In the tick-box response results, both faculty and centralised support staff rated social adjustment issues as much more significant than teaching staff did. As teaching staff accounted for approximately half of the total number of respondents, their rating of these issues had a significant effect in lowering the all-staff average.

Other significant issues associated with the social adjustment that first year students make when entering university included:

i) whether students entered university with an already established peer group or not. Some staff members offered this as an explanation for the statistic from the 2002 FYE survey stating that “26% of students did not make a new friend at UWA in their first year” (Institutional Research Unit 2002)

ii) an aspect of this is the social divide that forms between public and private school students, based on already established networks, which can also shape forms of social elitism within Faculties

iii) Another issue of note was the adjustment to new found freedoms. One centralised support staff respondent referred to the problems of “alcohol and other ‘vices’”), another identified “poor life choices to conform to peer expectations”
Typical responses to Social issues

A large number of respondents (approximately 30 of 130 total) spoke of ways that faculties, schools or individual courses sought to create social opportunities for commencing students. These social opportunities are an important way to engage students with the learning community at a school or faculty level. These initiatives included:

- Barbeques, lunches, and other social gatherings held by schools or faculties at targeted times within the semester, often involving staff and students from all levels within a particular area. Several of these barbeques are used as opportunities to provide orientation and support information. Emphasis was placed on the need to provide social opportunities that didn’t involve alcohol, for commencing students under 18, and those who didn’t want to consume alcohol.

- Orientation Camps and camps held early in first semester (see specific initiative below). These camps are an ideal time to present information to students about logistical issues, the structure of their course and how to get support within their area.

- The creation of formal congregation areas where students can socialise outside of the lecture situation on-campus.

“Mentoring systems by both more advanced students and also by staff - eg. non-subject related "tutoring" or mentoring sessions - expose the students to the staff in situations that are not just knowledge/research based.” (Teaching staff respondent – initiative that “could be done”)

“In-faculty mentoring, where older students within the same area form a support relationship with commencing students.”

“The library is being increasingly used for social meetings, group study etc. Unfortunately at the moment the library buildings are not designed to cope with this use. More relaxed social spaces appear to be needed to match our students who are studying and experiencing university” (Centralised support respondent – initiative that “could be done”)

“Students are part of a group when they are in lectures. Once the lecture room vacates, the only other meeting places are eating places on or off campus. There are very few seating or gathering places (outside of eating venues) where they would have the opportunity to meet and talk to fellow students. (Faculty support respondent – initiative that “could be done”)

“We attempt to bring together a group of combined degree students who otherwise would be ‘lost’ between two faculties.” (Teaching staff respondent)

“We have a student society and have a BBQ after the first year lecture in week three. Some of these students then join the society which provides lots of social opportunities.” (Teaching staff respondent)
A further 15 respondents suggested ways to socialise new students within the class teaching situation through team/group work. A majority of these respondents were teaching staff. In fact, providing support through a classroom context was, appropriately, the most common way that teaching staff felt that they could engage with personal issues in some way. This was in contrast to the majority of faculty and centralised support staff that sought to engage with students on a more one-on-one, direct basis. In the responses describing in-class initiatives, the emphasis was placed on group discussion and team projects, and the need to circulate students through different groups to expose them to a diversity of other new students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handouts providing tips for students as to what they can do to gain more social interaction would be useful” (Centralised support respondent - initiative that ‘could be done”)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We run orientation classes for the first years which detail the library's services and we tell them where the coffee shop is etc., and encourage them to visit.” (Centralised support respondent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Talk through the UWA &amp; College support systems available to them and encourage them to use them. ”(Centralised support respondent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“At Health Science orientation, I discuss those areas that cause anxiety and help by answering students’ questions about areas of concern” (Teaching staff respondent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In the course of day to day contacts I try to remain conscious of the fact that new students are being bombarded with new impressions, new situations and vast amounts of information. No question from a student is &quot;stupid&quot; no matter how obvious the answer. Each question is legitimate and important. If a student asks directions while standing next to a sign with the required information - I answer the question personally and don't just point to the sign.” (Centralised support respondent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If resourcing was not an issue then students would benefit enormously from a short fun-based series of workshops on how to deal with the demands of university life.” (Teaching staff respondent, initiative that “could be done”)</td>
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</table>

Other respondents suggested ways that information about personal adjustment issues and social opportunities can be provided to students. Several respondents suggested the use of workshops or classes at the beginning of the year to inform students about their social transition.
A particular section of the staff body that responded to the survey saw the support of first year students as particularly important within their university role. Some of these staff were in an identified support/advising/coordination role that demanded that they engage with first year issues, while others took it upon themselves to provide support as an extension of their described professional role. There were multiple responses, particularly within centralised support responses, that described a direct provision of support to First Years.

“Offer forming deep friendship groups. Offer spiritual mentoring. Offer referral to student faith groups listed to students in distress and offer counsel where appropriate. Encourage groups that would offer peer support that would contribute to personal growth.” (Centralised support respondent)

“Make myself available to students at any time to discuss personal issues that may be affecting their work or their general university experience. I state this availability explicitly in the first lecture of the course and periodically during the semester.” (Teaching staff respondent)

“When tutoring, I found that two of my students (both first years, but in different years) were experiencing difficulty with English as a second language, and although they assured me that they would have easy access to ESL assistance, were unable to find any. I hunted around and located on-campus language assistance for them.” (Teaching staff respondent)

“There were some examples of teaching staff who sought to engage with their students’ personal issues directly by offering one-on-one support, which was typically beyond their prescribed professional role at the university.”

“Offer forming deep friendship groups. Offer spiritual mentoring. Offer referral to student faith groups listed to students in distress and offer counsel where appropriate. Encourage groups that would offer peer support that would contribute to personal growth.” (Centralised support respondent)
Specific Initiatives that seek to engage with a social transition issue

Initiative – providing social opportunities within class situation.

We have a cake roster so that a different student brings cake to Friday class. We have a break in teaching to have cake and coffee which has worked as a good ice breaker between students and staff.

Teaching staff respondent, School of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts.

Initiative – providing social opportunities via an orientation camp.

The Faculty also runs a first year Orientation Camp held on the first weekend of term- it's an overnight camp and students who attend tell us that the Camp was very good at helping them make friends and feel as if they belong.

Teaching staff respondent, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences.

Initiative that “could be done” – web-based initiative for connecting new students socially

Have a website available where they can put in some personal details and then can be “matched” with people with similar backgrounds and/or interests.

Faculty support respondent, School of Agricultural and Resource Economics

Initiative – providing social opportunities within the Faculty, targeting international students

We organise a special welcome barbeque for new International Students and ask the Faculty staff to attend, so the students can meet them. Usually most of the students attend as they think it’s part of the orientation, so they get to meet the staff who can answer their questions. On the day most staff spend quite a bit of time answering specific questions.

Faculty support respondent, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics

Initiative – providing social opportunities within the Faculty, targeting rural students

Because of the entry process for medicine and dentistry we have put together programs – i.e. rural orientation which gives the rural students the opportunity to meet each other prior to the commencement of their studies and this way they look out for each other. When the rural students come to Perth to sit the UMAT and have interviews we have rural dinners on the evenings prior and this gives them the opportunity to meet and to start developing friendships which carry on during the first year at university.

 Faculty support respondent, Medicine and Dentistry

Initiative that “could be done” – course specifically about transition issues
I could offer a course through a teaching faculty that enabled students to openly address the meaning of life issues that arise in the school to university and country to city transitions. This would validate their spiritual dimension and enable them to openly address these issues rather than attempt to obliterate them in behaviours that are self-destuctive and destructive of community.

Centralised support respondent, Student Services

Initiative that “could be done” – Provision of information to prospective students

A personal invitation to each Yr 12 TEE student to come to EXPO? Many students do not know it is on.

Faculty support response, School of Earth and Geographical Sciences

Initiative that “could be done” – Engaging students with staff in their area

If we could see them several times through the year in different settings (formal and informal) so that the students knew who we were and felt comfortable approaching us with their concerns – this would be good.

Centralised support respondent, Mathematics and Physical Sciences Library

Initiative that “could be done” – Providing transition information in a hard format.

Give them a handout introducing them to each staff member and their role, contact times and availability.

Faculty support respondent, Medicine and Dentistry

Initiative – Providing transition information in a hard format.

The faculty office produces a first year survival guide together with LPS to answer some of these issues for students.

Faculty support respondent, Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Initiative – Providing transition information in a hard format.

If the Prospective Student Office had more general information about the university experience and what the different support services at Uni were to hand out at schools and expos, that would go along way to educating students about the services offered. Even a generic publication, like a simplified handbook flier that told them what there was and where it was so even before they came to university they had something to refer too. The information in the front of the study at UWA book is not detailed enough about first year experience.

Centralised support respondent, Prospective Student Office
Initiative that “could be done” – Community building and provision of information online

It would be great to develop an interactive web site linked to student administration with discussions on general issues and chat room facilities for students to interact with each other. This should be restricted by student number to avoid no-students having access.

Faculty support respondent, Natural and Agricultural Sciences