



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

GUIDE TO BEING A BUDDY

INTERNATIONAL BUDDY PROGRAMME



THANKS FOR BEING A BUDDY

This guide has information about the International Buddy Programme (IBP) and what it means to be a buddy for a new international student. International students are a diverse group from all around the world, enrolled in a variety of different programmes. Every student is unique, and has their own needs and expectations. As a buddy, it is important to be open, flexible, and responsive to these needs.

Our international students

Victoria University of Wellington welcomes around 1,300 new international students every year.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students

Students can come from all over the world to study for a Bachelor's or postgraduate degree at Victoria University of Wellington. Some may have studied pre-university courses such as Foundation Studies or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) before starting their degree and may already have some knowledge about Wellington and the University.



TYPES OF STUDENTS

Study Abroad and Exchange students

Study Abroad and Exchange students study at Victoria University of Wellington for one or two trimesters. The courses they study here often credit back to their degree at their home university. These students generally are interested in immersing themselves in Kiwi culture and may enjoy travelling around New Zealand during breaks and weekends.

Foundation Studies students

Foundation Studies prepares international students for their future university study. Besides improving their English language skills, students take preparatory academic courses for a variety of subjects.

New Zealand scholarship students

New Zealand Scholarship students come to the University on a New Zealand government scholarship to study for either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Undergraduate students come mainly from the Pacific and postgraduate students come mainly from Southeast Asia. New Zealand Scholarship postgraduate students are generally older and may bring their families. Some of them might have held senior government official positions in their home country before coming to study at the University.

It is up to you to decide how you want to connect with your buddy, and how much of your personal life you want to share.

BUDDY BASICS

Your role as a buddy is to:

- ▶ be a friendly and welcoming face
- ▶ commit a minimum of 12 hours during the trimester to your buddy and to the programme
- ▶ Attend an IBP workshop (see *Training, next page*)
- ▶ make contact with your buddy upon matching
- ▶ initiate a meeting with your buddy upon their arrival in Wellington
- ▶ continue to answer queries and provide university and local information on an on-going basis
- ▶ take part in the IBP Welcome Event and other social events with your buddy (as time or your buddy relationship permits)
- ▶ plan other independent activities with your buddy during the trimester
- ▶ provide feedback to the IBP coordinator as appropriate
- ▶ maintain contact, even if your buddy is feeling 'at home'
- ▶ be a good representative of Victoria University of Wellington and New Zealand.

Establishing boundaries

As part of the International Buddy Programme, you represent the University. In accordance with the University's Student Conduct Statute, you are:

- ▶ expected to act in ways that are consistent with the role and guiding values of the University, and that does not impede or prejudice the work of other members of the community;
- ▶ expected to act with integrity and demonstrate respect for others.

Remember, you are an ambassador of Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, and New Zealand.

It is up to you to decide how you want to connect with your buddy, and how much of your personal life you want to share. You can talk with the IBP coordinator if you have any issues with boundaries.



BEING A BUDDY

Training

All new buddies must attend a workshop to help them prepare for their role. There will be a two-hour training for all current buddies. Current buddies will be contacted via email by the IBP coordinator with further information, dates, and times.

Training is necessary for all buddies. In order to claim points for the Wellington International Leadership Programme or the Wellington Plus Awards, this workshop is compulsory.

If you are a returning buddy, you do not need to attend the workshop, but it is recommended.

For more information and guidance, email international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz

Buddy programme events

Events such as the welcome event, movie nights, and potluck dinners are run each trimester. You will receive email updates about upcoming training and social events from the IBP coordinator and social media, so keep an eye on your email.

If you have any questions, contact the IBP coordinator, email international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz

Things to do with your buddy

We encourage you to take the initiative to plan activities with other buddies. If you want to invite others along, email the IBP coordinator at international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz to advertise your activity and connect with others in the buddy network.

Maintain contact with your buddy and email them regularly.

Communicating with your buddy

Maintain contact with your buddy and email them regularly. Periods such as the lead-up to mid-trimester break and the end of trimester are when your buddy may need some extra support and advice from you.

Think carefully about how you communicate and how this may come across to someone from another culture.

- ▶ Use clear language and explain New Zealand slang
- ▶ Check for understanding with your buddy. Sometimes it can be useful to follow up with an email to ensure understanding, such as:
'I look forward to catching up with you on Monday 27th at 4 pm in The Hub'
- ▶ Be aware that building a good rapport with your buddy may take time
- ▶ You may want to research where your buddy comes from, to gain a better insight into their home culture.

Remember, people communicate in a variety of ways, not only verbally, but visually and physically as well. While it's important to be yourself and to act naturally, keep in mind that other cultures may have different ideas about concepts such as appropriate dress, personal space, and physical contact or behaviours such as eye contact.

What if your buddy ignores your emails or appears to lose interest?

At times, a new international student will sign up to the IBP for support and find they are happy on their own after a short while in Wellington. This may be a sign that your buddy is doing well—this is a good thing.

Even if you lose contact with your buddy, you can still get to know other participants in the programme through the wider IBP network. You are part of a diverse group of students, all keen to get to know others from around the globe and share their areas of interest.

If you lose contact with your buddy, it may be possible to be re-matched with someone else. Contact the IBP coordinator, email international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz



When students first arrive, they could be feeling a wide variety of emotions—they may be excited to be in a new place and looking forward to meeting new people and trying new experiences.

BEING THERE FOR YOUR BUDDY

Culture shock

Culture shock is the term used to describe different feelings and reactions people can have after moving to a new country and while they are becoming familiar with a new environment.

Culture shock is common among new international students, and it is important for buddies to understand this process so they can respond appropriately. For all new students, the first year at a new university can have its ups and downs, confusing moments, and surprises. New international students must cope with the stress of entering university and living in a foreign culture. Everything is unfamiliar—they must learn to function day to day in their new home.

When students first arrive, they could be feeling a wide variety of emotions—they may be excited to be in a new place and looking forward to meeting new people and trying new experiences. Or they may feel sad about leaving family and friends behind, nervous about finding accommodation, setting up a bank account, buying a mobile phone, or making new friends. The process and timing of culture shock varies—most experience feelings of elation, isolation, happiness, and confusion at some point during their transition before they adjust to their new life.

Euphoria

Your buddy may feel excited, euphoric, and be stimulated by all of the new things encountered. The new culture can seem romantic, wonderful, and new—new lifestyle, foods, and freedoms.

Encourage your buddy to:

- ▶ get involved, meet people—make contacts/friends when upbeat
- ▶ participate in tutorials, prepare well, and offer their ideas
- ▶ be open to cultural coaching
- ▶ practise English
- ▶ connect with hobbies and interests from home in New Zealand.

Help your buddy by:

- ▶ showing them around the University campuses and Wellington
- ▶ learning their preferences; finding common interests
- ▶ being interested in them and their culture; learning about festivals and planning ways to celebrate respectfully with them around their special days. Making an effort with new words, names, and foods.

Distress/shock/confusion

Not all differences will be exciting. Some may cause your buddy to feel sad, insecure, or confused. Some may struggle to understand the ‘rules’ of this new culture, and feel awkward and alien. They may feel they have to change to become a new person, and fear losing their own identity. Seemingly small problems can be overwhelming, and your buddy may show a lack of interest and have trouble sleeping.

Encourage your buddy to:

- ▶ focus on why they came to Victoria University of Wellington in the first place
- ▶ keep a balance between old and new, home and New Zealand
- ▶ lean on those around them who can help
- ▶ keep a balanced lifestyle, exercise, sleep, eat well
- ▶ be patient and tolerant of host culture
- ▶ grieve for their losses, and balance this with new experiences
- ▶ reach out to friends for support, both from home and New Zealand.

Help your buddy by:

- ▶ empathising with their difficulties—don’t take criticism personally and try not to argue how wonderful New Zealand is
- ▶ explaining the rules and norms of New Zealand—if they understand the ‘why’ behind frustrating situations, they may be able to better interpret situations and actions
- ▶ keeping in contact if they are becoming withdrawn
- ▶ encouraging them to keep submitting work and attending class.

If you are worried about your buddy, contact the IBP coordinator or the International Student Support team for advice.

Email international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz or international-support@vuw.ac.nz

As your buddy settles in, they may gradually need your support less and less.

Negotiation

At some point, your buddy will start making the decision to deal with the differences and challenges of living in a new culture, and to integrate aspects of it with their own ways and beliefs. They may start to feel a certain psychological balance and to have a sense of direction. New feelings of pleasure and sense of humour may be experienced.

Help your buddy by:

- ▶ helping them understand their motivations by asking questions: Whose idea was it for them to come to New Zealand? What was their goal? How are they feeling about that now? Is it a goal they still value? What do they want to do about that now?
- ▶ evaluating positives and negatives in their home culture and New Zealand—yes, there are lots of challenges, but there is lots of learning too—what are some they have noticed so far?

Adaptation/adjustment

Hopefully, your buddy will be successful with the cultural transition and adjust to their new life. Things become more ‘normal’ and automatic—they establish goals, develop routines, and become concerned with basic living again. By beginning to experience a feeling of belonging and a greater sense of identity, they can be themselves in their new culture.

Encourage your buddy to:

- ▶ keep building connections with locals, as well as maintaining some ‘old’ connections and interests
- ▶ ask locals about cultural ‘rules’.

Help your buddy by:

- ▶ being there for them—continue to do what you were doing before.

As your buddy settles in, they may gradually need your support less and less. If you have established a good connection, you will be able to sit back and enjoy the friendship and all the things you are both learning.



WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

As a buddy, you aren't expected to have all the answers, but you can point your buddy in the right direction by helping them find the right person or service.

Student services

Find out about Victoria University of Wellington's many student services and encourage your buddy to use them—go to

www.wgtn.ac.nz/students/support

Student learning

The following programmes might be useful to your buddy. Encourage your buddy to check them out at www.wgtn.ac.nz/siiss

- ▶ **Cross-cultural Communication (to be held in Trimester 2)**—Cross-cultural Communication workshops help international students to be successful in their host culture. Through activities and role-play, students reflect on their own communication styles and learn effective communication styles in a New Zealand context. This workshop series discusses communication strategies for speaking to lecturers and other students. Sessions focus on how to start conversations and make connections, how to make requests, how to say 'no', and how to give feedback.

- ▶ **Conversation Group (Fridays, 11 am–noon in KK001)**—This programme helps international students perfect their English by providing an informal setting where students can chat with native speakers.
- ▶ **PALS (First five weeks of Trimester 1, Fridays, 9–10.30 am)**—This is a programme designed for international students and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The programme introduces the learning environment and culture at Victoria University of Wellington and helps to understand the requirements for successful academic study.

Be sharing, caring and have fun—and always remember we are here to help. If you want ideas and advice, or have any queries or concerns, contact the IBP coordinator at International Student Support.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

Level 2, Easterfield Building
Kelburn Campus

📞 04 463 5350

✉️ international-support@vuw.ac.nz

IBP COORDINATOR

✉️ international-buddy@vuw.ac.nz



MAKE AN
APPOINTMENT
TO VISIT THE
INTERNATIONAL
SUPPORT TEAM