The International Student Lifecycle
Stage 1 – Transition Towards

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

Foundational Supports: This section outlines the core services and resources essential for addressing basic needs and facilitating smooth transitions throughout the student journey.

Advanced Supports: This section offers insights into advanced support strategies aimed at enhancing the student experience and promoting wellbeing. When applicable, foundational and advanced supports might be combined.

Support and Resource Delivery Options: Practitioners are encouraged to consider a range of delivery options, including in-person, virtual, and asynchronous formats, to ensure accessibility and flexibility tailored to the preferences and needs of students.

Guiding Principles: Drawing from established principles in international education, the guiding principles section articulates core values and approaches that underpin effective support for international students. Practitioners are encouraged to apply these principles as guiding frameworks across all stages of the international student lifecycle to ensure consistent and student-centred support.

External Resources: This section highlights external resources, such as community organizations and government agencies, to supplement and enhance institutional support efforts.

PRE-DECISION

The pre-decision stage is a critical opportunity for international students to engage with the institution and sets the stage for the future relationship between the student and the institution. During this stage international students and their families will develop their impressions of the institution and an understanding of what to expect.

Foundational Support

- **Clear and Accessible Information Provided In-Person and Online:** Provide information through various platforms, such as: website, social media, email, and written communications. The content should include information in key areas related to decision making:
  - **An overview of the institution, location, and campus culture**
  - **Application and admissions processes**
  - **Faculty and academic program options**
  - **Student supports and co-curricular opportunities**
  - **Immigration and travel details**
- **Opportunities to Consult with Staff:** Prospective students need opportunities to consult with staff within the institution, including international recruitment officers, immigration and settlement advisers, admissions staff, and faculty advisers.
- **Targeted Information for Families:** Provide information designed to connect families with the institution. Provide recruitment information and materials in multiple languages to accommodate communication with families.
- **Recruitment strategies and engagement:** Focus on global market planning and target events – in-person, digital, and virtual (e.g., live Q&A sessions)

Advanced Support

- **Student Ambassadors for Prospective Students:** Design programs to recruit and support students through connections with student ambassadors. Provide contact opportunities with current students and alumni – peer to peer student engagement for prospective students. Use online platforms that provide opportunities for students to form peer groups and engage with other students (e.g., Unibuddy).
- **Home Country Information Sessions:** Use home country information sessions as part of the international recruitment planning and strategies. Leverage the international travel of staff and faculty and engage alumni in-country to support information sessions and recruitment efforts.

SUPPORTS AND RESOURCE DELIVERY OPTIONS

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Engage prospective international students with informative sessions focusing on academic opportunities, cultural immersion, and practical tips for studying abroad, fostering a sense of community and addressing their queries before making crucial decisions.
- **Peer-to-Peer Engagement and Programs:** Facilitate connections between current and prospective international students, allowing for firsthand insights into campus life, academic rigour, and integration challenges. This will foster trust and camaraderie as they navigate the decision-making process.
- **Recruitment Events – Virtual and In-Person:** Offer diverse platforms, both virtual and in-person, for universities to showcase their offerings. This will enable prospective international students to interact with faculty, alumni, and admissions representatives, providing comprehensive information and fostering personal connections.
- **Advising and Consultation:** Provide personalized guidance and support to international students at every step of their application journey. Create opportunities to address concerns, offer tailored advice, and ensure clarity on academic pathways and visa requirements while instilling confidence and ease in decision-making.
- **Relationship Development:** Cultivate long-term relationships with prospective international students through consistent communication, personalized interactions, and targeted outreach efforts, nurturing trust that extends beyond the initial recruitment phase, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to the institution.

ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT

Providing effective admission and enrolment management support is crucial for attracting, engaging, and retaining international students.

Foundational Support

- **Clear and Accessible Information:** Provide easily accessible information on admission requirements, application procedures, and deadlines specifically tailored to international students. Offer multilingual resources and support services to assist international students in understanding and completing the application process. Be clear on the financial cost and true cost of living for the area.
- **Streamlined Application Process:** Utilizing *EducationPlannerBC* or the institution's direct application portal, ensure that there are clear instructions on the required documents and how they may be submitted. Provide guidance on preparing and submitting academic transcripts, English language proficiency test scores, and other necessary documentation. From the student perspective the admission and enrolment processes include the following steps:

    1. Research academic programs and admission requirements.
    2. Determine intake timelines (i.e., September, January, May, July) and application dates.
    3. Ensure the admission requirements are met, including academic and English proficiency requirements and potentially country specific requirements.
    4. Complete online application and provide required information and documents. These may include personal information, academic records, and test scores (if applicable).
    5. Submit additional application materials such as letters of recommendation, transcripts and essays.
    6. If applicable, pay application fee.
    7. Once a decision is received, obtain the Letter of Admission or Offer Letter for the immigration processes and Provincial Attestation Letter.
    8. Apply for scholarships.
    9. If applicable, pay deposit.
    10. Register for courses: If it is the student's responsibility to register for classes, be clear on how that can be completed, dates, and provide support for academic advising well in advance of registration. International students are also more likely to need manual waivers for course enrolment that should be addressed before registration date.

- **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Offer financial aid and scholarship opportunities specifically targeted towards international students to help alleviate the financial burden of studying abroad. Provide information on available funding options, application requirements, and deadlines to assist international students in securing financial support.
- **Regular Assessment of Admission and Enrolment practices:** Conduct regular assessments and surveys to gather feedback from international students and identify areas for improvement in admission and enrolment support services. Collaborate with international education organizations and government agencies to stay updated on best practices and regulatory changes impacting international student recruitment and enrolment.

Advanced Support

- **Personalized Assistance:** Assign dedicated international admissions officers to support international students throughout the application and enrolment process, addressing their individual needs, concerns, and goals to enhance their overall experience and success and offering tailored assistance and resources. Offer virtual or in-person information sessions and workshops to address common questions and concerns of international applicants.

- **Application Fee Waivers or Reductions:** Consider offering application fee waivers or reductions for international students to alleviate financial barriers to applying to the institution.
- **Enhanced Online Application Portals:** Implement user-friendly online application portals specifically designed for international students, allowing for easy submission of application materials, and tracking of application status.
- **Document Translation Services:** Provide access to translation services for international students to translate academic transcripts, recommendation letters, medical documents, and other required documents into the language of the institution.

PRE-ARRIVAL

Pre-arrival resources and supports can play a crucial role in helping students and their families feel less anxious, more prepared, and more connected to the institution as they start their educational journey. One of the primary objectives of this stage is to help students understand the essential tasks and procedures they need to complete before coming to Canada to begin their studies.

Foundational Support

- **Pre-Arrival Immigration** (More detailed information about immigration support can be found in the guide on stage 2 – transition in): Provide information on work authorization and how to apply for a study permit
- **Financial Planning:** Provide realistic information to help students plan their finances, including tuition fees and options for paying these fees, living expenses, travel costs, and any unforeseen expenses.

- **Settlement:** Provide information to help students prepare for their transition into a new country. Depending on where the student is leaving from, some of these tasks will need to be done upon arrival, but making students aware at this stage can help them prepare:
  - **Housing Resources:** Securing suitable accommodation, either on-campus or off-campus, involves understanding lease or rental agreements, payment terms, and potentially arranging for roommates. Students preparing to live on-campus will begin their engagement with the institution's Residence Services.
  - **Health Insurance:** Ensuring adequate health insurance coverage is essential for international students for ongoing health maintenance and medical emergencies.
  - **Banking:** Making students aware of what will be needed to open a bank account tailored for international students, considering fees, transfer options, and currency exchange services.

- **Cultural Preparation:** Facilitate learning about Canada's cultures, languages, norms, and potential challenges to help engage students and get them prepared for their transition into living in a new country. Provide background on the Indigenous people of the area.
- **Travel Planning:** Help students understand what is needed to travel to Canada and their institution destination. The planning can include determining travel options, what requirements might be in place to travel and how students can get to the institution destination, if this is different from where they arrive into Canada.
- **Course Selection and Registration:** Provide support for students with their course registration, including timely information about what they need to do and when. Course registration processes may be different than what the student is expecting, so the process needs to be made clear. For example, at some institutions, students may need to register in June or July for their courses for the next two terms or full-year. Other institutions may register the students in the courses as part of their program. International students are more likely to not have their pre-requisites from their previous institution recognized in the registration system. Be clear that students need to check this in advance to ensure any courses requiring pre-requisites have the pre-requisite noticed and it will not stop their registration.

- **Prepare for Arrival and Orientation Programs:** Provide information to students about registering for orientation activities and other welcome and transition activities. Remember to be clear in the timelines. For example, saying "Immediately upon arrival, apply for your MSP" may mean that a student does it while at the airport while in reality, it should be done within the first two weeks.
- **Pre-Arrival Online Programs and Events:** Engaging students in pre-arrival online events gives the opportunity to share important and timely information while giving students insights into student life and the culture of the institution.

- **Peer to Peer Connections:** Provide opportunities for students to learn from one another's lived experiences and develop important connections and networks that will help students engage with the institution and feel a part of the community.
- **Website Content:** Providing relevant and accessible website content helps students navigate the pre-arrival stage effectively and sets the stage for a smooth transition to campus. Content should be written and formatted with the international student journey in mind. It should be highly searchable and easy to navigate with a cell phone.
- **Communications with Students:** Emails: Emails are a useful tool to share timely and important information, including tasks and processes required to travel to Canada and begin studying. It is essential that emails use a welcoming and supportive tone, with information that echoes what can be found in more detail on the website.
- **Online Meetings:** Engaging with students online helps gives an opportunity to ask questions and get more personalized information. This is also an opportunity for students to get connected with key staff members, experience a welcoming presence, and get a preview of what to expect on-campus.
- **Social Media Engagement:** Engaging with students through social media has become an essential component to student communication plans. This practice can be more effective if platforms in target market regions and countries are utilized. For example: Weibo, WeChat and Douyin in China; Quora in India; and Telegram, Discord and WeChat in African nations.

Advanced Support

- **Advanced Online Pre-Arrival Sessions:** Providing a pre-arrival online information session for students has become the norm for most institutions that welcome international students. Online session offerings can be advanced if there are the resources to offer these sessions in multiple time zones and at different points in the pre-arrival journey. Providing a series of pre-arrival sessions to help students engage with material in more manageable circumstances. For example, institutions could cycle through three levels of pre-arrival sessions:
  - **Level 1:** An information session could be provided after students are admitted and help to communicate the next steps for accepting the institution's offer, making travel arrangements, and the steps needed to start the immigration process.
  - **Level 2:** This session could focus on connecting students with current students at the institutions and give them a chance to ask questions and get firsthand information about being an international student in Canada.
  - **Level 3:** This could focus on securing housing and other settlement information. In addition, at this stage, students may also benefit from assistance with course registration.

- **In-Person Pre-Arrival/Pre-Departure Sessions in Home Countries:** These events provide students with essential information and support their transition to a new country. These sessions introduce the institution and allow students to get a personalized response to their questions. Students attending these sessions can also meet other students going to their institution and a chance to start to build supportive relationships.
- **Videos on Student Life:** Creating short videos for websites and social media platforms is another way to share information and give students some perspective about student life on-campus. These videos can include other students, key staff members, and highlight support services that will help students with their transition. Using videos to help share information allows students to take in the information at their own pace and allows the institution to share information more broadly as needed.
- **Specialized Support for Families:** Family influence and engagement can play a big role in the international student journey. Institutions need to find ways to engage with families and share information. Many students coming to Canada speak English as an additional language and live with families who are either not fluent in English, or have no knowledge of the language at all. Attention should be paid to providing information in multiple languages or formats to help families feel a part of the process and highlight the importance of their part in the student's journey. Institutions might also consider holding information sessions specifically for families. Information shared could include an overview and highlights about the institution, the processes needed to join the institution, travel to and life in Canada, and expectations of the students while at the institution.
- **Advanced Programs for Peer to Peer Connections:** Programs to help students connect with one another will aid in newly admitted students feeling a part of the university community earlier in the student journey. Students who feel more connected are more likely to transition from admitted students to enrolled or registered students thereby helping institutions decrease attrition. More and more platforms are being developed to create online communities for students and give them the opportunities to engage with each other through student groups based on their interests (e.g., Unibuddy).

SUPPORTS AND RESOURCE DELIVERY OPTIONS

- **Online Information Workshops:** Institutions can conduct virtual sessions to provide international students with detailed information about the application process, immigration requirements, academic programs considerations, and campus life, allowing students to participate remotely and ask questions in real-time.
- **Video Series:** Institutions can produce a series of informative videos covering various aspects of the pre-arrival stage for international students. These topics can include the topics listed above, as well as information regarding settlement considerations for students, including starting how to start looking for housing options, making financial arrangements and planning their travel, offering visually engaging content that students can access at their convenience for detailed guidance.
- **In-Person Workshops (In-Country):** Institutions organize workshops in students' home countries to offer guidance on the application process, visa procedures, and cultural adaptation, providing an opportunity for face-to-face interaction and personalized support.
- **Recruitment Offered Programs On and Off-Campus:** Recruitment practitioners sometimes offer programs that showcase campus facilities, academic offerings, and student services both on-campus and through off-campus events, allowing prospective students to explore their options and engage with representatives directly.
- **Pre-arrival Online Course:** Institutions can design comprehensive online courses comprising multiple sessions that cover topics such as academic expectations, cultural orientation, and practical tips for living in Canada, allowing students to progress at their own pace and access resources before their arrival. These courses can be offered through the institution's course delivery mechanisms to introduce students to these platforms before they begin their studies.
- **Information Sharing:** Through website content, emails, and social media platforms, institutions can share essential information about the application process, immigration requirements, scholarships, and campus resources, ensuring that international students stay informed and connected regardless of their location.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that the admission and enrolment processes are accessible to all students, including international students and those with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Provide clear, multilingual, and easily understandable information, guidance, and support through multiple platforms (e.g., website content, emails, information sessions, videos, live virtual sessions, print materials, and direct contact with admissions officers). Tailor support to meet the needs of students with disabilities or special needs and consider diverse ways of learning and gathering information.
- **Collaboration:** Foster partnerships to enhance support services. These include in-country high schools, higher education institutions, and third-party organizations such as international education organizations, national agencies, and consulates.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of admission and enrolment support services and programs for international students. Use feedback, research, and emerging needs to refine information, communication content, and enrolment strategies. Ensure these strategies are responsive to the evolving needs and expectations of students and their families.
- **Culturally Appropriate and Regional Relevance:** Recognize and respect cultural differences and provide culturally appropriate content and support. Incorporate communication mechanisms and social media platforms that are meaningful and accessible for specific countries and regions.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Cultivate cultural competency among staff and faculty involved in the admission process, promoting awareness, understanding, and sensitivity to cultural norms, customs, and the varied communication styles of international students.
- **Equity:** Ensure equal access to information, resources, and opportunities for all students, including international students, by removing barriers and biases in the admission process. Consistently review practices to understand and eliminate obstacles, promoting fair and equal opportunities that align with those of domestic students. Provide tailored pre-arrival support and ensure that resources and information are accessible and reflect diverse lived experiences and identities.
- **Ethical Practice:** Ensuring that institutions support students in making decisions that are in the best interests of the students and their families. This aspect can be increasingly challenging when institutions face financial challenges and constraints. However, the focus of recruiting and enrolling international students needs to go beyond seeing them as a source of revenue.

- **Holistic Approach:** Address academic, personal, and career-related aspects. Students will be engaging with the institutions from an academic perspective while trying to imagine living in a new environment, engaging in co-curricular experiences, and experiencing social engagement.
- **Inclusivity:** Foster an inclusive environment that embraces and respects the unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of international students. Recognize that international students are not a homogenous group and tailor supports to meet their diverse needs, reflecting individual, regional, and cultural diversity. Ensure that all students feel valued and welcomed.
- **Setting Realistic Expectations:** Engagement with students during the pre-arrival stage should help them understand what to expect when they arrive and orient themselves at the institution. Institutions should be cautious about providing service during the pre-arrival stage in a manner that is not sustainable after the students begin their studies.
- **Student-Centred:** Placing international students and their families' needs and aspirations at the forefront to provide appropriate and relevant resources and support.
- **Timely and Digestible Information:** It is critical to exercise caution in determining the timing and amount of information to be shared with students at this stage. In an effort to make sure students are well prepared, sometimes there can be a tendency to share too much information at a time when students can feel overwhelmed and may not have all of the context needed to make sense of the information.
- **Transparency:** Maintain transparency throughout the admission and enrolment process, providing clear and accurate information on requirements, procedures, timelines, and expectations.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- **American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO):** AACRAO offers resources and professional development opportunities for admissions and enrolment professionals, including guidance on best practices for international student admissions.
- **Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC):** ACCC represents colleges and institutes across Canada, including registrar offices involved in admissions and student records management.
- **Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) - British Columbia (BC) Branch:** The BC Branch of ARUCC represents registrars and admissions officers specifically in British Columbia's universities and colleges.
- **British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT):** BCCAT coordinates transfer and admissions policies among post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.
- **Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE):** CBIE plays a vital role in supporting and advocating for post-secondary institutions across Canada. It provides resources and professional development opportunities for Canadian institutions seeking to attract and support international students. Through their website, publications, and online community hubs, CBIE offers guidance on admissions policies, recruitment strategies, student services, immigration in Canada, international student experiences, and education abroad programs. Additionally, CBIE provides benchmark information based on international student survey data, helping students gain context for life and studying in Canada. CBIE also organizes webinars, workshops, and conferences for professional development in international education.
- **Embassies and Consulates:** Embassies and consulates can be important sources of support and information for international students considering studying abroad. They can provide guidance on immigration applications and regulations, and embassy services that are available to students.
- **External Agencies (e.g., Kaplan, ICEF, IDP):** External agencies such as Kaplan, ICEF, and IDP offer comprehensive services to assist international students in the pre-arrival stage. These agencies provide guidance on choosing the right academic program, applying to institutions, and navigating the visa application process. They also offer support with travel arrangements, accommodation options, and cultural orientation, ensuring that international students have a smooth transition to their new academic environment.

- **High schools and Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs):** High schools and post-secondary institutions can be valuable partners in engaging with prospective international students seeking information about academic programs, admission requirements, and campus life. They can support collaborative recruitment events, campus tours, and information sessions to help students explore their options and make informed decisions about their educational journey.
- **National Departments - Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC) & Global Affairs Canada (GAC):** Through their website and diplomatic missions abroad, Global Affairs Canada provides information on travel advisories, manages diplomatic relations, and provides consular assistance. These areas can be of help to institutions in gaining deeper understanding of the diplomatic and political relationships with particular regions. This information may play a role in how we engage with students and their families and provide more insight. IRCC provides detailed information about immigration policies and entry requirements ration policies. They also offer guidance on obtaining study permits, temporary resident visas, and work permits, ensuring that international students are well-informed and prepared for their journey to Canada.
- **Recruitment Platforms:** Recruitment platforms such as IDP, Kaplan, and WES offer comprehensive services to assist international students in their pre-decision stage. These platforms provide information about academic programs, institutions, admission requirements, and application procedures. They also offer personalized guidance, support services, and access to educational resources to help students navigate the complex process of applying to study abroad.
- **Peer Connections Platforms (e.g., Unibuddy):** Peer connections platforms such as Unibuddy provide opportunities for prospective international students to connect with current students and alumni. These platforms offer virtual chat sessions, Q&A forums, and mentorship programs where prospective students can ask questions, seek advice, and gain insights into life at their chosen institution. Peer connections platforms facilitate peer to peer support and help ease the transition for international students before they arrive on campus.
- **The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP):** TAICEP provides resources and training for professionals involved in the evaluation of international academic credentials, offering guidance on credential evaluation standards and best practices for admissions.