

## Partnering for student success – a case in crisis management

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A critical incident has been identified as any situation involving injury and hospitalisation, trauma and death. ISANA has been helpful in developing guidelines for international student advisers to support the student, their family and friends on behalf of the education provider in an efficient and compassionate manner.

When critical incidents coalesce and escalate to include students from other education providers, the modus operandi for handling a critical incident becomes more complex. While not losing sight of the individual student, the critical incidents require crisis management on a larger scale. Handling situations on this scale necessarily involves stakeholders external to the institution.

In 2006, a number of international students at the University of South Australia (UniSA) sought advice and counselling as victims of crime. Patterns emerged. The crisis involved students from other education providers, common localities and the largest group of victims emerged as a cohort from one region of the world. The crisis received political attention as well as media scrutiny.

The immediate and long term physical safety and emotional well-being of the students were the primary foci. Other issues such as media management, collaboration with other affected education providers and the concerns of the ethnic community also required attention. UniSA adopted several strategies to assist the students and resolve the crisis.

Internal key stakeholders included student support services, the international office, security staff and senior management at UniSA. External stakeholders included the State government, local councils, student support services at other education providers, the South Australian police, community organisations, diplomatic representatives, student groups and Education Adelaide. Cooperative strategies emerged and this was important to a successful outcome.

Strategies included forming a core internal crisis management team, setting of clear roles for members, communication strategies (internal and external), community forums facilitated by community groups and the police and sharing information and support across the sector.

International education is an important aspect in the Australian economy. International students have enriched the Australian culture and community. They are also seen as easy, identifiable target for petty crime. The crisis in 2006 made clear that international students and their issues and concerns are not a case of 'YP' (Your problem) or only affecting the education provider. This experience showed that their issues and concerns were a community concern. This paper will share the experience, strategies and the important lessons that were learnt along the way to resolving the crisis for the students and the universities involved.