Student Services, Division of Pro-Vice Chancellor (S&E)
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Breaking Down Barriers: Language and Space

Relationship Based Preparation for Humanitarian Entrant Students Entering University

Brian Sweeney & Matthew Hingston
UTAS CALD Program

Context

Who are CALD Students?

CALD – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Domestic – not International Students

Humanitarian Entrants/Forced Migrants

- mostly refugees
- trauma & torture
- collectivist cultures
- priorities are safety, family & education

Context ~ UTAS Client Group

UTAS 2009 – more than 350 who identify as CALD

More than 160 are forced migrants

Mostly African – Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Eritrea, the DRC …

Also Latin America, Middle East, Central Asia and the Balkans

UTAS numbers up almost 30% in 2009

Effect of past on preparedness for University

Voluntary Migrants / International Students

- Choose country & research before they leave.
- Plan move carefully in advance.
- Take time to organise passport & visas.
- Pack and take all their belongings.
- Say Goodbye to family and friends.
- Usually leave a forwarding address.
- Can return home if things do not work out.
- Although not prepared for the specifics of the Australian Education system, many come from countries and/or socio-economic backgrounds that prepare them for formal education.

Refugees (Forced Migrants)

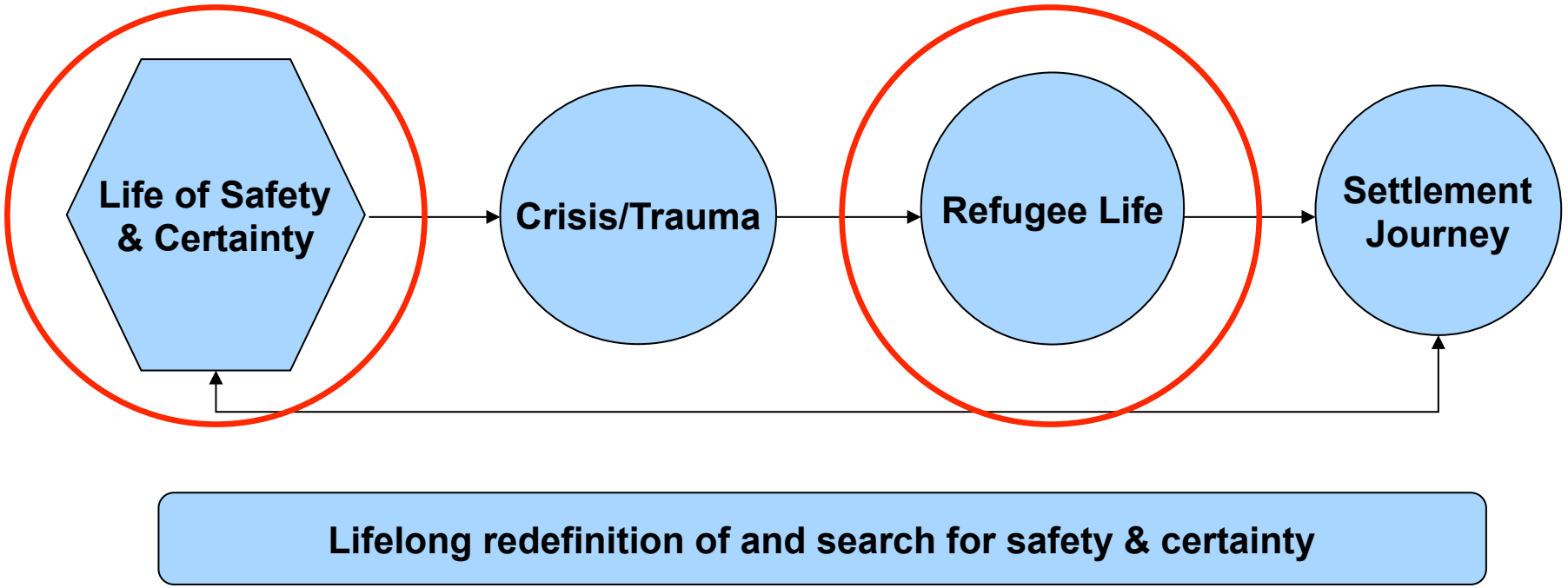
- Take quickest way out of their country
- Leave hastily/often to escape extreme violence.
- Leave secretly without travel documents.
- Leave only with what they can carry.
- Cannot tell anyone ~ fear of reprisals against family.
- Often do not make contact for fear of reprisals.
- Unlikely to be able to return home.
- Education (before) and during refugee experience often limited/broken.

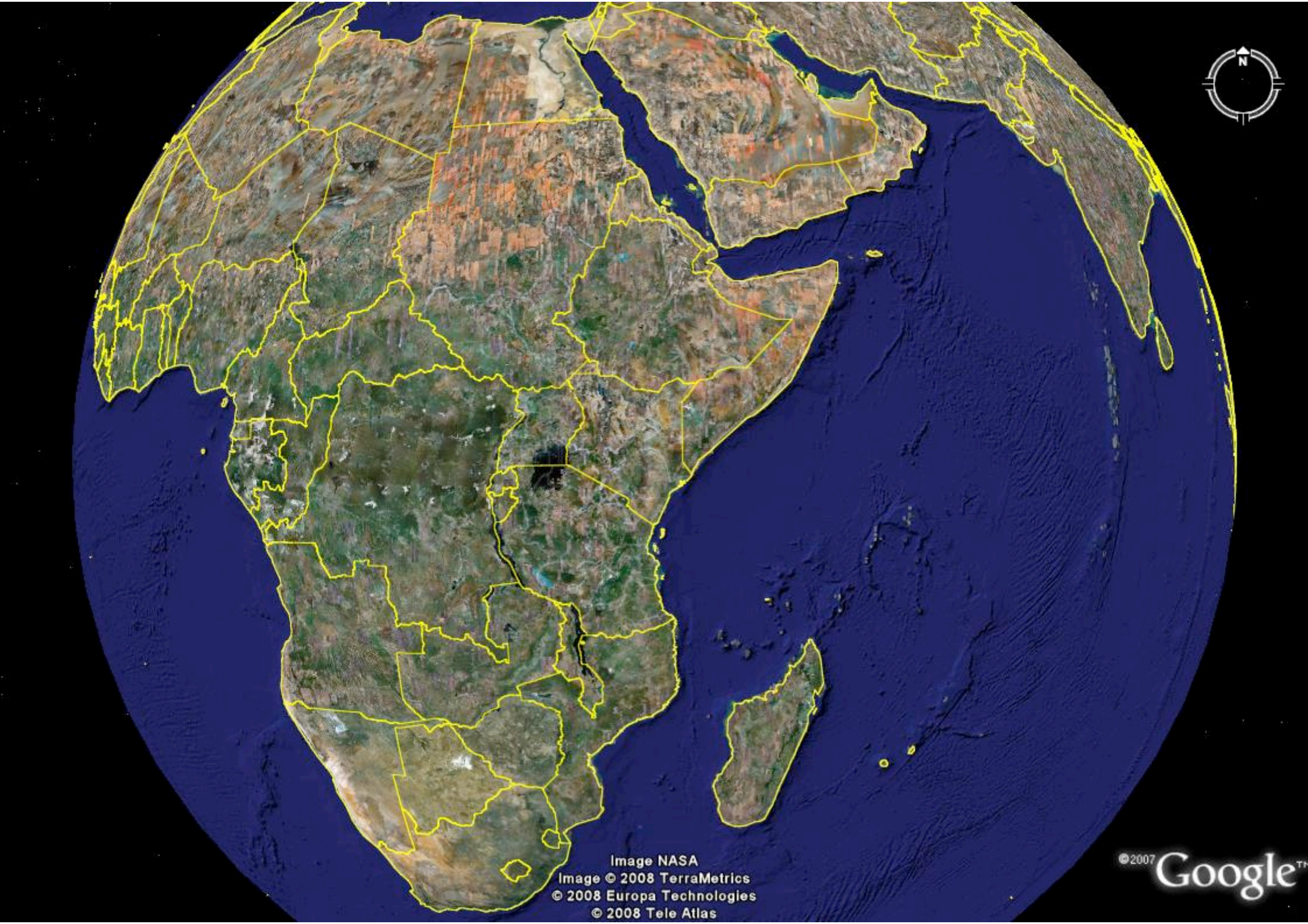
Moses' Story

Moses arrived from Sudan in 2005.

His story is like many …

Broad Context: Trauma, Dislocation and the Search for Certainty

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Chad
Sudan
Djibouti
Gulf of Aden
N'Djamena
Adis Abeba
Ethiopia
Central African Republic
Somalia
Kakuma, Kenya
Bangui
(Mogadishu) Muqdisho
Uganda
Kampala
Kenya
Congo
Nairobi
Kigali
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Bujumbura
Burundi
Kinshasa
Victoria
Tanzania
Dodoma
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Junqalī (Jonglei)
Sharq al Istiwā'īyah (Eastern Equatoria)
Kakuma, Kenya
Uganda
Rift Valley
Eastern
North Eastern
Kampala
Kenya
Nairobi
Kigali
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Photo Caption: Somalian refugees wave at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya.
Credit: Alan Barke

His experiences leave a strong impression on Moses – fostering a desire in him to become a doctor.

To Moses settlement in Australia makes this desire attainable.

On arrival Tasmanian law necessitates that Moses is placed in age appropriate, rather than skills appropriate, education.

Moses is bright, but, displaced by the war he has:

- a broken education
- little exposure to computers
- limited exposure to written English.

He struggles at school. Though his dedicated ESL teachers try their best to bring him up to speed, the three years of college he has to catch up is clearly too short.

Nevertheless, he is intent on going to Uni. After three years of college, despite the advice of the teachers around him Moses applies for Medicine, Pharmacy and Nursing.

These first three preferences are vetoed, but regional University entrance requirements are more lenient for mature age students …

As a migrant, and now citizen, neither Moses' English proficiency nor his lack of experience with computers will be taken into account in his application.

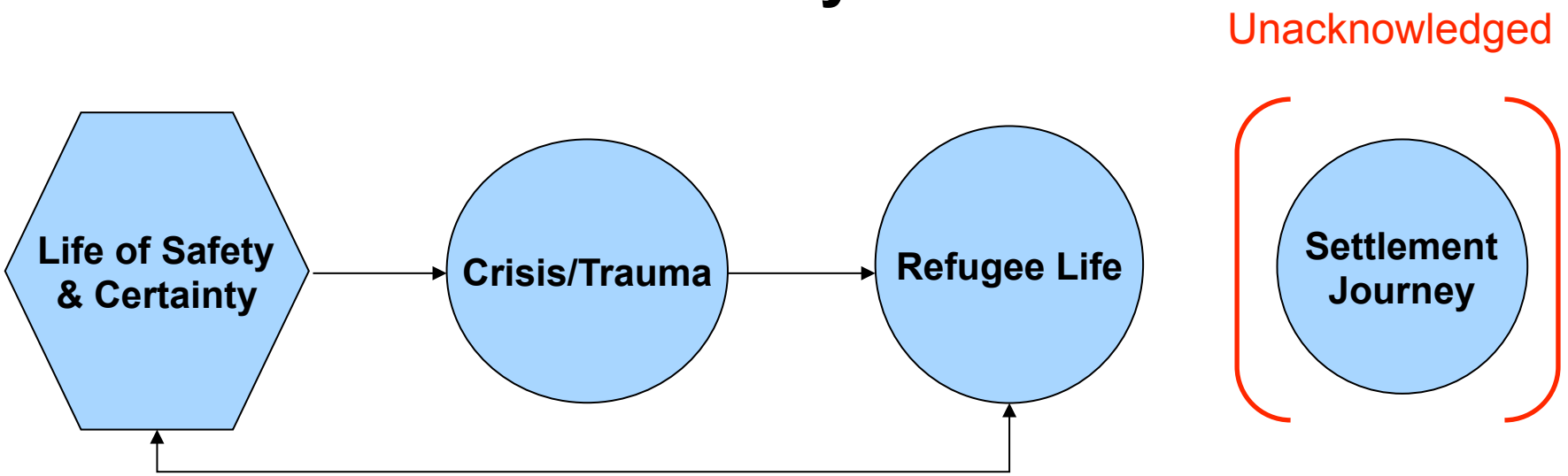
Though the assessing officers have strong personal reservations, as they know that Moses will struggle, under its guidelines for entry the University is required to offer Moses a place in an Associate Degree in Science.

Disappointed at not getting into Medicine, but not understanding the implications of what he has been offered, Moses accepts the offer as a step towards his goal to become a doctor.

Though this system is not deliberately arranged to set up students in this case for failure, that is how it turns out for many forced migrants.

How can we empower these students to better understand their situation and make realistic choices for the best way ahead?

A Misperception: Arrival = Safety & Certainty



Types of Culture

Majority World (85%) = Collectivist Culture

Western World (10-12%) = Individualist Culture

Survival International, *Annual Report*, 2003.

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Issues Within a University Context

Language — Cultural space

High level language and grammar

Critical Thinking and Writing Styles

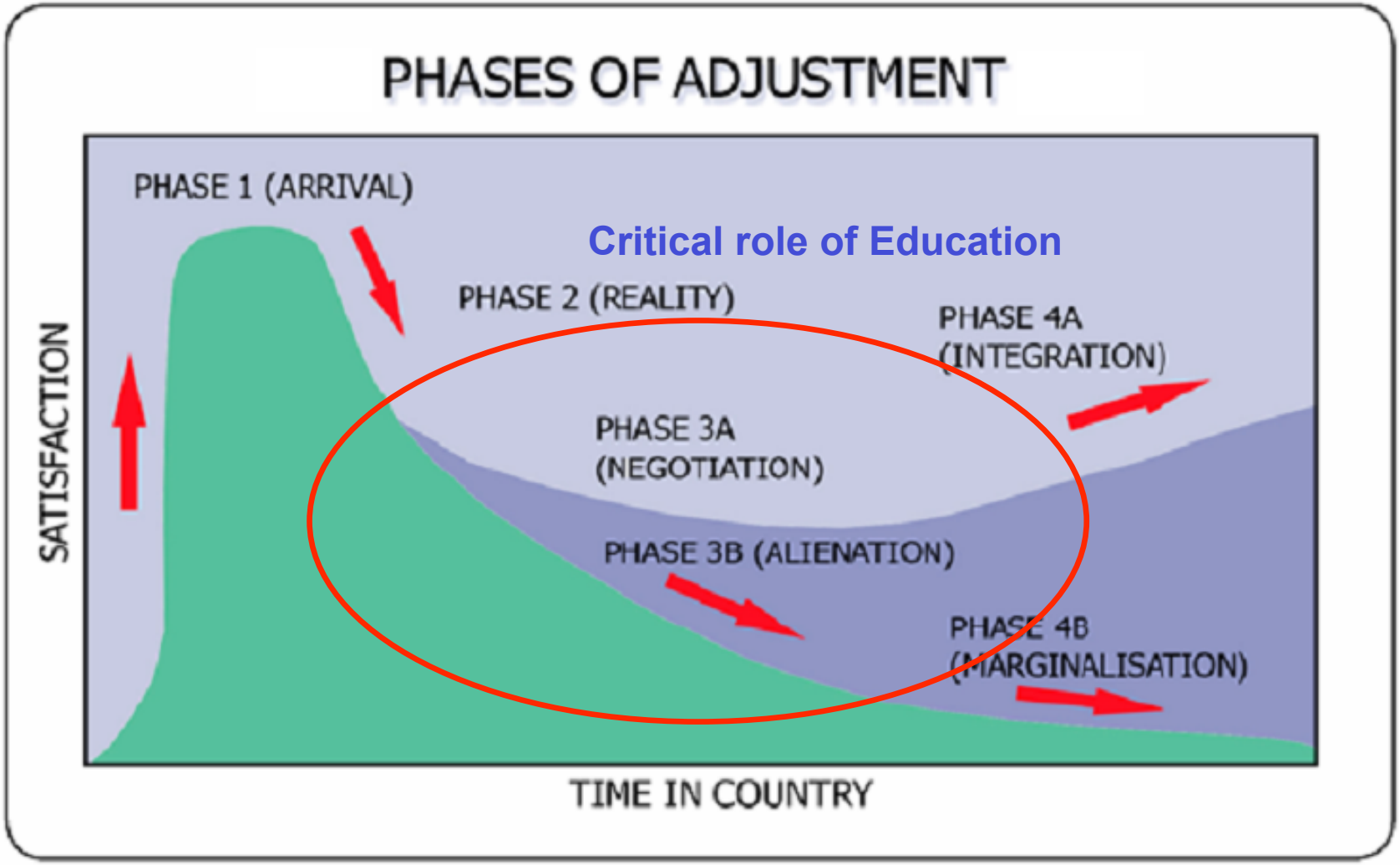
Referencing & Plagiarism

Information literacy

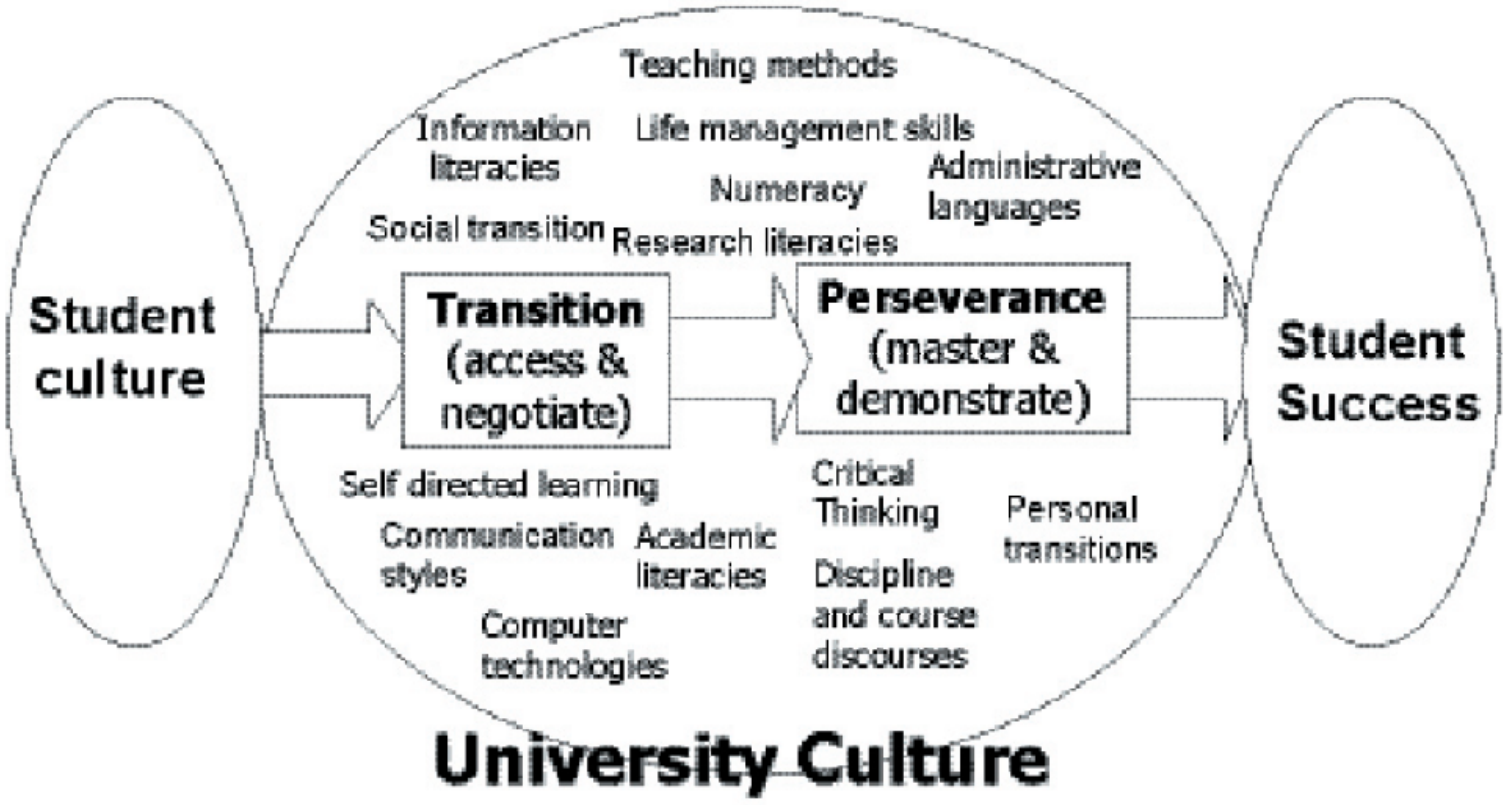
Expectations & Realities

Interaction with Uni staff

The Settlement Experience

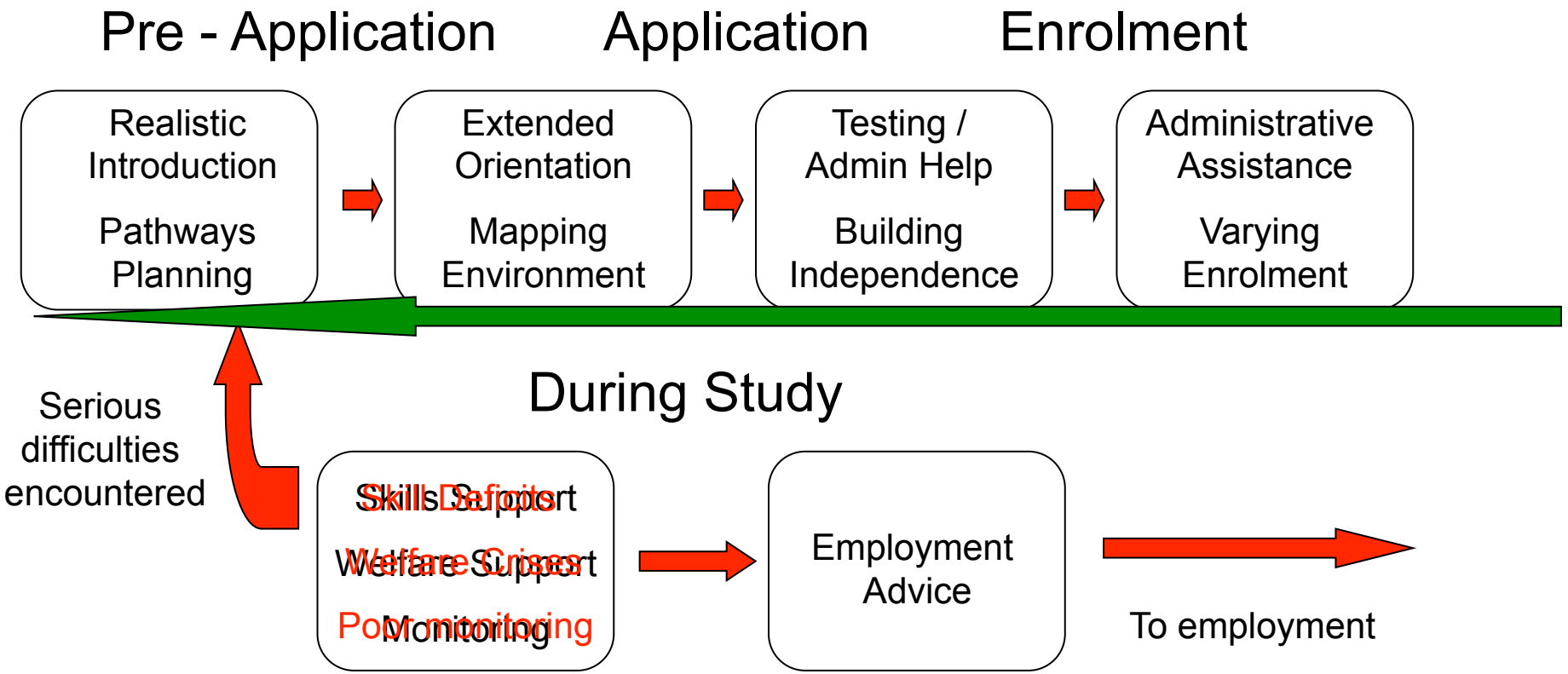


Framework for Student Engagement & Mastery at University

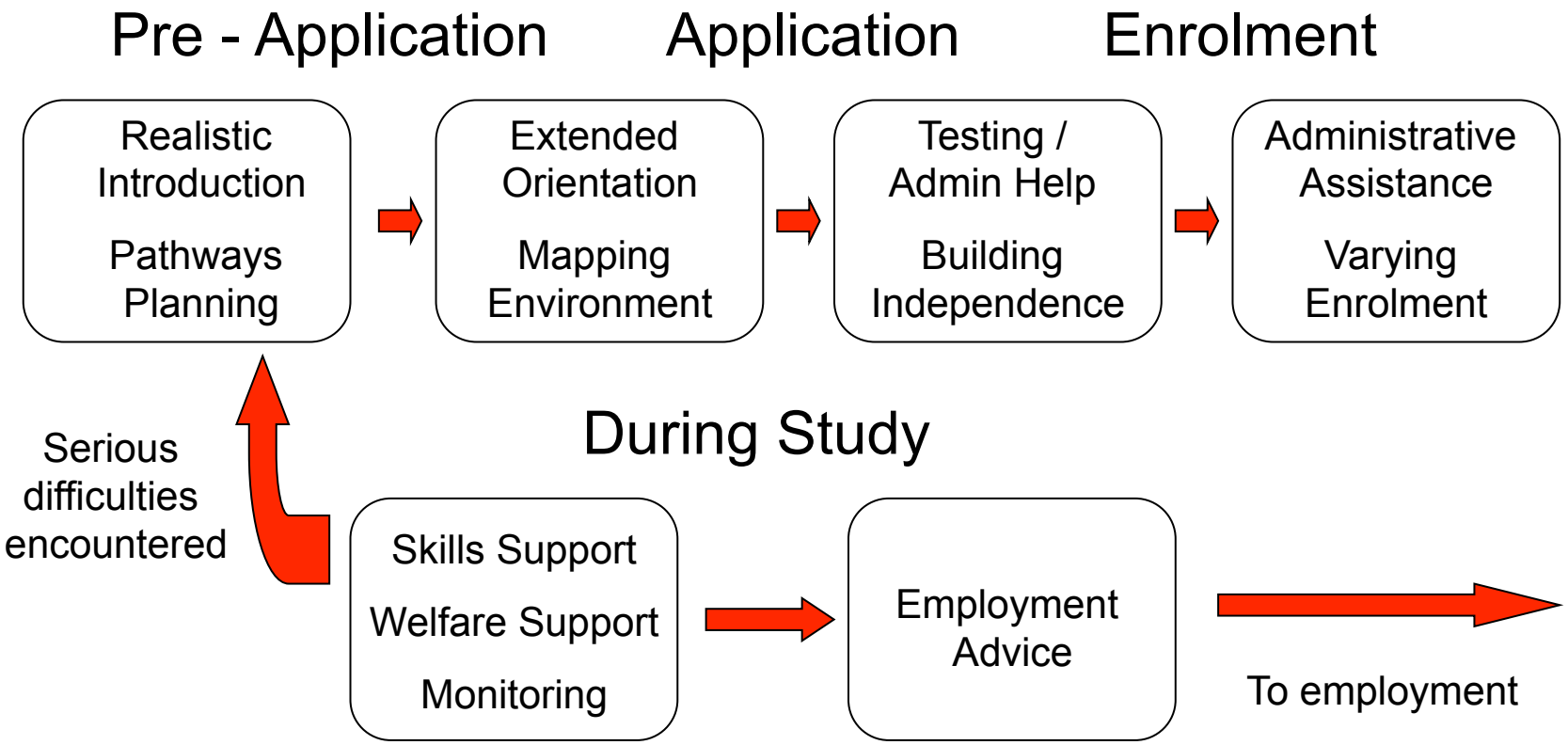


Source: Jill Lawrence USQ

The CALD Programme & the Student Lifecycle



The CALD Programme & the Student Lifecycle



How (not) to build a CALD program

Skill Deficits
Welfare Crises
Poor monitoring

Entrance policy does not take into account:

- Broken schooling
- English language for domestic students
- computer skill deficits

- *Not deliberate, but this new element in the system has unforseen consequences*

No National policy underlying entrance standards

(For migrants as opposed to Internationals)

- for English language
- for academic / computing skills

- *Equity issues in domestic entrance policy make 'gate keeping' here a difficult option*

How (not) to build a CALD program

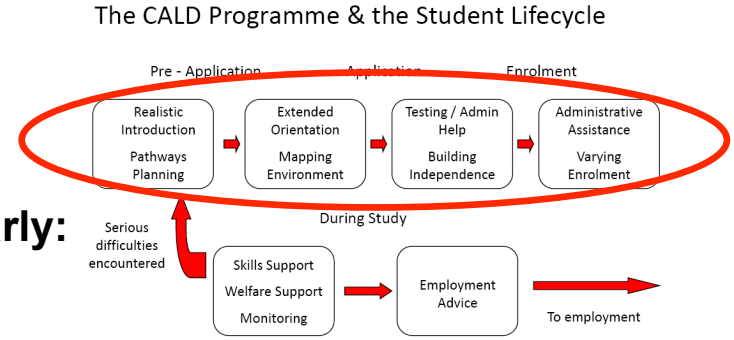
Skill Deficits

Welfare Crises

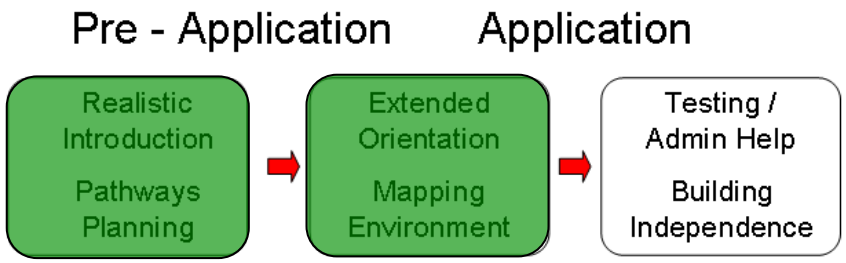
Poor monitoring

Need to reach students early:

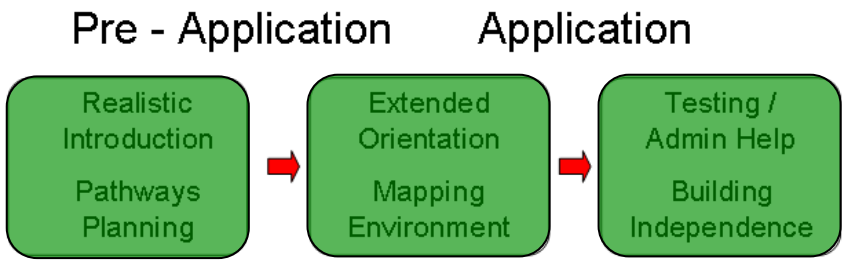
- Most of activities happen before traditional Uni support begins.



- *Voluntary nature of pathways advice, testing and support necessitates a protracted building of trust.*



- Outreach to all local “feeder” institutions/Uni visits
- Weekly lists through application data
- *Messages at this stage must have different focus than “recruitment”*
- Accent is on **Realism**
- Empowering individuals:
  - understand their choices
  - the implications of each choice



- Reading and writing task – read an article and write an essay style response.

- Assessed using a set of criteria – text construction and sentence level aspects.

- Labor intensive – assessed by two staff and moderated.

Pre - Application Application

Assessed on a scale (A+ to E):

A to C – likely to cope with support (on a sliding scale from A to C)

D or below – clearly not ready for language demands of tertiary education.

Initial pilot showed strong correlation between test scores and academic success.

During Study

Skills support

Welfare support

Monitoring

- Combination of skills workshops and individual appointments.

Workshop Topics

Writing essays and reports at university
University writing: How to do references
University writing: Quoting and paraphrasing
University writing: Summarising
Fixing common grammar problems
How to read more quickly and effectively
Developing university vocabulary
Preparing for exams

- Marked interest in seeing and analyzing models of successful academic writing.

During Study

Skills support

Welfare support

Monitoring

•Need to be flexible – within an agreed number of hours between those two components in response to changing student needs.

• Took time to publicise and attract students – need to tie formally between test + support.

• Need schedule early / consistent time and location.

• Good take up – about 1/3 total FY cohort of Humanitarian entrant students.

During Study

Skills support

Welfare support

Monitoring

•For students who lacked formal grammar knowledge (those who scored D or below on testing) this additional support was not enough.

•These students sought intensive 1 on 1 support and their needs were more language based and their stress levels high.

•This support was not designed and is not able to address the needs of those students whose language level (grammar, vocab, reading, paragraph and argument structure) is not sufficient to cope with the demands of tertiary education.

Our Guiding Principles

Adaptable to other 'at risk' groups

- Early Contact with Communities & Individuals
- Realism that considers cultural and aspirational context
- Relationship based engagement, support and development
- Focus on Student Life Cycle
- Mutual responsibilities – negotiated and documented

How (not) to build a program for 'at risk' cohorts

Key Learnings

1. While not deliberate – open access to university in of some cohorts (incl. CALD) have unforseen consequences (conspicuous failure)

2. Equity issues in domestic entrance policy make 'gate keeping' at that level a difficult option (unless whole domestic policy changes)

3. Successful transition to University begins before application.

4. A voluntary structure of pathways advice, testing and support necessitates a protracted building of trust.

5. Messages before application and entry must have different focus than "recruitment" = student centred ***realism***

How (not) to build a program for ‘at risk’ cohorts

Key Learnings

6. Early contact can be initiated by outreach and applicant data (luckily we have a defined cohort – other “at risk” groups more difficult to identify by both methods.)

7. In the absence of a formal “gate-keeping” mechanism it is necessary to present the test as an opportunity to identify areas where skills are lacking along with strategies for developing those skills.

8. Results from testing must be formally tied to ongoing tailored support to promote take-up through interviews with language teachers and formal study plans.

9. Clear need to establish a level beyond which the additional help will not be sufficient and communicate this to the students.

How (not) to build a program for ‘at risk’ cohorts

Key Learnings

10. Students who enter contrary to advice below this level place a lot of stress on themselves and all support and academic staff.

11. Monitoring before census dates (through lecturers and support staff) and after semester results essential to continue pathways assessment / advice.

12. Dedicated learning support not only benefits students but gives a more comprehensive picture of student needs and abilities to central support than feedback form results / academic staff.

Consistent with DEEWR (AUQA audited) Good Practice Principles

1 Universities are responsible for ensuring students are English language competent.

2 Resources are adequate to meet students' needs throughout their studies.

3 Students aware of their responsibilities for developing English language proficiency during their study.

4 Universities ensure effective English language entry pathways.

5 English language proficiency & communication skills are important graduate attributes.

6 Development of English language proficiency is integrated with curriculum design, assessment practices and course delivery through a variety of methods.

7 Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment.

8 Students are supported from the outset to adapt to their academic, socio-cultural and linguistic environments.

9 Students encouraged & supported to enhance their English language development through effective social interaction on and off campus.

10 Universities use evidence from a variety of sources to monitor and improve their English language development activities.

Source: http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Documents/Final_Report Good_Practice_Principles_Part1.rtf

Where to from here?

- Research into current post-enrolment testing occurring in Australia as models to inform improvement of existing pre-enrolment test.

- Development of formal Cultural Access Plan recognised by student and staff to formalise link between testing and support while studying.

English Assist is happy to be in contact with others working in the field.

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