & Tompson, 1992; Mortenson, 2006; Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Ying, 2003). However, there have been researchers who caution against using Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions to infer the beliefs and values of individuals (Hewling, 2005; Macfadyen, 2006). This was discounted by Hofstede
(2002), who argued that the dimensions were not intended to draw conclusions about individuals but rather to gain an insight into the differences among cultures.

The move across cultures, therefore, has varying effects on the individual. For some international students, adjusting to the new culture might be difficult and, when coupled with other factors associated with cross-cultural learning, some students might not know how and where to access help in their new culture. This may not be unique to international students however, since the above models could apply to any individual who is adjusting to a new culture, for example, refugees and immigrants, or domestic students from very different environments.

Caution is needed when drawing conclusions from research which uses cultural backgrounds to differentiate between student groups, as these ignore individual differences among individuals from the same cultural background. As noted in a personal communication from Ziguras to Sanderson (2006) about Hofstede’s theory:

I’m not convinced that Hofstede’s cultural profiles are useful. Even if they are accurate averages for the Malaysian population, Malaysian international students in Australia are not typical Malaysians. Only around one per cent of the tertiary age population in Malaysia studies overseas and compared with the Malaysian norm, they are younger, richer, more Chinese, more urban, more likely to have parents who have studied overseas, etc. Also, these are people who are seeking an education which is different to the Malaysian educational norm, indicating that they may not share the same values as are ascribed to the Malaysian norm. (C. Ziguras, personal communication, as cited in Sanderson, March 24, 2006). (p. 65)

Further, recent research has cautioned against grouping all Asian learners together, arguing that students coming from the same cultural background may possess quite different learning
preferences. Ryan and Slethaug (2010) further noted that a number of studies carried out with ‘Chinese’ or ‘Asian’ students lacked a clear definition of who was included in these groups. It is important that research into the experiences of international students differentiates the various groups to understand the impact of cultural background as well as the individual differences that exist amongst the student cohorts.

As Clark and Gieve (2006) point out:

[T]here is a notable tendency in the applied linguistics literature to report the perceptions and reactions of Western instructors which, rather than being interrogated for ethnocentric bias and stereotyping, are validated by recourse to a Confucian heritage explanation which appears plausible rather than being empirically established . . . Much of the evidence produced for the way Chinese students behave in classroom settings has been drawn from reports and perceptions by Western instructors, thus filtered through their own values, expectations and standards. (pp. 60–63)

Culture shock thus affects individual students differently (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Kiley, 2003; Lewthwaite, 1997; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Singh and Thuraisingam, 2007; Suen, 1998; Wang and Shan, 2007; Zhang, 2002). It can include language difficulties, experiences of discrimination, lack of social support and mental health issues with reports of loneliness, depression and helplessness during some international students’ first few months at university (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Singh & Thuraisingam, 2007; Wang & Shan, 2007). Suen (1998) also reported that international students experiencing both language difficulties and mental health problems were more likely to withdraw from forming friendships, with few of the students in her study having any Australian friends.
**Accessing social support**

One way in which universities seek to support students and so reduce the potential for culture shock is the provision of specific services designed to support engagement (see section 2.1.4). As well as the formal support services offered by universities, international students can access social support through friendships with other students.

According to Berry (1997a, 1997b, 1998, and 2005), the benefits of having friends from the same ethnic background are fewer than those associated with having friends from a broader cultural mix, including the host country. Making friends with domestic students, however, can be difficult and complex. Even though research demonstrates that social support is associated with successful adjustment (Buote et al., 2007), some international students experience difficulties including perceived language difficulties, cultural barriers and discrimination in social situations (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Research carried out in the US has shown that some international students reported feeling lonely, sad and depressed because of a lack of social support. They also reported experiencing racial and ethnic discrimination, which was more common amongst non-white students. These were reported as barriers to making US friends and socialising in the host country (Biasco, Goodwin, & Vitale, 2001; Constantine et al., 2005; Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Stroebe, Van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis 2002). The factors influencing interaction with the cultural “other” will be discussed in section 2.4.

**2.3.7 Personal adjustment**

Universities also provide services designed to assist students with health or personal difficulties. The literature reveals that international students underutilize these particular services more than any other cohort (Lu, 2001). In Lu’s study, 50% of international students reported
knowing of the counselling service, but not using it because they felt they did not need it. Only 9.3% of international students knew of and used the counselling services. When asked if the services provided were seen as helpful for them, 39.7% of international students who had accessed the services reported that the health service was helpful and 18.6% reported not helpful. As can be seen, less than half of the international students had accessed the services provided by the university. Of those who did access the services, not all agreed that the services were helpful.

**Accessing personal support**

**Counselling**

Research reports various reasons for the under-utilisation of counselling services by some international students. These include the fact that some international students are unaware of their mental health needs, which may manifest into physical ailments, making these students seek medical help rather than counselling (Hyun, Madon & Lustig, 2007; McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Some students lack confidence in Western practices, and prefer to rely on traditional medicines (Rothstein & Rajapaksa, 2003). For others, the stigma associated with seeking help for “emotional issues” in their home cultures affects their willingness to access such help (Corrigan, 2004; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Some international students are not familiar with personal counselling, as this form of “talking therapy” is a relatively Westernised practice (Feltham, 1995). The perception of others is that seeing someone about personal problems reflects a weakness, which might dissuade them from accessing such services (Ayalon & Alvidrez, 2007; Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Gonzales, 2001; Sanders-Thompson, Brazile, & Akbar, 2004). These studies support the view that many students from ethnically diverse backgrounds are less inclined to seek formal counselling help for cultural reasons.
(Ayalon & Young, 2005; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005; Kim & Omizo, 2003; Masuda et al., 2009).

Another issue highlighted through the literature is that some international students prefer to access informal help, rather than the formal assistance offered by the university (Corrigan, 2004; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007; Zhai, 2004). Russell, Thomson and Rosenthal (2008) found that some international students prefer to seek help from friends, peers and family members, rather than use formal counselling services. These findings supported Ang and Liamputtong’s (2007) finding that international students from mainland China viewed counsellors as “outside the circle” (p. 19) of people they would usually turn to in relation to their personal issues. Moreover, they associated counselling with mental illness, and so were less inclined to access it. Other factors included lack of knowledge about the universities’ counselling services and a lack of confidence in their language abilities to convey the nature of their problems in English.

Not all studies supported the idea that students’ cultural backgrounds impacted upon their readiness to access certain services. In Russell, Thomson and Rosenthal’s (2008) study, it was concluded that reasons for under-utilisation of the health and counselling services were attributed to within-person variables – as measured by depression and stress questionnaire items rather than demographic variables, such as cultural backgrounds. According to these results, help-seeking behaviour is influenced more by individual rather than cultural differences.

**Health services**

The literature revealed differences between Western health care belief systems and some international students’ beliefs that could inhibit some international students from seeking help from this sector (Rew, 1997). According to Collins (2001), compared to the general population,
international students are more likely to leave taking action for their ailments until they become seriously ill. This may be because they rely on traditional remedies (Collins, 2001) or that there are customs and traditions such as using traditional healers which may inhibit international students from accessing health-related services (Anderson, 1994; Mori, 2000). Some international students’ health help-seeking behaviour may also be compounded by what Sharif (1994, as cited in Marginson et al., 2010) called “foreign student syndrome”, which is characterised by physical complaints such as aches and pains and passive behaviours. These are often accompanied by fear of failure, or of being sent home, resulting in a reluctance to seek medical help in case their ailments are serious enough to merit deportation or having their families contacted (DeTurk, Posey & Altonen, 1995, as cited in Collins, 2001; Fong & Wu, 1996).

2.3.8 Intensity of the First Year Experience (FYE)

Research in the field of students’ experiences refers to the great significance of their first year, and the enormous practical, academic and social adjustments demanded of them during that period (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005; McInnis, 2001). The extent to which these adjustments are made influences the totality of an international student’s experience. For some, the experiences can be intensified in their first year at university as they adjust to different teaching and learning styles, compounded by possible language barriers and adapting to a new culture (Krause et al., 2005). Factors such as addressing the practicalities of accommodation and personal safety, adjusting to the new academic protocols, adjusting to the student-teacher relationships typical of a Western university, accessing university support services, adjusting to their new social contexts and becoming familiar with different accents as well as the level of English required for university, are all intensified during the first year of university for many
students. For some international students, the first year experience can be intensified if they also experience language barriers and need to adjust to a new social and cultural context where they may not have the support of family and friends. As students progress through their studies and familiarize themselves with their new culture, some of these factors become less problematic whilst others, such as managing financial circumstances and engaging with domestic students might continue to influence their experiences of university studies.

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are many factors that influence international students’ experiences of international education. One is the ability to access the informal support gained from friendships with domestic students—or “host nationals”. The next section of the literature review will focus on the domestic students who share the IE context. It was deemed important to include the experiences of domestic students, as they can also impact significantly upon international students’ experiences. As some universities promote ‘international outlooks’ as a graduate attribute, it is important to understand how domestic students interact with international students in order to gain a better understanding of the provision of international education.

2.4 Experiences influencing domestic students' perceptions of International Education

Interaction between domestic and international students has been the subject of much research, and the perceived benefits of such interaction widely documented (Alexitch & Chapdelaine, 2004; Brown, 2009; Buote et al., 2007; Seah, 2008; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). While there is evidence that making friends with host nationals is more advantageous to international students than having co-national friends (Berry, 1997b; Sam, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Zimmerman, 1995), these interactions can be
problematic (Brown & Peacock, 2007; Killick, 2007; Leask, 2007 and 2009; Osmond & Roed, 2010). Experiences that can influence domestic students’ perceptions of their international peers, and of IE more generally, are discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Domestic students’ perceptions of international students

**Domestic students’ perception of international students’ English language proficiency**

In a UK study by Harrison and Peacock (2010), domestic students reported that international students’ lack of English language proficiency was a barrier to culturally-mixed group work. This finding was also reported by Osmond and Read (2010) where the “issue of language barriers was extensively discussed” (p. 118) by domestic students, who reported that it took too much time to complete assignments because some international students needed to translate words; they became frustrated with having to constantly repeat words for some international students; they were worried that using colloquialism would be offensive to international students; and they experienced greatly increased workloads because of international students’ lack of English proficiency.

**Domestic students’ responses to culturally mixed assignment groups**

A second factor influencing intercultural interaction is “in-group favouritism” (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); that is, where students mix predominantly with those similar to themselves (Summers & Volet, 2008). In their study, Volet and Ang (1998) investigated domestic students’ views of working in culturally-mixed groups. It was found in one course that “the formation of the six culturally mixed groups was largely the result of chance rather than choice (students who were "left over", had missed an earlier tutorial where the groups had been established or who had enrolled late)” (p. 9). Among other reasons, students reported that it was easier and more
comfortable working with those who shared the same culture. The authors also identified that some ethnocentric and stereotypical views of the ‘other’ affected the success of intercultural groups. This factor was somewhat diluted when students had a chance to work with ‘others’ and their stereotypical views were challenged. It was noted that unless deliberate attempts were made by the teachers to facilitate culturally mixed groups, students would continue to choose to work with their own.

According to Kenway and Bullen (2003), the simple division between domestic and international, can give rise to a process called ‘othering’:

Homogenisation is integral to the process of ‘othering’; to the creation of an ‘other’ who is typically stereotyped, silenced, marginalised. In the context of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, it is by these means that the subjectivity of the coloniser is established and empowered. (p. 11)

The finding that those who are culturally “other” can face negative stereotypes has been supported in recent research (Kimmel, 2010; Kubota, Lin, Rich & Troudi, 2006; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004; Summers & Volet, 2008). Summers and Volet’s study used the Students’ Appraisals of Group Assignments (SAGA) to explore university students’ attitudes towards culturally-mixed groups when undertaking a semester-long group assignment. Group members were self-selected and the SAGA results indicated that there were no attitudinal changes towards culturally-mixed groups as students progressed through their degrees: students who had previous experience with languages other than English, that is, who were taught in other languages, were more positive about self-electing into culturally-mixed groups; local students who self-elected into non-mixed groups were more negative about culturally-mixed groups; and students who chose culturally-mixed groups showed more negative attitudes about culturally mixed groups at the end of the
group work. It is possible that working in culturally-mixed groups reinforced rather than challenged their stereotypes and so their negative attitudes were stronger at the end of group work. As the stated “graduate attributes” of many universities include reference to being able to work in a globalised world or having an international outlook, this finding is troubling. The authors added that “it was primarily the more negative attitudes of local students who favoured non-mixed group work that posed a barrier to international students joining mixed groups” (p. 367).

Caution should be taken when interpreting Summers and Volet’s (2008) findings, as the study only included students from one unit and the post-test was administered straight after group work, which might have influenced students’ responses. The authors concluded that further research was required to understand whether or not attitudes changed after some time had elapsed, or whether teacher-selected groups would impact upon students’ attitudes.

These suggestions were addressed in research carried out by Kimmel (2010) at an Australian university. Three empirical studies in two classes (business and science) were conducted as part of Kimmel’s PhD thesis, and it was found that science students were more positive about group work after it was done than were business students. This was attributed to the fact that in the science class, group sizes were bigger, structured teacher support was available and the task allocated required group collaboration. Results also showed that students preferred to work with close friends or peers from similar cultural backgrounds, as this was seen to be more fun and relaxing, and less stressful. Factors inhibiting intercultural interactions included those related to communication, context and teaching strategy such as differences in working styles and work ethic. The study also aimed to understand whether interactions differed in academic and social settings. Students reported that the latter encouraged interaction, because
there were no assessment pressures. These findings support the view that context, that is, the social settings, and classes which employ the strategies used in the science class, can influence intercultural interactions and that the barriers identified by Volet and Ang (1998) are still an issue.

In Harrison and Peacock’s (2010) study, reported barriers of intercultural interaction included different work orientation and commitment, with domestic students claiming that international students lacked commitment and contribution to group work. Fear of offending international students was also another barrier to intercultural interaction, with domestic students reporting anxiety when interacting with international students because they had to be ‘mindful’ in case they offended these students. In those cases, it was reported that it was easier to work with like-minded individuals. Additionally, domestic students reported that culturally-mixed group work was ‘risky’ in that they feared that their group scores would be lower if they engaged in culturally-mixed group work and the international students could not engage in tasks demanded of them. The authors noted how domestic students found it difficult to reflect on their experiences of interacting with international students because they viewed international students as the ‘invisible minority’ (p. 129). The authors added that “as members of the majority culture, with the privileges that that entails, blindness to the existence of the ‘other’ is not uncommon” (p. 129).

The above findings suggest that there are still issues surrounding intercultural interaction and support Ward’s (2001) assertion that the benefits of having multi cultural campuses are as yet not fully tested. This is further supported by De Vita (2005) who argued that “the ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning is still very
much that, an ideal” (p. 75). The Volet and Ang (1998), Summers and Volet (2008) and Kimmel (2010) studies, along with others which support these findings (Constantine & Sue, 2005; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002) further suggest that intercultural interaction does not only depend on international and domestic students, but stresses the importance of having staff members and institutions promoting and supporting intercultural interactions.

**Domestic students’ perceptions of international students as “other”**

Studies conducted into ethnocentrism and xenophobia carried out in the United States have shown that although international students are a diverse group, their American peers, faculty administrators and the general community, often view them as homogeneous (Leong & Ward, 2000; Paige, 1990; Pedersen, 1991; Williams & Johnson, 2011). The international students were grouped together and broadly viewed as ‘handicapped’ or lacking in language and other academic capabilities (Paige, 1990). This attitude was further demonstrated in Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern’s (2002) study, which reported that American peers saw international students as ‘foreign’, ‘socially and culturally maladjusted’, ‘weird’, or ‘clueless’. However, the sample of domestic students had had little contact with international students and so their responses were based on their stereotypical beliefs of international students.

The findings that domestic students hold negative attitudes towards international students have been reported elsewhere (Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007). Moreover, recent research suggests increased levels of ‘xenophobia’ since the September 11 attack on the World-Trade Centre, especially aimed at Islamic and Arabic international students (Williams & Johnson, 2011).
Dunne (2008) found that students generally displayed ‘homophily’, a preference to associate and bond with similar others. This preference meant that intercultural interaction caused students anxiety and uncertainty, and was less rewarding than interaction with co-nationals, thus constituting a barrier to intercultural interaction:

Homophily, therefore, fosters homogeneous groups, which are further solidified over time by shared experiences. As such, it increases the likelihood of ‘Separation’ from dissimilar others, including students perceived as culturally different. Consequently, it may represent a significant barrier to intercultural contact. (p. 136)

The fact that intercultural interaction caused anxiety was supported by Harrison and Peacock (2010), who noted that domestic students avoided “the company of international students” and displayed a sense of ‘passive xenophobia’ (p. 135) where they “expressed a deep-rooted tendency to seek out like-minded people” (p. 135). In cases like these, it can be very difficult for international students to penetrate these barriers and make friends.

The effects of discrimination are pervasive, with some studies suggesting that discrimination can lead to poorer academic outcomes for international students, social isolation, and even a decline in physical health (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). Other research has reported that discrimination can also lead to a decline in mental health, characterised by higher levels of anxiety and depression (Phinney et al., 1998); lower self esteem (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003); high stress levels (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991); and chronic mental health problems (Leong & Ward, 2000). Discrimination was also associated with higher levels of ‘in group’ identification among international students (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991), with international students preferring to identify with other international students rather than with domestic students due to perceived
discrimination. Combined with the many issues discussed thus far, including language barriers and culture shock, discrimination can have negative effects on international students in multiple areas of their lives, decrease the likelihood that they will access services and negatively impact upon their university experience (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Research has identified that some sub-groups within Australian society possess a culture of broader ‘indifference’ toward cultural others - those outside mainstream society - such as its local Aboriginal populations (Guilfoyle & Taylor, 2010) as well as toward migrants and refugee communities (Dandy, 2009; Guilfoyle & Hancock, 2009). It is possible that this general passive disregard, which has been part of the psyche of some Australians, accompanies them to the university context. Even if not intended to do harm, these deeply ingrained if not overtly recognised attitudes can impact negatively upon international students (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009). In research conducted by Guilfoyle and Harryba (2009) with international students from the Seychelles, one of the major themes to emerge was the perception of discrimination. Seychelles international students felt isolated and lonely because they had no friends on campus and felt that Australian students did not make an effort to be friendly.

In a course designed to raise students’ consciousness about their attitudes towards those who were different in terms of ability, ethnicity, sexuality and family form, Sims (2002) found that students who were challenged to think about how they responded to difference were more likely to have changed their attitudes towards ‘others’ six months after completing the course. Sims (2002) added that:

When our task is the preparation of professionals to work in the community, we cannot be satisfied by changes in the thinking alone of our students. We have a responsibility to ensure that students’ practice is reflective of the highest professional and moral standards.
We must create in all of our courses, opportunities for students to learn about the issues associated with diversity in our communities, to understand issues of power and powerlessness, oppression, and the subtle ways that we create an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division. (p. 588)

Sims (2002) argues that students’ “Value Position”, that is, their response to those who are different, can be one which aims to exclude, ignore, fix, or value difference. If students who believe that those who are different should be ignored, excluded or fixed are not given the chance to reflect on and challenge their value positions, then their attitudes towards ‘others’ might not change. This could be another barrier to intercultural interaction, where students do not see the importance of valuing those who are different. However, the study only measured students’ attitudes six months after the course and it is possible that these students’ attitudes reverted after working with those who are different.

Thus intercultural interaction can be fraught with barriers. As pointed out by Sanson et al. (1998):

Contact, even when it presents contradictory evidence, may not undermine the stereotype but may in fact promote ‘stereotype defence mechanism’, wherein the disconfirming evidence is ‘explained away’ by viewing the individual as an ‘exception to the rule’, as an atypical member of the group. In some cases, contact can and does exacerbate existing prejudices. (p. 171)

According to these authors, even if active efforts are made to ensure that students are placed in culturally mixed groups, and even if these students are supported to communicate effectively with the ‘other’, it is still not guaranteed that these interactions will bring the reported benefits.
In fact, it is possible that these interactions can reinforce negative stereotypes, rather than challenge them.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, International Education, and the support services designed to support it, have been examined from the perspectives of university staff, international students and domestic students. Focusing on these three key stakeholders has provided a more holistic understanding of the factors at both individual and institutional levels that influence experiences of IE. For staff members, these included their individual beliefs about teaching and learning, their individual skills and qualifications to work with diverse populations, and their individual perceptions of international students. International students’ perception of their English language abilities, their capacity to adjust to new academic, social and cultural environments, and the intensity of the first year experience all influenced their experiences of IE. Domestic students’ perceptions of international students’ English language proficiency, their response to culturally mixed group work and their responses to the cultural ‘other’ all influenced their experiences of working alongside international students.
Chapter 3
Research Methodology

Chapter 2 explored the literature relevant to the experiences of staff, international students and domestic students of International Education to provide the background to the current study. This chapter begins with an explanation of the theoretical framework that guided the methodological decisions pertaining to the study. It explains how Social Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000) was used in the overall design, and the collection, management and analysis of the data.

3.1 Selection of the research paradigm

A qualitative approach to the study was determined to be the most appropriate, given the multi-dimensional issues to be addressed. Yin (2011) argues that qualitative research allows the researcher to study individuals in the context of their environments, under real-life conditions. Moreover, qualitative research has the potential to consider multiple perspectives of phenomena being investigated.

3.2 Epistemology: Social Constructivism

Epistemology, or one’s understanding of the nature and development of knowledge, determines one’s view of the world (Patton, 2002). This then leads to how a researcher might study the world, which governs the methodology of research. In the current research, Social Constructivism informed the epistemology, which then framed the Grounded Theory (GT) methods within the constructivist paradigm. The “how” of the research was constructed using a single case (the Case University) and data analytical methods associated with Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) were applied (see Figure 3.1).
Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that “the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and subject create the understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (pp. 13-14). Social Constructivism is therefore a perspective that assumes that there are ‘multiple realities’ as individuals understand and create their realities through their unique experiences, so that the same events may have different meanings for different people. Reality is seen as a multi-versal (Crotty, 1998) rather than a uni-versal construct because of the diverse interpretations.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that “realities are social constructions of the mind and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals” (p. 43). In the current research, the multiple realities investigated included those constructed by university staff members, and both international and domestic students. Social Constructivism was chosen as the guiding epistemology to accommodate the perspectives of the three groups and to provide an understanding of the three realities within one ‘case’; that is, the Case University.

Constructivism was chosen as the epistemology to frame the current research for the following reasons:

a. As an international student myself, I chose a topic that has great personal relevance, which might have been seen as potentially biased in the context of a more positivist paradigm. If I had chosen another paradigm which focused on being “objective” and
starting with a “blank slate” I would not have been able to separate my experiences of being an international student from what I was observing. Thus, Social Constructivism, which emphasises the co-construction of meaning built by researcher and participant together, was perceived as an appropriate approach. The original model of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was based on the premise that “there is a need not to review any of the literature in the substantive area under study” (Glaser, 1992, p. 31), so that the researcher comes to the data without constructed biases and where the resulting theory reflects only the data. My honours project about international students’ issues ensured that such a clean slate was not possible since I already knew some of the literature regarding international students. Constructivist Grounded Theory, on the other hand, allows for the researcher to have already encountered theory and literature in the area of study.

b. The current study was investigating multiple realities: those of the international and domestic students, as well as staff members. Social Constructivism allowed the use of different lenses to understand each participant’s experiences.

c. The interaction between the participants and researcher during data collection was seen as central to study. Charmaz (1995) argues that from this interaction, researchers can become “authors”, in that they can also include their voice. The use of the first person is acceptable as the researcher describes not only the participants’ stories, but the setting, the interaction and the interpretations (Charmaz, 1995). I wanted to include my own perceptions about the different aspects of the study. During sampling, interviewing, data analysis and writing up, I kept notes of what I was thinking and observing. Social Constructivism allowed me to include excerpts of
these notes throughout the thesis to show how I changed as a result of interacting with the participants and with literature. The quote “No researcher would expect to be in the same cognitive-space at the end of a research project than at the beginning” (Knight, Halkett & Cross, 2010, p. 3) resonated with me as I realised how my views changed as I interviewed participants and reflected on their views (see Reflective Journal in Appendix O).

d. Finally, I did not set out to build a theory, but to understand the varying experiences of different participants in International Education at the Case University and Charmaz’s Social Constructivism allowed for that. Charmaz (2000) argues that because reality is subjective, it is very difficult to build a theory about social phenomena. Each individual interprets events and situations differently and so the theory would not be generalisable.

3.3. Guiding Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical framework chosen by a researcher depends on the study’s aims, research questions and anticipated outcome, and is informed by the epistemology (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). According to Blumer (1998), Symbolic Interactionism (SI) is the process whereby individuals attribute meaning to their experiences. Three core principles are inherent to Symbolic Interactionism (Atkinson & Delamont, 2010):

- The meanings that individuals attribute to objects/entities (such as persons, institutions, situations, and/or combinations of such) will determine what actions will occur toward those objects/entities.
- The meaning attributed to the objects/entities around an individual is derived from social interactions.
An interpretive process is used to direct and modify the meanings as the situation is dealt with by a person (p. 4).

Central to Blumer’s (1998) premises are symbols, namely language which human beings use through their interactions. Blumer further states that:

Ordinarily, human beings respond to one another, as in carrying on a conversation, by interpreting one another's actions or remarks and then reacting on the basis of the interpretation. Responses, consequently, are not made directly to the stimulation, but follow, rather, upon interpretation; further, they are likely to be different in nature from the stimulating acts, being essentially adjustment to these acts. (p. 71)

Symbolic Interactionism was appropriate as the theoretical framework because a fundamental aspect of this study was the interactions between the participants and the researcher. As such, a theoretical framework allowing for such interactions was needed.

3.4. Research Methodology: Constructivist Grounded Theory

“Methodology is the strategy used for answering research questions” (Keith, 2007, p. 62). The current study used the techniques associated with Charmaz’s (2000) Constructivist Grounded Theory to guide data collection and analysis. Mills et al. (2006) argue that “researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality” (p. 2). The current study used Charmaz’ Social Constructivist Grounded Theory because her approach married the fundamental structures and strategies of GT with a Social Interactionist framework, which allowed for an investigation of both the participants’ views of reality and the researcher’s (Charmaz, 1994). It also allowed for interpretation of the interaction between participants and researcher as data collection proceeded.
3.4.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) was developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), who wanted to induce the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of phenomena by using a set of systematic, practical strategies to develop or build new theories “grounded” in data, rather than deducing theory through constructing and then testing hypotheses. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), one way that inductive research can be conducted is by asking open-ended questions that capture variable data, and then constantly comparing the answers (or data). In Glaser and Strauss’ view, constant comparison starts by comparing data from different sources, and then classifying the data through the creation of codes and core categories. Data are often gathered by way of interviews, which researchers continue to perform until data saturation, that is, until the point when no new information is being gathered from new interviews.

Since its introduction there has been much discussion and debate around GT. This has led to development and extension of the theory, and the creation of different iterations. Mills et al. (2006) argue that instead of seeing these as separate methodologies, GT’s development can be seen as an evolving paradigm. Thus the methodological choices that researchers make from the available GT-related strategies depends on them finding an epistemology “that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality” (p. 2) since an interpretivist epistemology will effectively frame GT methods and techniques.

3.4.2. Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist Grounded Theory was developed by Charmaz (1994) and conceptualises the relationship between the researcher and participants in a way that acknowledges that the conversation between them has the capacity to affect the data in numerous ways. In the original GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and subsequent Glaser-only discussions (1978, 1992, & 2002),
Glaser argues that a researcher needs to be passive and come to the data as a blank slate to minimise the impact of any preconceived ideas about the subject/phenomena. Researchers are encouraged to expose themselves to as little literature about their topic as possible, so that any conclusions made are “grounded” in the data rather than a reflection of the researcher’s previous knowledge or personal views.

Charmaz (2000, 2001) argues that researchers can never approach their research in a completely objective state, since the very act of choosing the subject matter must be in itself an indication that the subject is of interest to the researcher. Further, the Constructivist Grounded Theory researcher recognises that the act of collecting data, that is, interacting with participants, can itself affect the data. Thus, the researcher is encouraged to “add…a description of the situation, the interaction, the person’s affect and [their] perception of how the interview went” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 33).

Reason and Heron (1995) describe the prior knowledge with which the researcher enters a project as the researcher’s “critical subjectivity”. In the context of a Constructivist paradigm, which frames a co-construction of reality between researcher and participant, this critical subjectivity needs to be monitored and, in some cases, fostered or countered, so that the researcher does not impose a personal view at the expense of other participants’ views. Charmaz (2000) contends that the researcher can keep a reflective journal, which provides researchers with an expressive thought space outside of their interview relationship with the participant.

I recognised that as an international student myself, my vested interest in the outcomes of the study meant I could not come to the project with a ‘tabula rasa’ or blank slate. Thus, Glaser and Strauss’ version of GT was not suitable. Additionally, Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, 1998) version did not emphasise the co-construction of data/reality between the researcher and
participant. Thus the underlying principles of Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2006) informed the development and evolution of the project’s design and methodologies.

**Grounded Theory techniques used in the current study**

Mills et al. (2006) describe GT as an evolving model of research that has changed in numerous ways since its introduction by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. There are, however, certain characteristics common to all GT versions. So, while neither the Glaser and Strauss (1967), nor the later Straus and Corbin (1990) versions of GT were fully appropriated in the current project, a number of the heuristic characteristics from both approaches were used in the adoption of Charmaz’s (2000, 2001) *Constructivist Grounded Theory*. The GT/Constructivist Grounded Theory techniques and methods used in the current study include:

*Reflective journal*

Reflective journals are common to all GT approaches, although the reason for their use can vary. Charmaz (1995) contends that collected data have the capacity to affect a researcher in numerous ways, particularly if the content of that data is intrinsically linked to the researcher’s personal narrative. A reflective journal was kept as part of the current research (see Appendix O) in order to provide an audit trail – for both myself and any reader – of my thoughts and opinions relating to the research as it progressed. This was considered important because I met all the inclusion criteria to be a member of the target international student group. Further, I have included text boxes titled ‘my observations’ throughout the dissertation that incorporated my thoughts, observations and ideas as they developed throughout the project. They were written in the first person to allow for the presence and centrality of the researcher’s voice and for ‘an internal dialogue for analysing and understanding important issues in the research project’
(Smith, 1999, p. 360). Additionally, as the research adopted a Constructivist epistemology, “the use of the first person and of direct quotes is a way of acknowledging that the voices of researchers and those whom we research are not the same yet are interconnected” (Gilgun, 2005, p. 259). It was reasoned that if the thesis had not employed the use of first person voice, it might have given “the impression that [the researcher] did not take part in [their] own study” (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 38). As Charmaz (2006) pointed out “writers’ rendering of experience becomes their own through word choice, tone, and rhythm” (p. 175). Providing these accounts was important because:

Phenomena are always filtered through the subjective understandings of the individual conducting the study. Therefore, the researcher can have neither a ‘God’s eye-view’ of phenomena, nor be an objective ‘eye-witness’, but can only be an ‘I-witness’, always filtering phenomena through subjective understandings. (Mantzoukas, 2005, p. 283)

Therefore, journal entries were incorporated in an attempt to increase transparency and show readers how the researcher’s subjective understanding of the phenomena contributed to the research process (Jasper, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The journal kept throughout the project was used as a reflective tool, demonstrating the researcher’s reasoning, judgments and emotional reactions in response to the research processes. However, a critical analysis of the journal entries was also merited, therefore, a ‘reflection on the reflections’ section was also written. This section was written two years after final data collection, which allowed the researcher to reflect on the research process as a whole.

Analytic induction

Analytic induction is a process that qualitative researchers employ when they are faced with ‘anomalies’ in their data. Bühler-Niederberger (1985, as cited in Flick, 2007) defines it as “a
method of systematic interpretation of events, which includes the process of generating hypotheses as well as testing them. Its decisive instrument is to analyse the exception, the case, which is deviant to the hypothesis” (p. 476). According to Cressey (1950), analytic induction develops in six steps:

1. A rough definition of the phenomenon to be explained is formulated.
2. An hypothetical explanation of that phenomenon is formulated.
3. One case is studied in the light of the hypothesis, with the object of determining whether the hypothesis fits the facts in that case.
4. If the hypothesis does not fit the facts, either the hypothesis is reformulated or the phenomenon to be explained is re-defined, so that the case is excluded.
5. Practical certainty may be attained after a small number of cases has been examined, but the discovery by the investigator or any other investigator of a single negative case disproves the explanation and requires a re-formulation.
6. This procedure of examining cases, re-defining the phenomenon and re-formulating the hypothesis is continued until a universal relationship is established, each negative case calling for a re-definition or a re-formulation. (p. 31)

In the current study, both international students and staff members commented that their experiences of International Education were influenced by domestic students. The researcher had not anticipated including these students in the sample, but was faced with information that was not covered by the research questions. According to analytic induction, the researcher could do one of two things, either 1. reformulate the hypothesis; or 2. redefine the phenomenon to be explained, so that the case is excluded (Flick, 2007). I chose the first option, deciding to recruit some domestic students to clarify the issues brought forth by international students and staff
members. Thus, a third research question relating to domestic students’ experiences of International Education was added to explore the phenomenon further.

**Theoretical sampling**

Theoretical sampling is a common qualitative data collection strategy (Coyne, 1997) that allows researchers to pursue new directions as they become apparent during data collection and/or analysis (Charmaz, 2000), and therefore facilitates the process of analytic induction. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2001):

> Researchers cannot know exactly what the most significant social and psychological processes are in particular settings, so they start with areas of interest to them and form preliminary interviewing questions to open up those areas. They explore and examine research participants’ concerns and then further develop questions around those concerns, subsequently seeking participants whose experiences speak to these questions. (p. 676)

In the current study, theoretical sampling was used in numerous ways. For example, I had not initially planned to interview domestic university students as part of the study. After listening to international students and university staff members, however, it became apparent that it was necessary to include some perspective from the domestic student cohort. Staff members had observed that domestic students seemed unwilling to work with international student because of a perceived lack of English proficiency. International students also reported difficulties working with domestic students. The nature of the interactions between the international and domestic students in the learning context became potentially promising investigative ground in understanding the perceptions of international students. Specific instances where theoretical sampling was used will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, which presents the context, or “case”; that is, the Case University of this study.
Evolving data collection tools

Robust theoretical sampling can, and should, lead to a natural evolution in the data collection tools associated with a study. Interacting with staff members and understanding their experiences brought new perspectives and affected questions in subsequent interviews. So too, a calm approach was required when some staff interviews became personally challenging as a result of negative views of international students being articulated to an interviewer who was clearly an international student. The reflective journal was also helpful with this process. Allowing the data collection tool to evolve according to the context is consistent with Knight et al.’s (2010) assertion that the researcher is not in the same place at the end of the research as he or she was at the start.

Evolution of the data collection tool also allowed for Charmaz’s (1995) contention that participants have the capacity to change their views or realise certain opinions after, and sometimes even during, the interviews. Thus, the data collection process impacts upon both the researcher and the participant, a process recognised by the Constructivist researcher as essential to understanding social phenomena holistically.

Finally, an evolving data collection tool also gives the researcher the flexibility to put in place specific strategies to counter any power imbalance that might become apparent between the researcher and the researched (Mills et al., 2006). These can include changing a location or time for the interview. Significantly, power imbalances in semi-structured interviews usually involve the researcher implementing strategies from a position of power, however, this was not the case in the current research. On the contrary, I often interviewed people from a position of limited power, which became particularly apparent if the staff member reacted to the questions in what was perceived to be a hostile manner.
**Coding, Memoing and Sorting**

**Coding:** According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the process whereby raw data are categorised using a name that “summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43) and is the central phase of the data analysis process (Dey, 2004; Marvasti, 2004; Moghaddam, 2006). It allows the researcher to make sense of the data and sort them meaningfully. Coding includes the constant comparing of each piece of data with previous samples to ensure that no information is lost, and to facilitate the development of clearly defined categories. There are three steps involved:

Initial coding: involves reading the data whilst remaining open to new information. This can be achieved by going through the data word by word, line by line or incident by incident (Charmaz, 2006). During this process, the researcher is looking for patterns.

Focused coding: involves the researcher building categories from the common patterns found in the data, by grouping similar codes (from step 1) together. The focused codes are considered “directed, selective and conceptual” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) and the researcher is then required to decide which codes are important.

Axial coding: is conducted to find relationships between the codes and categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1998) developed criteria to find these relationships:

a. They must appear frequently in the data

b. The data are not forced (into a category) and the elements of each category are consistent

c. The name given should be potentially identifiable in other research areas (so common vocabularies should be used). (p. 147)
Coding, memoing and sorting strategies occur simultaneously, and involve the researcher noting down potential relationships between the coded categories being developed.

**Memoing**: This is a reflective process that usually occurs at the same time as coding (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). The technique involves using cards or notes to remind the researcher about existing categories and any relationships to other categories. Memos also allow the researcher to reflect on what the interview was about and what the interview meant to the researcher (Glaser, 1978). These memos can then be incorporated into the researcher’s reflective journal so it becomes clear how researcher’s views might affect data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the current research, memoing was also used to link the categories with previous research, which became a critical component in writing up potential findings.

**Sorting**: This is the process by which the researcher groups cards that represent similar ideas together. As such, relationships between categories can also be arranged by grouping similar cards together. This layout becomes helpful when organising and structuring the research report.

* theoretical Sensitivity or “Critical Reflection”?*

The original GT argued that researchers should come to the research as blank slates or tabula rasa (Clarke, 2005) so that they can “remain sensitive to the data by being able to record events and detect happenings without first having them filtered through and squared with pre-existing hypotheses and biases” (Glaser, 1978, p. 3). Glaser (1978, 1992, & 2002) has made a point of developing his arguments around a concept he calls “theoretical sensitivity” to demonstrate how subsequent iterations of GT have misinterpreted the notion of developing theory that is “grounded” in the data collected for a study. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) presented a number of specific techniques to counter Glaser’s criticisms that their version of GT lacked this “theoretical sensitivity” and to help researchers overcome their pre-conceived bias.
Charmaz’s (2000) view on researcher “bias”, informed by Social Constructivism, argues that it is not only impossible for researchers to be completely bias-free, but that the bias – or knowledge – that researchers bring to their research is of increasing value to that research (Janesick, 2000). The current researcher has embraced this idea by not only recognising the existence of theoretical bias, but also by making a concerted effort to iteratively engage previous literature and theory with each new observation; a technique suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and more recently by Knight and Cross (2012).

3.5. Research Methods and Design

3.5.1 Case Study

Crotty (1998) proposed four essential elements in the research process (see Figure 3.1). After choosing the appropriate epistemology, theoretical framework and methodology, a researcher needs to choose specific methods that concur with what the researcher wants to explore (Crotty, 1998). Methods are techniques used to gather and analyse data (Crotty, 1998; Keith, 2007). The current study conceptualised the study as a single “case”, i.e., the Case University, to investigate different stakeholders’ experiences of International Education. Data were gathered from university documentation and semi-structured interviews.

The ‘case study’ is a common research strategy used to focus on the dynamics within a single-setting of phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989). Willig (2008) describes a case as follows:

A case can be an organization, a city, a group of people, a community, a patient, a school, an intervention, even a nation state or an empire. It can be a situation, an incident or an experience [and] involves an in-depth, intensive and sharply focused exploration of such an occurrence. (p. 74)
Conceptualising the ‘University’ as a ‘case’ was also consistent with David and Renea’s (2008) assertion that each institution has its own specific characteristics, budget and student population, and so can be studied separately using a case-study design. Thus, the University was the case, and the three user-group cohorts were staff members, international students and domestic students. These cohorts made up three units of analysis (UoA) (also called contexts of analysis).

**Characteristics of a case study**

There are several defining features of case studies. They incorporate an idiographic perspective (Yin, 1994), where researchers can conceptualise or focus on specific details of the case. This emphasis on specificity can allow for great depth to be reached (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) as the researcher observes and analyses the case from multiple perspectives (Dooley, 2002; Stake, 1995) using multiple strategies (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Case studies also pay attention to contextual data, which involves investigating how the factors being studied are played out in their particular case. In the current study, I aimed to investigate aspects of International Education at an Australian university. The contextual understanding of each conversation as a ‘unit of analysis’ provides the pragmatic scaffolding of multiple case studies (Yin, 1994) where layers of data and analysis can contribute to a detailed and “synergistic” understanding of the parts of the whole phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies also provide potential for triangulation, where researchers gather information from a number of sources to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Willig, 2008). Triangulation facilitates the collection of rich data sets and can help increase validity of the research. In the current study, data were triangulated by using a number of sources, including interviews with
international students, domestic students, and staff members (primary data); and analysis of documents from the Case University’s website (secondary data).

Creswell (1994) describes the qualitative ‘case’ as a “bounded system being studied” (p. 61). This requires consideration of the boundaries, or scope, of data collection: for instance, how many interviews will be conducted, or whether there will be a limit on the number of questionnaires administered (Ellinger, Watkins & Marsick, 2009). These boundaries, according to Constructivist thinking, are constructed and imposed on the research by both the researcher and, in social research, the respondent/participant, since we know that “cases are socially constructed and co-constructed between the researcher and the respondent. In this way, cases are not really defined or bounded until data collection—and even analysis—is finished” (Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton & Oakes, 1995, p. 21). The ‘bounded system’ in the current research, was loosely the “University” (as the case), and the constructions to be analysed (that is, the ‘units of analysis’) became apparent as data collection progressed.

According to Yin (1989), a case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). Case studies can be simple or complex, and may differ according to type, design, and/or focus. Stake (1995) outlines three different types of case studies, and their broad purposes:

1. an intrinsic case study: where the researcher is interested in understanding the individual characteristics or uniqueness of a single case;

2. an instrumental case study: whereby the researcher is interested in an issue, and uses the case to illustrate it; and

3. a collective case study: whereby researchers select more than one case to study.
The type of case study chosen by the researcher depends on the size of the study, its purpose, the paradigm and theoretical frameworks chosen and/or the theories being tested (Corcoran, Walker & Wals, 2004). Case studies can incorporate both qualitative and quantitative research methods and can be used across a variety of disciplines (see Figure 3.2).

**Case Study Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Multiple sources: documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Descriptions, themes, assertions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.2: Elements of case study (Creswell, 1994, p. 65)*

Case study research (CSR), is one that “systematically explores a setting in order to generate understandings about it” (Cousin, 2008, p. 131). It is a contextual approach that must take into account multiple phenomena and the relationships between them. Yin (1994) defines case study research as “scholarly inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 33). A researcher who chooses to carry out case study research “wishes to understand it [a phenomenon] completely, not by controlling variables but rather by observing all of the variables and their interacting relationships” (Dooley, 2002, p. 336). As pointed out by Patton (2002):

Decisions about samples, both sample size and sampling strategies, depend on prior decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis to study. Often individual people, clients, or students are the unit of analysis. This means that the primary focus of data collection
will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting. (p. 228)

Since the research questions in this study were about the experiences of staff members, international students and domestic students, it was decided that these three groups would be the units of analysis.

**Epistemological difficulties associated with case study**

Case study methodology has potential limitations, including issues surrounding triangulation, ethical difficulties, and generalisability to other cases/contexts (Silverman, 2000; Willig, 2008).

**Triangulation:** Some researchers have argued that although triangulation is a good means of achieving validity, it can become problematic if the sources and methods of data collection and analysis contradict instead of complement each other. As argued by Willig (2008):

> It is possible that some of the methods of analysis chosen by a researcher are not, in fact, epistemologically compatible. For example, a combination of realist and relativist methods of analysis of a participant’s account of a particular event cannot generate meaningful insights. (p. 85)

In the current study this was not an issue as the selected paradigm argues against absolute realities, instead arguing for different data perspectives. Also, as shown in Figure 3.1, the chosen epistemology guided the chosen theoretical framework, which in turn facilitated the choice of methodology and methods. This ensured that all the elements complemented each other.

**Ethical Issues:** Participant well-being is one of the ethical issues associated with case studies. As pointed out by Willig (2008):
Being interviewed, writing a diary or taking part in tests that involve self-reflection are likely to stimulate thoughts and feelings in the participant, which he or she may not have experienced otherwise. Although this may have positive and even therapeutic effects, it is also possible that it could affect the participant in less desirable ways. (p. 86)

In the current study, both international and domestic students may have felt distressed and/or discouraged after talking about their university experiences. Steps were taken to ensure the safety of participants, including the offer of free counselling and debriefing sessions after interviews so any concerns could be addressed.

**Generalisability:** Another major issue associated with case study research is the lack of transferability, or generalisability, of the study’s findings. Although the primary aim of qualitative research is not to generalise the findings, three types of generalisation are still commonly used: statistical generalisations, analytic generalisations and case-to-case transfer (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, Washburn, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) argue that qualitative researchers usually do not strive for statistical generalisations since the “goal usually is not to make inferences about the underlying population, but to attempt to obtain insights into particular educational, social, and familial processes and practices that exist within a specific location and context” (p. 240). Analytical generalisations on the other hand, are “applied to wider theory on the basis of how selected cases ‘fit’ with general constructs” (Curtis et al., 2000, p. 1002). According to Onwuegbuzie (2003), qualitative researchers “generalise words and observations...to the population of words/observations (i.e. “truth space”) representing the underlying concept” (p. 400). Case-to-case transfers occur when researchers make generalisations to cases similar to the one being studied (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007).
Social Constructivism is being used in the current research, which argues that there are multiple realities and so findings from one population should not be taken to explain all variance of the phenomenon. Willis (2005) also argues that all conclusions are contextual, and that generalising would suggest that all human behaviour was the same across settings, which clearly is not so. Although it is not the goal of this research to generalise the findings, all Australian universities are bound by law to provide specific support services to international students (see Chapter 2) and so the findings could be applicable to other similar cases (other institutions with similar support services). Lincoln and Guba (2002, p. 3) argue that case studies should meet the applicability criteria, which “assess the extent to which the case study facilitates the drawing of inferences by the reader that may have applicability in his or her own context or situation”. As such, findings from the current study could be applied to other institutions that enrol international students.

3.5.2 Methods used in the current study

Interviews and document analysis

The methods chosen by a researcher are the “techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that, “different kinds of data give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to understand a category and to develop its properties” (p. 65). Two methods were chosen for the current study: document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Document analysis

A search of the Case University’s website and collection of brochures and flyers about the services provided to students at the Case University were seen as important in understanding the
context of International Education. Knowing the aims of the services allowed for interview questions to gauge whether international students understood why these services were being provided and presented an overview of whether or not the Case University was providing services to cater for all the international students’ needs. This process also assessed the accessibility of information about the Case University’s services.

**Semi-structured interviews**

Within the qualitative approach, semi-structured, face-to-face informal interviews were chosen to gather data because according to Hollowaay and Fulbrook (2001) “interviews…provide not only access to feelings and thoughts, but also to private accounts of the situation that might contradict official reports given in formal situations” (p. 542). This in-depth analysis would not be possible if quantitative research methods were chosen.

In the current research, the interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for answers to specific questions, but also allowed for the participants to include new insights (Appendix J, K & L). This new information was then included in subsequent interview schedules as part of analytic induction. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore some points in order to understand more fully the participants’ stories. All interviews were carried out in venues where both the participants and researcher felt comfortable and safe.

### 3.6 Reliability and validity in qualitative research

The versatility of case study research has led some researchers to criticise its possible lack of rigor (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Issues surrounding reliability and validity of the findings have been identified as problematic (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Moreover, some qualitative researchers have suggested alternative terms to replace validity and reliability that better reflect
the nature of qualitative research, and also ensure rigor (Leininger, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Guba (1981) conceptualised a number of indicators of trustworthiness, which can be used to evaluate the rigor of qualitative research. Four are relevant to the current study:

1. **Credibility**: plausibility of the findings (are they true representations of what the participants reported?)

2. **Transferability**: ability to transfer the findings from the case studied to other similar cases

3. **Dependability**: the logic of the research process employed. A detailed account of the procedures ensures that other readers can follow decisions made by the researcher throughout the study. As suggested by Corcoran, Walker and Wals (2004), a case study should “provide a critical analysis of practice and be documented in such a way that it can have transformative value for others” (p. 9).

4. **Confirmability**: Findings can be confirmed by original documents (interview transcripts, records and field notes).

In this study, confirmability was achieved by keeping a reflective journal during data collection and analysis (Appendix O). This created an audit trail, which also allows others to follow the researcher’s thoughts and decision making process. This process facilitates clarity and may help others to understand why certain steps were taken and how conclusions were made.

According to Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail should include a good record - keeping system, with detailed documentation regarding content and contexts of interviews and observations, as well as ongoing methodological decisions. An audit trail also includes descriptions of the researchers’ personal feelings, which might serve as a
cathartic endeavour (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). In this study, detailed descriptions of the ‘case’ as well as information about the participants will be discussed in Chapter 4, limited only by confidentiality and guideline adherence. Moreover, detailed explanations for choices of each step will be included. Personal notes will also be added throughout the thesis as text-boxes and appended as a reflective journal.

The second method of ensuring rigor is credibility, which was facilitated by comparing data from three primary sources—staff members, international and domestic students and one secondary source - documents from university websites.

A third way of ensuring rigorous research is ‘goodness’ (Tobin & Begley, 2004), which acts “as a means of locating situatedness, trustworthiness and authenticity” (p. 391). According to Arminio and Hultgren (2002), interpretive studies should display six elements of ‘goodness’: (1) Foundation (epistemology and theory) – this provides the philosophical stance and gives context to and informs the study; (2) Approach (methodology) – specific grounding of the study’s logic and criteria; (3) Collection of data (method) – explicitness about data collection and management; (4) Representation of voice (researcher and participant as multicultural subjects) – researchers reflect on their relationship with participants and the phenomena under exploration; (5) The art of meaning making (interpretation and presentation) – the process of presenting new insights through the data and chosen methodology; and (6) Implication for professional practice (recommendations) (p. 450).

In this study, foundation, approach and collection of data were clearly and thoroughly discussed in this chapter, whereby Crotty’s (1998) diagram of the elements of research was used to demonstrate how the chosen epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods informed the research process. Representation of voice will be demonstrated throughout the
dissertation by using excerpts from the reflective journal in text boxes to highlight research observations, and by using text boxes integrated into the analysis of the participants’ views. The dissertation will show the difference in ‘voice’ by incorporating both passive and active voices throughout. This was chosen to illustrate that the researcher and the participants were integral parts of the research process and both were being influenced by each other.

3.7 Summary

The current research applied a Constructivist epistemology using a case study approach to understand the different perspectives of the participants (see Figure 3.3).

![Diagram]

*Figure 3.3: Design of the study*

This chapter has described the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods that were chosen to inform the current study. The next chapter provides further information on the implementation phase of the study. It describes the chosen case, participants, data collection tools, and the procedures utilised in analysis of the data.
Chapter 4
Research Implementation

This chapter discusses the implementation phase of the study (see Figure 4.1). It describes the context in which the data were gathered, that is, the Case University; the specific sampling techniques employed; and the decision-making processes employed in recruiting and interviewing participants. Demographic information about the three groups of participants, information about the materials used and processes applied in the study, and the ethical considerations that guided the research are also discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how Social Constructivist Grounded Theory was used to analyse the data.

Figure 4.1: Tasks and phases undertaken in the current study

Diagram adapted from Knight and Cross (2012)
4.1 The Case

Awarded University status in the early 1990’s, the case in this study was the second largest university in the city in which it is located. Known particularly for its excellence in education and nursing courses, the Case University offered more than 400 courses from undergraduate to Doctor of Philosophy degrees across a wide range of disciplines. It also offered alternative pathways through partner institutions for students who did not meet the usual academic entry requirements. The level of English proficiency acceptable for entry differed depending on the type of test (e.g., IELTS, O-Level) and the course being undertaken (Appendix N).

For students whose first language was not English, and whose home country academic qualifications did not meet the requirements of an Australian university, there were associated institutions (e.g. English language centres) which provided courses that could help students meet the minimum entry requirements. These institutions offered foundation programs, certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas or postgraduate pre-qualifiers to help international students gain entry into the Case University. The Case University also took into account previous professional experience relevant to the course the student wanted to undertake, in addition to qualifications of the same level as the course, to evaluate students’ entry requirements.

4.1.1 Staff and student statistics

In 2010, there were 2,253 academic\(^3\) (see Table 4.1) and 1,733 general (see Table 4.2) staff members employed at the Case University, providing services to 24,241 students, of whom 18,638 were domestic students and 3,101 were on-shore international students (see Table 4.3).

\(^3\)“Academic staff” included in this statistic differed according to function (teaching only, research only, teaching and research and others) and levels (Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers).
Table 4.1

**Academic Staff Headcount by Contract Type, 2006-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract Type</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Ongoing</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Contract</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Ongoing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Contract</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual/Sessional</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>1,472</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>1,602</td>
<td>1,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,335</td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>2,230</td>
<td>2,253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

**General Staff Headcount by Contract Type, 2006-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract Type</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Ongoing</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Contract</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Ongoing</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Contract</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>1,907</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>1,723</td>
<td>1,733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enrolment records indicate that the student population had grown steadily by around 15% between 2006 and 2010. The 9% increase in domestic student enrolment during that period was surpassed by an increase of almost 40% in international student enrolments (see Table 4.4). This represented a growth in the international student market share of around 21.6%, with that cohort making up nearly a quarter of all students at the Case University in 2010.

Table 4.3

**Enrolments by Citizenship and Broad Course Level, 2006-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship and Course Level</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Postgraduate</td>
<td>3,102</td>
<td>2,954</td>
<td>2,896</td>
<td>3,283</td>
<td>3,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Undergraduate</td>
<td>13,975</td>
<td>13,253</td>
<td>13,273</td>
<td>13,119</td>
<td>15,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International On-shore Postgraduate</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>1,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International On-shore Undergraduate</td>
<td>1,799</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>1,730</td>
<td>2,066</td>
<td>1,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Off-shore Postgraduate</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>1,103</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>1,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Off-shore Undergraduate</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>1,067</td>
<td>1,526</td>
<td>1,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
<td>21,093</td>
<td>20,605</td>
<td>21,028</td>
<td>22,274</td>
<td>24,241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4

Growth in Student Numbers & International Student Market Share, 2006-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>(\uparrow)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>21,093</td>
<td>20,605</td>
<td>21,028</td>
<td>22,274</td>
<td>24,241</td>
<td>14.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Domestic Students</td>
<td>17,077</td>
<td>16,207</td>
<td>16,169</td>
<td>16,402</td>
<td>18,638</td>
<td>9.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total International Students</td>
<td>4,016</td>
<td>4,398</td>
<td>4,859</td>
<td>5,872</td>
<td>5,603</td>
<td>39.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International student Market share (of total students)</td>
<td>(\uparrow) 21.6 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 International student population

Consistent with most Australian institutions, the Case University attracted more on-shore international students from Asian countries than almost all other international countries combined, with students from Asian and South-East Asian countries consistently making up between 46% and 51% of the annual international student intake from 2006 to 2010 (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

International Student Enrolments by Citizenship, 2006-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>(\uparrow)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>318 (12%)</td>
<td>423 (16%)</td>
<td>469 (17%)</td>
<td>583 (18%)</td>
<td>757 (24%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>264 (10%)</td>
<td>270 (10%)</td>
<td>344 (13%)</td>
<td>506 (16%)</td>
<td>494 (16%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian countries</td>
<td>889 (34%)</td>
<td>880 (34%)</td>
<td>831 (31%)</td>
<td>881 (28%)</td>
<td>842 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Asian</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African countries</td>
<td>507 (19%)</td>
<td>553 (21%)</td>
<td>582 (22%)</td>
<td>603 (19%)</td>
<td>561 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European countries</td>
<td>220 (8%)</td>
<td>225 (9%)</td>
<td>295 (11%)</td>
<td>257 (8%)</td>
<td>278 (9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>418 (16%)</td>
<td>228 (9%)</td>
<td>168 (6%)</td>
<td>356 (11%)</td>
<td>169 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2616</td>
<td>2579</td>
<td>2689</td>
<td>3186</td>
<td>3101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Case University provided education on-campus, on-line and through strategic partnerships with other institutions in other parts of the world. Moreover, through partnerships with other institutions and its own campuses, the Case University graduated students with qualifications from diploma level to doctoral level degrees (see Table 4.6).
Table 4.6

Enrolments by Course Level (all students), 2006-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate by Research</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate by Coursework</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master by Research</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master by Coursework</td>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>2,242</td>
<td>2,547</td>
<td>3,029</td>
<td>3,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>1,110</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Diploma</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate / Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Honours</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Pass</td>
<td>15,263</td>
<td>14,595</td>
<td>14,359</td>
<td>14,973</td>
<td>16,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma / Diploma</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>1088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21,093</td>
<td>20,605</td>
<td>21,028</td>
<td>22,274</td>
<td>24,241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the period from 2007-2009, international students were spread across the various course levels of the Case University. Table 4.7 presents the spread of international students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees.

Table 4.7

Number and Percentage of International Students by Course-type, 2007 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>3yrs (Tot / %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HD by Research</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD by Coursework</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td>3606</td>
<td>3606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad/Grad-cert</td>
<td>1120</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>3167</td>
<td>3167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad Bachelor</td>
<td>3,499</td>
<td>3,393</td>
<td>10392</td>
<td>10392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assoc/Dip/VET</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,769</td>
<td>5,847</td>
<td>17808</td>
<td>17808</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: HD = Higher Degree; UD = Undergraduate

4.2 Services offered at the Case University

The Case University began the move from specialised services for international students to a more centralised and generic model of service provision in 2008, with the closure of one of...
its main metropolitan campuses. In 2009, this move included structural changes and the introduction of the Student Services Centre (SSC), which administered all services accessed by all students, whether domestic or international. A representation of the services provided by the Case University through the SSC can be found in Figure 4.2.

Although an “International Office” continued to exist within the new model, it was not an ongoing provider of student support since its sole function was to facilitate international student admission. Once enrolled, an international student was considered to be a ‘student’ in the same sense as a domestic student. Before the creation of the SSC, international students had access to a number of International Student Officers (ISO) who were trained, knowledgeable about available services and visa implications, and experienced in working with students who had English as an additional language (EAL). The ISOs, who worked only with international students, referred them to appropriate services and personnel, and facilitated their access. Prior to 2007, the Case University’s third metropolitan campus housed the International Office, which dealt not only with admissions, but also cultural and social activities for international students, accommodation and other needs as they arose. International students had a ‘one-stop-shop’ where they could access the specific services they required. With campus consolidation, non-admissions support for international students became part of the Student Services Centre (SSC) and the international office became an admissions office.

4.2.1 The Student Services Centre

The Case University’s official documentation states that:

The Student Services Centre (SSC) has as a main focus the delivery of services that meet the needs of:

- Prospective and current students and [the Case University] graduates
- [The Case University] faculties and schools; and
- External customers and stakeholders of [the Case University]

SSC’s purpose is to:

Attract, retain and graduate optimal numbers of students and ensure effective and efficient services to all our customers. We do this through striving for personal excellence, displaying integrity in our actions, using rational inquiry to solve problems and find solutions, and respecting those people we provide service to and work alongside. (citation withheld)

Through the SSC, the Case University provides services relating to: student health; equity, diversity and disability services; chaplaincy; career advice; learning support; enrolment and administration advice; technology; and library utilisation (see Figure 4.2). The website areas dedicated to the SSC also provide hyperlinks for international students to external resources relating to:

- Preparing to leave home (for example; quarantine, customs, clothing)
- Arriving in Australia (for example; reception services and accommodation)
- Studying in Australia (for example; health cover, visa information, changing education providers)
- Living in Australia (for example; emergency numbers, banking, climate, personal safety)
The SSC website also provides information about campus services such as sports and fitness facilities, food outlets and taverns, the multi-faith office, optometrist, hairdresser, Student Guild, bookshop, computer laboratories, wireless internet access and childcare. Additionally, there are links that provide information about course offerings, and important dates regarding withdrawal, enrolment and academic penalties. There is also information about scholarships and student loans for domestic students. The Case University has a student and staff portal where enrolled students and staff members can access information about their particular courses, student services and updated news about the Case University.
4.2.2 Restructure of administration and support

During participant recruitment and data collection, the Case University went through an administration and services provision restructure, designed to consolidate and centralise all staff, student and services support. Significantly, the current study provides the first empirical evidence of staff and students’ experiences of the structural changes that occurred in 2009 and 2010.

4.2.3 Choice of the ‘Case’

Convenience study

The Case University technically represented a ‘convenience sample’ (Henry, 1990; Patton, 2002) because the researcher had been studying at the Case University for a number of years. It was, however, the most appropriate because: (a) as a Constructivist study, the researcher was intrinsically connected to the user-groups; and (b) the researcher was in a unique position to compare what the students were reporting under the current model of support, with her personal experiences of service provision under the previous model.

High representation of international students

The Case University has a large international student population, being consistently above the national average by around three to five per cent. International student representation was particularly high within the Business Faculty\(^4\) where the increasing numbers of international enrolments meant that most staff within that faculty were involved in their teaching or support.

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\(^4\) The name “Business Faculty” is used generically to describe the faculty where business-related schools are located. It is not literally called “Business Faculty”; this has been used to protect specific university staff and students. This is the case with naming of all schools or faculties at the University within this thesis.
Changes to model of support

The Case University had recently moved to a centralised model of service provision and, at the time of the study, was going through further restructuring of its support services, providing a unique opportunity to investigate international student support from the perspectives of two support-models.

4.3 Research tasks undertaken in the current study

The current study developed in several phases, characterised by different research tasks (see Figure 4.3). The role of feedback in informing both the next step of analysis and further data collection, as represented in the Figure 4.3, was critical.

4.4 Sampling

Sampling evolved in two phases: initial and theoretical sampling. According to Charmaz (2006), “initial sampling in grounded theory is where you start, whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go” (p. 100). Initial sampling was purposive (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), which involved the researcher identifying key participants who could respond to the research questions and inviting them to be interviewed. This was carried out through snowball and volunteering techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Several methods were used to recruit participants, including invitational emails, flyers, website posts and advertisements in selected lectures. The invitational email was sent to a student retention officer and to a Head of School who were personally known to the researcher and who were able to provide advice on how to navigate the Case University’s policies on recruiting participants.
4.4.1 Sampling staff members

*University-level services:* An email was sent to the student retention officer requesting approval for the invitational email to be forwarded to potential participants (see *Figure 4.4*). This email was then passed on to other personnel in management positions before approval could be given. The email contained the information letter (Appendix F) about the study as well as the consent (Appendix I) and demographic forms (Appendix E).
Approval was sought to interview staff from the SSC (Student Services Centre), but participants could only be interviewed during their non-work time, which may have been a deterrent for staff members who already felt they were too busy. After two weeks, no one from the SSC had replied so individual emails were sent to the Student Connect Officers, counsellors, pastors, student advisors and career advisors. All emails included the information letter (Appendix F) and consent (Appendix I) and demographic forms (Appendix E). This process took place over a two month period, with reminder emails sent every two weeks. The managers of student information units of both metropolitan campuses were contacted, who reported that further approval was needed from the Human Resources section for staff members to participate. The Directors of the SSC and of Human Resources were contacted and although they reported that approval was not required, no SSC staff members volunteered to participate.

**Faculty-level services:** The same invitational email was sent to Deans of International within all faculties, which included the information letter (Appendix F), consent (Appendix I) and demographic forms (Appendix E). This email was then forwarded to the Heads of Schools (HoS) who then forwarded it on to staff who had worked with international students (see Figure 4.5).

This process was very useful within the Business Faculty, where both academic and general staff were helpful and quick to respond. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the Business Faculty had developed a stronger connection with international students than other parts of the Case University, perhaps reflecting the greater enrolment of international students in that faculty, and therefore their greater experience.
A flyer (Appendix M) was also posted in the Education Faculty’s newsletter. It was a condensed summary of the research and interested participants could then access the full information letter. Once some staff had been recruited, snowball techniques (Silverman, 2000; Stake, 1995) were engaged to recruit new staff participants, both at the faculty and university levels. This was by far the best method as participants were able to convince their colleagues that their inputs would be valuable to the research.

My Observations: Excerpt from reflective journal

It was easier to access staff from the Business Faculty. I only interviewed a few academic staff from Science and Health Faculty and the Education Faculty. It could be because these staff members were too busy to spare 30 minutes for an interview. This could be an indication of how much importance they place on international students and if they could not dedicate half an hour for an interview on their own challenges of working with these students, how prepared are they to put aside time to talk to their own international students and listen to their needs?

It could also be due to the fact that some staff are sessional and therefore are not
committed enough to the Case University. Or because of the changes going on at the Case University at the time. Many staff members were unsure about the security of their jobs, especially for support staff whose jobs were being re-shuffled from school based to faculty based. This affects international students and the way services are delivered because staff members are worried about their livelihoods and so this can overlap into how they approach their work.

Another reason why staff from the Business Faculty might have been more willing could be because they have reached critical mass. This faculty enrols more international students than any other faculty and it could be that they are more in-tuned as to the support needs of both these students and staff who work with them. A lot of positive feedback was received from the Business Faculty and it became clear after some interviews that the staff were interested in keeping their students happy and have a good university experience.

From this observation, it can be then said that most of the Education Faculty and Science and Health Faculty are not as interested as those staff from Business Faculty because they have not yet been exposed to so many international students in their classes. Literature has shown that because of the new model of funding adopted by the Australian government, some universities might need to enrol more international students to fund their research, teaching, infrastructure and other university activities (Beaton-Wells & Thompson, 2011). If universities go down this route, more international students will be enrolled in faculties.

Also affecting the number of international students might be the new migration list. In July 2010 the Australian immigration department published a new migration list which reflects the skill shortages in Australia. The list has far reaching implications for those students who had chosen a career path from the previous list which does not appear in the new one, e.g. hairdressing. Importantly for universities, this new list might shift the pattern of enrolment. Courses in which more international students were enrolling before might change to reflect the changes in the new list and so staff from all faculties could be affected.
4.4.2 Sampling international students

To keep within the Case University’s ethical guidelines regarding protection of student privacy, potential international students were not emailed directly. Online advertisements and hard copy flyers (Appendix M) were distributed throughout the Case University, including to the Graduate School website which invited both international students and their supervisors to participate. A number of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students, as well as international students enrolled in postgraduate coursework and their supervisors responded (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Sampling international students

To target undergraduate students, the flyer (Appendix M) and information letter (Appendix G) were also sent to the Case University’s International Student Council (ISC). The president of the ISC did not respond, despite several attempts. It was unclear if the ISC was still operational, as neither emails nor phone calls received a response.
Another avenue of recruiting international students was through the Student Guild (see Figure 4.6). Guild staff then forwarded the information letter to potential staff participants and to international Student Guild members. Participants were then asked to encourage others to participate through snowball techniques.

**My Observations: Excerpt from the reflective journal**

It was much easier to sample staff members than international students. The ISC president never answered any of my emails and neither did anyone from the ISC. If the council for international students cannot reply to a request for research about international students, then what can they respond to? If an international student needed help, who would they turn to? The ISC seemed to be disengaged and out of reach. They seem to be rhetorical and only in name.

### 4.4.3 Sampling domestic students

To recruit domestic students, the same procedure was used as for the international students, where the coordinator of student information was contacted with a request to include the flyer on the Case University website under students’ news link (see Figure 4.7). The few students who responded to the advertisement were then asked to tell other friends about the research. Lecturers in the Business Faculty were contacted and asked to advertise the study in their classes. The Business Faculty was chosen as it enrols more international students than the other faculties.
**My Observations: Excerpt from reflective journal**

It was difficult to recruit domestic students and of those who did agree to participate, it felt like they were ‘being nice’ about the international student issue. I felt as if they were not being honest but as the interview proceeded some of their ‘real’ opinions came out. For instance one student was telling me she sees herself as a very accepting person but she then went on to explain that she could do her degree without knowing about the international student plight. That she was at university for her degree and if she did not interact with international students that would not matter. A lot of the students I interviewed had the same views but I wonder if that’s because they are mature-aged students and they do not have time to socialise and be bothered about the campus activities? As one student said “I come to uni and go home”. Maybe the importance of intercultural interactions needs to be stressed? It might be useless to implement programs to enforce this interaction if the domestic students do not see the benefits of such an interaction. One student even asked why did international students choose to study in Australia? This decision meant that the onus should rest with the international students to then approach the domestic student. If only it was that simple!
4.4.4 The use of theoretical sampling in this study

Theoretical sampling allows a researcher to recruit research-appropriate participants and to follow developing leads and ideas as data collection progresses (Charmaz, 2000). This process allowed for new information to be considered in the following ways:

- The proposal for the current study did not include domestic students in the sample. After interviewing some international students and staff, it became clear that it was essential to include the opinions of domestic students.

- I decided to interview key staff members who did not directly work with international students but who helped administer policies regarding international students. This became important after interviews with staff members revealed that their work with international students was affected by the Case University’s policies and rules.

- More participants were interviewed after some themes emerged, such as discrimination. This was needed to understand if the incidents were isolated or a common occurrence.

- The study’s proposal did not target institutions which offer alternative entry pathways to the Case University (e.g., English language centres). When it emerged that many of the interviewed international students had entered university through that route, and many staff members were mentioning that bridging courses would be beneficial for international students, it became important to interview staff members from the English language centre.
4.5 Materials

The major method of data collection was evolving semi-structured interviews. Materials included the evolving interview schedules used for each cohort (see Section 4.5), a voice recorder, note pad and pens. Materials used for the simultaneous data analysis and write up phases of the current study included the use of the NViVo software, note pads, and cards and memos to analyse and store the data.

4.6 Development of interview questions

The semi-structured interview schedules were developed to answer the original research questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen following the epistemology of Social Constructivism, which argues that realities are co-constructed. According to Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006), “epistemologically, constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant, and the co-construction of meaning” (p. 26). The evolving semi-structured interview schedules therefore, allowed for different ‘constructions of meaning’ between participants and the researcher. Social constructivism also allowed the interview schedule to be influenced by a combination of factors, including:

1. Analysis of relevant literature

Example: Does your approach change when you’re working with international students compared to when you’re working with domestic students? (Appendix J)

This question was asked because research reported that working with international students required the use of different techniques and skills from those used with domestic students (Burch, 2008; Frasier, 2011; Trice, 2003). The researcher wanted to understand if different techniques were being utilised to work with the two different groups. If they were being used, the
researcher wanted to understand what these techniques were, and why and how they were being used.

2. From the researcher’s knowledge and experiences of the previous model of service provision

Example: Do you think that university provides enough support for international students? (Appendix J)

This question was asked of both staff members and domestic students for a number of reasons. First, in the previous model of service provision, the Case University had a dedicated campus which housed the central office for international student support, and which was staffed by personnel who were experienced in addressing international students’ needs. The campus dealt with everything from accommodation, visa and immigration issues, to organising social activities for student groups. Under this model, students and staff could direct international students to that campus, where the student could access someone who could help with their various needs. The researcher wanted to find out if, after the change in the model of service provision, staff and students could now direct international students to a particular office or individual who could answer questions or address needs that were more likely to be specific to international students, particularly in emergencies, considering that in the new model, none of the services were ‘international student’ specific.

Again, if positivist paradigms were employed in this study, using my previous knowledge to guide the development of some questions would have been viewed as ‘biased’. Since I met the criteria to be part of one of the target populations, social constructivism was ideal, as it would have been impossible to eliminate my personal experiences and knowledge from the development of the interview schedule.
3. From a search of the Case University’s website, that is, analysis of the services provided at the university

Example: Which support services have you accessed (used) at university? (Question #3 in international students’ interview schedule) and, Have you heard of these other services? (Question #8 in international students’ interview schedule) (Appendix K)

These questions were asked for two reasons:

The researcher wanted to understand if international students were aware of services provided by the Case University, and if so, the extent to which these services were perceived to be helpful and/or suitable. If students were aware of the services, but indicated that they had not accessed them, or did not anticipate accessing them, then the researcher could better understand any barriers that might exist for international students in service utilisation.

4. From theoretical sampling, that is, as new data presented, questions were added so that information could be clarified in subsequent interviews

Example: What are your views on culturally mixed group work? (Question #4 in the domestic student interview schedule); and, What are the benefits/challenges of working with international students? (Question #3 in domestic students’ interview schedule) (Appendix L).

These questions were asked after exposure to literature suggesting that international and domestic students alike tended to cluster in homogenous groups, and after international students reported difficulties ‘befriending’ and ‘working in groups with Australian students’. The researcher needed to find out if this was a common perception among the international students, and whether domestic students also perceived these difficulties.
The interview questions also developed as new information was gathered. Questions were added and new populations targeted (domestic students, staff in management positions, staff from the English Language institutions). These techniques are all consistent with research using Social Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000).

4.7 The interview process

The scheduling of interviews depended on participants’ availability, so the sub-groups (i.e. staff members, international or domestic students) were not interviewed in any particular order. All interviews took place at the Case University, at a time agreed by both the participants and researcher. The interviews were 30-60 minutes long, were conducted in English and were recorded with the consent of the participants. The aims of the research were reiterated at the start of each interview, and participants were reminded of their rights (for example, to withdraw at any time). Consent forms, information letters and the counselling brochure were provided according to the ethical guidelines. A demographic form was also given to the participants.

4.8 Participants

Staff

Ten male and 28 female staff members responded to the request for interviews, most of whom were over forty-five years of age. Both academic and non-academic staff were represented. Academic staff included seven lecturers and seven academic leaders, such as Deans and Associate Professors. Non-academic staff (support staff) had roles either relating to student processes, which comprised of 21 interviewees or management processes, which comprised of 3 interviewees (see Table 4.8). Student processes staff included student support staff, learning advisors, ESL advisors, computer support officers, careers advisors, counsellors, Student
Connect Officers, guild staff, student welfare officers and student retention staff. Management processes staff consisted of admissions and recruitment officers. Staff experience of working with international students ranged from six months to twenty-three years.

Table 4.8

*Staff Members’ Roles in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff roles</th>
<th>No. participated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support: student processes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support: management processes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic lecturers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic leaders</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International students**

Twenty-five international students were interviewed. This group included students from varied cultural backgrounds with only two having English as their first language. Saturation (Bluff, 1997; Byrne, 2001; Fossey et al., 2002; Morse, 1995 and Sandelowski, 1995) for the second research question occurred after this number of interviews had been conducted, since this group included students from diverse cultural, linguistic and academic backgrounds which influenced their narratives. International students and their country of origin are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

*The Demographic Information of International Students in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1st Lang</th>
<th>Time Yrs</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>course</th>
<th>Region/Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Masters (arts)</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bachelor (FBL)</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Honours (CHS)</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>SE Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Continent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Sub-Continent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Sub-Continent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Singhala</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Sub-Continent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Sub-Continent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Masters (arts)</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Americas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The international student group included both undergraduate and postgraduate students and their length of stay in Australia varied from two months to nine years. The course and faculty distribution of the interviewed international students are presented in *Figure 4.8*.

*Figure 4.8: Course and faculty distribution of international students*

**Domestic students**

Ten domestic students were interviewed, nine female and one male, with only one postgraduate student participating. As explained in section 4.4, difficulties were encountered in recruiting a broadly representative sample of domestic students. All but one had English as their first language (see Table 4.10).
Table 4.10

Demographic Information about Domestic Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>1st language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.9 Gaps in the sample

There were gaps in the samples from each group of interviewees. Staff from the Support Services Centre (SSC) did not respond to the numerous invitations to participate (see Figure 4.9). A deterrent for SSC staff might have been the time restrictions imposed by the director of SSC. No pastors or student advisors were interviewed, and only one counsellor agreed to be interviewed. As shown in the literature review, there is a dearth of research from counsellors’ points of views, especially from an Australian context (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Rothstein & Rajapaksa, 2003). Wider representation of staff roles would have provided invaluable information to inform the study.

The domestic student cohort was also not broadly representative, with only one male, and one postgraduate student participating. Eight were enrolled in either business or psychology degrees, and two in education degrees. The perceptions of students from other faculties and departments, therefore, are not represented in this research. Also, many had experiences living overseas, which was another factor which contributed to the lack of representation.
4.10 Data analysis

Data were stored and managed using NViVo8/9 software, and then coded using techniques from Constructivist GT (see Figure 4.10). Although stored and accessed using NViVo, coding and categorising of the data were done manually. A more detailed step-by-step process of data analysis is illustrated in Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.9: Demographic information about staff members

Figure 4.10: Phases of Grounded Theory (Moghaddam, 2006)

The notes taken during each interview were reviewed before the next interview to gain a broad sense of what the interview was about. Although there was a set of (semi-structured) questions, most participants had an individual over-riding issue, which was returned to often throughout the interview. At the completion of each interview, notes were read and summaries
written. This assisted an understanding of the perceptions of each participant, and also provided information for subsequent interviews.

**Figure 4.11a**: Phases of data analysis (Adapted from Knight & Cross, 2012)

If any particular issue that was clearly of importance to the interviewee had not been included in the original schedule, it was added for the next interview so issues could be further...
explored. Thus, interview schedules evolved as data collection continued. The process of noting down the ‘essence’ after the interview was a part of initial coding where the data were examined without pre-conceived ideas of what the data would tell me. The next step involved reading the transcripts and highlighting issues that answered the research questions. Figure 4.12 is an excerpt of such coding, and is included to illustrate this process:
Excerpt from transcript of staff #7 (support-student processes)

"Many of our staff are sessional staff and are very good at what they do, they know the content of their courses very well, they’re in business and they’re very successful." [But they may have no teaching background, so they may invite me and think that if I go and do a session, that’s the academic skills covered for that semester and it’s simply not like that, academic skills take a long time to develop, it’s an ongoing process]. [And one of the things we need is for staff to be aware that it’s not just about providing content of the course but we do now have to advise students about skills development]. So and I think one of the other conversations is about consistency regarding skills and language. What I mean by that is what I see when I see students is [Some academic staff when they give feedback on work, comment on the structure of the assignment and the language and encourage students to do something about their grammar or their sentence structure, encourage them into workshops in the learning centre and so on]. [Other people simply look at the assignment and think oh the student’s had a go, clearly done some reading, there’s some content there, don’t know what to do about the grammar, so I’ll just bump them through]. [And I think that leads to students getting a very inconsistent story and that encourages them to think oh I’m okay really I don’t need help, I passed three of my units so I don’t know why that person was mean to me and said my grammar is terrible, I can ignore that].

Notes:
1. Sup. staff acknowledges content expertise of aca. staff
2. Sup. staff perception that some lecturing staff don’t understand the time it takes for int.stu to acquire aca. skills
3. Sup. staff think that some teaching staff don’t recognise complexity of teaching int. stu.
   - need for PD?
4. + 5 + 6: supp. staff perceives that different lecturers give different messages to int.st
5. Leniency/soft marking by some aca. staff?
6. - Inconsistent message may lead to some int.stu to think that their skills are ok
   - Inconsistent message thus reduces chance that int.stu access services

Figure 4.12: Excerpt from transcript of staff member #7

The example in Figure 4.12 highlighted issues relating to perceptions of one support staff in relation to how some teaching staff members marked international students’ work. The memos
added in the margin are summaries written to capture something of the meaning of the participant’s statements. These memos helped to understand what the participants were saying and allowed for a comparison of what each participant reported in relation to others. The issues of leniency/soft marking and that some teachers were inconsistent in their marking, were major issues in this study, and so when it first arose, the researcher added it to the interview schedule so that it could be explored and an understanding might be gained of how prevalent soft marking was, and in what circumstance/staff position this situation occurred. Four of the seven lecturers reported marking international and domestic students differently. This finding would not have been possible if the issue had not been identified early and clarified in subsequent interviews.

Another example of how transcripts were coded has been added below:

**Figure 4.13:** Excerpt from transcript of international student #4

In this example, the international student was referring to accessing specific services tailored to his needs because he was a HDR student and had no time to run around to find the right person to talk to. One issue emerged: the time-demands on already busy students to access
services. Lack of time became a very prominent issue amongst HDR students who had busy schedules but also with undergraduate students who had other commitments such as work or family. The memo was a reminder to ask other international students about how other commitments in their lives affected service utilisation.

Memoing was carried out in two distinct processes. First, during transcription, key words which seemed to appear across cohorts were highlighted. These were accompanied by memos which detailed where the keywords appeared, to facilitate data gathering and summarising. Examples of this included references to English proficiency and cultural background. Second, memoing was done through a reflective journal which was kept throughout the research process. After each interview I recorded my thoughts and opinions about the interview process. I also kept a note pad which contained key words or key phrases that the interviewees were using. This was kept during the interview itself, and was used to compare what I had heard the interviewee say during the interview.

Constant comparisons were made between notes taken during the interview, memos written after the interviews, summaries of transcripts and the reflective journal. This was done for each participant. Additionally, I wrote down my thoughts about the processes and difficulties encountered during data analysis. Excerpts from this journal, titled “my observations” have been added throughout this thesis.

The next step in coding was more focused. Each transcript was read again and new summaries were written for each interview, taking into account the memos written in the margins. All the summaries were printed and pasted on a wall. The key words from each summary were highlighted, which made it possible to visualise categories within and between the cohorts. This helped to compare and contrast the experiences of each cohort at the Case
University. To simplify the findings, each keyword was followed by participants’ codes so that if a participant disagreed with a statement, this could be reported as well. For instance, one of the summaries was that “international students were worried that being placed in a class with other international students would decrease their level of English rather than improve it” (international student #20). In the summary, the key words and phrases were English and being placed in [the same] class and so next to that comment (staff member #36 and staff member #11) was written, as a reminder that staff members 36 and 11 had something to say regarding having international students in the same class and how that would impact upon their English language. English proficiency was a major issue for all three groups and so having a keyword like English made it easier to map out what everyone had to say (whether positive or negative) about English proficiency. Around this issue were other keywords such as IELTS, bridging course, and preparation units. The process of highlighting the keywords and noting where they appeared was done with every summary so that every piece of information was analysed.

The last phase of coding was a checking process. All the transcripts were read once more, and data not highlighted were those that did not relate to the research questions. These were mostly information about the staff member’s position and formed part of rapport building. All notes, memos and summaries were checked to ensure they related to the interviews and reflected what the participant was trying to convey. Each summary and memo was compared to previous memos and summaries.

In the final phase, the NViVo9 software was also used to help aggregate data to give the reader a sense of ‘how many’ as an additional means to substantiate a point. For instance, as reported in the findings chapters, four of the seven lecturers agreed that they marked
international students differently. Themes in the study were named using the participants’ own words (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55), such as ‘heavy workload’, ‘lack of time’ and being ‘frustrated’.

4.11 Meeting ethical guidelines in the study

A brochure of the counselling services offered by the Case University was offered to the international and domestic students in case they experienced distress. To ensure confidentiality, all interviews were transcribed as soon as completed and the transcribed data were de-identified. This was achieved by allocating a unique number to each transcription.

Help with transcribing the interviews was sought from a professional transcribing organisation. The interviews were first coded so that no identifying information was sent to the organisation, and a signed form from the organisation ensuring confidentiality of the transcribed information was obtained. Transcribed interviews were then sent via a secure website, which could only be accessed using a unique password. The only authorised personnel who had access to the data were the researcher and research supervisors. Much attention was given to ensure that the Case University remained as unidentifiable as possible. There was still the possibility that staff might have felt insecure in sharing information that might jeopardise their jobs although numbers and only broad role description have been used. Again, all participants were reminded that their information would be kept confidential, their job titles not mentioned and their interviews coded. For this reason, all support staff were identified as either filling a support or management role, rather than referring to a specific job title.

In summary, this chapter described the implementation phase of the study. It presented the contextual information about the ‘Case’, and discussed the sampling procedures used to recruit the three groups of participants. The difficulties encountered to recruit some participants were also discussed. Demographic information, the development of the interview schedules and the
data analysis processes were also discussed. The results of the data analysis will be presented in the forthcoming chapters.
Chapter 5A
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Staff Experiences

The current study aimed to understand the experiences of three key stakeholder groups when engaging in International Education at an Australian university. Chapters 5A, 5B and 5C will discuss the results using critical reflection (Knight & Cross, 2012), and in the context of previous research, participants’ narratives, co-constructed narratives built between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2000, 2006), and the researcher’s reflective journal (Laverty, 2003; Watt, 2007). Reflective journal excerpts will feature in these chapters as in-text boxes, and following Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000 & 2006), will document the researcher’s views as the study unfolded.

Research Question 1: What experiences influence staff members’ perceptions of International education at one Australian university?

In response to the first research question, staff experiences of International Education have been categorised into those that operated at (1) the individual staff level and (2) the broader University level (see Figure 5A.1).
5A.1 Staff experiences at the individual level

5A.1.1 Individual staff members’ responses to international students

Many responses from both academic and support staff reflected positive attitudes towards international students, and an appreciation of what they brought to the learning environment.
Staff members\textsuperscript{5} described working with international students as “\textit{rewarding}” (Support #8), “\textit{enjoy[able]}” (Support #7) and “\textit{gratifying}” (Support #17). Other positive comments included “\textit{I like having them there}” (Academic #12); and that they helped other students become “\textit{aware of …other cultures as well}” (Leader #18). Staff members referred to their international students as “\textit{diligent}” (Academic #9), “\textit{deserving}” (Leader #10), and commented that “\textit{there is an enormous potential there}” (Leader #10). The presence of international students in class offered “\textit{interesting perspectives}” (Academic #26) and added “\textit{diversity… [for] richer classrooms}” (Leader #3), especially “\textit{for the quite young Australian school leaver population}” (Academic #20). Staff members 26 and 20 gave examples of how international students provided examples which ‘opened the eyes’ of other students, such as experiences of child labor in India and civil war in Africa. Another lecturer observed that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I find international students generally speaking are more studious. They’ve come here to do their studies; they’ve come here to actually complete it. They’re polite, respectful.}
\end{quote}

(Staff member #2-academic/lecturer)

This supports research regarding the potential for international students to make a significant contribution to the learning environment. It has been reported that many international students bring a cultural mix to the university student population and act as cultural carriers of resources and links between cultures, which can lead to decreased hostility, discrimination and prejudice amongst cultures (Bochner, 1986; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; de Wit, 1995; Gudykunst, 1998; Kell & Vogl, 2008; Mahat & Hourigan, 2007; Sam, 2001).

\textsuperscript{5} To facilitate reading, in parts of Chapters 5A, B and C, individual staff responses will be represented as follows: academic denoting academic staff; support for support staff; and leader denoting academic staff leader. These will then be followed by their assigned number.
Not all staff members were uniformly positive in their views. Some felt “frustrated” and “resentful” when working with international students. Responses to some students’ motivation for studying in Australia, and perceptions of students’ communication skills were referred to as causing difficulties in the implementation of IE.

5A.1.2 Response to some students’ motivation

Frustration arose with some international students who were openly studying as a migration pathway, because of the effort and time commitment required to support them.

_I have a little bit of concern sometimes with international students, their actual interest in the course or whether it's an interest in the visa.... And so I try my best to help them, go out of my way to help, but it’s as if they’re not motivated, not interested...._  
(Staff member #26-academic/lecturer)

This view was shared by non-academic staff members:

_It seems that the migration opportunities … coincided with what somebody thought they might come and study, not necessarily wanted to study._  
(Staff member #19- support/student processes)

_There are students who will just do whatever they have to do to get their migration and perhaps their heart isn’t always in the right place for that._  
(Staff member #32- support/student processes)

Two non-academic staff members, whose roles were to support student retention, had experienced students wanting to change their courses as the list of preferred occupations on the Australian migration list changed. A senior management staff member’s point of view was that although universities did not sell education as a pathway to permanent residency, many international students were aware of such a link:

_There are a significant number of international students who come to Australia with the hope that one day they might be able to apply for permanent residency. While we don’t sell that link, they know that that link exists... I’ve seen people who have good distinction_
level degrees from their home country going off and doing bricklaying…thinking they could go this route to PR [permanent residency] more quickly. I don’t like education providers, whether it’s our university or any other university, being part of an immigration game…

(Staff member #33-support/management)

This manager’s view was verified in the narrative of one particular international student, who stated that the sole reason he chose to study accounting was because it required little use of English, and the course focused on numbers. He had searched for jobs which were in demand on the migration list, and accounting was seen as the easiest option.

My observation: It is worth noting that the University promotes migration presentations held on the campuses, by the Australian immigration officers. A recent one discussed the “Quickest way to secure a skilled visa to work in Australia” and options for student visas.

Some students’ lack of motivation that was unrelated to migration possibilities was also commented on by two staff members, who claimed that it was difficult to put in the effort with some international students who themselves were not putting in much effort:

What is of greater difficulty for my colleagues …is to have students where you can see that they just don’t care… parents want them to do their Masters here, and they don’t care about it really that much… they just do the minimum effort… to get those students through is a bit of a difficulty.

(Staff member #10-academic/leader)

5A.1.3 Perceptions of some students’ communication skills

The over-riding challenge for many staff members who worked with international students was communication difficulties. These related chiefly to English language proficiency, which had major implications for their time and workload. Cultural differences that affected communication were also mentioned. Each of these is discussed in the following section.
Perceived lack of English language proficiency

Both academic and support staff reported their perception that international students from non-English speaking backgrounds generally lacked adequate English language skills. From the sample of 38 staff respondents, all but seven mentioned that the ‘language’ or ‘English’ of some international students was an issue for them. The seven who did not identify English proficiency as an issue either: (1) had English as an additional language themselves; (2) had extensive experience working with diverse students; or (3) were from management-level or marketing positions, and so not directly working in an ongoing teaching or support capacity with them.

*The obvious [issue] is language. It’s very difficult to write correct English at a high level, at a university level.*  
(Staff member #17- support/student processes)

*I would say some of the main challenges for me is obviously language barriers.*  
(Staff member #30- support/student processes)

*I find it difficult when their English is not very good, because they have trouble then understanding my instructions to them, or what is expected of them.*  
(Staff member #20- academic/lecturer)

*We’re talking about oral communication skills and we’re talking about written skills ...*  
(Staff member #12- academic/lecturer)

*I mean I sit there for hours and drop through the English and try and correct that, that is a bit of a difficulty.*  
(Staff member #10- academic/lecturer)

The students’ country of origin was often viewed as an indicator of their English proficiency:

*The Indian students whose written English often isn’t all that brilliant.*  
(Staff member #10- academic/leader)

*We do have a lot of students with real language difficulties from China... really depends where they come from.*
It’s about English proficiency. That really is all it is, and it’s not every international student I have to say... it just depends where they come from sometimes.

I find Europeans speak better English and write better English and because they have been doing English from very early on in their schooling... Students from Sri Lanka, India and Asia are quite different and particularly the Chinese students and Vietnamese students, they often come to us with very basic English skills, Thai students also.

Academic staff member 26 pointed out that the number of international students with writing difficulties in her class has influenced the content of the course, and this had implications for the broader group of students who are enrolled in the course:

Other academic staff commented on the additional time involved when students didn't have the level of English required for university study:

...my classes are predominantly English as a first language students, we get through all of the materials within good time. The other sessionals that are teaching very large international English as a second language class groups have to go a little slower through the material so they’re not covering the same ground.

My 12 year old would be able to describe what “behaviour” is. I had students who were using their translation dictionaries to work out what behaviour means. So if they can't understand the word behaviour, how are they going to understand all the concepts and words that are related to human resource management that aren’t in the normal vernacular.
Staff member 6 referred to the difficulties of explaining to international students what ‘simple’ words meant. When prompted to discuss what happened in these situations, the lecturer explained that it was usually ‘too late’ when she found out that the students had not understood words used in class. Misunderstandings were usually identified when assignments were submitted, so her strategy of sending the students to the learning advisor was less effective than it could have been. The ‘late identification’ factor was also supported by lecturers 26 and 27.

Both academic and support staff members claimed that it became very ‘frustrating’ for them when they provided additional explanations for some international students, who indicated that they understood, only to discover later that the international students had not understood at all:

_I find that sometimes a little bit frustrating because I will say to them, this is what we need to work on...and they will say yes, yes, yes – but they don’t actually understand._

(Staff member #24- support/student processes)

_One of those ones who agree with you all the time...she says “yes yes I agree, oh yes I see” and I’m thinking I’m not sure that you really do._

(Staff member #26- academic/lecturer)

_Some pretend that they understand when they don’t, and you only discover that when you get their assignments back because...they sit there in class and nod because they don’t want to lose face._

(Staff member #10- academic/leader)

The fact that international students required more of their time meant that support staff, who had to see a certain number of students per day, were under additional pressure:

_I can’t sit for three hours with one student because I cannot offer the same service to the next student._

(Staff member #1)
An additional implication associated with English proficiency, as expressed by some staff members, is assigning international students to group work with domestic students, or helping international students integrate into the Australian HE environment:

*There’s a problem of integration where it’s necessary to be able to integrate these students into the Australian environment...that’s something we [staff] can only facilitate. The students will have to take responsibility for them [selves] to actually improve their English language skills.*

(Staff member #11- non-academic)

*Trying to get any integration between domestic and international students, it’s like enforced friendship.*

(Staff member #17- non-academic)

Some staff members noted that international students tended to stick to their own, and domestic students also grouped with other domestic students. Some staff members saw this as problematic because they saw interacting as a way to help international students to improve their English:

*How are you going to learn if you’re not speaking the language...If you are keeping to your own friends and talking in your own language, you are not going to learn.*

(Staff member #27- academic/lecturer)

However, even if staff thought that interaction between domestic and international students would benefit international students in terms of their English proficiency, and benefit domestic students with ‘eye-opening perspectives’, it still was an issue:

*Actual feedback we get from UTEIs and focus groups is that you get people saying things like international students love group work, love it, because they see it as an opportunity to meet other people and onshore students generally don’t like it because they see it as ‘my grade average is going to be dragged down now’.*

(Staff member #12- academic/lecturer)
You get a lot of criticism from local students that they [international students] don’t contribute, and I mean that’s a generalisation, but you do get a bit of criticism from the local students that the internationals don’t contribute adequately or sufficiently.

(Staff member #26- academic/lecturer)

Differences in opinions

Although both academic and support staff pointed out that English proficiency was an issue, they differed in their perceptions of the contributing factors. For some support staff, the issue was more than just language; it also reflected a lack of familiarity with Australian university systems:

I’m aware that there’s a lot of extra needs for most international students...whether it’s because that English isn’t their first language or because things are just run differently in different universities.

(Staff member #5-support/ student processes)

Some held the academic staff responsible for not doing enough to understand international students:

There are no poor students; there are only poor teachers...You can’t keep saying the same thing over and over again, because they don’t understand, and you can’t expect them to understand.

(Staff member #14- support/student processes)

If they [international students] can't understand me it's probably because I've said something a funny way and they are not familiar with that particular word. So I try and rephrase it or speak slower. I've witnessed some people who will simply say, you don't speak good enough English, I'm not going to listen to you...There are lecturers out there who think you shouldn't be in this course because you can't communicate well enough.

(Staff member #32- support/student processes)

Staff members’ opinions appeared to reflect differences in their experiences and backgrounds (Arkoudis, 2006; Sanderson, 2004). Those with ESL backgrounds did not express the same frustration as those with less culturally diverse experience. They were more
sympathetic towards international students, and expressed the satisfaction they found working with international students rather than seeing them as problematic:

_Because I’m a specialist ESL person and I’ve been doing it for some time, I actually really enjoy working with international students._

(Staff member #7- support/ student processes)

Some staff members ‘homogenised’ the international student cohort, by classifying all international students as those for whom English was not their first language. This supports studies carried out on ethnocentrism in the United States, where although international students were a diverse group of people, their American peers, faculty, administrators and the general community often viewed them as homogeneous (Leong & Ward, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Williams & Johnson, 2011; Paige, 1990). Further, research into ‘homophily’ and ‘othering’ also found that international students tended to be grouped as one cohort instead of focusing on individual student’s characteristics (Dunne, 2008; Kenway & Bullen, 2003).

The fact that most staff members from the sample (31 out of 38) indicated English proficiency as problematic, which supports previous literature relating to English proficiency, suggests that it is an ongoing issue for some staff members (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; Bektas, 2008; Nilsson et al., 2004; Trice, 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2003).

**Perceived cultural differences**

Staff responses also indicated that communication difficulties appeared to be compounded by cultural barriers. Some ESL staff members or staff members with extensive experience teaching diverse populations, noted that what other people labelled “language problems” were actually more complex. They explained that students might not speak up in class or seek help from their lecturers because of specific cultural backgrounds:
It’s probably a mixture of language and culture and expectations and the education system they’ve come from. So to say it’s a language barrier...is probably being a bit simplistic.

(Staff member #21- academic/leader)

I think sometimes for academics they misunderstand the problem. There are some cultures that are not as well spoken as Western cultures, and people don’t freely express themselves in group work, and it’s very easy for a lecturer to label that as English. It may not be English; it could be that the student is not Australian enough for them in terms of what do they expect a student to be?

(Staff member #11- support/management)

Lots of students are able to get an adequate IELTS, but still not able to understand very well what was going on, because of the other kind of cultural things about language.

(Staff member #18-academic/ leader)

For a support staff member, the cultural component only became apparent when he started to work with international students:

While we were waiting to begin, I just asked them how classes were held in India, and it turned out that nobody spoke, that they’d never done an assignment, everything was exam based.

(Staff member #1- support/student processes)

The same staff member further explained how he worked with a cohort of Indonesian postgraduate students who were lecturers in their country. The staff member was very surprised that no one spoke in class and when he inquired what the concern was, “they said, nobody opens their mouth in a lecture in Indonesia except lecturers”.

Welfare and counselling staff who worked with international students also identified students’ cultural background as an issue. A welfare officer was concerned that international students did not seek official assistance soon enough. She explained that when she asked international students who came to her at a point of crisis why they had not sought help earlier,
they would often comment that they had sought help from their family or friends. The counsellor was then in the position of needing to prove on the students’ behalf, for either academic or visa requirements, an extended period of personal difficulty or poor health, in order to receive an extension or other consideration:

One of the grounds I can use to appeal is personal or medical issues and for a lot of international students, they've got those valid grounds but they haven't spoken to anyone about it and you have to prove it... you have to show that you saw a counsellor or you went to the GP...And you’ll say, well, who did you speak to, because we need a piece of paper to show that you spoke to someone, and they're like, oh in my culture we don't speak about these things. I hear that all the time. They're like, oh no, it's very private. In my country we don't talk about emotional issues. We then have to explain to them, well I understand that, [but] you're here now. We need to somehow have evidence that you had this condition.

(Staff member #30- support/student processes)

This situation, according to the staff member, raised issues about being ‘fair’ for all students:

I and my colleagues will often write a support letter if we’re advocating for someone on appeal, and we’ll tend to say that in the letter, due to cultural differences, this student did not seek help and then that's generally accepted by the committee as a fairly valid argument, whereas for a domestic student I'm not sure if that would be as accepted.

(Staff member #30-support/student processes)

When the counsellor was asked why international students did not use counselling services, or tended to seek help only once their problem had reached a critical point, it was stated that it may be due to international students having different expectations of what a counsellor does, rather than actual deficits in the counselling services or the specific strategies used:

I think international students from some backgrounds have the expectation too that we’re going to tell them what to do. So it probably seems a bit weird to them, or it makes it seem less worthwhile, to come because we’re not, as a general rule, going to tell them what to do.

(Staff member #38- support/student processes)
Differences in opinions

Significantly, an ‘Asian’ academic staff member expressed the view that the use of ‘cultural background’ to explain international students’ behaviour was also somewhat over-simplistic. She explained that she did not understand why so many people viewed cultural background as the main reason for international students not seeking help, or wanting to be ‘spoon fed’:

*I’m Asian too... I was every lecturer’s nightmare because if I didn’t understand I will say, explain to me...This culture stuff is a cop-out, an excuse. If you want to succeed, you ask, you go out of your way.*

(Staff member #27-academic/lecturer)

This view was also supported by other staff members, who suggested individual differences and students’ attitudes played a bigger role in determining students’ readiness to engage rather than their cultural backgrounds:

*Some people are very conscientious and they will try and get as much information as they possibly can, and that’s just their nature. There are other students where even if you provide the information, they don’t really access it or read it.*

(Staff member #11-support/management)

*I don’t think it is language or culture, I think it is just attitude.*

(Staff member #27-academic/lecturer)

*I mean in the danger of stereotyping, I find that the Chinese students sometimes come with rather poor language abilities, but on the other hand, that most of them are prepared to work really hard which is in their favour. They are also more likely to take up the help offered by the language advisers.*

(Staff member #10-academic/leader)

The responses of staff members highlighted some of the complexities associated with the implementation of International Education. Bearing in mind Sanderson’s (2006) ‘profile of an ideal lecturer’, and Teeken’s (2003) caution against using stereotypical views of students based on their cultural backgrounds, it would seem that, while remaining mindful of a students’
backgrounds, and the potential for such factors to have an impact, the focus should always be on responding to each student, whether domestic or international, as an individual. This would also avoid classifying those who come from different cultural backgrounds as ‘other’ and ‘outsider’, which increases the risk of staff treating them as such. The complexity of stereotyping based on cultural backgrounds has also been supported by other research, such as that concerning the Paradox of the Chinese learner (Arthur, 2004; Bailey & Dua, 1999; Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Slethaug, 2010; Volet & Ang, 1998).

The responses of staff also highlighted the fact that, just as the cohort of international students was not a homogenous group, nor was the “staff” a group of people who shared the same experiences and opinions. In some cases, there were assumptions that the cohort of “international students” were, in fact, only those who spoke English as a second language; and while many of those interviewed expressed frustration with the language proficiency of some international students, some also acknowledged that cultural background as well as language difficulties had an impact on their engagement. Other members of staff expressed the strong view that it was all about the attitude of the individual student. The views of staff members also reflected differences in their own backgrounds and experiences. Reflection on these responses was a timely reminder that all individuals deserve to be considered as precisely that – individuals.

5A.1.4 Tensions around student assessment

Staff perceptions of the English language proficiency of some international students created tensions around assessment of both oral and written assignments. Four of the seven lecturers stated that they marked international students’ work differently from that submitted by domestic students. These lecturers acknowledged being ‘lenient’ or ‘having double standards’, reporting
that because much of the work written by international students had significant grammatical problems, they only looked at the content for conceptual understanding. On the other hand, a submission from a domestic student with grammatical errors would receive a harsher response:

What I try to do is, and it is frustrating because it does take a lot longer, I try to correct it... And I try not to take it into consideration with their final mark. Where [as with] English-speaking students I go no, re-read, rework...go and see the academic skills advisor. I tend to be a bit more lenient with the international students.

(Staff member #20-academic/lecturer)

Some staff tried to balance assessment of the final product with assessment of student effort. One explained that she was reluctant to fail her international student because the student had followed her advice and sought the help of the learning advisor. Although the student’s work did not improve substantially, the lecturer wanted to reward the student “for having done the extra work and I felt there was some learning there”. Her decision, however, still caused some tension, as she reflected:

So am I right to pass them and let them go out there to the labour market and not be able to do what is asked for? Is that going to degrade or devalue the degree for other people?

(Staff member #26-academic/lecturer)

This conflict resulted in a plan to “balance” her leniency:

I think what I’ll probably do is mark their exam hard because if my giving them that very reluctant pass is going to make them pass the unit when they wouldn’t otherwise, then I wouldn’t want that to be the only reason they pass the unit.

(Staff member #26-academic/lecturer)

Another lecturer also questioned whether some learning, or even potential learning, should be considered, even if the actual assignment was not at the required standard:

It does put you in the dilemma. That is probably the biggest impact it has...because I think, why am I failing this person? I’m failing them because they don’t meet the requirements ... [but] I’m also conscious that they’re in second year and they’ll be in
third year next year and I wonder whether I’m being too hard, or will it have improved by third year?

(Staff member #12-academic/lecturer)

One staff member explained that she assessed differently according to the nature of the assignment:

Nine times out of ten I only look at content, but if it’s a report that would normally be submitted to…a superior officer or something in your workplace then it’s got to be formatted properly and your grammar must be right.

(Staff member #9-academic/lecturer)

The issue of being prepared for employment in an Australian workplace was also raised by staff member 6, who expressed her concern that passing students with inadequate language proficiency would reflect poorly on the Case University if the students sought employment in Australia. This concern is supported by research carried out by Graduate Careers Australia (2008), which reported that employers rated good written, oral communication and interpersonal skills as the most relevant skills in potential employees. Thus, students’ English proficiency also has implications for the Case University: when students graduate, they need to be well prepared for their professional lives, or a qualification from the Case University will be devalued. It must be acknowledged, however, that concerns about the standards of oral and written language of many domestic students are regularly raised by university staff, employers, and by the media, so this is not an issue that relates only to international students.

For some staff, however, the personal stories of some international students seemed to outweigh the more nebulous concerns related to the university’s reputation, causing significant levels of emotional conflict when it came to assessment. One explained that during a visit to Vietnam, she had seen the many difficulties international students experienced in order to come to Australia to study. She saw parents sell most of their possessions, mortgage their homes and
take up loans to send one of their children to university in Australia, in the hope that the success of one child might also result in opportunities for siblings in Australia. After seeing these hardships, the lecturer found it harder to mark international students the same way as domestic students, who (she assumed) had not sacrificed as much for their studies. She explained that if the students failed, the consequences were enormous not only for the individual student, but would result in financial ruin and lost opportunities for their entire family.

*Often I think I’m harder on the onshore [domestic] students than I am on my international students because I feel like they’re getting over a lot to get here so you tend to view them a little more sympathetically, whereas I feel like I’m a bit harsher on onshore students.*

(Staff member #12-academic/lecturer)

The tension around student assessment was evident in a similar story told by a lecturer who was about to fail an international student because her work was barely intelligible. He explained to the student that the low marks were due to the essay being incomprehensible. The student then told him that someone had died in her family and she had to go back home and her English had deteriorated because in her home town she did not speak English. The lecturer then described the emotional conflict he felt during these situations:

*There are often times with international students that the language isn’t as good and probably you accept a lower standard. Like if a local student handed in something with the same grammar, you would probably say this isn’t good enough but with an international student I tend to be a little bit more lenient in that I don’t mind if the English is imperfect in terms of grammar.*

(Staff member #26-academic/lecturer)

The emotional impact of the difficulties some international students face was also a challenge for some support staff:
I do have sympathy for them when they come here and I know it’s very difficult to get it right and I think it’s quite shocking for some students.

(Staff member #17-support/student processes)

Two lecturers explained that in such situations, not only was their ability to assess objectively affected, but the additional time supporting them through what were often urgent circumstances, led to some role confusion. In what they perceived as the absence of any other support, they became the student’s counsellor, friend and advisor, which added further pressure.

Not all lecturers experienced this particular tension around assessment, with some strongly disagreeing with what they perceived to be ‘double standards. In at least one case, the staff member’s personal narrative appeared to play an important role in shaping her view of assessment. Staff member 34 had two children studying at university and felt strongly that lenient marking for international students might disadvantage domestic students such as her own children.

The roles that staff played also appeared to have an impact on their attitude to assessment. For a staff member in an upper management role, and with no prior experience teaching international students, the priority was the Case University’s standing and reputation, and the practice of lenient marking was seen as potentially damaging to that reputation:

There should be no watering down of standards, and people shouldn’t be being influenced. We have a quality assurance system at the [Case] University and we have moderation ...where we check that the marking of assignments is consistent, and that the grades that are being awarded are genuine grades. So absolutely, there should be no suggestion that marking should be different because of an outcome expected from a student. And frankly, going down that route really potentially exposes the university.

(Staff member #33- support/ student management)

When support staff members such as learning advisors were asked about the practice of ‘leniency’, there was an agreement that this was not helping the international students:
... some academic staff, when they give feedback on work, comment on the structure of the assignment and the language and encourage students to do something about their grammar... Other people [academic staff] simply look at the assignment and think, oh the student’s had a go, clearly done some reading, there’s some content there, don’t know what to do about the grammar, so I’ll just bump them through. And I think that leads to students getting a very inconsistent story and that encourages them to think, oh, I’m okay really, I don’t need help.

(Staff member #7- support/student processes)

Some learning advisors (LAs) understood that working with international students took more time, but believed that some academics “took the easy way out” and marked only content. Learning advisors generally felt that this practice was not useful for either the staff or the students:

*Instead of kind of building cultural bridges from both ends and making sure that the gaps are easily covered, they [academics] tend to go “Oh well, she is Chinese after all so I won't be too hard on the grammar”...and that might be very nice but I don’t think it’s actually particularly helpful.*

(Staff member #22- support/student processes)

Significantly, there were some international students who agreed with this position; that is, that their lecturers did not indicate the need for English classes or the need to see learning advisors in the feedback on their assignments (see Chapter 5B), and so they did not feel they needed to access such services.

The above responses appear to reflect staff members’ different experiences and roles. Those who disagreed with ‘soft marking’ (Devos, 2003) were largely either not teaching international students, or not involved in their assessment. Staff in managerial roles are perhaps more immune to being affected by the “personal connection” that most teachers develop with their students. Support staff do not have the additional role of student assessment, therefore, it could be difficult for them to comprehend the tension associated that aspect of teaching. As discussed in Chapter 2,
academic roles have become increasingly complex, partially as a result of the neo-liberal approach that now appears to guide the operations of many universities (Kayrooz, Kinnear & Preston, 2001), and tensions around student assessment appear to have been compounded by these additional factors.

The above findings are supported by numerous media reports and some previous research on the issue of ‘soft-marking’ (Birrell, 2006; Barber & Morgan, 1984; Devos, 2003; Ramburuth, 2001). Andrade (2009) suggested that if staff had been working with international students for a long time, they might not realise themselves how accommodating they had become and might be lenient unconsciously. In the present study however, some teaching staff candidly reported that they were conscious of being more lenient, and even offered explanations of circumstances which increased the likelihood of them marking international students’ and domestic students’ work differently. This was countered by the view of other staff, some of whom also taught, that such a practice was unfair. It would appear that issues around assessment remain contentious, and affected by a range of personal and managerial concerns.

5A.1.5 Use of effective strategies within an International Education context

All of the seven lecturers and three of the seven academic leaders interviewed referred to strategies they used when teaching classes that included international students that would be effective with most students, and which were consistent with the principles of good teaching practice discussed in Chapter 2 (Arkoudis, 2006; Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Bretag, Horrocks & Burch, 2008; Fallon & Brown, 1999; Smith, 2002; Sanderson, 2004; Trice, 2003; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). The strategies mentioned most often by respondents have been grouped into broad categories for discussion.

Adjustment to language
A number of staff members mentioned efforts to speak slowly and clearly, and to avoid jargon. Strategies such as repeating important terms, and embedding definitions and more explanations, were also used. One staff member commented on the need to be aware of student responses, as a lack of understanding was often evident in facial expressions.

*We try not to use jargon.*

(Staff member #16 - support/management)

*Having to adapt your language to be very simple and not kind of overwhelm them with jargon or technical terms.*

(Staff member #30 - support/student processes)

*Quite often if you are lecturing to a group, you’ve got to keep an eye on their faces, because you can see when you’ve used a word that they have not understood, and you have to reiterate and explain different words.*

(Staff member #2 - academic/lecturer)

These responses suggest that language proficiency problems were recognised as a major inhibitor to academic progress for some international students and that they, as the teachers, needed to modify their language to facilitate understanding.

**Use of an interactive teaching style and small group teaching**

Some teaching staff increased the interaction in lectures by including more discussion rather than using the more traditional lecture format. Arranging seating in semi-circles to encourage interaction, and breaking into smaller groups wherever possible, provided opportunities for role playing, and for students to interact with more people, particularly if the group composition was changed often:

*Through smaller group work... find a way of actually breaking up the group differently each time so then they get a chance at some point to speak to most people.*

(Staff member #12 - academic/lecturer)
Although small groups were mentioned often, staff differed in their views on the most effective group composition. Staff member 18 believed that allowing self selection, which almost always resulted in international students choosing to work with other international students, was effective because it often allowed students to translate and support each other, in which case comprehension increased, which was after all the most important outcome. Staff member 20 used different approaches to group work to suit the individual classes, sometimes opting for self-selection and randomly allocating members on other occasions. Staff member 27 preferred intercultural groups, and specifically taught the students how to work in groups and manage group tasks; for example, by explaining the different roles group members could play, and how to give constructive feedback.

*Use of technology*

Technology was used in a number of ways to support teaching and learning. A number of staff recorded all teaching sessions so international students could replay them as often and as slowly as required. The use of online discussion forums was also mentioned, especially if personal perceptions about English proficiency, or a lack of confidence limited the contributions of some students in class. Staff member 10 pointed out to her students that grammatical mistakes were not significant in that context. The important thing for her was for students to discuss the course content and gain perspectives from different students using a medium that allowed international students the freedom to do so. *On-line resources*, such as model essays and grammar guides were also posted to support students.

*Use of the expert knowledge of international students*

Several staff members referred to incorporating the specialised knowledge or experiences of international students, thus making them the ‘expert’. This strategy is one particularly
appropriate for culturally mixed groups (Cruickshank, Chen & Warren, 2012; Hellmundt, et al., 1998), and should also increase knowledge of global issues and intercultural awareness.

Staff member 18 designed a group assessment task that required students to use design techniques to portray another culture, based on the particular knowledge of the international student. This gave domestic students insights into how other cultures operated and helped domestic students “not to look at themselves in a Western designer way, but to look at the big picture”.

Taking advantage of opportunities to showcase the contribution of international students was also mentioned as a way of both encouraging their involvement and demonstrating their expertise:

*I usually say, would you mind doing it? I think you’ve done really well and I think you guys are working really well, can you demo it for everybody else? And I say, you don’t have to if you don’t want to, but I think you’ve done a great job.*

(Staff member #12- academic/lecturer)

Staff member 10 recounted an incident where a higher degree student was very helpful in supporting other international students who were struggling with the requirements of a literature review:

*A former very good Chinese master student of mine came in, and I left it to him to explain to them [other international students]. I know they took him to lunch and I think he spent a total of three hours with them and after that, really, they made a leap in understanding what was required of them.*

(Staff member # 10-academic/leader)

**Provision of alternatives**

Alternative ways of contributing, asking questions, and being assessed were offered by some staff. In addition to incorporating on-line discussions to support students with language
difficulties, which was mentioned by several staff, one staff member encouraged the use of exercise books in tutorials so that students could write their questions to the tutor if they felt uncomfortable asking in class; another allowed some students to submit a series of short answers to questions rather than formulate all the information into an essay.

**Increased level of feedback**

Increasing the feedback on assignments for international students to provide greater direction was a strategy suggested by two staff members; as was increasing the scaffolding provided by structuring assignments throughout a unit to incrementally build the required knowledge. Another staff member encouraged international students to send drafts of their assignments for additional feedback before final submission. These strategies would be appropriate for all students who needed extra support, but would also be time-consuming considering the extensive feedback some students require.

**Liaison with Learning Advisers**

Only two staff members specifically mentioned either referring students to learning advisors, or discussing with advisor the best approaches to work with international students. One added that it was important to follow up after students had been referred to ensure that they had attended, and were progressing.

**Sensitivity to the learner**

A number of the strategies discussed previously incorporate understandings that all good teachers have about the need for sensitivity, and the importance of encouraging students, acknowledging their strengths, reinforcing their efforts, and building their self esteem by
providing successful learning experiences. Being careful not to embarrass students by putting them “on the spot” was also a consideration.

*I really avoid putting any international student on the spot. I would never ask them a question outright.*

(Staff member #12 - academic/lecturer)

One strategy that may be more relevant with international students from different cultures was to be conscious of how humour was used. Staff member 1 believed that, as much humour is strongly culturally based, it could easily be misunderstood.

*I might change my approach in the sense of being more careful with my sense of humour. It’s not easily understood, so you have to careful if they are sensitive in that way.*

(Staff member #1 - support/student processes)

This comment reminded me of the ‘profile of an ideal lecturer’ discussed in the literature review. Sanderson (2006) found that the “suggestion of modifying, for example, their body language or avoiding spontaneous humour is unsupported” (p. 413). Staff members in Sanderson’s study did mention that they used humour, but that they had to be careful and sensitive. Although the profile is focusing on lecturing staff and the staff member in the current study was non-academic, the issues of being sensitive to using humour remains. What is deemed ‘sensitive’ is subject to staff’s and students’ interpretations.

Six of the seven lecturers interviewed and four academic leaders practised reflective teaching (Biggs, 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1998; Ramsden, 2003): trialing a strategy, monitoring its effects, and if the students were not performing to the standard expected, these techniques would be changed and evaluated. Thus many of those interviewed were aware of their responsibilities to their students and were making efforts to provide a quality learning environment for them. As one academic leader pointed out, “I take the view it’s not what our
students come with, it’s what they leave with, and how we support them to do that” (Leader #15).

Literature has supported the findings that some staff members employ different strategies when teaching diverse student groups (Burch, 2008; Fallon & Brown, 1999; Trice, 2003; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). The above experiences show that staff members were employing some of the techniques associated with ‘good teaching principles’ and active teaching styles as discussed in Chapter 2 (Arkoudis, 2006; Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Bretag, Horrocks & Smith, 2002; Sanderson, 2004).

5A.2 Staff experiences of university policies and procedures

Staff members also reported experiences that related to policies or procedures at the university level that influenced their perceptions of International Education. Most of these responses related to the implementation of the new centralised model of student services. As mentioned in Chapter 3, at the time of data collection the Case University was moving away from offering specific services for international students, to a more generic, centralised model of service provision. This model meant all students accessed the same services with the intention of bringing domestic and international students together:

...a philosophical debate has been occurring within [Case University] for a while... one side of the debate believes that the best way to serve international students is to have them fully integrated with the Australian students, and there’s another side of the debate that says, no, international students have got different needs from the Australian students, and therefore we need to have specialised services only for the international. Now three years ago and beyond ...we had an international student support [centre] as part of [Case University] ...and they had award winning services and programs for international students. However, while that was in place, there was a grave concern that the international students were not integrating with the Australian students, so when we had a change of leadership ... the new leaders sort of went to the other side, to say, no, you
shouldn’t segregate international students, they are all students. So we basically
transitioned from that model to the model that we are currently operating under, where
all students report to the one place irrespective of where they come from, and hopefully
that service centre is adequately meeting the needs of international students.

(Staff member #11-support/management)

Under the revised model, the first point of reference for all students was the student
information unit where students “took a number” to see a student advisor. If the student advisors
could not help, students were asked to make an appointment with Connect Officers which could take more time.

The way [the student information unit] is set up is everybody comes through the front. It’s not really a front counter but imaginary front counter and the enquiries are floated down through there, which is good. But because it minimizes if somebody just has a quick question...that’s fine, but for specialised queries you wonder if they’re equipped to deal with international students.

(Staff member #16-support/management)

Staff responses to the new model are discussed in the following section. While two members of the support staff viewed the new model in a very positive light, in that it would reduce the “hand holding” and “will encourage international students…to adapt to the reality of study abroad” (Staff member #37), the overwhelming response was one of frustration. The impact of increasing numbers of international student enrolments, and communication difficulties at a number of levels that affect International Education, are also included in the discussion.
5A.2.1 Frustration with new model of service provision

Perception that new model does not meet the specific needs of international students

Many staff comments reflected the belief that at least some of the needs of international students are quite different from those of domestic students:

*I think they made a mistake getting rid of the international student advisers. I mean that was a department that specialised in that area; they knew what they were talking about.....I just don't understand where they are coming from by saying everyone has the same problems. It's just ignorant to say that. I mean obviously international students have so many more issues to contend with.*

(Staff member #30-support/student processes)

A non-academic staff member also felt that international students had different needs and that services should be offered to help with all of these needs:

*They [international students] need an awful lot of support. International students face separation from their families, their support networks, everything that they need to get along in life basically. They come to a country that they don’t know anyone, they don’t know how the country works, what the culture is like, anything like that, and that would make you feel very isolated and alone and there needs to be more social support and emotional support.*

(Staff member #31-support/student processes)

Some staff members argued that a centralised system underestimated the complex needs of some international students, and that staff who worked at the student information centre were not trained to handle some of the unique issues associated with international students. Others commented that a centralised system was less effective for students who were shy, or lacked confidence in their English skills. Staff operating in a busy, open plan environment might struggle to understand what the precise problem was. Another staff member noted that international students needed privacy to discuss some of their issues, which the student
information unit lacked, but it could be argued that this is not a problem unique to international students. It was further mentioned that staff in the student information unit had not realised that international students needed more support, and that often the advice given was unhelpful:

*I think that the student services centre - once they started actually dealing with international students - they started to realise how different they were from the Australian students.*

(Staff member #11-support/management)

*It’s no good saying to a student, go and look on our website because you [don’t] know what to look for, you can’t find it and I suppose the Orientation days are supposed to alleviate that but... for international students, quite often, they come late.*

(Staff member #2-academic/lecturer)

**Concerns regarding their ethical responsibility**

Terms such as ‘ethical’, ‘moral’, having a ‘duty of care’ and ‘equity’ were also used to describe the provision of additional services to international students:

*I try to explain to my students about equity and equality and... I say to them if I’m treating everyone equally then that means that I give everyone the same information, I’ve treated everyone equally. However, if I’ve got someone who doesn’t speak English and I give them a translation so they can understand mine, then that’s equity, that’s giving them the same. There’s a difference between equality and equity.*

(Staff member #20-academic/lecturer)

This position was supported by research carried out by the University of Edinburgh (2012), where it was pointed out that:

*Being equitable does not mean providing the same for every student but recognising the different needs within a diverse group and making necessary steps to ensure that services are provided in a way that meets these needs as far as possible. (p. 5)*
Some staff members argued that because the Case University had accepted students with lower levels of English proficiency, the university was morally obliged to support these students:

*But... if we’re going to let people in who are not fully proficient in English, we have to support them.*

(Staff member #22-support/student processes)

*But I think that’s quite unethical really because, so you let them in and then they’ve kind of got the false hope that they are at a certain level and then they come here and some of them can’t cut it. Is that their fault or our fault for encouraging them to come in the first place?*

(Staff member #30-support/student processes)

*[We]* entice students to come here, we’ll take their money, but once they get here they really don’t have a lot of support. They are on their own.

(Staff member #31-support/student processes)

One academic leader argued that by not providing additional support, the Case University was not only risking its reputation, but also, discouraging potential international students:

*I mean I’d take a hard line on this. If you’re not going to provide adequate support, then don’t do it [enrol the students]... because in the long run, actually it’s at a cost. Things get out. [Case University] is taking this in with low IELTS but they’re not providing the support. It’s to their own detriment if they do that.*

(Staff member #34-academic/leader)

This view was shared by other academic and support staff, who recounted conversations with students in which the Case University was compared unfavourably to neighbouring universities in terms of student support. Staff members also compared the support available at the Case University to that available to them when employed at a neighbouring university.

*I think there was a lot of emphasis placed on how we should teach internationally. And in the period where I was in a responsible position at that university, a lot of work was done with staff members on cross-cultural issues.*

(Staff member #18-academic/lecturer)
Other places, say [names other university] where they have also dropped their IELTS for entry for some courses. They have a whole centre there…it's not outsourced. It is part of [Names other University]. They have an English language centre that is there for support for students who don’t have English. We don’t have that. You can't have it both ways and that’s the problem with [Case University]. It’s trying to have it both ways. It’s trying to attract students but then not provide the support.

(Staff member #34-academic/leader)

My observations: I personally know friends who have changed university because of a lack of ‘socialising events’. They did not feel a sense of belonging to this university, and so moved to a neighbouring university.

However, one staff member noted that the Case University ‘could only do so much’ (Staff member #11-support/management) and that all international students were adults who could find services by themselves. This neo-liberal stance on service provision was discussed in the literature review (see Chapter 2), where students are seen as active agents who are capable of accessing services they feel they need.

Lack of consultation

Staff members opposed to the centralised/generic model argued that they were not consulted, despite the fact that they had to deal with the repercussions of such a model. This point was also raised by academic leaders, who argued that ‘management’ made decisions about international students, without consulting those who taught these students:

*There has to be much better support systems... and I think that the problem with [Case University] is that they don't understand the requirements for international students because they never taught really themselves.*

(Staff member #34- academic/leader)
This supports research carried out by Chang (2007); and more recently by Barker, Hibbins and Fannelly (2011); and Green and Mertova (2011), who reported that when staff members are not engaged in decision-making, they are less likely to embrace and practise the policies enacted.

There was also frustration expressed by staff because existing IE expertise was not transferred to staff in the centralised student service, resulting in needless confusion:

_We had a team of international student support that team basically over many years have come up with the services they were providing, and there was method in what they did... However when we transferred...student support in general to the student services centre, I’m not aware of any knowledge or systems or processes or services that were transferred from us to the student centre services...they are reinventing the wheel that already existed, because they didn’t take anything from the previous model._

(Staff member #11-support/management)

**Reduction in specialised learning support staff**

The reduction in staff trained to work with international students that had occurred with the introduction of the centralised model drew very strong responses. Lack of learning support staff was a major challenge for those teaching large numbers of international students; and support staff believed that the newly introduced workshop model of support was not as effective as individual consultations:

_There has to be much better support systems and just having...three or four learning advisers for the whole university, is just ludicrous._

(Staff member #34- academic/leader)

_It’s very hard for us to meet the needs of all our students, both international and local with that number of staff. We’re trying to address it through a series of workshops but my feeling is that there’s a great need for individual consultation [with international students] and it’s hard to accommodate the needs of all those students with so few of us._

(Staff member #7-support/student processes)
This was supported by a non-academic staff member, who had been trying to advocate for embedded English classes for all students in their first year:

_ I don’t think there are enough learning advisors. I think we are going to have to grow that dramatically._

(Staff member #1 - support/student processes)

Lecturing staff member 2, although aware of the rationale for the reduction in numbers, did not think this was appropriate where there were such large numbers of international students:

_ A lot of the support services have been centralised so we are losing our student support officer and I know that’s a plan by the [Case] University to optimise its resources and streamline them, but I don’t know that that’s appropriate, particularly in a school that has so many international students._

(Staff member #2 - academic/lecturer)

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My observations: Excerpt from reflective journal

Staff member 34 was clearly opposed to the structural changes that the Case University was going through which meant the loss of [names person], our international student support officer. This interview was interesting and could have gone for hours..

The loss of specialised staff due to the centralised/generic model was felt across both academic and non-academic staff members. This coupled with the increasing student numbers, which will be discussed next, had major implications for staff members.

5A.2.2 Increasing international student enrolment

The increase in international student enrolment had occurred not only on campus, but in the numbers of students who studied some units online. For academic staff, this increase impacted upon the way they taught and how they interacted with students:

_ It’s much easier with a small sized group of say 30 to establish a rapport so that they don’t feel uncomfortable about coming and talking to you, but if you have got a lecture_
group of 150, it’s much more difficult to get them to understand that they can come and seek assistance, that they’re not on their own, and that requires a fair bit of follow up with the systems.

(Staff member #2 - academic/lecturer)

The [Case] University just can’t cope with those sorts of numbers...because I mean I can’t refer half my class to the writing consultants.

(Staff member #9 - academic/lecturer)

The increase in student numbers was also commented on by learning advisors who observed that the workshop model of support that had been incorporated as part of the streamlined services, and was designed to support larger numbers of students, was less effective than individual consultations. Their views are supported by research in this area (Brooman-Jones, Cunningham, Hanna & Wilson, 2011; Harris & Ashton, 2011).

5A.2.3 Multi-level miscommunication

A further frustration reported by staff members, which some believed had been exacerbated by the introduction of the new model, related to communication problems at the school and faculty level, between academic and non-academic staff and between university management and staff. This led to significant confusion and misleading advice to international students who were being directed to incorrect departments or schools, or to different metropolitan campuses because people were confused about which services were still being offered and which had ceased.

If our own staff are not fully aware of the service of what a Connect Officer is and what they do and what their role is, how the hell do we expect students – if you go and search the net for the Connect team, I don’t think you’ll find information on what they do.

(Staff member #33 - support/management)

They’ll [international students] get sent around all over the place and they sort of get pushed from one place to another and again often they’re just dismissed because no one’s bothered to realise they do have an actual valid case.

(Staff member #30 - support/student processes)
... If I was an international student I’d find it very, very difficult to know who to talk to and where to go for information.

(Staff member #31-support/student processes)

There’s things that aren’t communicated very well and I’ve been here over three years and...It’s always something that I’ve been a bit dismayed about - that the [Case] University doesn’t know what other parts of the university are doing - and how can we help students effectively if things are changing and not being communicated?

(Staff member #5- support/student processes)

Poor systems of communication were also raised regarding feedback when students were referred to the support staff:

*It [feedback] goes into a big abyss and you never hear anything back.*

(Staff member #6- academic/lecturer)

*I wouldn’t mind even if someone went and spoke to them [international student] and they actually get a signed form to say that ‘yes’ they went to see them [support staff]... so I’m not sure whether there is any follow through.*

(Staff member #27-academic/lecturer)

Staff member 27 also discussed that communication difficulties existed between the international office, who admitted students, and the faculty level. She referred to a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student who was admitted with an IELTS of 5.5, despite the faculty’s explicit advice that it was too low for research degrees. The enrolment of international students who did not meet stated entry qualifications despite consultations with Admissions staff was also mentioned by two other academic staff members as examples of poor communication at the university level. Enrolment of students without the required level of English language proficiency, or who lacked assumed knowledge, resulted in great frustration for both students and staff.

These examples of poor communication are incongruous considering that the aims of centralisation were to streamline processes in order to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness
(Azfar, Kahkonen & Meagher, 2001; Brown, 2000; Lauglo, 1995; Hanson, 2005; Huisman & Morphew, 1998; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Vidovich, 2002). The reported communication difficulties between faculties and schools, enrolment inconsistencies, and lack of feedback from support staff had major implications for both academic and support staff as they managed the daily educational experiences of increasing numbers of international students. These implications will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Thus, amongst the staff members who had worked under the former model, there was broad agreement that it had worked better both for the staff members and international students. Under the former model, the international office catered for not only admissions, but offered services such as international student officers (ISO), who had allocated time, were always on campus and had private offices for international students to discuss their issues. Some ISOs were multilingual and had been international students themselves, which helped international students who lacked confidence in their English skills. They were also familiar with the immigration requirements for students, and held a number of social activities, through the international student groups (e.g., Kenyan students group, Chinese students association). As staff members pointed out, this department was specialised in that they had experience in dealing with international students’ issues. They advocated for international students and understood their needs. Under the present model, the wide perception was that not all of the international students’ needs were being met, as there were no programs or services being offered which took into account the numerous academic and socio-cultural difficulties some international students experienced.

Some cautionary notes are required when interpreting these findings. It is possible that because this study was conducted during the period of transition from one model of service provision to another, some implementation difficulties might be expected. It is also possible that
staff members who formed an integral part of the former model, such as faculty-specific learning advisers, were reacting to a change which they perceived as devaluing their contribution. Further, some staff members who had worked under the previous system for some years, might simply have been reacting to the change, which is not always a comfortable process.

5A.3 Suggestions to improve the provision of International Education

Since language proficiency was such a prominent issue, staff members were asked for possible solutions. Responses ranged from “[the] University should not take students with low English levels” to more pragmatic solutions, such as providing more specialised support for these students. Some staff members wanted a preparatory or bridging course for international students before they entered university, which would teach them ‘Australian English’ as well as academic English and referencing skills needed to succeed at a university level:

We offer our Australian students the university prep course. Maybe we should offer a slightly different version for our international students who we think need it and that will give them six months where they can build a community because they know that they belong to this group. They can learn how to research databases and things like that properly. But it would be intensive English speaking, getting them acclimatised to university life.

(Staff member #2-academic/lecturer)

I think we could do some bridging courses just like we offer to our local students. They have alternative pathways that some of the international students could do...so that they develop some of the skills in terms of analysis and general academic thinking skills.

(Staff member #6-academic/lecturer)

Additionally, two staff members stated that because of the different teaching and learning backgrounds of some international students, a bridging or preparation course might be beneficial in teaching them about what is expected of them in Australian Universities:

Having a decent preparation, a bridging course with their language and their study skills too, because many international students don’t have the same sort of educational process,
writing essays and even the continuous assessment that we have here is new to them...Their system is just exams at the end.

(Staff member #17-support/student processes)

Because a lot of them come from education systems where they’ve rote learnt...and that’s just not the way we do things here.

(Staff member #6-academic/lecturer)

5A.3.1 English skills bridging courses for international students

Many international students, who did not meet the Case University’s English entry requirements, had been offered alternative entry pathways through the English language institution. Through English courses, students were not only taught English to meet the entry requirements, but there were preparation courses as well, which taught skills needed at the university. Staff members from the English institution were therefore interviewed to explore how they worked with international students and what they thought of the preparatory courses for all international students. The two academic staff members interviewed, agreed that students who had gone through their programs before starting university reported being better prepared for university:

We have a couple of bridging courses that we run for [the Case University], then [international students] are fully acceptable as direct entry to either an undergraduate or a postgraduate degree in certain faculties. The students who come out of those courses fare very well. They come back to give us feedback and over time we have anecdotal feedback, but we’ve also got the actual results feedback. So the [Case] University has enabled us to have access to certain statistics that have shown us that they [international students who take part in the bridging course] have held their own amongst domestic students as far as future results have gone.

(Staff member #21-academic/lecturer)

While some staff stated that tailor-made international students’ preparation courses were seen as effective for teaching some of the academic skills required for university studies, the two international students participants who had gone through the English institution classes
suggested that being in a class with (only) other international students did not help them acquire new English skills and that one of the reasons they decided to study abroad was to learn about Australia, and not be surrounded by other international students. This viewpoint was supported by staff members who thought that international students’ English skills would improve if they were interacting with native English speakers instead of other ESL learners:

They [international students] would not be getting that immediate interaction with other English speakers, other students. It [bridging course] might just encourage them more to close off and be by themselves? I think its better that, the sooner they meet, the sooner they might be able to bounce off each other.

(Staff member #36-support/student processes)

When asked about sitting preparatory courses as a way of preparing for their studies, a number of international student participants felt they did not need it. They also expressed concern that taking part would be more costly for them. Most postgraduate international student participants stated that they did not need such a course.

There were varied opinions over possible solutions regarding how to overcome the perceived English proficiency challenge. When the idea of a preparatory or bridging course was mentioned to subsequent participants, not all staff members or international students agreed with the suggestion, with some arguing that most international students acquired these skills as they progressed through their studies. Interestingly, some third year international student participants, who had been in Australia for more than three years and had been at university, were still experiencing difficulties with their spoken English during interviews.

Moreover, there were some staff members who mentioned that identifying international students as a group that needed support before starting university might be seen as discriminatory and that not all international students needed a preparatory course of this nature. For these staff
members, it was a matter of distinguishing between those students who needed a preparatory course and those who did not, but also issues around making the course compulsory without imposing adverse effects on the students’ visas:

*It's problematic in a lot of ways- first of all how are you going to know who to put in that [bridging course]... Then of course there would be people, whether they need it or not, who would be saying, I can’t afford the extra living expenses, I can’t afford the extra time ... it’s not that straightforward... If somebody meets requirement entry into the course, and they are coming on a student visa, we can’t, because of ESOS, put them in an extra semester that they don’t need.*

(Staff member #19-support/student processes)

*I think the problem is if you make it compulsory, there really are lots of students who don’t need to do that level of work.*

(Staff member #17-support/student processes)

There is also evidence that learning an additional language is a process which can take up to six years (Cummins, 1979). The English Language Growth project revealed that English skills needed to be nurtured over time, and that learning academic English skills required students to practise these skills including reading, writing and speaking (Rochecouste et al., 2010). In the current study, some academic staff members agreed with these findings and reported that the test was only one indication of student’s proficiency and that language acquisition took a long time. Short-term intensive English courses may not be adequate in raising the standard of English to the level required for university study.

*I think a lot of people who make decisions in universities lack understanding of what it's like to be an international student. I don't think they really get, one, how difficult it is or two, how problematic operating in a second language in particular is. I think it's hard enough operating in a different culture and sharing the same language but operating in a different language experience is so difficult and people tell me oh we'll give them six months of intensive English and then they'll be right and it's like they have no idea that English acquisition takes so long.*
5A.3.2 General/academic skills bridging courses for international students

Another possible solution to the English proficiency issue was offering a generic skills unit for all students in their first year at university. It was thought that this option would eliminate the ‘discrimination’ factor and would benefit all students, including the domestic students. The problem with offering this unit, as suggested by its lecturer, was that it was not popular or necessary according to some students:

Occasionally people complain about it [generic skills unit], especially people who felt that they had those skills already.

Having generic skills preparation courses attracted the same arguments as compulsory preparatory courses, in that not everyone thought they needed it. Moreover, having such a unit might become problematic for full fee paying students, such as international students, who might feel that these courses were not contributing to their course and which might incur additional fees. The incurred cost of mandating preparation courses was seen as a major hurdle:

What worries me is how much extra money that’s going to cost them and how many people that will eliminate from our market... I mean these people in Vietnam were having to get bank loans because our government needs to see the total amount of tuition. And I just wonder how many students would be able to do that if we put an extra six months or an extra year on it.

I think it’s a silly suggestion for a couple of reasons. Do you do it for all undergraduates? We do it for all post graduates? Postgraduates, we have some highly skilled post graduate students coming from other nationalities, having studied degrees in their own country and done very, very well. Why would you put them through foundation?
5A.3.3. Raising the English entry level requirements

Raising the English entry requirement (e.g., IELTS score) was suggested to address the perceived English proficiency issue. As pointed out by some senior staff, however, whose primary concerns were not the daily issues of working with students with poor language proficiency, this “solution”, would have an adverse effect on enrolment numbers:

But if you ask for an IELTS score of seven at entry, that significantly reduces the market you can sell to.

(Staff member #7-support/student processes)

You could do that [raise IELTS]. You wouldn’t have any students.

(Staff member #33-support/management)

Further, raising the IELTS scores for entry into university would not necessarily benefit all international students:

Lots of students are able to get an adequate IELTS, but still not able to understand very well what was going on, because of the other kind of cultural things about language...So they may have a technical understanding of language sufficient to pass a test, but not be proficient in communicating effectively or understanding effectively.

(Staff member #18-academic/leader)

5A.3.4 Embedding support

A final possible solution was suggested by staff in the Business Faculty - that of embedded learning and academic support. In the Business Faculty, the learning advisors (LAs) ran a program where sessions about referencing, academic writing and plagiarism were ‘embedded’ into the Masters’ courses. At the start of the Masters’ degree, a learning advisor worked with all students in the class, which had a significant proportion of international students. The LA also worked with the teaching staff and the course coordinators to understand the content of the course to ensure that workshops were content-specific. The embedded program was designed to
develop the skills of international and domestic students as well as academic staff members who chose to be involved in the program. The program was also designed to reduce the strain of marking international students’ work because these students were working with the learning advisors as they developed their assignments. What it also meant was that these students were learning the skills needed for other courses and did not need the learning advisor as much throughout their studies. The learning advisors reported that although it was a labor intensive program, in the long run it benefited the international students and the staff members as well.

Embedding support has received much attention in literature recently, and it has been shown to increase academic staff members’ skills to handle their students’ writing issues; increase students’ attendance rate because the support is content-specific and delivered in their units; and also increased international student attendance for general workshops run by LAs, because these students were by then, familiar with the staff members. However, studies have indicated that the embedded approach is costly and although it appears to be effective for all cohorts – international and domestic students as well as teaching staff alike - few universities have adopted this method throughout all of their courses (Baird, 2012; Brooman-Jones, Cunningham, & Hanna, 2011; Crosling & Wilson, 2005; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Stratilas, 2011). The approach, however, is relatively new, and presents as a promising area for future research.

5A.4 Summary

In summary, it was observed that perceptions about international students depended on staff members’ roles and how much exposure they had had with this cohort. Support staff members in some schools of the Science and Health Faculty, which had fewer enrolled international students, had not thought about or developed specific strategies to work with this cohort, whereas in the Business Faculty, which had reached critical mass, and where there were enough international
students or ‘enablers’ (Caruana, 2010), staff were prompted to develop strategies to work with this cohort.

Staff members reported a number of experiences which influenced their perceptions of International Education. These were discussed at the individual staff level and at the university level:

**Individual staff-level experiences:**

- Individual staff members’ responses to international students;
- Response to some students’ motivation; and
- Perceptions of some students’ communication skills.

These then led to two reactions from some staff members:

- Tensions around student assessment; and
- Use of effective strategies within an International Education context.

At the university-level, experiences which influenced the perceptions of staff members included:

- Frustration with new model of service provision;
- Increasing international student enrolment; and
- Multi-level miscommunication

Findings indicated that:

- Service provision became problematic for academic staff for different reasons from those reported by support and management staff.
• Academic/teaching staff members were more likely to experience frustration when working with international students than support staff, which led some to be more ‘lenient’ when marking work from this cohort.

• Support staff members were generally more sympathetic to international students’ issues, especially in relation to perceived language and/or cultural barriers.

• Staff who had English as an additional language reported that they were more understanding of international students’ difficulties compared to staff who were from a non-ESL background. ESL staff blamed at least some of this problem on the academic staff for not doing enough to understand international students.

• Staff in administrative/leadership positions tended to view the problems of international students’ service provision from a top-down university wide perspective, and were relatively transparent that their concern lay not so much with each international student’s education experience, but with the university’s reputation and affordable (usually meaning centralised) support services.

My Observations:

Analysing data from staff members was much easier than analysing those for international students. It could be due to the fact that I can identify more with what the staff members are going through and as the research developed I gained a better understanding of their “frustration”. It was a new experience for me, since I already had a general feeling of what the international students would say. It amazed me how discriminatory some of the staff members were though, to the point where some were venting their anger about international students out on me. It took extreme control not to lash out or to answer back, but I thought that being an interviewer it would not have been the proper thing to do. Instead I carried on with the interview and had a debrief session afterwards with my supervisors. I
believe that (staff member #25) interview affected the way I shaped my questions in my latter interviews. It made me more wary, and because I had chosen Constructivist Grounded Theory as my approach, I had to follow up any leads. Therefore I had to ask successive staff members if they felt the same way about international students. It was uncomfortable, but my beliefs about international students and the service utilisation changed after encountering “frustrated” staff members. I could see their point of view and it made me realise that it is hard on them to have to work with individuals who cannot articulate their thoughts in English. While interviewing some of these students myself, and finding I could barely understand them, I can appreciate the efforts staff put in to help these ESL students.

Staff interviews also made me realise the importance of university policy makers to consult with front-line staff about potential policy/structural changes that might impact upon how staff work with each other and with the students. As well as extensive consultations, the Case University should carry out research to understand how policy changes would affect its staff and student populations before implementing such changes.
Chapter 5B

Discussion of Findings in Relation to International Students’ Experiences

Research Question 2: What experiences influence international students’ perception of their education at one Australian university?

The second research question aimed to investigate the experiences of international students at an Australian university. Findings have been categorised in a similar way to Chapter 5A; that is (1) experiences that operated at the individual Student level and (2) those that operated at the University level (see Figure 5B.1). Note that in describing the students (e.g. international #10, Female, UG); the (UG) represented undergraduate students which included bachelor degrees as well as Honours and post-graduate diplomas. Postgraduate students (PG) included Masters by coursework and Higher-Degree-by-Research (HDR) students included Masters by Research and doctoral degrees.
5B.1 Experiences at the individual student level

5B.1.1 Response to their university experience

Some international students reported that their university experiences were “good” (International #8, Female, UG; International #19, Male, UG) and “positive” (International #6, Female, UG). Some praised their teachers for enhancing their experiences, and others praised the work of the international student officers, who formed part of the previous model of service provision. Others pointed out that their university experiences were good compared to their
studies in their home countries, and some indicated that having friends who helped them become acquainted with the university, or having studied at the Case University previously, also helped promote a positive experience.

I’ve only done my post grad here, and it’s been a good experience.

(International #4, Male, HDR)

Generally [the challenges] it’s not about academic side exactly. The academic side, it’s great.

(International #13, Male, PG)

However, these students also reported some challenging experiences relating to their own preparedness for international education, their interactions with staff and students, as well as issues with the services that the Case University was providing. These experiences will be discussed below.

5B.1.2 Perception of personal communication skills

English language proficiency

In this study, 12 of the 26 international students reported that because English was not their first language, their English proficiency was a concern across a range of areas, including understanding lecture content, making themselves understood, participating in discussions, and demonstrating their knowledge and skills:

Because you know, language is a problem of international students, and if I don’t have good language ability it will maybe lead to someone else misunderstand, or the teacher don’t know what I said, or I can’t understand the lecturer.

(International #10, Female, UG)

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6 Four international student participants reported that they saw no issues with their English, two had registered English as their first language, and one reported that because their lecturers had commented on their assignments regarding their English skills, they assumed their proficiency was of a satisfactory standard. Another international student reported that because he had two months extensive English courses, he did not think his English proficiency was an issue or problem.
Hard to listen to lecturer...accent is difficult.  
(International # 17, Female, PG)

I know the areas, but because my English is not good, so I feel shy.  
(International #19, Male, UG)

Five of these students believed that only some of their language skills were problematic, distinguishing between their ability levels in reading, writing, listening, and speaking:

I always have the problem with speaking and writing [in English].  
(International # 15 Male, PG)

I am confident that my written English is not so bad. My oral speaking is bad. And the assignment is written, so it’s not [a problem] ”.  
(International #19, Male, UG)

Academic writing is the problem....need more time [to write].  
(International #3, Male, UG)

International students’ willingness to engage in class discussions was also affected by their perception of their personal language proficiency which had a significant impact upon their academic experience at university. Even students who were accomplished professionals, and believed they had a lot to contribute, said it was a challenge for them to speak in English:

I’m not shy at all, and I don’t have problems talking in class … because English is not my first language, I just find it very hard when I need to talk, especially in front of the class, and if I see someone trying to discuss with me, I think, am I saying something wrong, are people understanding what I’m saying.  
(International #25, Female, PG)

I was the only international student …and I did feel a bit intimidated… during the whole course I never spoke, and that did affect my marks. I had so many ideas but I felt a bit reluctant to discuss them. But as you know, like Australian students are very confident and they’re able to talk.  
(International # 24, Female, HDR)
For some, English language difficulties added another layer of complexity to examinations. Use of a dictionary was permitted in examinations, but permission had to be requested many weeks before, which was not widely advertised. One student explained that when preparing assignments, no one had to know that she used a dictionary to check meanings, but in the examination, this was very obvious. She also believed that all students being given the same amount of time to complete the examination was unfair, as she had to look up the meanings of words, and translate her thoughts from Italian to English before writing her responses, which took much longer:

*The test itself was in English, so I needed my dictionary just to double check the requirement of my exam... I had to apply five weeks before the exams in order to have my dictionary... and I had a heart attack because I didn’t know that... it’s highly unfair [that she is treated like native English speakers in exams], because I’m not like everyone else.”* (International #12, Female, UG)

For this student, there was a level of embarrassment in exams when she had to use her dictionary. She made comments such as “I am at the same level of everyone else” to point out that although she was using the dictionary, she was at the same academic level as those students who were not using the dictionary. This situation supported the concept of “othering” (Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Palfreyman, 2005). As Benzie (2010) pointed out, the process of othering promotes the thinking that:

All international students have low English levels... that it is only because of English language deficiencies that EAL students are failing to gain employment on graduation... that there exists a single, clearly defined standard of English and that if they have not achieved it before entry to the university, learners need do little more than follow a series of steps as required by their lecturers. (p. 451)
Therefore, students such as those who use dictionaries in exams could be made to feel like the ‘other’, where they would feel intimidated or embarrassed because of their perceived lack of English language proficiency.

**Cultural differences in communication**

Some international students believed their ‘background’ or ‘culture’ predisposed them to lack confidence in terms of participating fully in classes and seeking help if necessary:

*Chinese always shy, and just listen to lecturer and take notes.*  
(International #10, Female, UG)

*I am an Asian student and I’m quite shy and can feel reluctant to say things ... I don’t want other people look at me that I’m not independent.*  
(International #7, Female, HDR)

*Because that’s part of culture, especially Asian people; I am a shy person ... I don’t really like asking people for help.*  
(International #9, female, UG)

*The background I have back home is, everything is systematic. You raise your hand and the lecturer or teacher picks you up and then you contribute and that’s it.*  
(International #14, Male, HDR)

*From my background as a Saudi, yes, they can participate, but the problem is ...people sometimes are afraid to be rejected by others and so sometimes they are a little bit shy.*  
(International #13, Male, PG)

*Asian, they are very shy people.*  
(International #7, Female, UG)

This ‘shyness’ was not reported by all students, with some students from Italy, Saudi Arabia, Holland and some African countries stating that if they required help, they were not hesitant to ask for it.

*Because me as an Italian, my culture, if I have something to say, I say...*  
(International #12- Female, UG)
One of the difficulties with classifying this “shy” construct as part of international students’ culture, is that – from a psychological perspective – shyness is understood in terms of individuals who are socially withdrawn (Asendorpf, 1990), who tend to avoid those social behaviours that push them to expose something of themselves into a socially-interactive situation. It would appear, however, that in many cases, the quiet or withdrawn behaviours are more complex, since even those students who reported that they were not usually shy in their home countries and even had experience interacting within relatively sophisticated professional environments, said it was a challenge for them to speak in English in Australia, even if they felt they had a lot to contribute:

*I think in my case it was, back home I used to work and do training, and I think that people’s experience helped me a lot. I’m not shy at all, and I don’t have problems talking in class and those sort of things. I think it’s more, because English is not my first language, I just find it very hard when I need to talk, especially in front of the class, and if I see someone, trying to discuss with me, I think am I saying something wrong, are people understanding what I’m saying.*

(International #25, Female, PG)

A perception of inadequate English language skills, which may in some cases be combined with a culturally-based reluctance to seek help or draw attention to oneself, was also identified as a barrier to accessing general student support services throughout the university. The change to a centralised student support structure meant that international students now had to explain their problems in relatively ‘open’ office spaces, sometimes numerous times and to multiple staff, who did not specialise in the complex situations presented by some international students. This appeared to be an added deterrent for some international students who already felt uncomfortable seeking help from strangers, and who lacked confidence in their ability to explain their problem in English.
Under the previous model, international students had access to international student advisors (ISO) who were very familiar with the issues these students face, from visa renewals to renting accommodation near other international students. Some of the ISO staff had been international students themselves and so were very knowledgeable and experienced with legislation regarding international students. It is probable that students would be more inclined and comfortable to access services under those circumstances. The challenges of communicating their issues in English were still ever-present, but there were not the additional barriers presented by the current model, making service access and utilisation even more difficult. In addition, it has been argued (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008) that international students are more likely to access services if they know ‘the face’ of the person delivering this service, and so having other international students as student officers and even peer mentors had the potential to facilitate better service utilisation, a model, according to some staff reports (Chapter 5A), which proved effective prior to 2007/8.

**International students’ understanding of English language assessments**

A related issue for many international students was confusion around common assessments of English language proficiency, such as the *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS). The confusion surrounded what their scores actually meant in terms of their capacity to engage in tertiary study, and how these measures were used by universities. International students, who sat for the IELTS as proof of English proficiency to be admitted to university, had varied opinions on the tests’ benefits and aims. Some students stated that because they had passed their IELTS, their English must be adequate for university study. Others resented the fact that some courses changed the qualifying score without adequate notice, and the money they had to spend on bridging courses:
I just have 6.5 in IELTS so that’s a good mark, but I just have 6 for reading... just for half a point, I pay three or four thousand dollars for 10 weeks [intensive English bridging course] and that’s huge money, and frankly I haven’t learnt anything about it [English language]. I think I’m good enough to start studying at universities

(International #20, Male, UG)

I’ve done it [IELTS] but when I did, the [required] score was 6.5 and now it’s 7.0 so on Saturday I have to do it again. It’s stupid.

(International #11, Female, UG)

| My Observations: | Interestingly, in the three interviews with students 11, 19, and 20, I found it very hard to understand what the international students were saying, even though all these students reported that they did not perceive there were any problems or issues with their English proficiency. |

Confusion around the levels of English required for different courses, and what different scores on language assessments actually meant, could have a potentially serious impact upon the progress of international students whose first language is not English. Incorrect beliefs about the standard expected, and the standard they have reached, can result in poor academic progress and potential failure. This would also result in significant financial losses and the humiliation of returning home to families who had sacrificed a great deal to provide the opportunity of university education in another country.

Staff members also expressed some confusion regarding what tests such as the IELTS actually signified (Chapter 5A). It appeared therefore, that assessment of English language proficiency and the standards required to successfully access university study were still areas that lacked clarity for both staff and international students.
5B.1.3 Lack of confidence when approaching staff and accessing services

The overall lack of confidence or reticence reported by many international students, whether related to concerns about English language proficiency or from a cultural predisposition, also affected their willingness to seek help from university staff or to access services. When asked about who they approached for help, many reported that they would first approach friends:

*I will talk to my friends first. Yes. And then if I cannot solve it by myself, maybe I will ask the advisor.*

(International #10, Female, UG)

*I asked my friends and I tried to find information on the internet on my own and also I asked another friend, a close one of mine, outside of school who is also a teacher. But I didn’t really go to the lecturer.*

(International #7, Female, PG)

*I have friend, and friends is better than unknown person.*

(International #19, Male, UG)

Another common response was that they would ask a staff member who was familiar to them. All student respondents from the Faculty of Education still referred to the former international student officer, who, with the introduction of the centralised model, occupied another position.

... [Name], the international student advisor... she’s a very nice person, very friendly and helpful. Students who feel very nervous in their studies, like me when I was in my first semester, I was quite dauntful with my classes and it seems to me like she really knows the psychology of international students.

(International #7, Female, PG)

*I think she’s [name] good for international students, and she often sends me an email and sees how I’m going. I think that’s good; I keep in touch with her.*

(International #10, Female, UG)
Staff members’ observations supported the idea that international students preferred accessing services where they were familiar with the person offering the service. Staff members reported that, even if they were not performing the roles of support service staff, international students who knew them from previous interactions seemed to be more comfortable seeking help from them:

*One of the things I’ve learnt about international students is, students who come from a different culture often need to know a face and know a person before they will come and access the service. So if you advertise workshops online and they don’t know who’s running them, they’re very unlikely to turn up.*

(Staff #7 - support/student processes)

*We are always aware, particularly if a marketing person has been dealing with them [international students] and they’ve got an issue, they often come back to us anyway because they remember the face. They saw you at the Orientation and they’ll come back to you.*

(Staff #33 - support/management)

*I like to think that once a student has built a rapport, at least they’ll get in touch with me.*

(Staff #19 - support/student processes)

This is consistent with literature which found that utilising services was much easier for international students if they knew the person they needed to deal with (Ang & Liamputtong, 2007; Huang, 2006; Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Rosenthal et al., 2006).

*If you can start to build this relationship with this person... for some people it’s less intimidating.*

(International #12, Female, UG)

Seeking help from unknown staff provoked the fear in at least one international student that he would be regarded in a negative manner. He stated “he’ll [a familiar lecturer] not judge you by stereotype”, suggesting an awareness that the personal contact would allow the student to
be seen as an individual. This preference for familiarity has major implications for international students and for staff members providing services to these students (see section 5B. 5).

5B.1.3 Intensity of the First Year Experience (FYE)

In the current study, the notion of greater difficulties throughout the first year was supported to some extent. For some students, even if they had completed either degrees in their home countries or attended the English Institute, found it harder at the start of their Australian university experience. However, as supported by the FYE research, these challenges decreased as they progressed through their studies and became familiar with the academic and cultural differences between their home and host countries:

*The first three or four weeks was a little bit hard. Until you get to know how to use which words, especially in the more academic way, was a little bit hard. But it was just the first ones.*

(IInternational #25, Female, PG)

*I was quite shy. But after that, I just got used to it.*

(IInternational #23, Female, HDR)

*When I was in my first semester, I was quite dauntful.*

(IInternational #7, Female, HDR)

*It’s my first semester here... at first is really complicated.*

(IInternational #20, Male, UG)

*After the first breeze [difficulties] it was quite smooth I should say.*

(IInternational #24, Female, HDR)

These findings support research by Dalziel and Peat (1997) and Krause et al. (2005) who found that English language difficulties, adapting to a more informal learning environment, and confusion about where and how to access support services, were understandably heightened during the first year.
However, the current data also showed that these difficulties were made easier for some students who had completed parts of or their whole undergraduate studies in Western countries and who were thus more accustomed to the university life:

*I don’t think it’s much different than Singapore.*

(International #6, Female, UG)

*I’ve done a master’s with [the Case University] before, so I know the system.*

(International #14, Male, HDR)

The data also showed that the university experience of some undergraduate students who had been at university for more than a year was still characterised by difficulties, providing confirmation of the idea that international students needed support for the full ‘lifecycle’ of their university studies (Higher Education Academy and UKCISA, n.d.).

5B.1.4. Response to staff attitudes and teaching methodology

Staff attitudes

The extent to which academic staff both supported international students to contribute, and encouraged native English speakers to be more accepting of students whose first language was not English, also greatly affected the experience of the international students:

*I really like my [names class] lecturer...he’s really into helping people not to reject you, but our lecture class for [names class] is not really good.*

(International #20, Male, UG)

*I think that at first I feel shy to speak in English, and then the other students, the teacher encouraged me to speak in English.*

(International #19, Male, UG)

On the other hand, as one international student explained, staff members could also have a strongly negative impact upon the experience of international students. Comments such as
“lecturers being too busy” (International #3, Male, UG) could reflect a lack of willingness to assist (while acknowledging that lecturers are indeed busy people); and the following incident reflects impatience if not outright hostility:

They should be more helpful... I have seen one of the people [staff member] who’s working in E Lab... there was a Chinese student who was really bad in English, so he was just really confused with everything, and the man in E Lab just shouted, ‘Who can speak Mandarin? He cannot speak English!’

(International #20, Male UG)

The attitudes of some academics suggested assumptions about the skills of international students and the contribution they could make, and had an impact upon how international students responded:

The lecturer for [names class] just asks questions from Australians so it’s really bad... so international students...don’t feel really comfortable in class, because it’s our second language, when we want to say something it’s totally different from what they say.

(International #20, Male, UG)

**My Observations:** This quote reminded me of seeing a writing consultant at the university. At the start of the session, it was mentioned several times how international students struggle with academic writing and we were given handouts with common international students’ mistakes written at the top. It became difficult to participate in the seminar, which also enrolled domestic students, because I had already been stereotyped as a ‘problematic international student’.

This feeling was reciprocated by international student 24, who attended the same workshop more recently, suggesting that this issue was continuing:

Everything was discussed in terms of how international students make mistakes in their writing.

(International #24, Female, HDR)
Viewing international students through a negative lens, and not acknowledging the contribution they could make, not only detracts from the experience of the international students, but denies domestic students the opportunity of learning from their international peers, and thus engaging more fully in a globally relevant education.

**Teaching methodology**

In addition to the broader attitudinal approach of academic staff, their pedagogical skills were also of great relevance – as one student expressed it: “[methods of] conveying information is important...teaching method is important” (International #3, Male, UG).

Part of the methodology that was critical for international students was the ease with which they could understand the lecturer or tutor. A number of respondents made comments similar to “lecturer’s accents…difficult to follow” (International #16, Male, PG; International #17, Female, PG; International #18, Female, PG; International #21, Female, UG). Another expressed it as follows:

> Some lecturers are considerate….they slow down their speech. But some don’t pay attention to international students. They assume that international students should understand the lecturer. [I think] that teaching staff should be given training about international students.

(International #3, Male, UG)

Content expertise and level of experience were also important considerations for international students. Two postgraduate students were critical of the fact that their supervisors were “inexperienced” (International #3, Male, UG; International #5, Male, HDR). This was seen as an important factor because these students expected their supervisors and tutors to have the knowledge to help them. Being seen as ‘inexperienced’ was an issue especially for the HDR student who argued that the “supervisor is the most important” person during his candidature.
The extent to which strategies consistent with an internationalised curriculum were incorporated was also important for international students. Two students remarked that lecturers should be mindful that using only Australian examples isolates international students further:

*We come from another system, an entirely different system. And he just talks about details in Western Australian context, and we just couldn’t connect.*

(International #23, Female, HDR)

As can be seen by the international students’ responses, they do not want to be identified as ‘problematic’, but rather to benefit from an academic lecturing style that facilitates a positive domestic student response, and encourages and values the contribution that international students can make. This is in line with discussions regarding inclusive and student-centred teaching (Arkoudis, 2006; Biggs, 2003; Cannon & Newble, 2000; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003), where international students are encouraged to become the ‘expert’ and the focus is not on what the students do, but what students learn, thus supporting Biggs’ notion of a Level Three teacher as the most effective (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Importantly, the view was that the responsibilities of the teaching staff included being able to ‘reach’ the international students, rather than placing the full responsibility for learning on the student:

*So the student always has in mind the fact that if, especially coming from another country, that you are lower than the lecturer. So the reaching point has to come from the lecturer, not from the student.*

(International #12, Female, UG)

This quote supports Hofstede’s (1986) Power Distance (PD) construct which addresses the degree of equality within a culture and how this power difference is accepted by those individuals who identify as belonging to that culture. This would be particularly relevant for students whose home country was hierarchical rather than egalitarian in nature, and who would
be more likely to have difficulty questioning people they perceive to be in a position of authority, even if this puts them at risk of continued misunderstandings. This would suggest that, as the authority figures, it is the lecturers who need to make particular effort to reach international students who see themselves as ‘inferior’. However, as pointed out by Sanderson (2006), caution should be taken when using models which rely on students’ cultural backgrounds to make conclusions about their behaviours. Instead, teachers should adopt the approach of Biggs’ Level Three Teacher, where the focus is on the desired learning outcomes and the strategies and teaching/learning context that will assist the students to meet those outcomes instead of focusing on characteristics associated with the students’ cultural background.

5B.1.5 Perception of domestic students’ attitudes

Comments from a number of the international respondents suggested they viewed domestic students as being somewhat insular, not only in the learning environment, but also more widely:

*It’s about the locals. They are in small groups, they don’t like to talk with others; don’t like to mix with others.*

(International #13, Male, PG)

*I found that a few people in class they look at you and say, especially in things like group discussions, because your experience is overseas, so they are not so interested about listening to your experience.*

(International #25, Female, HDR)

*Need to feel more welcome.*

(International #3, Male, UG)

*University should invest more to increase social networks, increase integration between Australian and international students.*

(International #2, Female, HDR)
Interestingly, the international students pointed out that they actually preferred to be among local students, and came to Australia to experience the Australian culture:

*Actually I prefer being among locals. I like to listen about their experiences.*

(International #25, Female, HDR)

*I believe at the end of the day, what you get here is not just the award of your degree, but you must also come up with valuable networks, the social side of it. People here more or less work as individuals. They don’t really realise the need for us to use this time, that we are working in the same university, to get to know each other beyond academic.*

(International #14, Male, HDR)

International student 3 explained how, because he felt so alone, he joined the sports facility to meet new friends. After two months going to the gym, he withdrew because no one talked to him. He still had to pay the fees, because he was locked into a contract, even if he did not use the facilities anymore. He then joined the Guild, again, in an attempt to meet people and make friends. He commented that the activities rarely included students, only the Guild staff. He further discussed that in his faculty they did not have a peer mentoring program and that because of the numerous failed attempts to make new friends, he did not socialise. He came to class and went straight home after class.

This feeling was also reported by International student 13, who commented that “sometimes you get ignored”, to capture how he felt when he joined the engineering club. He further added that “they [team members were] saying, either you have to do whatever we’re doing, or you cannot be part of the team.”

Feelings of rejection, even if only passive rather than overtly hostile, would clearly have an impact upon the experience of international students, and could lead to increasing feelings of
isolation such as that described in the previous scenario. This pattern is consistent with the notion of “othering”, described by Palfreyman (2005) as:

The ways in which the discourse of a particular group defines other groups in opposition to itself: an Us and Them view that constructs an identity for the Other and, implicitly, for the Self... Othering of another group typically involves maintaining social distance and making value judgments (often negative) based on stereotyped opinions about the group as a whole. (pp. 213-214)

5B.2 International students' experiences with university level services

Experiences that operated at the university level also had great potential to impact upon the perceptions of international students. Those reported by the students in this research essentially related to service provision. One service in particular was greatly valued by the postgraduate students, while issues with tutorial size and dissatisfaction with some existing services were also reported.

5B.2.1 Response to targeted services for higher degree students

The seven Higher Degree by Research (HDR) respondents were overwhelmingly positive in their responses to a postgraduate centre which had been developed as a pilot program in 2009 to provide support, opportunities, advice and resources for HDR students. Working together with the faculties and supervisors, the centre provided a “one-stop-shop” for HDR students to access support in terms of their research, short-term employment and career planning. The centre also provided on-line modules for research training for both HDR students and their supervisors, and operated a peer mentoring program, whereby HDR students advanced in their studies mentored new students and helped them with long term career planning. As the peer mentors were going
through the same journey, they could better direct new HDR students to what was available and how to make the most of the services. Of the seven HDR students interviewed, all agreed that they knew where to go as a “first port of call”.

While not specifically designed for international students, the existence of this centre does acknowledge the needs of a particular cohort of students, and appeared to be successful in meeting them very effectively.

5B.2.2 Response according to tutorial size

While some students, particularly the more assertive ones, would seek help if the issue was important enough, the data suggested that the number of students in the tutorials or workshops was a factor that affected the international students’ willingness to ask questions, to interact, and to seek help if necessary. This was particularly true if lecture numbers were large:

*The lecturer has a lot of students to handle, but tutor has only 20, and I use tutor.*

(International #19, Male, UG)

The student explained that he could ask the tutor for clarifications because the class was small, and the tutor was more familiar with the students than the lecturer was. The smaller class would increase the chances that the tutor interacted more with the students and therefore got to know them better. This is consistent with the view reported earlier that international students felt more comfortable requesting help from someone who was familiar to them.

A related matter was the fact that a number of the students mentioned that they would only ask for help if the matter was “important”:

*If the things are important I will ask - for example, about assignments, or whatever - but if not important, I will not ask.*

(International #10, Female, UG)
Another student who had been studying in Australia for more than three years still felt that she could not ask questions in class, and would wait until she was “desperate” to contact her lecturers. This suggested that timely requests for help were less common than they should be, and that some international students may often be anxious because of their reluctance to seek help. International students’ overwhelming preference for dealing with a familiar person, which was more likely to occur in smaller groups, suggests that they would fare better both academically and socially if tutorial sizes were smaller. While difficult to manage in the current climate, greater academic success and more enjoyable experiences for international students was likely to result in positive outcomes for the university in the longer term. This was supported by staff members who agreed that using workshop models, specifically for academic support, was not as effective with some international students, who preferred individual consultations (see Chapter 5A).

5B.2.3 Dissatisfaction with existing services

Lack of specific services required by international students

Some of the sampled international students indicated that there was a lack of specific services to help them deal with new difficulties they encountered as part of their transition to university in a completely new context. Two international students described how they felt completely alone having to organise their ‘new life’ with no help or guidance:

*If you don’t know anyone here it’s really hard to find a place because you need recommendations and there’s no-one to help you.*

(International #24, Female, HDR)

*Most of the students here don’t have a family here. They are homesick. They have to manage that, like me. I am working part-time also and I have to organise myself, work,*
studies and my family, interaction with my friends. Everything I have to organise all those things, which I need not to do in my country. I was just studying and that is it.

(International #8, Female, UG)

This is supported by First Year Experience (FYE) research, which refers to the enormous practical, academic and social adjustments, demanded of students during their first year (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005; McInnis, 2001). The quotes also support research relating to addressing the practicalities when relocating for university studies, which argues that international students can face a range of challenges (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Novera, 2004; Marginson et al., 2010; Scheyvens, Wild & Overton, 2003), especially during the transition phase. Research also indicated that some international students suffered from homesickness and the loss of their social support (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004), which was reported by some international students in the current study.

Students also indicated there was a lack of services which recognised and catered for international students’ religious ceremonies and dietary restrictions:

Some of the students, they’re having a problem with food because they’re Muslims, as you know; they’re eating Hallal, especially when it’s related with meat... Some of us can avoid this problem, but sometimes when you’re putting pork or ham in a sandwich, please make it very obvious because we don’t eat pork and ham.

(International #13, Male, PG)

Not having familiar food and/or places to worship have been reported in previous research (Furnham, 2004; Lin & Yi, 1997) as having an impact upon students’ adjustment to their host country. It can also lead to some international students feeling that they did not belong to the university.
My Observations: I am reminded of the interview with domestic student#6 and a conversation I had with a fellow international student about classes clashing with prayer times, especially during Ramadan. I also wonder if there are allowances during this time for Muslim students who are fasting. Similarly, other religions would also have times when students are fasting-do staff consider this and allow flexibility in terms of class attendance during these times?

Other international students commented that activities often involved alcohol, which placed them into what they perceived to be awkward situations because they did not drink:

_I tried to break the ice and get involved with the engineer club and the first time they will come to me, then later on things becoming a bit more, I don’t know the guys over there, are they saying either you have to do whatever we’re doing [alcohol] or you cannot be part of the team._

(International #13, Male, PG)

Another student reported that some activities were held too late for them to feel comfortable travelling home “because it’s not that safe to stay out so late, and so I don’t attend them” (International #6, Female, UG). Thus many international students found that socializing and blending into their new environment was challenging on a number of fronts, as cultural differences were not acknowledged or considered. This supports research regarding addressing the practicalities of studying in another country, where concerns for personal safety was recorded as being one of the most important considerations for international students when choosing the host country for their education (Marginson et al., 2010; Universities Australia, 2011). Further, with the recent increase in attacks on some international students (CCC, 2010; Dong, 2012; Mason, 2012), this might deter other international students from attending activities, possibly even university classes, which are held later in the night.
The comments regarding lack of specific services also extended to international students’ academic development. They reported difficulties in finding appropriate work placements that were required for the successful completion of their degrees, a finding supported by Trice (2003). These students believed it was the university’s responsibility to organise work placements for international students since the students themselves might not be aware of how to go about seeking such placements, or employers might not be willing to use international students without endorsement from institutions:

*When I came here I found out that to graduate my degree I have to do 12 weeks’ work experience. That’s another issue because nobody’s interested to hire international students. Some of them said you can do this work experience in your own country as a solution, but I’m here in Australia, I’m here to learn. I will do the whole degree in my country. Why am I here? There’s no benefit. I’m here to learn.*

(International #13, Male, PG)

*I would want … probably an industry attachment…so that by the time you come out of the education system you have got a practical exposure… there could be really a conscious effort to attach a student to their particular career and probably they can negotiate with the employers even on a voluntary basis where I’m not even paid.*

(International #14, Male, HDR)

This point was supported by a career support staff member:

*Because they’re on student visas, sometimes that can be an issue for them because the reality is that a lot of employers will not employ international students.*

(Staff #28 support/student processes)

**Insufficient Services**

Other international students identified services which existed, but not in sufficient quantity to meet their needs. These included insufficient study space on campus, which could affect all students, but possibly affect international students more because of their overcrowded
accommodation (International #21, Female, UG); insufficient copies of prescribed texts in the library (International #11, Female, UG); limited access to computers (International #22, Female, UG); and limited access to electronic libraries in languages other than English (International #17, Female, PG; International #11, Female, UG). International students were less likely to know where to locate alternative free internet services or second-hand texts, which increased their reliance on university services, or on information provided by the university about alternatives. Some of these issues are not unique to the international student population; however, as the lack of study space and insufficient copies of prescribed texts impact upon other student cohorts as well.

**Lack of coordination of existing services**

In some cases, services existed, but information about where they were located and how they could be accessed, was poorly co-ordinated:

*Either I didn’t have this information as well, so where should I go, and which service.*

(International #25, Female, PG)

International students described a series of frustrating and unhelpful encounters when trying to access particular services. One particular student (International #11, Female, UG) reported that she would never again go to the student information centre, which is now the first point of help for all students, after being sent from there to the faculty office, which sent her to the international office, who sent her to a lecturer, who then sent her back to the faculty office.

Dissatisfaction with the student information centre was also raised by another international student, who claimed that staff there were not ‘specific’ enough (International #3, Male, UG):
Well, they sent me everywhere. First I went to the faculty office and they told me no, they do not deal with student visas. They said that it’s the responsibility of international office. I went there and they told me that since I’ve been here for quite a while, the international office does not deal with that and to go to the student central. I was a bit annoyed because it was difficult to find someone specific to go to.

(International #4, Male, HDR)

It appeared that as soon as some staff heard a student mention ‘visa’ or ‘international student’, they automatically assumed that the international office would be able to help. Misunderstandings on the part of students and faculty staff about the new role of the International Office (IO) were mentioned by four international students. After the introduction of the centralised model of service provision, the IO only handled admissions. Once enrolled, all students accessed the centralised student support centre. Some staff members seemed to be unaware of this and so were still sending students to the IO, where IO staff then sent students all over the university:

_The international office staff do not want to listen._

(International #3, Male, UG)

*She [IO staff] didn’t know where to put me in. And so I tried to find my way [by myself].*

(International #11, Female, UG)

Another student reported her experience when, distraught over a family emergency in her home country, she needed expert advice and help immediately:

... my husband came to work in Australia, and he got a phone call and they asked him to come back [home], and I went here to student services, to ask a question ... because I was thinking about withdrawing from my course, and this was an option at this time. And they said ‘are you an international student’, ‘yes I am’, so ‘no you have to talk to international student services information centre’. I called there and they said ‘no there’s no one here that can answer your questions’. We drove to [names campus], got there, a guy picked up the phone, he was just like on the floor next to me, and I said ‘I came here from [names campus] to see you’, explain all the things, on the phone he said ‘no, that’s not me, you
should go to international student services’. I said ‘I just went there; they said that it’s with you, can you see me?’ ‘No, I can’t see you. In 10 minutes I’m going home, and that’s international services’. So I went back. I got here, explained the whole situation again and they said ‘no there’s another sector that’s going to answer your questions’. So I was feeling like ping-pong between all those people. And the service that they should provide that was international service in [names campus]; the guy was just rude and awful.

(International #25, Female, PG)

The lack of knowledge on the part of the centralised support staff regarding the correct avenue of support, added greatly to the distress experienced by this student. She was being sent from one campus to another, without anyone being able to help her. Service utilisation would have been optimised in this case if the student had been directed to the right person, provided one was available and knowledgeable about student visas and the implications of withdrawing from units. But such outcomes are reliant on staff being fully informed. This point was also identified as one of the ‘frustrations’ staff felt, as reported in Chapter 5A.

Reports of international students being ‘lost’ or ‘confused’ as a result of poor communication and/or coordination were also recounted by staff:

_I remember last year there was a student who arrived at the airport. Luckily enough there was someone from his home country on the plane who was an [Case University] student, so he says, “I’ll take you to the campus” and the student came here at 4 o’clock in the evening, nowhere to live and we were lucky - fortunate enough, we managed to find him a room at the student village just temporarily for him to stay and then we took him to the shopping centre for him to buy food for that night and for breakfast the next morning._

(Staff #11-support/management)

**My Observations:** I have experienced this situation before as well. It was 3am on a Saturday, when a friend called and asked me if there is room at my house for a couple who had just landed in Australia who had nowhere to stay. The Case University had not arranged prior accommodation and this couple came to my house in the middle of the night with a one year old child. We had to help them
set up bank accounts, take them to university which was starting the next week, and find child care.

A mitigating factor may be that the university was going through the transitional period as one model of service was replaced by another during data collection. This may have added to the confusion for both students and staff members regarding which departments were responsible for which services. Nevertheless, the number of international students who reported unsatisfactory and even distressing experiences suggested that the model was introduced without the necessary training of staff to ensure more appropriate and timely responses. Apart from those mentioned already, three other international students stated that the centralised student information centre required “more staff” (International # 17, Female, PG) as students had to stand in “long queues” (International #16- Male, PG) to find out information, which was sometimes urgent.

**Electronic information difficult to navigate**

Yet another university-level experience reported by international students concerned the difficulties they faced when navigating the university’s website, which is often the first place students accessed when seeking information or support, particularly if they lacked confidence in their oral communication skills. Accessing information about available services on the website was regarded as even more difficult than seeking information from other sources (International #16, Male, PG; International #17, Female, PG; International #18, Female, PG; International #21, Female, UG):

*I think the website is very hard to navigate...for example that time when I came, I didn’t know there was such a thing for the driver reception for the international students. And the thing is, it was so hard to navigate for the information.*

(International #6, Female, UG)
The website is a little bit confusing for the first time because I have to open many sites, the faculty’s websites and all of the other websites

(International #15, Male, PG)

...the website is not user-friendly enough, I think... It’s a bit difficult, because [Case University] is big and there are quite a lot of different departments. So I understand the challenge. Like [names another university] their website has the pull-down menu. I find that it’s helpful.

(International #23, Female, HDR)

It’s so hard to... you know, if you’re not very computer savvy it’s hard to find out when it is [programs being offered], where it is. The website is not very friendly.

(International #24, Female, HDR)

This view was also supported by some staff members who questioned whether the Case University was promoting the services effectively or whether the difficulties arose because so many services were located in the faculties which meant accessing another level of information.

As discussed in Chapter 2, many universities now use ICT to promote and deliver their courses and some of their services. However, as was also discussed, ICT has culture-specific elements. Some international students still preferred face-to-face services, as they can still experience difficulties with using ICT, especially if it is in an additional language (Tour, 2009; Walsh, 2007). From the study’s findings, it is clear that some international students were experiencing difficulties finding information using ICT, which suggests that the Case University needs to look specifically at how international students interact with web-delivered information to facilitate information retrieval (IR) about the courses and services available to the these students. The issue of difficulties navigating the website was not unique to the international students, however, since staff members also reported this challenge; suggesting that it is a systematic issue within the university, impacting upon both staff and students.

Timing of information delivery
Student Orientation

As with web-delivered information, the official Student Orientation period is traditionally one of the first opportunities for international students to learn about what lies ahead for them (Berg, 2003; De Leeuw, Nicholson & Gao, 2009; Kelm, Hult, & Lashbrooke, 2003; Yucas, 2003). Missing Orientation has therefore been identified as one of the crucial factors in international students’ lack of knowledge regarding university support services. Unfortunately, the complexity of visa arrangements and international travel often meant that international students missed Orientation. The impact of this can be profound:

Actually, I late for that one [Orientation]. So I just join in with the whole, and actually I can’t understand most of that [services offered], because maybe I’m late, or the language problem.

(International #10, Female, UG)

No, I came a bit late because my application got a bit delayed, so I couldn’t attend the Orientation.

(International #24, Female, HDR)

Many international students needed to find accommodation, adjust to a new city and different culture, and in some cases, organise childcare - and all in a language in which they were not completely confident or proficient. The complexity of the ‘setting-up’ period relegated attendance at Orientation to the bottom of a new international student’s priority list:

But my friend had trouble, like you know, [the Case University] they come and pick you up at the airport and they drop you to a temporary housing but that place is very expensive so they couldn’t say there for long, but they had no choice, they didn’t know any other place to go, so they had to look around and find a house quickly, they were running out of their money... They don’t have time to just come to uni for a two hour session or a one hour session if they don’t think it’s useful.

(International #24, Female, HDR)
This was supported by research which suggested that some international students did not attend Orientation due to lengthy visa processing times, which then lead to late entry to university (Dalglish & Chan, 2005; March, Zeman & Adrian, 2005).

In the current study, although students reported feeling ‘lost’ because they had not attended Orientation, attendance did not guarantee that they would have a clear understanding of the services being offered. As one international student stated, there was simply too much information being given at Orientation for an international student to follow. This student was not confident in her language skills and so did not ask for clarifications. As is typical of some international students during Orientation Week, she had yet to find permanent accommodation - she was still living in a temporary arrangement with friends - and was experiencing her first time away from home. In cases like these, information given during Orientation about the broad range of available services was likely to get ‘lost in translation’. Interestingly, an international student whose first language was English also reported that “too many leaflets” were handed out at Orientations, which “increases confusion” (International #2, Female, HDR). Therefore, it was not solely an English comprehension issue, but an information over-load issue.

Missing Orientation or attending Orientation but being over-loaded with information appeared to significantly affect international students’ awareness of services. In Chapter 2, there were discussions of how some universities offered online Orientation for international students, but as was discussed, not all international students are computer-literate and, internet connections in home countries can be problematic. A better understanding of the complexity of the setting up period should help the Case University’s services to offer more timely assistance and package it more appropriately.
Inappropriateness of existing services

In addition to a lack of coordination of existing services, some international students reported that the Case University was providing services with which they were unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

Counselling services

Eight international students were not aware what a counsellor’s role was, or if the Case University provided the counselling services. One international student did not know about the multi-faith chaplaincy or understand the pastor’s role. Of those who were aware of the counselling services, none had used the services, either saying that they did not think using the service would benefit them or that they would prefer to talk to friends and family about their personal problems rather than seeing a counsellor:

*I don’t think I have any serious problems that I have to, it is not necessary for me to meet them [counsellors].*

(International #7, Female, PG)

*I will talk to my friends first. Yes. And then if I cannot solve it by myself maybe I will ask the advisor.*

(International #10, Female, UG)

*I have friend, and friends is better than unknown person.*

(International #19, Male, UG)

This observation supports the research of Barletta and Kobayashi (2007), who argued that cultural differences were important reasons for under-utilisation of counselling. They noted that counselling is, by and large, a Westernised practice: a type of ‘talking therapy’ that is unfamiliar to some international students. In addition, many cultures share the perception that going to see someone about ‘personal problems’ reflects weakness (Ayalon & Alvidrez, 2007; Corrigan,
This view was supported by a student who said that “advice is personal rather than professional” (International #18, Female, PG). When asked to clarify, she explained that a counsellor is seen as a ‘professional’ and if she needed advice, she would rather speak to her friends.

That ‘talking therapies’ tend to concentrate on the individual may account for some of the ongoing resistance of international students to engaging with counselling services. Understanding the differences between individualistic and collectivist societies (Hofstede, 1986) can provide some insights into why some international students struggle with accessing some services, bearing in mind that there are individual differences between students from the same culture. What is clear from this study is that reasons for a lack of counselling (and general) service utilisation are multi-faceted and complex.

Health services

Healthcare was also discussed as one of the on-campus services with which international students were unfamiliar. In the current study, two of the international students reported that when they felt ill, they relied on traditional remedies from their home countries/culture rather than going to a General Practitioner. One postgraduate student said she had brought along her traditional medicines, and only after she has exhausted that supply, would she consider going to see a doctor. Another international student related a story about a friend – also international – who went to see a doctor, but was unable to explain her symptoms. This led the participant to recommend that his friend use their traditional medicine:

“You know the doctor talk about the history of IBN, or whatever, he just talking, and my friend have no chance to talk about the symptoms about herself. And I don’t think the doctor really know what happened to [names friend]. I just told my friend to use our own medicine.”
Other students, however, commented that having a doctor on campus suited them. Some did mention that their English proficiency was a concern in terms of “difficulty expressing” their presenting symptoms. These findings support literature which showed that international students’ difficulties with language have the capacity to stop them seeking medical help, as they feel less confident in their ability to explain the ailment (Collins, 2001). Further, the findings also supported Anderson’s (1994) research which found that the cultural customs and traditions of international students have the capacity to impact upon their health seeking behaviours, for example using traditional medicines. As discussed, however, most international students in this study did not report concerns about accessing health-care, suggesting that again, there are individual differences within the international student cohort.

5B.3 Suggestions to improve the provision of International Education

International students provided suggestions aimed at improving both their social and academic lives. These will be discussed separately, but as pointed out in Chapter 2, factors which influenced students’ academic and social experiences were often inter-connected and influenced each other.

5B.3.1 Suggestions to improve students’ social experiences

*Target domestic students for cultural awareness programs*

International students believed that suggestions to improve international students’ social lives should be targeted at increasing acceptance by and promoting interactions with domestic students:
We are not afraid of others. It’s a message not to us, a message to the people here. You shouldn’t be targeting me for this subject of international and accepting the others. I’m accepting others, I’m here, but it’s about living here, to let them know that it has to be directed to the Australians themselves.

(International #13, Male, PG)

I found that a few people in class they look at you and say, especially in things like group discussions, because your experience is overseas, so they are not so interested about listening to your experience.

(International #25, Female, HDR)

This student pointed out that because he was a casual staff member as well, he went to a cultural awareness training aimed at commencing staff members only to find that there were only other international staff there and no Australian staff members. He commented that it is possible that at that point there might have been no Australian staff starting their careers at the Case University, but that was considered ‘unlikely’ by the student. He therefore suggested the above - to target domestic staff and domestic students for cultural awareness, because as an international student, he does not have any issues with mixing with other cultures, because he chose to study in an international university for that purpose.

Sponsor cultural events

As well as cultural awareness training for domestic students and staff, other students pointed out that currently at the Case University, there were no cultural events, no chances to raise awareness of the different cultures present, and no buddy programs (International #5, Male, HDR; International #2, Female, HDR):

No cultural events, no chances for people... I mean you have a lot of international students at [Case University], you can have ... maybe an international students day or something, where international students can come in their cultural costumes – this is just an idea, but you know, they should have some more interaction in those terms for people
from different nations to bring in their culture ...and I guess just share with others the different cultures we have.

(International #24, Female, HDR)

The student went further to explain that although students and staff were busy and might not attend, having cultural days during teaching periods, on the campus grounds somewhere near the library or cafeteria would at least catch the attention of students and staff on campus. This idea was also supported by international student 13, who suggested that events which took place in the tavern or those which included alcohol might not work for all international students. He suggested that the Case University should promote sporting and musical events, to bring all students together, regardless of backgrounds:

*Things like sports, music, I think those two things are one of the most - you don’t have to speak the same language; you don’t have to look like this. They should focus on more sports, more music.*

(International #13, Male, PG)

**My Observations:** Under the old model, we used to have football tournaments where the Australian students played against the different international student groups. There would be free sausage sizzles and soft drinks, which attracted many students. There were also prizes, and these were held on Sundays. Students’ families also came along to cheer. After the move to the new model, the student groups ceased to exist. Some international students formed their groups themselves without the endorsement of the university, with the purpose of supporting each other. I am aware of the Indonesian student group and the Saudi-Arabian student group.

However, international student 13 also argued that one week of cultural events was not enough, and that “for lots of cultures and lots of people here you can just enter any class and you can see how they’re diversified”. It would be better, according to this student, to have diversity
being embraced not only in social settings but in academic settings, that is, in classrooms as well, as discussed in the next section.

**Facilitate culturally mixed groups in class**

One student suggested that social interactions needed to be encouraged in academic settings. This would best be done by lecturers and tutors selecting group members, instead of leaving students to self-elect in groups:

*The instructors, the labs, the researchers, you shouldn’t let them say, form your group. No, you should select the group so they can mix together and breaking the ice.*

(International #13, Male, PG)

This was supported by another student who argued that being in international-only groups actually decreased his English proficiency because he was not practising with native English speakers. Further, being in those groups did not allow him to experience the Australian culture or to understand the Australian way of thinking and doing. He even suggested that mixed groups would not only benefit him and other international students, but also the domestic students, who would get a chance to learn about other cultures from international students:

*But the worst way to resolve this problem is to put international in international groups I think, that’s the worst way of doing that, that’s a kind of racism in my opinion... I come from a different culture, a different background so I can present lots of things that they don’t know, they can learn [from] me.*

(International #20, Male, UG)

This finding supports research which has also found that in the long term, co-national friendships have the capacity to hinder language acquisition and general adaptation to the new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Kim, 2001; Maundeni, 2006). Although this view was supported by some staff members, intercultural interaction is very complex. Summers and Volet (2008) reported that even when students worked in culturally
mixed groups, there were no significant differences between first, second and third year students’ attitudes towards culturally-mixed groups, which suggested that there were no attitudinal changes towards culturally-mixed groups as students progressed through their degrees. Further, research using contact theory argues that stereotypes about the ‘other’ can actually be reinforced if students are forced to work in culturally-mixed groups (Allport, 1979; Amir, 1969). From the above, and with comments from international students that domestic students were “not motivated” (International #20; Male, UG); “took too long” (International #11, Female, UG) to complete tasks for the group, or that “the locals...they are in small groups, they don’t like to talk with others; don’t like to mix with others” (International #13, Male, PG); it was deemed necessary to then recruit domestic students to give them the opportunity to discuss their experiences regarding culturally-mixed groups. These will be discussed in Chapter 5C.

**5B.3.2 Suggestions to improve students’ academic experiences**

*Provide content-specific academic support*

Some international students suggested that having learning advisors deliver content-specific classes were more suitable and they preferred individual consultations (International #3, Male, UG; international #22, Female, UG) rather than the workshop model, which was described as a “back to high school approach” (International #5, Male, HDR).

*Provide references to support accommodation and work placements*

International students reported that being in a new country; they expected the Case University to provide references for them, or a support letter which confirmed that they were a student. This would facilitate the process when students were trying to secure accommodation and employment:
Being an international student you don’t have any references that may count in your favour so that area is really a serious problem... [the University] should probably be in a position to come up with a document of support just so say confirm this is student here, blah, blah, blah, fully paid, whatever it is, whatever they can do just to try and support your application for accommodation.

(International #14, Male, HDR)

References for relevant work placements were also discussed, especially for students who were completing second and subsequent degrees for which some work experience was required. As alternative suggestion was to provide volunteering opportunities for these students through strategic partnerships with employers:

[There] could be really a conscious effort to attach a student to their particular career and probably they can negotiate with the employers even on a voluntary basis where I’m not even paid.

(International #14, Male, HDR)

5B.4 Summary

In summary, experiences which influenced international students’ perceptions of their university education were categorised into those that operated at the student level, and those that operated at the university level.

The student level experiences included:

- Some positive responses to their university experience;
- Perception of inadequate personal communication skills;
- Lack of confidence when approaching staff and accessing services;
- Varied responses to staff attitudes and teaching methodology; and
- Perceptions of domestic students’ attitudes.

At the university level, experiences influencing international students’ perceptions included:
• Positive response to targeted services for higher degree students;

• Preference for smaller tutorials; and

• Dissatisfaction with existing services.

**My Observations:** It was a bit difficult to transcribe the interviews from international students because of the heavy accents and some of them did not speak English very well, so it took more time. Plus, some were very shy. I can understand now what the staff members were going through. I think the onus lies with the Case University either not to admit students whose English is not of a high enough standard, or provide enough support for these students; because I think the current situation is unfair on all parties involved.
Chapter 5C

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Domestic Students’ Experiences

This chapter reports on the views of a sample of domestic students, who were included as a result of theoretical sampling after staff members and international students referred to issues that involved domestic students. The research question that guided the collection of these data is as follows:

Research Question 3: What experiences influence domestic students’ perceptions of International Education at one Australian university?

Responses to this question have been organised in a similar fashion to those relating to staff and international students. Experiences operating at the individual domestic student level are discussed before those that operated at the broader university level (see Figure 5C.1).
Figure 5C.1: Themes relating to the experiences of domestic students

5C.1 Experiences at the domestic student level

5C.1.1. Perceptions of their multi-cultural university

Among the small group of domestic students interviewed, there was generally an acknowledgement of the benefits of their multicultural learning context, but also clear disappointment in the limited way in which they were experiencing this:

*I think there is great richness and a great safety net in being exposed to differences... [But] our curriculum is not at all culturally diverse.*

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)
If you have a diverse class or different cultures then everyone’s got different stories and ideas and beliefs and values... [but] unless it’s a unit that discusses things like minority groups or indigenous culture or something like that, then maybe the lecturer might draw on asking those that are from a different cultural background to share their stories, but otherwise, no.

(Domestic # 8, Female, UG)

I personal see the benefits [of cultural diversity] but I don’t experience the benefits.

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)

I mean cultural differences are discussed in our text books and they give lectures on it but they don’t really apply it.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

The domestic students who participated in the study were somewhat critical of their domestic peers, with one stating that most were “still ignorant” of cross-cultural issues. A number of other comments supported this view:

Young Australians are incredibly insular...many young people here just have never gone out of their suburb virtually until they get here. I think it’s [the multicultural University] extraordinarily valuable to both incoming students and Australians.

(Domestic # 6, Female, UG)

I think with domestic students it’s like, since the international students cannot speak English that well they sort of reject them that way but they [Australian students] don’t even make the effort to actually communicate with these [international] students ... It’s a two way thing.

(Domestic #10, Female, UG)

Those who haven’t come into contact with a lot of different people, they are likely to be more “us” and “them” very easily on the smallest of things.

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)

Seven of the ten domestic students interviewed had lived and/or worked overseas, with three being migrants to Australia. The other three had not travelled overseas, but they commented that their academic and family backgrounds helped them become aware of diversity. One domestic
student further added that her ‘maturity’, ‘personality’ and ‘discipline’ also impacted upon her acceptance of diversity, as she was a mature-aged student who had experienced working with different cultures but also, because she was studying psychology, which helped her understand that there was more than one way of thinking. That ‘discipline’ helped students become more appreciative of ‘others’ was also supported by the five other domestic students who were also studying psychology. The backgrounds of these students suggest that the sample was not broadly typical, and adds further caution to generalising the results.\(^7\)

5C.1.2. Perceptions of some international students’ communication skills

Despite their acknowledgment of the benefits of a diverse university, and in some cases of the difficulties that international students might be experiencing in having to do “double the work in order to understand fully what the lecturer is saying or what the actual assignment is all about” (Domestic #7, Female, UG), communication issues were mentioned repeatedly as causing difficulties.

For eight of the domestic students, lack of English proficiency on the part of some international students was seen to be a significant barrier when working in culturally mixed groups:

*Their [international students] English isn’t great and along with the accent, it’s hard to understand sometimes.*

(Domestic #9, Male, UG)

*... In business you have a lot of Chinese students and their pronunciation – how they pronounce English is very different - and a lot of people are impatient with paying attention to what they’re saying.*

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\(^7\) Two domestic students pointed out that they would not know who were international or local on campus unless they were doing group work where they learnt about other students in their group or if they were given an assignment which focused on international students
This semester we had one [an international student] and we decided not to give him that much workload due to the barrier, the English language barrier.

There was, however, one encouraging report of how a group supported the international student among them, with a positive result:

*We had this guy from Thailand and he was very sweet, but he was really shy and we had to give a presentation and he was really nervous and we sort of helped him, and he had his little translator and we tried to slow down how we spoke, because we speak very fast, and, in the end, he actually did really well in his presentation.*

Another issue which arose was the reluctance on the part of many international students to speak in English:

*[If] you’ve come to an English speaking country you should make the effort to speak ... they need to make the effort to actually speak ... so everyone can understand what is happening otherwise it’s a one way conversation - you’re trying to tell them something that they’re not understanding. It’s like talking to a wall, but at the same time I feel sorry because it’s hard on them here, it’s a new country, new environment, new people, some people could be nice, and some people could be nasty.*

This issue was exacerbated for some domestic students who resented the fact that some international students spoke in their own languages around them, especially when the domestic students were doing extra work to help the international students:

*When international students come here I’ve noticed they tend to talk a lot in their own language, which I mean it’s fair enough but I don’t think it actually helps because if you speak English more then you would you’d get much better English but if they speak in their own language it’s a bit harder.*
I personally find it insulting if someone standing next to me talks in their language and I don’t understand it.

(Domestic #10, Female, UG)

While these excerpts reveal domestic students’ frustration with the communication difficulties, many included qualifying statements that reveal some level of empathy towards their international peers. Some also attributed communication difficulties to the international students’ cultural backgrounds, rather than simply to poor English language proficiency. This thinking has been documented in literature, in that it has been argued that what has been labelled as lack of English proficiency could actually be a combination of issues, which may affect students’ willingness to interact with others (Arthur, 2004; Bailey & Dua, 1999):

I think it was a cultural problem because … she was Lebanese/South American and when you read the profile of those two countries, it seemed to me that …she only felt comfortable dealing with someone she knew intimately; she didn’t trust anybody because that’s the way those cultures work, they work on familiar and other strong historic connections.

(Domestic #6, Female, PG)

Other domestic students referred to the international students’ cultural backgrounds to explain their general behaviour, as well as their lack of English proficiency:

I think it could be an English thing but I think it’s also a confidence thing and I think there’s so many cultural differences. I mean, in some cultures, being outspoken, being sort of extroverted is looked down upon. In Japan, you know, respect for elders, anyone above you, you are submissive to. So they might find it difficult in a tutorial to have open discussion because maybe they feel they have to be invited or directed.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

Asian people ...always keep their heads down and even if I said like “Hi, how you doing?” I wouldn’t necessarily get a response or if I smiled it would just be a blank face back.

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)
Domestic student 2, however, went on to explain that after completing a unit in psychology where they discussed facial expressions in different cultures, it “made sense” why “they” behaved the way that they do, in regards to eye contact and the “blank face”.

5C.1.3 Challenges associated with culturally mixed group work

Despite the evidence of some empathy for the international students’ situation, there remained for six of the domestic students interviewed some resentment around group assignments, particularly when the groups included students with limited English language proficiency, and when the domestic students perceived that their grades suffered as a result of multi-cultural group assessment tasks:

Most Australians are quite good hearted ... and they will help, but they don’t want to be taken advantage of, and they don’t want to be carrying someone else on their back.

(Domestic #6, Female, UG)

This point was supported by domestic student 9 (Male, UG) who suggested that if group work were chosen, then “the tutor should take into account [if a] person can’t speak as well”. Another was more forthright in expressing her frustration with group tasks:

[Lecturers] need to make it clear... when you give us these teams - you have to say, “International students, you are in a Western culture, you have to do enough work to function in that international culture because otherwise your other team members who understand how to function in that culture [are affected]”... They should either mark you on your ability and even though that team failed you should get a high mark, or they mark you as a multicultural team in the Western context. Now they’re mixing those two things up, which is disgusting for a university I think.

(Domestic #6, Female, UG)

I want to do the best I can and for some people [domestic students], if having difficulties, language barriers and that sort of thing, is getting in the way of them achieving good grades, then they might not be able to deal with having an international student in their group.
We had a particular problem where we had a girl from South America who could not work in the context and she destroyed the team in effect, and this made me very angry because I barely passed! They [the lecturers] barely passed me and I’m a really good student.

Last semester I had a Chinese student who wouldn’t understand the concept and she went on about her own stuff, which didn’t relate to the topic. It was a bit difficult to the point we had to consult the lecturer and the unit co-coordinator, get them into the picture because she was quite abusive in the end. It is a bit difficult but you’ve got to deal with them because they don’t even make the effort to speak English.

Every Australian student I’ve spoken to here is very unhappy [about team work with international students].

The ongoing difficulties suggest that currently the situation is some distance from the ideals espoused for international education. The language used in some cases – for example, statements such as “she destroyed the team”, and “I had a Chinese student who wouldn’t understand the concept...” as opposed to “couldn’t understand the concept”, reflects some level of hostility. The finding that some domestic students attributed their low grades to culturally mixed group work was supported by previous research (Ledwith, Lee, Manfredi, & Wildish, 1998). The potential for these attitudes to have further negative effects is considerable, which is discussed in the following section.

5C.1.4 Potential development of a culture of “othering”

While the domestic students displayed some understanding of the situation facing many international students, concerns around communication difficulties, and particularly the impact
this could have upon domestic students’ grades, can create the potential for perceiving “international students” in a deficit manner (Arthur, 2004; Bailey & Dua, 1999; Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Slethaug, 2010; Volet & Ang, 1998). There was evidence in the domestic students’ responses of Allport’s (1954) notion of in-group attachment and Byrne’s (1971) similarity principle, which argue that individuals prefer familiarity:

*I mean I think people tend to stick with people they feel comfortable with, which is people that share the same language, eat, diet and so that’s the reason for people not mixing.*

(Domestic #5, Female, PG)

*You only get a few students who will mix with others... I would prefer if I could choose my own group because I know who is capable of actually working.*

(Domestic #10, Female, UG)

One domestic student put forward the proposition that international students group together out of fear that domestic students would discriminate against:

*You see with Chinese students is they probably fear that they might be insulted or discriminate[d against]... That’s the reason they probably don’t go closer to the Australian students.*

(Domestic #10, Female, UG)

Lack of acknowledgement of the potential benefits of working with international students was articulated by another domestic student. Her view was that she was at university to gain a qualification, a goal which did not require, or place any importance on, interaction with international students:

*It’s not important for me to understand those [international students’ difficulties], issues and still get my degree. I can get my degree without – like how I have.*

(Domestic #3, Female, UG)

This view is not consistent with an ‘internationalised’ curriculum, a goal of which includes graduates’ abilities to work within diverse settings and have intercultural competence (Knight,
Further, research has shown that studying on a multi-cultural campus can increase students’ personal growth and cross-cultural competence, and can help students gain opportunities to travel and work with different cultures, which is reported to increase tolerance and decrease stereotyping (Bochner, 1986; de Wit, 1995; Gudykunst, 1998). Two of the stated graduate attributes of the Case University are: (1) Ability to work in teams and (2) Cross cultural and international outlook. The social tendency to gravitate towards those similar to ourselves (Byrne, 1971), however, suggests this cannot be achieved unless students see the importance of working with others from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The difficulties of intercultural interaction, particularly those related to group assessments, were also acknowledged by international students. They largely believed that the barriers to culturally mixed groups were domestic students’ attitudes, whilst domestic students reported the contrary. Both student groups claimed that the other group did not want to work with them, but rather chose to work with their own. Although there may be benefits in being in mono-cultural groups, such as having emotional support and being able to speak in one’s first language (Furnham & Bochner, 1982), these can also reinforce negative ‘us’ versus ‘them’ stereotypes (Thornton et al., 2009), which reduce the likelihood of successful interactions.

The complexities associated with culturally mixed groups were also recognised by some staff members, who believed that domestic students needed to be prepared to work with their international counterparts, and that the onus was on the university to teach domestic students the value of intercultural interaction. This finding supports previous literature (Watson, Kumar, & Michaelson, 1993):

They [the Case University] say to the domestic students, it’s good to mix with international students, but they never give them a reason and they never show them how and they never set up situations where it’s going to happen. And if you don’t do that it’s
not going to happen except by mistake... I think probably it is that cultural adjustment. And really priming the domestic students to overcome the barriers.

(Staff #22- support/student processes)

The domestic students also expressed opinions on factors operating at the university level that had an impact upon their experience of sharing their learning environment with international students. These are explored in the following section.

5C.2 Domestic students' experiences with university level services

5C.2.1 Responses to limited promotion of benefits of diversity

The interviewed students argued that the Case University played a role in facilitating and or hindering interaction between domestic and international students. One pointed out that it was the Case University’s responsibility to promote the positive benefits of diversity, if they wanted their graduates to have a cross-cultural and international outlook. The student argued that it was impossible for the students to have such an outlook if this was not endorsed by the university at all levels of the curriculum:

If they want us to be culturally aware then they’re going to have to promote ... because being culturally aware, that’s one of the attributes. That’s not really taught by just being in the classroom with culturally different people. You’ve actually got to enforce that cultural awareness for the students, enforce it in their learning or something like that.

(Domestic #8, Female, UG)

5C.2.2. Responses to limited promotion of a sense of community

Another domestic student pointed out that it was also the Case University’s responsibility to promote a sense of belonging amongst their students:

In terms of its social events, it [the Case University] sucks. You go to [neighbouring University] okay, it’s a hub. People go to [neighbouring University] when they don’t
even have class just to go and do social stuff because it’s a community but I find at [the Case University] we’re not a community. We’re just a bunch of people going to class together.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

She further added that social events often involved alcohol, which not all students consume, and which discouraged some international students from attending:

They don’t do much to promote socialisation besides drinking, and I don’t really think that – for some people, that’s not what they want.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

This point was also discussed by international students and staff members. There were accounts of students either leaving the Case University to attend the neighbouring one, or students thinking about leaving. This has serious implications for a university in times of decreased government funding.

Another issue raised in relation to the limited sense of belonging was the nature of tertiary scheduling, which sometimes made it difficult for students to interact with each other, as did the learning environments in some classes.

I guess in places like high school and primary school it’s different because you’re in a class so you’re in a sense forced to interact. At University, it’s up to the individual whether they show up… it’s not day in day out, you seem to form your own groups.

(Domestic #8, Female, UG)

I think it’s difficult because I find some international students, and maybe it’s because of my major, you know, we always face to the computer in the class, and we don’t have a chance to talk with them.

(International #10, Female, UG)

A neo-liberal argument might hold the view that as adults, all students, both domestic and international, should seek out the services and the experiences they feel they require. In terms of intercultural interaction, it would then be up to individual students to take the first step and
allocate themselves to culturally mixed groups. However, as was shown in research by Summers and Volet (2008), there is no guarantee that forming part of such a group would change students’ attitudes about culturally mixed groups. It would seem then, that there needs to be a role played by universities and staff to foster such interactions, even in a neo-liberal paradigm.

5C.3 Suggestions to improve the provision of International Education

Throughout the interviews, some domestic students made particular points about steps that could be taken to improve intercultural interaction, and therefore the experience of all students. These have been framed as suggestions, and categorised into those seen as the various responsibilities of students, staff and the university.

5C.3.1 Student-level suggestions

Some suggestions acknowledged the role that domestic students themselves could play in improving intercultural interactions. For one, using humour helped break the ice in a culturally mixed group, whilst for a second, slowing down her speech helped international students comprehend her more easily:

*Humour always helps, I think because it breaks the ice.*

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)

*With my speech, is to slow it, but not necessarily all the time. Only if they keep saying “pardon” or I see a blank stare on their face, then I’d try and slow.*

(Domestic #4, Female, UG)

In Sanderson’s (2006) research, it was found that staff members also used humour, although this was used with caution, as some international students might misinterpret the humour and/or find it offensive. Reducing the rate of speech was also supported by staff members as was
avoiding jargon to aid the comprehension of students whose first language is not English (see Chapter 5A).

5C.3.2 Staff level suggestions

Actively facilitate group work

Most domestic students’ suggestions reflected the belief that it was largely the responsibility of academic staff to promote, monitor and encourage culturally-mixed groups:

_I think it has to start with the academic staff because they are the ones ...organising, they’re directing the tutorials._

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

Having tutors or lecturers facilitate group work would, according to domestic student #5, remove the confrontation that domestic students sometimes face when trying to negotiate individual student responsibilities in group tasks:

_Your tutors or lecturers... perhaps need to facilitate getting the group work started. Finding out what the strengths are of the international students because it might be a bit confronting for a domestic student to go “Okay, so what are you good at?” but if the lecturer can help with that... and get the group dynamic started because it’s confronting [for domestic students]._

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

One student reported that one of her lecturers organised the groups and changed them every week, a strategy the student believed was successful in promoting interactions, in sharing the workload fairly, and in preparing students for the workplace:

_Students [were] chosen in a way that you weren’t sitting with a person you really know, you’re sitting with people you don’t know and that’s a good thing because when you go work outside you’re going to work with people you don’t know... they should have group work in such a way that you know that your group members are going to do work, not in a way that they take advantage of their situation and make you do all the work._

(Domestic #10, Female, UG)
The idea that teaching staff should be responsible for facilitating and managing culturally mixed groups was supported by another mature-age domestic student, who argued that the younger members of the group do not have the capabilities to make decisions within the group:

*They [teaching staff] leave it up to this diverse group of largely inexperienced young people to make a decision that they’re incapable of making.*

(Domestic #6, Female, UG)

**Create tasks that place value on international students’ experiences and expertise**

In some cases, suggestions reflected particular strategies that academics had used. One domestic student reported positively on an assignment that incorporated the specialised knowledge of an international student:

*You had to pick one student and then study their background and because we had the international student from Norway, we had to break it [her culture] down into Bronfenbrenner’s meso, micro, exo systems and see how they operated within that culture ... she was drawn into the assignment. The assignment was about her, as well as about her country.*

(Domestic #3, Female, UG)

Another referred to an assignment that could very easily have used the personal experiences and insights of international students, and helped domestic students understand the content from another perspective:

*I had to do a qualitative research proposal – our topic was refugees. Was it even considered that some people in our class may come from a situation where they may be considered an asylum seeker or a refugee? I felt like no-one was asked about their experiences in that sense...we were just given the assignment and ... it might have helped us to perhaps understand what’s important for them coming from their countries... Perhaps if the environment was created for them to give [their opinion].*

(Domestic # 1, Female, UG)

**Use broader range of texts**
Six domestic students pointed out that lecturers and course coordinators should make use of non-Western text books in addition to Western ones. This would give all students a chance to understand how the content being discussed translated in different cultures:

The text books ... are traditionally Australian... in business we do a lot of case studies but they’re usually American, English, Australian, New Zealand sort of companies.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

The majority of the text I see is written from a very white European/American background.

(Domestic #4, Female, UG)

Domestic student 2 explained that although psychology broadened her mind in terms of cultural awareness, the actual texts chosen for the courses were still very ‘Western’, and lecturers presented materials as if that was the only way of operating, rather than stressing that it was merely one way of operating:

...as psychologists, we do a lot of pucker pucker about equality and accepting of differences and diversity and the richness of differences. But when it comes to the text books, when it comes to your slides, I could sit across any lecturer that proposes to be so culturally aware... [who believe] that they have delivered their stuff with that view, that it’s open, but it’s not.

(Domestic #2, Female, UG)

As was reported in Chapter 5A, some teaching staff did incorporate some of the above suggestions in their curriculum. An example of this occurred when discussing child labour. Australian students took it for granted that at 10 years of age, a child should not be working. However, when an Indian student explained that in her country, a child’s income from working could be the difference between eating and starving, a debate opened up amongst the whole class. This supports research about the effectiveness of student-centred teaching, where
consideration is given to all student groups rather than only to the dominant group (Cannon & Newble, 2000; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003).

*Explain benefits of group assignments*

Due to the widespread dissatisfaction with group assignments, one student suggested that in cases where these were used, unit co-ordinators needed to convince the students of their benefits. Transparency about how marks were to be allocated, whether each group member would get the identical mark, and whether different criteria would apply for international students were other issues that needed to be explained clearly when incorporating group assessment tasks (Domestic #5, Female, PG).

*Provide alternatives*

An alternative to group work was suggested by another domestic student, who argued that because the oral English language skills of some international students is problematic, lecturers could offer the option of writing an essay, or short written answers to questions, rather than making an oral presentation (Domestic #7, Female, UG). This was a suggestion which was already being practiced by some staff in the Business Faculty (see Chapter 5A).

*5C.3.3 University - level suggestions*

When asked for university level strategies to increase positive intercultural interactions, a range of suggestions was offered, including an option linked to providing incentives for domestic students to engage with international students, and different suggestions for broadening cultural understanding.

*Partnering*
Domestic student 6 suggested a university policy of “partnering” rather than group work in classes where there were high numbers of international students. Partnering would match a domestic and an international student in the same class for half a semester, at which time partners would be switched for the second half of the semester, so that all the students in the classroom had opportunities to interact over a significant period of time with at least two different international students. She believed that this would work similarly to the peer mentoring programs discussed in Chapter 2, but would be more meaningful as the relationship was incorporated into the curriculum through the assessment tasks.

Another suggestion which aligned with the peer mentoring program discussed in Chapter 2 was put forth by domestic student 6, who pointed out that domestic students needed to be rewarded or given incentives to participate, and that giving them credits towards the completion of their degree could help domestic students be interested in partnering with an international student:

*Students actually get credit in their degree for being a good citizen... So you hook them [domestic students] in, and then you put into that a whole range of citizenship type things or anything linked to those graduate attributes and there’s a whole unit there that they can collect as they go through their degree.*

(Domestic #5, Female, PG)

Notions of “buddy” or peer mentoring programs were also discussed by some international students, which would increase the likelihood of engagement in such endeavours. These could potentially increase interaction between the two student groups both in and out of the classroom.

*Sponsored cultural events*

A second suggestion by domestic and international students included having more cultural events which would help raise awareness and may serve as a vehicle to promote interactions:
I think it would be great to have more events that embrace the different cultures at our university.

(Domestic #1, Female, UG)

I remember in primary school we used to do like food fairs and it would be culturally diverse where everybody who attended school that might have been Italian or Greek or Indian or Asian would bring something different and it would be like a multicultural food fair.

(Domestic #8, Female, UG)

However, not all domestic students agreed with one-off events. Some pointed out that cultural awareness should be more than “tokenism” (Domestic #2, Female, UG; Domestic #5, Female, PG); and that international case studies, international examples and sourcing the opinions of international students should be incorporated into the curriculum:

I don’t like the sort of tokenism multi-cultural, this is our dress, this is our food... I think there’s a huge role for the lecturers in the classrooms actually... some curriculums are obvious. I mean I’m doing linguistics... the biggest resource are the students because in our class, I should think perhaps [for] only a third, English is their first language... A huge resource and the teacher just teaches and talks about languages.

(Domestic #5, Female, PG)

This quote supports research cited in Chapter 2, in which strategies such as incorporating international examples are considered to be only a small component of an internationalised curriculum; and that some academics might not understand what is involved in internationalising the curriculum or how to do it (Caruana, 2010; Clifford, 2010). So although this student believes that internationalisation of some curriculum is ‘obvious’ in terms of incorporating international students’ views and examples, it is a complicated process.

Another domestic student was also against the ‘tokenism’ of displaying students’ traditional food and clothes as a means of increasing cross-cultural awareness:
More than food fests and things like that. I mean, some acknowledgment that it’s Ramadan for example,... that some students may be really tired ... how many staff are aware that some of their students will be fasting? So subtle – inclusion’s a very subtle thing.

(Domestic #6, Female, UG)

For this student, again, it was about “inclusion” of cross-cultural differences ‘subtly’, in all aspects of student life rather than on one dedicated day. This view was supported by some international students who suggested that one day or week to celebrate different cultures was not enough, and that cultural awareness should be incorporated into the classroom as well.

Some staff members also pointed out that funding multi-cultural events would be a major inhibiting factor, and that, from what they had observed; only international students attended these events and therefore they were not serving the purpose of raising cultural awareness:

It would be good if some kind of social thing could be set up but the trouble with that...it’s like enforced friendship.

(Staff member #17- support/student processes)

Given that cultural events might not be attended because students are already fully engaged with work and family commitments as well as their studies (Kimmel, 2010), it might seem more favourable to target intercultural interaction in the classroom. This too is problematic, in that staff responses suggest that some are already feeling overwhelmed with the numbers of international students in their classes, and having the additional responsibility of facilitating intercultural interaction may be viewed as adding to their already heavy workload.

5C.4 Summary

Domestic students reported a number of student and university-level experiences which influenced their perceptions of the multi-cultural university. At the student-level, factors included:
• Perceptions of the multi-cultural university;
• Perceptions of some international students’ communication skills;
• Challenges associated with culturally mixed group work; and
• Potential for development of a culture of “othering”

At the university level, it was reported that there was limited promotion of the benefits of diversity and of a sense of belonging between the university and its students. These findings support literature in that the onus to encourage intercultural interactions should not rest with one party but that each group should share this responsibility (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Leask, 2009). Teaching both student groups how to work together; articulating more clearly the benefits of having a multicultural classroom; designing appropriate tasks which give international students a chance to become ‘experts’; and supporting staff members to develop strategies to navigate a diverse class context might help decrease the difficulties associated with culturally mixed groups. These could also help each student group reap the benefits associated with intercultural interactions (Alexitch & Chapdelaine, 2004; Brown, 2009; Buote et al., 2007; Seah, 2008; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

My Observations: It was hard to listen to domestic students blame international students for the lack of social and academic interaction between the two groups. For one, not all international students have English as an additional language and also, even those who have EAL, not all have issues with group work.

I remember being an undergraduate student and entering class late once. The students had already chosen their groups and a friend (also an international student) and I were not assigned to a group. The tutor absentmindedly assigned each of us to a different group. One of the domestic student pointed at my friend and yelled at the top of her voice, “there is no way she is joining us, we have five
of us that is plenty”. The tutor looked at my friend and said, “Sorry, you might as well join another group”.

I think that intercultural interaction is indeed a complex construct fraught with barriers, many of which begin at an attitudinal level.
Chapter 6
Key Findings and Implications

This chapter discusses the key findings and implications of the findings for staff, international students, domestic students, and the Case University. Following Constructivist Grounded Theory, the chapter will also present a model generated from this research, which will illustrate how the Case University’s policies and procedures impact upon the ways in which staff and students view and treat each other.

6.1 Key findings relating to staff experiences

1. There was a general recognition of the positive qualities of international students, and of the benefits of having a culturally diverse university

From the sample of staff who responded, there were many reports of positive experiences when working with international students. They saw the benefits of teaching students from different cultures, and took opportunities to draw on the experiences and expertise of their international students. There was, however, a view that the motivation of some students was questionable.

2. Concerns around the English language proficiency of a significant proportion of international students increased the workload of most academic staff

The English proficiency of international students’ was a prominent theme, as 30 of the 38 staff commented that lack of English proficiency influenced how they worked with all their students, as it impacted on actual unit content; time spent on definitions and explanations; small group constitution; and assessment of oral and written work. Comments about ‘needing to be an English teacher’ and ‘needing an English qualification’ were also made. There was broad agreement that International Education had increased their workload.
This finding also relates to the tensions staff members experienced regarding assessment, in terms of whether to, or to what extent, grammatical errors should be ignored or penalised; determining relative contributions to group assessments; potential impact of leniency on future employment in Australia; and the risk such practices might have for the university’s reputation.

3. Academic staff utilised teaching strategies and resources to support international students to varying extents

Staff members who had experience working with ESL students and diverse student populations, or who themselves were from ESL backgrounds were more likely to incorporate relevant strategies into their teaching. The level of experience staff had with international students or ‘enablers’ (Caruana, 2010), impacted upon their confidence and pedagogical skills. Therefore staff members who had greater experience with international students were more likely to have adjusted their strategies to suit this group, and thus reported fewer challenges and negative experiences than those who had less exposure (Caruana, 2010).

4. The views of staff differed according to their role

Findings indicated that there were differences between academic and non-academic staff in their responses to international students. Non-academic staff members were more likely to be sympathetic towards the international student cohort. Some reported that teaching staff were not putting in enough effort to understand the international students who had English as an additional language and also felt that practising ‘soft marking’ was unacceptable.

Non-academic staff, however, were usually not responsible for trying to convey complex concepts to a student with limited English while simultaneously teaching many other students, nor for assessing students with a potentially good grasp of concepts but poor grasp of academic English. Academic staff were also often called upon to provide personal support because they
were the “familiar face”. Being aware of some students’ personal situations and the difficulties these students were going experiencing added another level of complexity to the assessment process. Responses to the centralised model of student support also appeared to differ according to roles. Both teaching and support staff were directly affected by the reduction in support staff numbers, with increased calls to offer personal support because of the lack of dedicated International Office staff; and a reduction in the staff: student ratio. Management staff were more supportive of the new model, but did not have to face the daily impact of its implementation. With curriculum reportedly being commercialised and packaged, and with reports of a loss of academic freedom (Kayrooz, Kinnear & Preston, 2001), teaching staff also appeared to face additional stressors compared to non-academic staff.

5. **Staff believed the university had an ethical responsibility to provide services targeted specifically at international students**

Staff members felt that because the Case University had chosen to admit students with low levels of English proficiency, it was their moral and ethical responsibility to provide them with appropriate support, which most believed was lacking under the current model. Two academic leaders used words such as ‘cash cow’ to explain how some staff members and the Case University saw international students. That is, these students were being enrolled so that the university could benefit from their fees but the university was not catering for their needs.

Further moral dilemmas resulted from the fact that some students were meeting the required English entry levels as measured by the IELTS, yet when they submitted assignments, were being told that their English language skills were too low. Some staff members saw this practice as morally wrong, as the university was setting these students up for failure. This comment also applied to those students who did not meet the entry requirements and had to enrol for six
months of intensive learning of English language skills. This practice was viewed as unethical by some staff who referred to research findings that it took up to six years to develop elementary English to the level required to undertake studies at a university level. A costly intensive course of six months, while lucrative for the providers, could not in most cases raise the standard sufficiently, and once again raised unrealistic expectations in the participants.

6. A large majority of both academic and support staff perceived the centralised model of service provision to be less effective for international students than the previous specialised model

Staff members reported that issues with the current model included lack of specialised staff and specialised services. While the aims of increasing cost-effectiveness, avoiding duplication of services and simplifying service provision may have been met to some extent, the new model did not meet the needs of many staff and students. The over-arching message from the staff who responded was that international student needs were more complex than those assumed by the generic model.

6.2 Key implications relating to staff experiences

The findings showed that although staff members reported positive experiences of working with international students, there was a level of dissatisfaction with the direction in which IE at the Case university was proceeding. Much of the dissatisfaction related to the introduction of a centralised model of service provision and a perceived reduction in services which, when combined with other factors, was causing significant frustration; an increased workload; and added stressors related to student assessment and equity issues. This accumulation of negative experiences could lead to an increasing likelihood that these staff members will view IE, and therefore international students, in a negative manner, or through a ‘deficit’ lens (see Figure 6.1).
6.3 Key findings relating to international students’ experiences

7. There was recognition that some parts of their university experiences were positive

From the sample of respondents, some international students reported that their experiences were ‘positive’ and ‘good’. These experiences were enhanced by staff who encouraged them and responded positively to their contributions; and by having friends who helped them adjust successfully at university. They were also more likely to have a positive experience if they had previously studied at the Case University, or a “Western” university, and so were more familiar with the context and the expectations.
8. **Higher degree research students responded very positively to the centre designed specifically to support this cohort**

The international students enrolled in HDR courses reported uniformly positive experiences associated with a support centre designed specifically for higher degree research students. It had a walk-in facility, provided numerous opportunities for students to socialise and provided training and resources for HDR students and their supervisors. Staff had specialised knowledge relating to their needs, and included HDR students who were more advanced in their studies to provide additional support. While meeting the needs of both domestic and international students, the existence of this centre was an acknowledgement that some cohorts have specific needs, and that specific services can be very effective in meeting them.

9. **Students from a culturally or linguistically diverse background overwhelmingly preferred a “familiar face” when accessing services**

Many students reported that they felt more comfortable accessing services from staff members who were familiar to them. However, the recently implemented model of service provision provides generic services through a student information centre, where international students were likely to interact with a different person each time, and who were less experienced with many specific issues that faced international students, suggesting that the model was less successful in meeting their needs.

10. **International students engaged more effectively in smaller teaching groups**

The students’ preference for familiarity also meant that they were far more likely to contribute to discussions, ask questions and seek help in smaller tutorial groups that allowed them to get to know staff and other students more easily. Tutorial size was therefore a factor that
affected their experience. With increasing student enrolments, however, few schools and faculties could offer tutorials of the preferred size.

11. Perceived communication difficulties detracted from the capacity of significant numbers of international students to fully engage in their university experience

Twelve of the 26 international students reported that because English was not their first language, their English proficiency was a concern across a range of areas. These included understanding lecture content, making themselves understood, participating in discussions, and demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Even students who were professionals in their home countries, and who had much to contribute, reported lacking confidence in their English language proficiency to participate in the classroom and to interact with domestic students. English language proficiency was also a barrier for some students when accessing services, as they feared not being understood or being unable to express their needs.

12. The experience of international students greatly depended on the attitudes and teaching skills of the staff

Some international students praised lecturers and other staff who were proactive in internationalising their teaching and involving international students in discussions. However, students also reported teaching contexts which lacked any global reference; in which they felt stereotyped in terms of their ability or way of working; in which their language needs or their special skills and experiences were not considered; and which did not promote the intercultural interaction that they had anticipated. Many international students believed their potential contribution to the learning environment was only partially realized, because they were not encouraged by teaching staff to share their experiences. This led to disappointment for some international students who were anticipating rich exchange between students and staff in the
classroom. The experience of some international students was therefore greatly reduced. These experiences could serve to increase international students’ perceptions of being an “outsider” or “other”, which would detract greatly from their motivation to participate in class, access support, and engage fully in their university experience.

13. Many international students felt marginalized by the attitudes of some domestic students and the lack of appropriate opportunities for interaction with domestic students

Many international students, even those who had reported that their university experiences were ‘positive’, commented on the lack of interaction between themselves and domestic students. Some attributed this to domestic students’ indifferent attitudes towards international students, whilst others reported that the responsibility to increase interaction rested with the teaching staff and the university. Interestingly, all three groups identified that culturally mixed group work was an issue and each student group accorded responsibility to the other for the difficulties experienced. These experiences would accentuate feelings of being excluded; of being an “other” on the part of international students, especially those who did not look or sound like most other students.

14. Overall, international students found that the centralised model of service provision did not meet their specific needs

The centralised service model was staffed by people who had a general understanding of the operations and procedures of the university, but lacked the specific knowledge often required by international students, such as visa information or embassy contacts. The open space of the student services centres did not match the needs of students when a combination of stressful circumstances and lack of confidence in their capacity to explain themselves adequately in English demanded more time, and more privacy than was available. In some circumstances, poor
dissemination of information meant that students were unaware of services, or were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the services provided. Others lacked the confidence to seek help from unfamiliar faces in unfamiliar places. These experiences would compound a sense of being the ‘other’ (see Figure 6.2).

Thus, despite positive reports of IE by some international students, for many who came from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, the sum of their experiences could contribute to a feeling of being the ‘other’ as they perceive that some staff and other students viewed them as lacking in some way. It is possible that the deficit lens through which some international students are viewed is contributing to a cycle of negativity. It might be that they do not actually lack English proficiency, and/or their cultural backgrounds are not that influential on their behaviours but, because they perceive that they do not belong, or are not welcome, they lose confidence. Feelings of being an ‘outsider’ and ‘other’ has the potential to erode self-confidence, increase a sense of isolation, and result in withdrawal from participating fully in their university studies.

Figure 6.2: Implications for international students

Key Implication for international students: An accumulation of negative experiences can lead to an increasing feeling of ‘otherness’ for international students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
6.4 Key findings relating to domestic students’ experiences

15. Most domestic students interviewed in this study could see the benefits of sharing their learning environment with international students, but were only experiencing this in a limited way

The sample of domestic students who responded largely viewed IE and international students positively, but were somewhat disappointed in the extent to which a genuinely internationalised curriculum operated in many classes. They also held somewhat negative views of the desire or willingness of other domestic students to participate fully in IE. Students who had travelled overseas were more likely to be sympathetic and to actively support struggling international students with assignments. This group did provide a number of constructive suggestions as to how to improve intercultural interaction between themselves and international students, which included the possibility of adapting assignment tasks; assigning marks differently; having teaching staff members assign the group members and manage and facilitate culturally mixed group work.

16. There was limited implementation and promotion of International Education

Some of the sample pointed out that the ‘multicultural university’ was experienced largely through seeing people from different cultural backgrounds on campus. Limited use of international examples and texts in the classroom, and few opportunities taken to incorporate the expertise of international students reflected minimal implementation of internationalisation at the level where it could have greatest impact. Some domestic students also reported that there were few cultural activities promoted on campus to increase their knowledge of other cultures, and few social or cultural events that would increase all students’ sense of belonging. Thus the view
was that the university was not supporting IE to the extent that it could, and therefore not demonstrating or promoting the benefits of a culturally diverse campus.

17. Communication difficulties often prevented effective interactions in academic contexts

Some domestic students reported that international students’ lack of English language proficiency was a barrier to culturally mixed group work, preventing international students from contributing sufficiently, and resulting in an increased workload for domestic students, and a negative impact on their grades. Negative experiences of group work in one unit have the potential to discourage participation of domestic students in other multicultural groups, particularly if domestic students perceive such involvement as a threat to their academic progress. This could also lead to a broader reluctance to interact, and even to a more generalised negative perception of international students. Under such circumstances, it is increasingly likely that they too could view their international peers through a deficit lens (see Figure 6.3).

![Figure 6.3: Implications for domestic students](image)

**Key Implication for domestic students**: An accumulation of negative experiences leads to an increasing likelihood of domestic students viewing international students through a deficit lens.
6.5 Implications for the Case University

It could be argued that the sense of ‘otherness’ for some international students, in most cases those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, is being reinforced to some extent by both staff and domestic students (see Figure 6.4). Existing insecurities on the part of international students could be compounded by an awareness of the negative lens through which they may be viewed. These feelings would affect their own experience of international education, and could also be relayed to potential international students in their home countries. This could have significant and long-term implications for the Case University in terms of its reputation as a safe and respectful learning environment, and eventually on future enrolments and the revenue generated by international students. Further, ‘otherness’ felt by some international students could decrease the likelihood that they participate fully in their studies, which can decrease the chances of meaningful intercultural interaction, and the transfer of knowledge, between themselves and other students and staff.

![Figure 6.4: Key implications for key stakeholders](image)

The findings of this research, many of which have a direct link to the centralised model of service provision for all students, have a number of potential outcomes for the Case University. This research suggests that, while the implementation of IE at the Case University affords a number of positive experiences for staff and both international and domestic students, that the
centralised model could be more effective in meeting the needs of the key stakeholders. The implications of these results for the Case University are further explored in the following section.

18. A centralised model of service provision is inconsistent with the Case University’s Value statements

One of the Case University’s stated values is “Respect: valuing individual differences and diversity” (Source Withheld). As outlined in Chapter 2, Sims (2002) proposed four possible ‘Value Positions’ that can be adopted in relation to difference: positions that are designed to either fix the difference, exclude the difference, ignore the difference, or value the difference. The value position adopted by an institution is reflected in its policies and procedures. A “one-size-fits-all” approach, such as that exemplified by a centralised model of service provision, is more consistent with a value position that ‘ignores’ difference. According to Sims (2002), “this position holds that we are all equal under the skin, and paying attention to difference in any way simply draws attention to the ways in which we are not the same, and this is undesirable; difference must be ignored. Unfortunately, when difference is ignored, the needs of all people are not necessarily met effectively. When we are all the same, it is not necessary to have services aimed at meeting the special needs of any particular groups” (p. 583). When an ‘ignoring’ position is adopted in regards to the ‘other’, then the services offered will reflect ‘sameness’. This research revealed that, although students and staff members reported some positive experiences, the generic service model did not, in many cases, take into account the specific needs of international students, which was contributing to challenging experiences for all concerned. In many cases, equity was not ensured by equality.
19. A centralised model of service may be inconsistent with relevant legislation and policy frameworks

Another implication for universities which adopt generic models of service provision is that the model may not comply with The Australian Policy Framework for Substantive Equality (SEU, 2005), which falls under the Australian Equal Opportunity Act. It states that “it is no longer sufficient to provide equal access to services but also ensure that these services adequately meet the needs of different people and groups of people” (p. 6); and that “Substantive Equality provides a powerful framework for change away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach, enabling all public services, including those contracted out, to actively address gaps and barriers and meet the needs of their diverse clients” (p. 2).

While not discriminatory in intent, a centralised and generic model of service provision may unconsciously, but systemically, discriminate against some international students. The SEU framework states that:

Systemic racial discrimination is racism that is embedded in the policies and practices of an organisation. Whilst this form of racism is often unintentional, the effect is to limit or restrict people particularly from minority groups from accessing all or some of the services of an organisation in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner. (p. 4)

Universities adopting a centralised, ‘one-size-fits all’ approach are arguing that all students have the same needs, a view that has not been supported by the current research.

20. A centralised model of service provision could increase international student attrition

An outcome of not meeting the needs of international students could be increased student attrition. Although the retention rate for the Case University in 2010 (the year prior to data
collection), was 0.4% above their target, and had increased slightly over the 2009 figure, it was below the national average of 84% (citation withheld). This source did not distinguish between international or domestic attrition; nevertheless, an attrition rate of more than 16% could have serious implications for the Case University, especially if it increases. There were, in fact, anecdotal reports from both interviewed staff and students of international students leaving the Case University, and in some cases transferring to neighbouring universities because of their negative experiences.

In a report to the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (Prebble et al., 2004), it was argued that institutions which catered for the academic, social and emotional needs of their students experienced better student outcomes than those which did not. It was reported that student departure is influenced by student “perceptions of how well their cultural attributes are valued and accommodated, and how differences between the cultures of origin and immersion are bridged” (p. 51). The findings from this study imply that more could be done by the Case University to demonstrate that it values students’ diverse cultural attributes.

Tightly linked to international student attrition is loss of revenue from this increasingly important income stream. In addition to the short term cost, negative reports to home countries could result in the longer term and very real cost associated with decreasing enrolment of full-fee paying international students.

Research into the marketisation of Higher Education reveals that students see themselves as customers and as such, want value for their money. As international students pay considerably higher fees than those paid by domestic students, they expect universities to offer services that cater to their needs. The current model might serve to reduce short term costs associated with providing additional specialised services, but longer term costs could be significantly increased
in terms of losing staff and students if the model of service provision does not meet the needs of the population it is serving. With student retention tightly tied to student satisfaction (David & Renea, 2008; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; Tinto 1993; Tompson & Tompson, 1996), international student support services may require closer scrutiny for cultural and situational sensitivity, and overall efficacy, in order to build a more stable and sustainable international students’ program.

6.6 The impact of a university’s Value Position

Taking the previous discussion into account, a model was generated to represent the potential effects of the Case University’s Value Position, from determination of policies and procedures, to the impact of their implementation on staff and students. As can be seen from Figure 6.5, if the value position adopted by the university is one that values difference, the message that diversity and those who are different are valued is likely to be translated to both staff and students. However, a position that ignores difference would suggest to staff and students that the individual needs of those who are culturally and/or linguistically different, can also be ignored.
Figure 6.5: Impact of the Case University’s Value Position

Each cohort experienced the effects of the centralised model in different ways. For some staff members, the centralised model caused frustration with the reduced level of support. This led to difficulties in teaching or supporting international students, drawing on their knowledge in class discussions, and significant tensions when assessing their work, all of which added to their workload, and their stress levels. The combination of these factors could lead to an increased likelihood of them viewing international students in a negative light, re-enforcing the feeling of ‘other’ for some international students.

The model of service provision also influenced how domestic students viewed and reacted to difference and diversity. Some pointed out that the Case University did not promote the
benefits of a diverse learning environment as effectively as it could have, resulting in a reduced sense of belonging for many international students. The centralised model adopted by the Case University promoted ‘sameness’ rather than diversity. This could lead to some domestic students viewing those who are different as ‘other’ and treating them as such - reinforcing the negativity felt by some international students. If students are not given the chance to reflect on and challenge their attitudes towards those who are different, their behaviours towards ‘others’ might not change (Sims, 2002).

While some centralised services were appropriate for international students, others were less so, because of poor timing, poor coordination, or a misunderstanding of how linguistic and cultural differences may impact on perception and utilisation of some services. This, added to challenging interactions with domestic students, reinforced the feeling of ‘other’ for some international students. This sequence of events has negative outcomes for all involved: for international students, domestic students, teaching and support staff, and for the institution itself.

The overall conclusion, as depicted by the model in Figure 6.5 is that:

If a university, through its Value Position and model of service provision, does not promote the position that difference is valued, students and staff are less likely to value those who are different, and more likely to treat ‘different’ as ‘other’ which isolates those considered ‘other’ even further.

Chapter 7 presents recommendations that have emerged from this study. If the Case University can provide a more fulfilling academic and social experience for international students, the needs of staff and domestic students are more likely to be met, and the university’s broader goals more likely to be achieved.
Chapter 7
Recommendations and Final Reflections

This chapter reflects on the study’s contribution to the literature relating to experiences of International Education from the perspectives of different stakeholders. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and presents a series of recommendations for the Case University. Since the purpose of this research was not to make generalisations, the recommendations have been constructed to be case-specific. All CRICOS institutions, however, are bound by the same laws, thus the recommendations could be applicable to other institutions providing International Education in a similar context.

7.1 Contribution of the study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in a number of ways. It has investigated the various ways in which a university’s model of service provision can impact upon staff members, and both international and domestic students. There has been little research into the effects of using different business models in the HE setting on key stakeholders’ experiences. The results of this study could inform decisions being made by other universities as they respond in a climate of reduced government funding and an increased reliance on alternate sources of income.

The second contribution is primary research involving university staff that crosses the academic-administrative divide. Some research undertaken with staff members has been either from one faculty (Bartram, 2007; Trice, 2003), or has dealt with either academic or non-academic staff members (Pitman, 2000; Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999). A number of studies have focused on staff involved in specific services at universities, such as counselling (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Kearney et al., 2005; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Snider, 2001) or the library (Chakraborty & Tuno, 2002; Hughes, 2001 and 2010; Jackson, 2005). This study included the
experiences of staff members involved in counselling, ICT support, learning support, peer mentoring programs, academic writing support, administrative support and student welfare, in addition to those involved in lecturing and tutoring. The study also included data from personnel in the English Language Centre which offered alternative entry pathways to the Case University. Including the experiences of staff members who performed such a variety of roles provided a deep insight into how the policies implemented by the Case University affected staff members, and through them, the experiences of their students.

The findings showed differences between staff members based on their roles, as well as differences between staff from faculties with low and very high enrolments of international students, or ‘enablers’, to use Caruana’s (2010) term. It was found that those who had less exposure to diverse classrooms were more likely to report challenges when working with this cohort.

A third contribution relates to the diverse backgrounds of the international students who participated in the study. Much previous research with international students has tended to focus on ‘Asian’ students or grouped all international students as one cohort (Bailey & Dua, 1999; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Kim & Omizo, 2003; Lin & Yi, 1997; Sakamoto, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). This study recruited students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and while it explored common themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews, it also acknowledged the individual differences that exist among international students, and incorporated personal stories into the data analysis.

A fourth contribution of the study is in relation to the broad range of roles played by staff who participated. A number of studies have focused on staff involved in specific services at universities, such as counselling (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Kearney et al., 2005; Popadiuk &
Arthur, 2004; Snider, 2001) or the library (Chakraborty & Tuno, 2002; Hughes, 2001 and 2010; Jackson, 2005). This study investigated the experiences of staff members involved in counselling, ICT support, learning support, peer mentoring programs, academic writing support, administrative support and student welfare, in addition to those involved in lecturing and tutoring. The study also included data from personnel in the English Language Centre which offered alternative entry pathways to the Case University. Including the experiences of staff members who performed such a variety of roles provided a deep insight into how the policies implemented by the Case University affected staff members, and through them, the experiences of their students.

Finally, the current study was undertaken during the period of transition from a specialised model of service provision to a more centralised, generic model at the Case University. Although many universities have gone through similar changes, this study captured the experiences of staff and students as they responded to changes that in some cases had a profound effect on them.

### 7.2 Limitations of the study

#### 7.2.1 Sampling limitations

A major limitation of the study was the lack of staff representation from the centralised student services unit, the function of which attracted so much comment from staff and student cohorts. Chapter 4 recorded the considerable efforts taken to include this group, as their perceptions of the service they provided would clearly be integral to a fuller understanding of the centralised model’s implementation. Their lack of participation was keenly felt as the impact of the newly implemented model became more apparent.
Although middle management staff offered their perceptions of the rationale behind the changes made to the model of service provision, contribution from those who actually made the decisions would have been invaluable in understanding the factors that influenced the decision. However, as recorded in Chapter 4, upper management staff did not respond to the invitation to participate in the study.

While the international students who participated in this study came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the majority used English as an additional language, and many of the findings therefore relate to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The experiences of international students from Western, English speaking backgrounds were therefore not represented as fully as they might have been had more students from those backgrounds responded.

Another sampling limitation relates to domestic students, who were recruited to follow up specific questions that arose from interviews with staff and international students. Only ten domestic students responded, of which nine were female undergraduate students, and most of whom had worked or been educated overseas. A more representative sample of domestic students could have contributed to a fuller understanding of intercultural interaction among the students.

7.2.2 Methodological limitations

Only one institution was used as the case and it might be argued that findings and the application of the model therefore cannot relate to other institutions. Nevertheless, one could argue that all institutions enrolling international students in Australia are legally bound to provide certain services to its students and as such, the contribution of this thesis lies in its applicability to other institutions that do enrol international students, specifically universities
which adopt similar models of service provision. Thus, this study could serve as a base for future studies in other institutions.

7.3 Directions for future research

Future research should take into account the limitations of this research project to provide further understanding of IE as experienced by key stakeholders. Future researchers should attempt to recruit more staff members who work in the area of student support. Existing literature reveals that pastoral care and counselling staff members have unique experiences when working with international students. In this study, only one counsellor and one welfare officer agreed to participate. Future researchers should aim to obtain more information from this cohort.

Also, future research could be carried out at universities whose characteristics are different from the current university, especially those that provide specific services for international students. Investigation of the implementation of a specialised model of service provision would increase understanding of international students’ readiness to access such services, and whether or not that model of provision meets the needs of international students more effectively.

Finally, considering that no system can be completely centralised or decentralised (Geo-JaJa, 2004), future research could also investigate the effectiveness of a “mixed model”, whereby some services, such as library and ICT services, are centralised at the university level whilst others, such as learning advisors, are located at school and faculty level.

7.4 Recommendations to enhance International Education at the Case University

Considering that the Case University’s Value Position, as reflected in its policies and procedures, can have a strong impact on how staff and students respond to difference and
diversity, a set of recommendations was developed that may contribute to more positive experiences for both staff and students at the Case University.

7.4.1 Provide supplementary support services specifically designed for international students in addition to the centralised model of service provision

The findings from the current study support the view that not all stakeholders’ needs were being met through the generic model of service provision. While many of the needs of university students are similar, and can be met by centralised services, some need specialised knowledge and skills, and it would appear that many international students would benefit from more targeted services delivered by specialised personnel. Staff with specific knowledge about visa conditions, relevant legislation, and a broad understanding of the cultural differences that might potentially cause difficulties, who are available for students at their point of need, rather than just to facilitate the enrolment process, would go some way to address many of the issues identified in this study.

A targeted service could include the contribution of more experienced international students, particularly if some training could be available for them. They could act as ‘ambassadors’, taking part in Orientation programs to deliver information, particularly about services with which international students may be unfamiliar. They could also act as a conduit between at-risk students and services they might need, but are reluctant to access. Having a ‘critical friend’ to advocate on their behalf could make a great difference to their willingness to approach lecturers or other services for assistance. Customising the counselling service to include trained international students could make such services less unfamiliar and more acceptable to those who may see some stigma attached to accessing the service. It would be hoped that the level of
assistance required would diminish as students gained confidence. In fact, those who receive help one year may be providing support for other students in subsequent years.

7.4.2 **Facilitate systems and activities that bring international and domestic students together to increase the sense of community and valuing of difference**

*Peer-mentoring programs*

More experienced international and domestic students could act as peer mentors for any students (domestic or international) who would like a mentor, with the mentees nominating if they would be more comfortable with an international or a domestic student as a mentor. Some international and domestic students may want to take advantage of the increased interaction with someone from a different culture, while others may be more comfortable with someone who shares their background. Providing for either opportunity would allow for the individual differences among all students to guide the process.

*International clubs*

International student bodies or clubs could act as social support networks for new international students and be responsible for promoting cultural events. This could have the added benefit of raising cultural awareness amongst domestic students. These types of activities could occur during the semester and in places where students frequently visit, such as outside the library or cafeterias, to increase exposure to the broader university.

The international student clubs could advise the Case University on campus activities that work best for international students, considering such things as different comfort levels with alcohol consumption; and could also be responsible for informing and encouraging their groups to participate in other campus activities, such as music, sports or artistic clubs.
**Liaison with community groups**

The Case University could liaise with specific cultural community groups to host events that might be of interest to both international and domestic students. Activities associated with book clubs, sports associations, arts and dancing might place international students in positions to interact with Australian community members as well as individuals from similar cultures as their own. This could enhance their sense of belonging, reduce loneliness and homesickness, and enhance their university experience. Additionally, it could increase some international students’ English proficiency as students could be interacting with native English speakers. These activities align well with the university’s strategic goal of community engagement, help international students develop a multi-dimensional view of their cultural communities within an Australian context, and broaden domestic students’ understanding of the wide range of cultures represented at the Case University. It would also be a cost effective option, as community groups already operate at minimum charge. The activities could help ameliorate the socio-cultural challenges faced by some international students during their university studies. As suggested by Caruana (2012):

> Local community participation is a means of transcending compatriot student communities, gaining ‘authentic’ exposure to the local culture and society (while sharing and sometimes promoting their own culture), enhancing language and other transferable skills, and feeling more ‘at home’. (p. 2)

The Case University could investigate whether such ‘authentic’ exposures to local community groups could be formalised so that all students can benefit from participating in community activities.

**On-line student forums**
An online forum for each course could provide opportunities for all students to discuss ideas with each other. This could overcome the reluctance of some international students to speak directly to others and reduce their concerns about English language proficiency, and may even result in future friendships on campus. The online forums could be offered at the course level so that more experienced students can provide guidance and feedback to new students. The experienced students could also be given incentives to mediate the forums.

*Increased cultural diversity in university staff*

The Case University could encourage job applications from staff with a broad range of experiences that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. If the Case University set a target of 15% of its employees being bi- or multi-lingual, the gap between staff and students in language and culture could potentially be reduced. In addition, such a goal, once reached could make the Case University’s course offerings highly marketable on a global scale.

*7.4.3 Provide professional learning opportunities for staff related to inclusive teaching which are either built into staff workloads, or acknowledged by accreditation*

This study revealed that academic staff members, who had English as an Additional Language (EAL) training, or more experience working with international students, responded more positively and experienced fewer challenges when working in an International Education context. While the Case University does provide professional learning opportunities in this area for staff, they are often seen to be an imposition because of the time they demand, by staff members whose workloads are already increased by some of the challenges associated with International Education. Some acknowledgement of the additional time and effort required through incorporating essential additional training into the workload model, and/or providing some formal accreditation for such training would ameliorate some of these concerns. Literature
has suggested that when teaching staff feel supported, and incentives are given for extra work, burnout is reduced (Byrne, 1991; Lackritz, 2004).

The professional learning workshops could include contributions from existing staff members who have the relevant knowledge and pedagogical skills, and could take advantage of the many resources available on-line (for example, the Teaching International Students Project through the U.K Higher Education Academy website). Having some interactive workshops for staff where both international and domestic students are invited could also inform staff of the most effective strategies from the students’ perspectives.

The professional learning workshops should also raise awareness of the three different levels of teaching (Biggs and Tang, 2011), their associated impact upon students and how some teaching strategies might be restricting rather than supporting student learning. According to Biggs and Tang, recognition of one’s personal approach to teaching is the first step in addressing the homogenous views some staff may have of their international students, and of acknowledging a need for change.

Such training opportunities should also include details of the services that are available for international students, so staff members can pass relevant information on to their students. This could increase the levels of service utilisation by some international students.

7.4.4 Review the English language requirements of all degrees in consultation with academic and support staff

The issue of English language proficiency was raised by all three cohorts, suggesting that it could be timely to review the English language requirements of different courses at the Case University. Further information about the specific English skills required to begin university-
level study in different courses and at different levels is required, rather than trying to measure course requirements against the existing IELTS indicators. In fairness to students who are accepted, and who believe that they have the requisite skills, some clearer indication of how well their skills match those required is needed.

7.4.5 Revisit the level of English proficiency required to enter university, or increase the English language support available

An alternative to the development of a new instrument would be to raise the IELTS scores required for entry, as there seemed to be a broad consensus that many international students who were eligible according to their IELTS scores did not possess the requisite skills. Unfortunately, the outcome of such a course of action would almost certainly be a decline in international student enrolments because many would no longer meet the requirements. This would place the Case University in the position of denying itself a source of the revenue it needs to function for all students.

If the current requirements regarding English proficiency continue, the Case University needs to identify early those students who need additional support, and increase the language development services it provides. Online tools such as that developed by the English Language Growth program (Rochecouste et al., 2010) should be promoted to these students so that they can enhance their proficiency. Embedding learning support, discussed further in the next point, might reduce the challenges faced by staff and students as a result of low levels of English language proficiency.
7.4.6 Provide embedded learning support with support of faculty-specific learning support staff

Offering a learning advisory service through the workshop model was not seen as effective for international students. Both academic and support staff members who had experience with embedded learning advisors (LAs) agreed that this model was more effective for both staff and students. The learning advisors could introduce themselves at the beginning of the course so that students became familiar with them, and so hopefully more willing to work with them throughout the semester.

Consistent with research in this area, staff members advised that, although this would be a cost- and labour-intensive solution (Brooman-Jones et al., 2011; Crosling & Wilson, 2005; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Stratilas, 2011), it would be more cost-effective in the longer term. Well-supported students who were able to get individualised assistance would need the service less as their studies progressed and they carried those skills forward. Having embedded learning advisors would increase the likelihood that international students would access the services early in their studies, rather than waiting until they reached a point of crisis. Students with improved skills would alleviate the stress felt by teaching staff when marking international students’ work, which could then reduce the likelihood of ‘soft marking’.

7.4.7 Limit the tutorial size of units that have significant enrolments of international students

While costly, this would also be an investment in the longer term. Smaller groups would facilitate interactions, help international students become more familiar with the staff and students, and therefore increase their participation. This would then allow domestic students who
are sharing the classroom an opportunity to learn from their international peers, which is likely to challenge some of the stereotypes surrounding international students. Smaller tutorial groups would result in more engagement and more effective teaching of all students. The result would be less attrition and its ongoing effects in terms of future enrolments, and therefore advantages for the university, staff and students. Costs could be offset by increased use of technology or larger lectures when the purpose is essentially information delivery of required or ‘base-line’ information.

7.4.8 Build the skills of all involved in group work

Teach roles involved in group work

Successful group work requires an understanding of ‘group dynamics’ and the different roles that group members can play. Many students would benefit from having some instruction on how to navigate group work early in their course progression. Such instruction should highlight the importance of listening to contributions from all members, as well as how to question, give constructive feedback, summarise discussions, and report findings. While some international students might come from cultures where speaking up in a classroom is not encouraged, all societies have individuals with different capacities to listen and acknowledge others, therefore such embedded instruction is likely to benefit many students.

Develop tasks that require expertise of all students

As was noted by some staff and students, assignments which required the specific expertise of one or more group members increased participation between students. Assignments that allow international students to share particular knowledge or expertise, and thus become the ‘expert’, might allow others to see them in a different light. The principle also applies to using the available expertise of all members in a group, so that those with particular research, technology,
artistic or presentation skills have an opportunity to shine. The ‘experts’ could also help build the skills of others in the group. While perhaps more time-consuming, devising tasks that are flexible enough to allow different skills and expertise to be demonstrated, and in supporting students as they become more familiar with playing different roles, would not only enhance the learning experience of all concerned, but help develop skills that will be relevant for them throughout their lives.

*Provide transparent guidelines regarding assessment of group tasks*

To overcome the perception that group work involving international students inevitably results in more work, and possibly lower grades for domestic students, fair and transparent guidelines need to be provided for all group assessment tasks. This might involve a combination of group and individual marks; a mark allocation for ‘group coherence’ and/or the extent to which the group task utilised the skills of all involved. This would be consistent with the Case University’s targeted graduate attributes of (1) the ‘Ability to work in teams’ and (2) a ‘Cross cultural and international outlook’.

*Provide assessment alternatives where necessary*

Depending on the learning outcomes of the units and the purpose of the assessment, group work could be substituted by other means of assessment. As discussed by staff 26, having a student present orally by herself with only the lecturer listening might be an alternative for a student with an anxiety disorder; short answer questions could replace an essay; and on-line discussions could supplement class discussions.
7.5 Conclusion

All three cohorts interviewed for this study reported positive experiences of IE at the Case University, indicating that it was doing many things well. There were, however, strong indications that the IE experience of all could be improved.

As pointed out by the Australian Vice-Chancellor Committee (AV-CC, 2002):

The challenge is to create the policy environment that allows for many different, but effective, approaches targeted at the needs of each group of students. It is not to find a single solution and impose it across all students, courses and universities. (p. 4)

Several of the recommendations in this chapter incorporate the notion of supplementary services for international students to support the centralised model of service provision. Provision of supplementary services would reflect more accurately a Value Position where diversity is valued rather than ignored. Other recommendations target building a greater sense of community, addressing the difficulties surrounding language assessment and the language difficulties experienced by a significant proportion of international students, and improving the learning environment for all students.

Responding more fully to the needs of international students as identified in this research is likely to not only ameliorate the effects of ‘othering’, but also reduce the work load and tensions many staff reported, and improve the learning experience of domestic students. Thus, improving the experiences of international students should improve the experiences of all involved in International Education. Case University is then more likely to receive the economic and socio-cultural benefits reported by some key stakeholders, and by previous research (Bochner, 1986; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; de Wit, 1995; Gudykunst, 1998; Kell & Vogl, 2008; Mahat & Hourigan, 2007; Sam, 2001).
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