

association corner



What was the association's most important achievement over the past year?

Assisting the Ministry of Education to create flexible, articulate graduation requirements for international students, holding an agent information seminar in Shanghai, China and collaborating with the Ministry of Health to create online medical insurance for international students.

What plans does the association have to further its work in the future?

We plan to host fam tours to familiarise agents with BC public education and enable them to visit school facilities; expand the Ipsea website to give online information about BC as a choice destination and the excellence of programmes for international students; and participate in selected agent seminars and study abroad fairs.

How does your association work with agents?

Ipsea introduces agents to member school districts and can provide information about BC, public education and programmes for international students in BC schools.

Full name: International Public School Education Association
Year established: 1994
Organisation's main role: to promote collaboration among member districts and support member districts in their efforts to promote British Columbia public education to the international community
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How is your association helping its members to compete internationally?

We advise Canadian and BC government departments and all interested parties on the needs, directions and effectiveness of international education. Ipsea also works cooperatively towards the establishment of common standards of ethical conduct and educational expectations so that education agents can confidently promote and explain the high quality of education in British Columbia.

Protests over New Zealand fee increases

The New Zealand University Students' Association has launched an international campaign to prevent universities in the country from raising international student fees on a yearly basis. The association is calling for the "grandparenting" of international students' fees, which would charge students a set fee for the duration of their studies, thereby enabling them to budget more effectively for the length of their stay.

The campaign was launched after a number of institutions in New Zealand announced large fee increases for international students this year, resulting in protests at university campuses around the country. The University of Waikato was the scene of a mass student protest earlier this year after it announced plans to increase international student fees by 10 per cent, following an increase of 28 per cent in the last two years. Sandy Pushpamangalam, President of the Waikato Students' Union, pointed out that a graduate student enrolled in 2001 for four years is currently paying 50 per cent more in fees because of fee

increases, inflation and other factors. Fees for international students at the University of Otago were also due to rise by between 19 and 20 per cent in 2005.

"The government should require all institutions to introduce grandparenting of international student fees to ensure that international students have certainty about the fees they will be required to pay," said Fleur Fitzsimons, Co-President of the New Zealand University Students' Association, in a statement.

Industry insiders in New Zealand fear that fee increases could discourage students from coming to New Zealand. However, in a recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Education, international tertiary students in New Zealand gave more favourable evaluations regarding their educational experience and academic progress than secondary and private language students (see page 7). When questioned about services and facilities, tertiary students rated these as either good or excellent, while life satisfaction received a higher score

among secondary and tertiary students than those in private language schools.

The report's authors, Professor Colleen Ward and Dr Anne-Marie Masgoret from Victoria University of Wellington, said, "This survey suggests that the majority of international students in New Zealand are relatively well adapted and generally satisfied with their experiences here."

In an effort to increase welfare provision for students from overseas, the NZ Citizens Advice Bureau has opened its first free independent information service dedicated to international students.

Nick Toonen, Chief Executive of the New Zealand Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux, noted, "The Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students requires education providers to support students with access to information about everyday life in New Zealand. These support systems are not monitored so while some education providers offer extensive support to students, others offer very little."

US visa call centre closed

A US embassy call centre located in Shanghai, China was closed for six weeks earlier this year, after Shanghai police found irregularities in the authorisation of the IT company contracted to run the telephone line.

The call centre was first launched in March this year and fielded 10,000 calls from visa applicants per week, addressing visa related enquires and scheduling appointment interviews. During the six week closure period, walk-in visa application

systems were used in Beijing, Gungzhou, Chengdu and Shenyang. In a statement, the US Embassy said that it had "been working closely with Chinese officials for months to establish the call centre and discuss operating procedures". The call centre is now back in operation.

The suspension of operations at the centre occurred one month after the USA initiated a new policy requiring all visa applicants from China to be fingerprinted – a move that was

not well received by Chinese officials. The Chinese Foreign Ministry responded by initiating new visa procedures of its own for US visa applicants. Following the changes, US citizens can now only be issued a visa outside China, rather than at the port of entry. Diplomats on personal travel have to apply for ordinary visas and pay associated fees and some visa applicants have to be interviewed before receiving their visa, according to a report by *Xinhua News Agency* in China.

IDP in India

An initiative to establish a network of Learning Centres in 22 cities around India, which will provide courses to Indian students seeking an education overseas, was launched in May this year by IDP Education Australia.

The learning centres will initially offer short preparatory courses for students planning to sit for the IELTS test and, according to IDP's Chief Executive Lindy Hyam, will be delivered through a mixture of online learning and face-to-face teaching.

"While initially we are offering the IELTS preparatory courses through the Learning Centres network, over time we will be working in partnership with Australian universities, colleges and schools to provide a range of programmes of study at different levels," said Hyam.

The academic content for the IELTS preparation courses is being provided by the Australian Centre for Languages and will be delivered in partnership with Planet company.

Japan tightens visa policy

Chinese students wanting to study in Japan are facing increasing problems when applying for their student visa after a Japanese government crackdown on foreign students who enter the country to work illegally.

The Justice Ministry in Japan announced in May that 73 per cent of visa applications from Chinese students had been turned down for the 2004 academic year, compared with 26 per cent for the same time last year. While all student visa applicants are facing tighter screening procedures, Chinese students appear to be disproportionately affected by the stricter policies, with South Koreans experiencing a drop of just four per cent in visas issued. Overall, the total number of student visas issued for the year was down by 46 per cent.

The stricter visa regulations have been introduced in response to public pressure after a number of high profile violent crimes were linked to Chinese college students living in Japan in 2003. Of the 110,000 foreign students studying in Japanese colleges and universities last year, 70 per cent were from China.

In a further bid to regulate the activities of international students, a panel of the Japanese Education Ministry recommended that all foreign students' performances be appraised more frequently than once a year and that scholarships and tuition grants should be taken away from those not performing well.

Finalisation of Sevis fee rule

The Sevis fee rule was finally published on 1 July, days after higher education lobbyists in the USA abandoned a proposal that would have allowed colleges and universities to pay the fee themselves and recoup the money by charging students higher fees.

The rule will be effective from 1 September and will charge all international students a US\$100 fee, which will cover the administration and maintenance costs of the Sevis student tracking system, to be paid before a student visa is issued. The fee can be paid by credit card over the Internet, by mail with a cheque drawn in US currency or through a third party – such as a school or college in the USA, although there is no bulk payment option currently available. Students who are denied a visa after paying their fee will not be refunded but will be able to apply for a visa of a different classification without having to pay the Sevis charge again.

The Department of Homeland Security is currently looking at ways to enhance the payment options, including a pilot project that will allow students to pay the fee at outsourced financial institutions overseas or at consular offices with international cashiers.

David Ward, President of the American Council on Education in the USA, said that the proposal for colleges to collect the Sevis fee themselves was abandoned earlier this year after a "significant minority" of US college officials strongly opposed the move.

Business school merger in Hong Kong

An alliance between two business schools in Hong Kong was announced in May. Their joint goal is to create one of the top business schools in Asia.

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) are to form a working group to look into the best way of managing such an alliance. "Hong Kong has unrivalled potential to develop into an international hub for quality business education," commented Paul Chu, President of HKUST.

Islamic students welcomed in Australia

A venture intended to encourage Islamic students to study in Australia was set up earlier this year between Victoria University and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils.

Professor Elizabeth Harman, Victoria University's Vice-Chancellor, said that Victoria University would be responsible for the provision of mainstream academic programmes to students while AFIC would provide pastoral care and other support services. Initially, students recruited through the scheme will study at the university's St Alban's campus but they will eventually be able to enrol in pro-

- grammes at any Victoria
- University campus.

Taiwan Scholarship Program

- Taiwan Premier, Yu Shyi-kun, has announced that he will introduce the Taiwan Scholarship Programme for the coming school year in an effort to encourage overseas students to study in Taiwan.

- The scholarship programme has been the subject of much discussion for several years and will provide NT\$80 million (US\$2.4 million) to at least 200 foreign students each year to study subjects including languages, electronic engineering, sciences and business management.

Student guide in Chinese

- A guide to living and studying in New Zealand has been translated into Chinese in an effort to better prepare Chinese students for living and studying in the country.

- New Zealand Education Minister, Trevor Mallard, said that recent research carried out by the Ministry highlighted the need to ensure a quality experience for international students, not only educationally, but also in day-to-day living.

- "This new guide will play an important role in helping students settle in to life in New Zealand," he said. "It advises students of some of the challenges they may

- face as international students and outlines avenues for accessing support."

Easing visa rules

- An agreement signed by Russia with Italy and France will make it easier for students, business people and cultural figures to travel between these countries in the future.

- The agreement is expected to eventually lead to the easing of visa restrictions between Russia and the European Union as a whole and aims to increase the issue of long-term, multiple entry visas for up to five years and usher in shorter processing times.

ACIO office upgrade in Taiwan

- A six-month project to upgrade and expand Australian visa services in Taiwan was completed in June this year with the opening of the enlarged offices of the Australian Commerce and Industry Office (ACIO).

- The visa application service at the ACIO has grown by 33 per cent this year compared with the same period last year and reflects the growing popularity of Australia as a study and holiday destination for Taiwanese people. According to an ACIO representative, there are currently 10,000 Taiwanese students studying in Australia.