

Enhancing the International Student Experience.  
The importance of Student Groups and peer support at Edith Cowan University.

Presented by  
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Edith Cowan University's International Student Support Team (ECU ISS) considers strong International Student Groups' activity to be an important underpinning of its strategy to support international students.

International Student Groups perform many valuable functions:

1. They provide a vehicle through which an international student's home culture can be validated and celebrated.
2. They contribute to ECU's campus life through the social programs they organise.
3. They play a pivotal role in the organisation of ECU International's International student Orientation Volunteer program.
4. They inform ECU's planning for international activity through their attendance in meetings, planning forums and other channels.

**Their role in the retention of international students and their contribution to enhance teaching and learning outcomes can not be overstated.**

ISS believes strongly in the importance of International Student Groups and has worked strategically to grow the numbers of International Student Groups on campus. Experience has found that activities 'owned' by International Student Groups have greater success than those managed entirely by ISS. ISS endeavours to work in partnership with the International Student Groups on campus and to facilitate their needs. It is also premised upon literature that demonstrates the benefit of peer-mentoring support of international students.

The number of International Student Groups has grown from three in 2002 to approximately 13 in 2006. This is, in part, due to a decision to devote one student adviser to being a student group liaison as a core activity in their position description.

This paper will provide an overview of ECU's approach to international student group activity and link it to literature that demonstrates the benefits that this approach has. Assumptions underpinning this approach will then be compared with actual ECU student experience as evident through survey and focus group feedback.