



A Guide to Working with Third-Party Providers

Prepared for IEAA by the Third-Party Provider Working Group

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Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Background](#)

[Consultation](#)

[Considerations](#)

[University role](#)

[Third party providers](#)

[Advertising on campus](#)

[Student role](#)

[Evaluating Third Party Program Providers](#)

[Additional Documents to request](#)

[Funding](#)

[Appendix 1: Resources](#)

[Appendix 2: Survey](#)

[Appendix 3: ACEN Forum Session Notes](#)

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a guide for universities in Australia to work with Third-Party Providers (TPPs). There is currently a spectrum of 39 universities in Australia where each is engaging at different levels with TPPs. Some institutions are not utilising TPPs at all and have no structures, policies, staffing, procedures, or agreements to work with such providers. There are a large proportion of universities who fall somewhere in the middle, with staff assigned to TPP work, have some policies and procedures regarding TPPs, have some experience with TPPs, have signed agreements etc. Finally, there are those universities that are quite advanced in all areas of working with TPPs and will hopefully have a lot of feedback and advice to share for this document and with less-experienced universities.

Background

In March 2015, the [WIL National Strategy](#) was released, referencing the need for clearer guidance on engaging with TPPs.

At the IEAA Outbound Mobility Forum 2014, TPPs were a recurring theme. Universities were struggling to understand how to work with TPPs to ensure due diligence of their mobility programs.

Noting the increasing presence of TPPs seeking to engage with universities and students to access internships for payment, there is a need to develop and disseminate resources, including guidelines on the efficacy, risks and benefits, role and operation associated with TPPs.

We need to ensure reliable information is available to students and employers to support the integrity of interactions involving TPPs arranging internships (Page 5, 2.2.).

Consultation

The working group consulted with Australia's peak professional bodies for career development and work-integrated learning in the higher and tertiary education sectors: the [Australian Collaborative Education Network](#) (ACEN) and the [National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service](#) (NAGCAS). The NSW/ACT Chapter ACEN held a forum on June 15 2015, Contemporary Challenges in Work-integrated Learning, where they discussed the draft guide. A summary of the feedback has been provided in [Appendix 3](#).

Considerations

University role

Agreement with third party provider

As a minimum it is recommended that a written agreement is developed between the university and the TPP outlining the roles and responsibilities. Specific requirements for your institution may vary.

Refer to the [Evaluative TPP](#) section below that you can use to start to vet TPPs.

Communication with internal university units

It is recommended that university units who manage the relationships with TPPs engage with other areas to communicate the list of approved TPPs and the service agreement between an approved provider and an unapproved provider.

For example: TPPs who are not an endorsed university provider should not be on campus promoting their programs to students. The timetabling office would need to be made aware of the approved providers. Refer to [advertising on campus](#).

Advertising to students

It is recommended that universities have a central list of approved TPPs and a process for students going through approved and non-approved TPPs. Universities may want to consider any students going on a program without the endorsement of the relevant university unit are not covered by university insurance, or eligible for a university grant. Universities should be aware that anything promoted on campus could be considered endorsed by the student or their family, thereby potentially opening the university to liability in the event of a misfortune. Contact your legal department for discussion and advice on how to avoid this scenario.

Third party providers

Engaging with universities

Any TPP that wish to work with a university should contact the appropriate university unit. Where any program involves an international component the international mobility unit should be contacted. It is suggested that a publicly accessed list of approved TPPs be available on the university website so that all stakeholders are aware of the relationships.

Advertising on campus

Program providers with no official relationship to the university may not promote their programs on the university's campus without affiliation or prior approval from the relevant unit. On-campus promotion includes tabling, classroom visits, faculty meetings, placing posters on bulletin boards and handing out printed materials on campus.

Student role

Student sourced programs/placements

If the student has sourced their own international program they should register their activity with the mobility office. Universities cannot lawfully stop students from going on a program, but they can confirm which TPPs are endorsed providers and support students to engage with these providers. Universities can also indicate that insurance is only provided for endorsed activities, which includes TPPs. Credit cannot be guaranteed for anything not endorsed by the university.

Evaluating third party program providers

This lists acts as a guide for things to consider when evaluating a TPP.

Theme	Details	TPP response
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How long have you been in business? Where have you led trips? Any specialties? ▪ Are there limits (min and max participants) to what you can do? ▪ Any country or are their specific places you can support? ▪ How many trips have you conducted for universities? ▪ How many students? Ages? Length of trips? Details of past trips? ▪ What is your experience in developing faculty-led custom programs? 	
Housing/ accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are accommodations like? ▪ How many students share an accommodation? ▪ Are they sharing with students on other programs? ▪ What amenities are included (internet, electricity, phone, kitchen, etc.)? ▪ What are the costs and deposits? ▪ Are refunds available? ▪ What type of security is in place overnight? 	
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your process? ▪ How do you advise students regarding their university processes? 	
Payment/billing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does payment work? ▪ How does billing work (cost), when are payments due (this is important because if payments are due before the student numbers are in we don't want to have to give them a deposit before we know we will have the student participation)? ▪ What is refund policy? ▪ Can you accept individual payments from students directly or bulk payments from universities? 	
Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have general liability and professional liability insurance? ▪ What insurance do you carry for your organisation? Your employees/volunteers? Our students? ▪ Does the organisation hold current and adequate domestic and foreign liability insurance? 	

Customer/in-country support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your customer support like? ▪ Will there be an assigned rep that answers student/faculty questions? ▪ How available are they? Will they be available on-site? ▪ What in-country support is available on your programs? 	
Emergency/safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your process for handling emergencies? ▪ How do you communicate with students while there? In emergencies? With parents? ▪ What relationships do you have on the ground with emergency responders and/or medical providers? ▪ Ever had to evacuate from a location? If so, how did you do it? If not, how would you do it? ▪ Does the organisation have an operating manual and universal crisis management plan that is available to all staff? 	
Access Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do you accommodate students with disabilities? 	
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you provide us with client references? 	
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How many full-time staff members do you employ? With how many of these people will I come into contact during my program? 	
Internships/placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How are the companies selected? ▪ How are the internships positions reviewed before, during and after the placement? ▪ What supervision is available to students on campus? 	
Student preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What support and information do you provide the students before the program to prepare them for the program? ▪ Do you run pre-departure programs? 	

Additional Documents to request

- ABN/registration documents
- Code of practice/terms and conditions
- Crisis management plan
- Public liability/professional indemnity insurance
- Offer/acceptance document copies (student)
- Pre-departure advice documents

Funding

The group discussed the issue of fee revenue with TPPs. If a student is doing a TPP program and the student can then receive credit to their home institution but are not paying for the credit how does the university recoup administrative costs? Can they charge an administrative fee? Is this illegal? Can the provider invoice the university their fees, and the university add some fees on top to charge the student if the university isn't doing the assessment but is giving credit/giving OS-HELP etc?

An example was in the most recent edition of [NAFSA's International Educator magazine](#). In the article 'Strategic Portfolios' by Janet Hulstrand, on page 47, Martha Johnson from the University of Minnesota explained their method of building in programming costs to TPP's cost, thereby recouping some of the funds lost by not having students directly enrolled at the university.

The group did not have a best solution for this scenario and believe this is a discussion to be had among the SIG for best practice.

Appendix 1: Resources

International Volunteer Programs Association:

- [Principles](#)
- [Program](#)

Johns Hopkins U Int'l Project [Registration form](#)

[Ohio State Volunteering](#) or Service Learning Abroad

[Boston Uni Risk Thoughts on 3rd Parties](#)

[University of California Davis Independent Programs](#)

[University of Minnesota](#)

[NAFSA - Best Practice for Vetting Providers](#)

[NAFSA - Marketing on Campus](#)

[Outbound Mobility Best Practice Guide](#)

[University of Minnesota - Non-affiliated program providers](#)

Appendix 2: Survey

The first step for the working group was to scope current practice across Australia and identify areas where universities need advice and resources.

As such, the working group sent the below questions in a short survey to allow members to tell us about current practice and policies.

Questions

- Do you have a policy/procedure that covers engagement with third party providers?
- If appropriate can you please share your procedure that references how you work with TPPs?
- What helped inform the development of your policy for working with TPPs? What were the legal considerations? Did you work with your legal department?
- Do you have any issues/concerns about working with TPPs?
- Are there any gaps in your processes that you would like to see addressed within IEAA across the mobility sector?

Survey results

- 26 out of 100 people responded.
- Approximately 42 per cent of those 26 have some form of policy of procedure in place already and about half of those worked with their legal department to create the vetting.
- Some of the steps these institutions take:
 - Students are advised to contact their academic departments to find out if they will receive academic credit. Students are informed that they will be considered independent students within the parameters above.
 - All agreements that have been signed by a university to date have been signed off on by a legal office.
 - This procedure includes reference checks from 3 referees (other universities who have worked with the agent/third party provider), the company profile and a list of other universities the company represents.

Appendix 3: ACEN Forum session notes

WORKING WITH THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS - Group discussion notes

1. **Guide wish list** – Is anything missing from the guide that you would find useful if included?
E.g. checklists, templates, examples of best practice or policy, etc.

ITEM	EXPLANATION
Fair Work Act	Seems to be missing, trust in TTP in assessing
Meaningful work	Third Party providers needing to guarantee quality of work
Appropriate cultural training offshore	
Risk management plan	
Impact on host country	
Learning outcomes	
Stats of safety in organisation	
Case studies	E.g. Of good practice/case study would be useful
Checklist	Could modify PACE checklist – online survey that prospective parties fill in, e.g. OHS, risk assessment etc. -> forms basis of legal agreement
Tip sheet for students / questions for students to consider	Costs involved, risks, details of roles/responsibilities, share past experience of students/testimonials or review option (a TripAdvisor type portal "internadvisor")
Student welfare/pastoral care	Cultural competence/awareness in remote and rural areas in Australia and places like China
Student welfare/pastoral care	What the student will actually take away from the placement
List of Third Party provider of university's	As an example
Rethink of strategy	Do we need third party providers?
Students review providers and share experiences	Student led and influenced ideas
Mechanism for feedback from students	

2. Considerations

Current inclusions are: Agreements; Communication; Advertising to Students and Student-sourced Placements. Are there any considerations you would like to see included?

- *Debrief of returning students/ feedback, reporting to University*
- *Promote coordinated approach to interface/contacting universities (process)*
- *Ethos/ethics of the sustainability of the community placement with a community engagement aspect*
- *Student to student communications included*

3. Evaluating Third Party Providers

Looking at the sample questions in the evaluating TPPs template, are there any other factors that should be considered when vetting 3PPs?

- *Roles and responsibilities for students, TPPs and details of activities and expectations (what is expected of the student? Host?)*
- *Student preparation -> add further questions to seek more detail, e.g. Pre-departure programs, cultural training*
- *What monitoring is occurring during the experience?*
- *Tender document not go directly to students*
- *Debriefing, certificate and other outcomes for students -> make this more explicit, as well as add ons (other benefits of the experience*
- *Student testimonials/evaluations*
- *Quality control: an ongoing/regular re-assessment or review process*
- *Ethics*

4. Any other general comments/feedback on the Guide?

- *Central register for 'dodgy' TPPs that all unis can access*
- *Why pay HECS if paying TPP?*
- *Why does the uni take responsibility for endorsing such providers if it is not a part of the curriculum? What is the uni's responsibility?*