A sustainable institutional approach to placements for international students

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ANZAHPE
1-4 July 2018
Hobart, Tasmania
International students in Australia

Approx. 25% of Australian university enrolments are now overseas students (Australian Government, 2015; Harrison & Ip, 2013)

International education contributed $28 billion to the Australian economy in 2016-2017 (DET, 2017b)

- 16.1% increase from previous year (DET, 2017b)

606,780 international students in 2017: (DET, 2017a)

- 31.5% from China and 11% from India (DET, 2017b)

Particularly rapid increase in health profession courses in recent years (Harrison & Felton, 2013)

International students report negative experiences in connection with work integrated learning (WIL), including placement (Gribble, 2014; Jackson, 2017; Patrick et al., 2008)
Why supervision matters

The importance of quality supervision in social work is widely recognised (Beddoe et al. 2016; Hay, Dale & Yeung, 2016; Turner-Daly & Jack, 2017):

Benefits include:

- Shaping students' professional practice (Davys & Beddoe, 2010)
- Mutual learning opportunities for both student and supervisor (Attrill, Lincoln & McAllister, 2016; Ross et al., Submitted)

Poor supervision may:

- Create unnecessary stress for students (Giddings, Vodde & Cleveland, 2004)
- Lead to student dissatisfaction (Giddings, Vodde & Cleveland, 2004)
- Result in insufficient preparation for future practice (Moorehouse, 2013)
Challenges supervising international social work students

A key challenge is the extra time and effort required (Attrill, Lincoln & McAllister, 2016; Felton & Harrison, 2017; Harrison & Felton, 2013; Ross et al., Submitted; Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017)

This may be due to:

- language barriers and cultural and educational differences (Attrill, Lincoln & McAllister, 2015; San Miguel & Rogan, 2015; Zheng et al., 2014)
- inadequate preparation, training or competence to supervise international students (Felton & Harrison, 2017; Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012)
- lack of support and/or connectedness to the university for field educators and students being unprepared for placement (Ross et al., Submitted)

Placement supervisors call for further research into cultural concerns in social work supervision (Beddoe et al. 2016)
Training field educators

Field educators tend to have little or no training in:

- culturally-sensitive supervision (Hvalič-Touzery et al., 2017; Felton & Harrison, 2017; Zunz & Oll, 2009)
- transcultural pedagogies (Ryan, 2011)
- supporting development of communications skills (Attrill, Lincoln & McAllister, 2016)

Social work field educators are interested in training focusing on how to supervise international students (Grieve et al., Submitted)

Some preparation/mentoring programs in use (Zuchowski et al. 2014)

No guidelines on how best to develop skills for supervising or teaching international students currently exist for field educators (Felton & Harrison, 2017; Tran, 2013)
Three approaches to the education of international students

The pastoral-care approach:
International students positioned as dependent subjects (Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2009)
Teaching/supervising international students viewed as laborious and challenging as additional support is required (→ no mutual benefits)

The consumer approach:
International students viewed as consumers of educational commodity → consumer protection is required (→ mutual economic benefits)

The agency approach:
International students viewed as capable of creating and enacting change (Tran & Vu, 2018)
(→ relationship between students and teachers/education providers based on mutual benefits for learning and development)
Viewing the student-supervisor relationship as valuable and reciprocal

There have been calls to embrace new perspectives on teaching international students:

→ A need to move beyond deficit thinking (Tran & Soejatminah, 2017)

International students viewed as:

- globally mobile citizens contributing to the learning process (Tran, 2013)
- capable of working across borders (Tran, 2013)
- resources for collective learning (Tran, 2013)

The supervisor-student relationship enables mutual learning rather than one-way knowledge transmission (Abukari, 2014; Felton & Harrison 2016; Ryan, 2011)

The onus of learning is shared between student, university, agency and supervisor (Harrison & Ip, 2013)

The transcultural approach: Culturally inclusive teaching and learning environments (Ryan, 2011)
The Study

**Aim:** To investigate field educators’ experiences of supervising international social work students

A nationwide research project conducted in 2017

Field educators across Australia invited to participate

The data:

- 66 anonymous online survey responses
- 15 in-depth phone interviews

Data thematically coded by 1st and 3rd authors using Nvivo Pro (version 11)

High levels of inter-rater reliability (Kappa ratings from 0.40 to 0.99)
Findings: Additional time and effort

60.5% survey respondents supervise international students differently to local students
50% interviewees supervise international students differently to local students

Data reveals deficit thinking ≈ “pastoral-care” approach

Extra time and support required to supervise international students:

“I would say if anything, for us here, we have to put more time and effort generally, into international students than we do with non-international students.” (Int. 13)
Findings: Preparation for field educators to supervise international students

Many field educators stated that they felt preparation from either their agency or the partner education provider would have assisted them.

“… I’ve certainly got no input into what it was like to have an international student, nothing. So I wasn’t prepared. And I think if I was to say what could be done to improve it, that would be one of those things. There was absolutely nothing provided.” (Int. 11)

“So a student was sent to me and there wasn’t anything to say that I knew how to supervise him. So he was just sent to me because I was a social worker, but there hadn’t been any… years ago there used to be a whole kind of seminar about it, offered about it and there wasn’t this time. So I think that’s probably something that needed to be better. (Int. 14)
Findings: Contact and cooperation with the education provider

Many field educators stated that they felt that closer contact with the education provider was needed:

“I actually think that there should be more [meetings between university supervisors and task supervisors], so that – normally what happens is you only get to see the other supervisor, the social work supervisor, from the university, half way through the placement. I believe that there should be a bit more in depth meetings, so maybe another one as well. So – beginning, maybe middle, and end.” (Int. 4)

“I think there needs to be far more liaison with the university prior to the placement to ensure that the goals of the placement are agreed upon and that there's shared understanding of the purpose of the placement.” (Int. 5)
Findings: Expectations of the education provider

Some field educators commented on the expectations of the education provider being either unrealistic or unclear:

“Unrealistic expectations of the uni that a student's particular difficulties can be addressed in the workplace combined with a seeming lack of support for the student from the teaching institution.” (Survey)

“I don’t know, the expectations of us is really unclear. The university, I feel like sometimes they’re expecting a lot from us and we’re not actually even paid often to provide that support.” (Int. 9)
Findings: Support from the education provider to supervise international students

Many field educators stated they would like more support from the education provider to supervise international students

“I also think the work relationship between agencies and the universities can be improved. Mainly – especially for students who really struggle with English, extra support from the uni.” (Int. 1)

“If there was, right from the start, a little bit more discussion around it, like if this student is struggling, this is what we [the education provider] can offer, this is how we could support you and this is how we could support them. Whether it’s academic support unit that comes in or – I don’t know what’s available but that wasn’t even really discussed prior to me taking on that student.” (Int. 9)
Findings: Education providers to ensure students are prepared for placement

Many field educators stated that they felt that international students were not adequately prepared by the education provider for placement:

“But over time I've shifted between doing a lot of coaching and then from now placing a lot more responsibility on the university to ensure that the students written communication is up to standard.” (Int. 5)

“I find the majority of [international] students are under prepared by the university and ill equipped to commence the placement.” (Survey)
Findings: Unintended negative consequences

Field educators unwilling to take on international students:

“I only did it for one term and wouldn’t do it again [supervise an international student] because I don't think it’s fair to the students or to me and my family; I need to get paid more than that to do that work. But the actual work, yeah, I really enjoyed; I wouldn’t hesitate to take on an international student.” (Int. 16)
Sustainable placements

Clearer understandings of education provider’s expectations

Clearer understanding of student experience, knowledge and language level

Increased contact and cooperation between education provider and supervisor/agency

Training or preparation for supervising international students - by either agency or education provider:

- Build supervisors’ awareness of the mutual benefits of supervising international students
- Provide information to supervisors regarding their international student cohort
  e.g. motivation, prior experiences, value as mobile citizens, aims, etc.

Ensure students are prepared for placement and understand the expectations
References


Grieve, A., Ross, B. & Ta, B. (Submitted). Towards transcultural teaching: Understanding the training needs of field educators of culturally and linguistically diverse tertiary students.


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Acknowledgment
Support to present at ANZAHPE has been provided by the Monash Education Academy.