IEAA INTERNATIONAL
EMPLOYABILITY GUIDE

Enhancing the Employability of International Graduates: A Guide for Australian Education Providers

Dr Cate Gribble
OVERVIEW

The employability of international graduates has emerged as both a key priority and a significant challenge for Australian educational institutions. The current generation of international students are looking for more than just an overseas qualification; they are also seeking relevant skills and work experience that will enhance their career, either in the Australian labour market, their home country or another country. Above all, international graduates are seeking educational opportunities that provide a point of differentiation in highly competitive global labour market (Blackmore et al, 2014, Lawson, 2012).

Recent research in Australia has found that many international students are dissatisfied with their employment outcomes and their opportunities to develop their employability while studying in Australia (AUIDF, 2013; Blackmore et al, 2014; Gribble, 2014; Murray et al, 2012). Work experience is a key priority for many international students across a range of disciplines, however, many students struggle to find placements and institutions are grappling with how to meet growing demand for work-integrated learning.

These raised expectations place pressure on Australian institutions, and this guide is designed to assist in preparing international students for success in a volatile and highly competitive graduate employment labour market.

Challenges to work readiness

International students often need help to develop key soft skills in order to be work ready upon graduation. This can be a challenge since many students under-value the importance of developing such skills, preferring to focus on acquiring technical skills and achieving high grades. Many international students lack understanding of the Australian job application process and work culture, which may differ significantly from job seeking approaches in their home country and are unfamiliar with Australian workplace culture. International students sometimes struggle to integrate into the local community and establish local networks which are often instrumental in finding work experience opportunities or graduate employment. The English language proficiency of international students continues to pose many challenges and acts as a major barrier to employment.

Recognising the importance of global employability

It is important to note that many Australian institutions are aware of the importance of developing the employability of international students and have already adopted measures aimed at improving international student employment outcomes. Graduate employability is a key focus of most institutions and there is growing awareness that international students require extra support in order to succeed in the graduate labour market. Many Australian institutions now have dedicated international careers advisers and programs that specifically address challenges faced by international students. Faced with increased demand for work-integrated learning (WIL) among both international and domestic cohorts, many institutions are developing strategies to scale up WIL programs and prepare international students for work placements.

Increasing opportunities for international students to participate in WIL a key focus of Universities Australia’s (2015) National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education. The issue of international students and employability is also a priority for state and federal governments. Expanding work experience opportunities for international students is a key focus of the International Education Strategy for Victoria 2013–2018 which includes a Study Melbourne Internship Program (Victorian Government, 2013). Identifying work experience opportunities has also been identified as a strategic action in the federal government’s Draft National Strategy for International Education (Department of Education and Training, 2015).
Meanwhile, key competitor nations such as the UK, Canada and New Zealand are strengthening their performance in this space. In New Zealand, integrating work placements and internships in tertiary qualifications for international students is now a key part of the government’s efforts to strengthen pathways to employment and residency (Education New Zealand, 2015). Canada’s international education strategy, Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity, is closely linked to migration policy, with the nation viewing international education as a way of addressing demographic decline and ensuring long-term labour-force vitality (Canadian Government, 2014). British institutions’ careers and employment services are considerably larger and receive substantially more funding than their Australian counterparts, and there are many lessons to be learnt from UK initiatives aimed at enhancing international student employability (AUIDF, 2013).

The following Good Practice Guide for Education Providers shows how Australian institutions can improve the employability of international students and provides case studies of good practice in Australian and overseas.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 1: Treat international graduate employability as core business

To remain competitive, ensuring the employability of international students must be a key priority of all Australian institutions who are engaged in international education. Ideally, a member of the institutional executive needs to take responsibility for developing and advancing the graduate employability agenda. While most institutions have made graduate employability a key focus of their strategic plans, strong leadership or a ‘champion’ is required in order to convert good intentions into real outcomes for students. The specific needs of international students need to be recognised in any institutional strategy. To garner real action on this issue, employability indicators need to be included in the KPIs of senior staff.

In the past, careers and employment services have too often been treated as being peripheral to the core business of educational institutions. The growing emphasis on employability requires that careers and employment services be brought in from the margins and funded appropriately. Careers and employment services face growing demands for their expertise from an increasingly diverse student population. Careers and employment staff have an expanding portfolio of responsibilities, ranging from managing internship programs (local and overseas), industry engagement (local and overseas), job fairs, entrepreneurship initiatives, job skills workshops, etc. The inclusion of staff who are able to both work with international students and industry (onshore and offshore) is vital and institutional leadership must recognise that international students face distinct challenges and require additional support to overcome barriers to graduate employment.

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 2: Carefully manage the pre-arrival employment expectations of international students

Many international students take an investment approach to studying abroad and participation in work experience or graduate employment is how they will evaluate their international education experience. However, difficulties associated with acquiring discipline related work experience can lead to dissatisfaction, poor retention, and potential financial and reputational losses for institutions. In order to minimise the mismatch in expectations and experiences, clear and accurate pre-entry information is critical.

Research in Australia and the UK has identified the importance of developing a common recruitment protocol for international students in order to assist with the management of expectations and to negate the perception that employment outcomes are guaranteed (AUIDF, 2013). Institutions must be careful not to over-promise work opportunities available while studying or after graduation. Institutions must also emphasise the importance of students taking a proactive stance, seeking and following through on advice provided by careers and employment staff, and taking advantage of opportunities their institutions offer.

Pre-entry information can include information about the Australian higher education sector in general, as well as more specific institutional and program details. Information about the Australian and global graduate labour market in particular discipline areas will also help students develop a realistic understanding of post-study employment in their field. Pre-entry information can be delivered in a range of forms (internet, education fairs, alumni networks). Importantly, using the voices of current international students and alumni to share their stories of studying and working in Australia is likely to have maximum impact. Finally, pre-entry information needs to be followed by a robust orientation program to ensure students begin their Australian experience well prepared. They also need ready access to available resources and opportunities to participate in a range of experiences that will ultimately enhance their employability.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 3: Embed employability skills into the curriculum from commencement

It is now widely recognised that all students need to be supported to develop their employability throughout the student lifecycle and in the context of their specific discipline. This is especially the case for international students who often require additional time and support in developing certain employability skills. Often international students are either unaware of the importance of developing their employability or do not see the value in developing key skills until it is too late. This is the cause of frustration for many working in careers and employment. Strategies need to be in place to ensure international students recognise the importance of employability early in their studies and develop a career action plan for developing key knowledge and skills.

One solution is for careers and employment staff to provide a mandatory workshop for all first year students that highlights the importance of engaging early with employability development and career planning. The workshop should send international students the message that the institution values employability, that success in the job market hinges on developing employability and that the acquisition of career capital must take place throughout the student lifecycle and beyond. The University of Exeter has embedded the ‘eXfactor’, a mandatory one day personal and professional development course, into the first year curriculum and has enjoyed considerable success (see Case Study 1).

Once students are established in their studies, programs that provide a framework to develop employability in tandem with their core studies have many advantages. At a number of institutions there is growing interest in the ‘career portfolio’ which encourages students to acquire and develop key skills and attributes throughout their course. These may include work experience, volunteering, extra-curricular activities, part-time jobs, resume writing, interview skills, job fairs, joining professional associations or participating in a global mobility experience. Upon graduation, the student will be able to draw on their career portfolio when seeking graduate employment opportunities. Bond University’s Beyond Bond and QUT’s ePortfolio are two examples of such programs that enable students to build a comprehensive repository of information that will provide them with a valuable resource for demonstrating their skills, knowledge and achievements to prospective employers (see Case Studies 2 and 3).

Employability should also be addressed at the discipline level so that students learn how key skills and attributes translate into their chosen field. An increasing number of academic programs now include a professional skills subject that teaches the types of skills and attributes required in the Australian context. At Flinders University, the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre work with the international relations academic teaching team to develop students’ employability skills, equipping them to transfer knowledge into the professional context (see Case Study 12). Professional disciplines, such as nursing and engineering, are often more advanced due to a long history of input into curriculum design by established practitioners. Other disciplines can learn a lot from their experience.

International students, who may have limited exposure to the Australian labour market, are likely to benefit considerably from contextualised study of Australian workplace requirements. Often, the introduction of a professional skills unit has been in response to challenges students face when embarking on a work placement or seeking graduate employment. For example, Victoria University has introduced the teaching of communication and team-work skills into a core first-year information systems unit in business degrees. Staff responsible for the changes are of the view that a balance of discipline specific skills and professional skills may make the degree more attractive and improve graduate employment outcomes (Woodley & Shackleton, 2012). The School of Nursing at Deakin University runs a pre-clinical workshop for international students prior to the commencement of clinical placements, which was introduced in response to international students being previously unprepared for the requirements of the Australian hospital setting.

One of the challenges facing academics is convincing students of the value of learning such skills. Many international students have a very strong academic focus, believing their priority should be to acquire technical knowledge and skills. Creativity is required in order to highlight the link between employability skills and employment outcomes. Techniques commonly used include bringing in employers and recruiters as guest lecturers, field trips to industry sites and inviting successful alumni to reflect on their experiences. Importantly, the benefits of developing professional skills alongside discipline-specific knowledge needs to be reinforced to students through their engagement with each aspect of the institution. Fostering collaboration between academic teams involved in course design and careers and employment staff will also promote the integration of employability.
CASE STUDY 1: THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER’S ‘EXFACTOR’

In 2010, in response to concerns over low graduate employment levels in certain disciplines, the University of Exeter introduced a mandatory one-day personal and professional development program for all first-year students. While initially the program focussed on disciplines with low graduate employment rates, it has since been extended throughout the university. In recognition of its outstanding work on improving graduate employability, the University Exeter was awarded with the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) Graduate Development Award, AGR Best of the Best Award and the AGR Blue Ribbon Award; the first time a University had achieved this.

The eXfactor is delivered around the following themes:

- Critical thinking and communication
- Career planning and you – why now
- Behavioural profiling
- Emotional intelligence
- Competencies and attributes
- Opportunity awareness – using LinkedIn data
- Professionalism; what it is and why it is important
- Networks and contacts
- Employer / alumni career stories
- Decision making
- Promoting yourself to employers
- Organisational and occupational analysis

A mixture of university careers consultants and external experts run the program which uses experiential learning techniques designed to take into account different learning styles. Employers and alumni are invited to share their ‘career story’, which reinforces the key messages of developing skills, participating in extracurricular activities and gaining work experience. They have found that advice from a recent graduate in their discipline or an employer in their field tends to resonate well with students.

In addition to the eXfactor, the university offers a series of extra-curricular skills sessions which can be counted towards The Exeter Award (www.exeter.ac.uk/exeteraward). Students are encouraged to make the most of these sessions to help them develop their employability.

www.exeter.ac.uk/careers/events/exfactor

CASE STUDY 2: ‘ePORTFOLIO’, QUT

Queensland University of Technology’s Student ePortfolio is a university-wide, online resource designed to enhance the learning process and assist students with the transition from university to graduate employment. Students use the online resource to document and present their academic, professional and personal development in the format of a personal ePortfolio which they can then draw on when applying for jobs.

Students are encouraged to reflect on experiences drawn from a wide variety of situations, including their education, past or present employment, community-based activities, and recreational pursuits. Each recorded experience must be associated with one of ten core skill areas. These skill areas have been defined with reference to generic employability attributes, industry group standards, and the QUT graduate capabilities. Students also publish examples of their work and other relevant documents.

The ePortfolio encourages students to develop a deeper awareness of their knowledge, skills and experiences and to identify any skills areas that need further development. QUT students currently use Student ePortfolio in a variety of ways – as part of their coursework, in voluntary programs run by faculty, and independently.

www.studenteportfolio.qut.edu.au
CASE STUDY 3: BOND UNIVERSITY’S BEYOND BOND

‘Beyond Bond’ is a personal development program specifically designed to foster advanced interpersonal skills and enhance the employability of Bond University graduates.

It is a degree requirement for all undergraduate students which complements and enhances academic learning. It is embedded into the core curriculum but tailored by the Careers and Employment team to meet individual students’ needs. It also provides practical, hands-on application of the generic skills covered in Bond’s compulsory core subjects and incorporates essential career planning strategies.

The program offers a wide range of activity options so that students can tailor Beyond Bond to match their degree, career goals, specific talents and community interests.

Structure

Throughout the duration of their degree, students must accrue a minimum of 100 points by undertaking and reflecting on various activities and initiatives endorsed by the Beyond Bond program coordinator.

All students must complete the Beyond Bond activities and associated e-portfolio submissions included in the three compulsory Bond core subjects (30 points):

- Critical Thinking and Communication
- Leadership and Team Dynamics
- Ethical Thought and Action
- Beyond Bond: Professional Development and Community Engagement

Students then select from a range of activities, totalling a minimum of 70 points. These electives are categorised as:

- Work-based – Internships, part-time employment, service-based learning, elite sports engagement;
- Work-related – Mooting, BondCo, capstone project, industry-related competitions;
- Community-based – Volunteering, mentoring / coaching programs, community leadership, global experience;
- Career exploration – Attending career events, industry engagement, career workshop.

E-portfolio submissions

For each activity undertaken as part of Beyond Bond, students must write a piece for their Beyond Bond e-portfolio reflecting on the value of the experience and how it has enhanced specific employability skills.

Outcomes

In addition to an official Statement of Attainment on the graduate’s Academic Transcript and Australian Higher Education Graduate Statement (AHEGS), students benefit from having developed a strategic plan for graduate employment and a comprehensive e-portfolio to show prospective employers. The Beyond Bond activities are specifically chosen to enhance employability skills and expose students to a wider range of career options.


Contact Kirsty Mitchell at kimitche@bond.edu.au
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 4: Provide international students with opportunities to advance their English language competency throughout the student lifecycle

The rapid progress of global higher education has resulted in the English language proficiency of international students becoming a concern in every country where students are not studying their native tongue. English language proficiency is perhaps the most fundamental employability skill, and yet the English language proficiency (ELP) of international students has been the subject of concern and debate over many decades. In order to graduate with ELP skills demanded by employers, international students need to commence their studies with requisite levels of ELP and have opportunities to develop and hone those skills throughout their studies (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009). To enhance international students’ participation in WIL and improve graduate employment outcomes, opportunities to develop contextualised ELP relevant to specific fields of professional practice and workplaces are critical, in addition to academic English development (Arkoudis et al, 2014; Humphreys & Gribble, 2013; Tran, 2013).

The major challenge facing institutions is how to develop sustainable and integrated whole-of-institution approaches to assure graduates’ ELP outcomes. According to the English Language Proficiency and Employability Framework, the impetus for change will come from institutions adopting the stance that students will not be able to graduate from their courses unless they can demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills (Arkoudis et al, 2014). The framework advocates a model of distributed responsibilities involving collaboration between staff at each level of the institution (teaching and learning leaders, course coordinators, academics, academic language and learning advisors). The framework provides many examples of initiatives designed to enhance ELP in the employment context (Arkoudis et al, 2014).

Importantly, international students need to be made aware of both the critical importance of further developing their ELP and their responsibility to seek out opportunities to improve their language skills. Although language support while studying and within the disciplinary context is essential, important language acquisition also takes place outside of the classroom and off campus. The high number of international students from particularly language background (e.g., Chinese and Indian) makes speaking English a challenge for many international students. In many cases, international students continue to live, study and work in their native language. Social media makes it possible to communicate constantly with friends and family back home. In some instances, an international students’ language skills can stall while studying in Australia (Lane, 2012). The importance of seeking out opportunities to practice English and to make the most of studying and living in Australia needs to be reinforced. For institutions, this means providing mechanisms for international student to immerse themselves in the Australian community. Closely linked is the importance of institutions developing new strategies to enhance interactions between local and international students.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 5:
Improve engagement between international and domestic students to enhance the employability of both student cohorts

One of the challenges facing all institutions is how to enhance interactions between local and international students and improve the integration of international students into the local community. The lack of interaction between international students, domestic students and the broader community has become a thorn in the side for many institutions. International students are often frustrated and disappointed with the lack of interaction with local students (Arkoudis et al., 2009; Leask, 2009; Blackmore et al., 2014). One factor that limits interactions between local and international students is the tendency of many students to combine work and study and spend minimal time on campus. Also, many local students have established friendship groups and so are not motivated to expand their networks to include international students. Student accommodation on campus is limited and often costly. International students typically live with other international students, often from the same language group. Limited interaction with local students and the broader Australian community impedes international students from advancing their ELP, developing important cultural knowledge and creating local networks, all important facets of employability.

Many institutions have tried to improve interactions between international and domestic student via initiatives such as transition programs, common foundation subjects in undergraduate degrees, and group work (Arkoudis, 2015). However, more work needs to be done. International students who do make the leap and immerse themselves are able to successfully form friendships with local students and integrate into the local community. Importantly, local students need to better understand the benefits of developing friendships with international students which include greater intercultural understanding and international networks which will enhance their employability. The push to expand outbound mobility programs is a welcome development with participation in outbound mobility linked to improved intercultural competence (Potts & Berquist, 2014). Programs that develop the intercultural skills of all students, regardless of whether they participate in a mobility program, are likely to enhance overall employability. In 2010, the UK’s Aston University piloted an arts-based intercultural skills development program designed to enhance intercultural awareness of both local and international students in the School of Business. The program is now compulsory for all first undergraduate business students (see Case Study 4).

Research suggests that students living on campus in accommodation designed for students perform better than their peers who live off campus (Department of Education, 2015). More purpose-built student accommodation on or near campus may improve the international student experience and promote interaction between local and international students.

Encouraging positive relationships between international and domestic students, and the broader Australian community requires creative solutions. The University of Melbourne’s Welcome to Melbourne program, an initiative of the university’s Advancement Office, offers a model for institutions to draw on staff and alumni in an effort to integrate international students into the local community (see Case Study 5).
CASE STUDY 4: ASTON UNIVERSITY’S INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH MAP CONSORTIUM

Business schools attract high numbers of international students and the development of students’ intercultural competence in business programs presents a particular challenge for curriculum developers. At Aston University in the UK, in an effort to enhance the intercultural skills of both local and international students, an arts-based methods of intercultural training was trialled in the School of Business. It has since been rolled out to all first year undergraduate students in the School of Business (approximately 1,000 students) who complete a mandatory arts-based intercultural training workshop.

There are a number of benefits associated with using arts-based training to develop intercultural competence – it is engaging, fun and can involve physical activities (theatre, dance), and so can act as an ‘ice breaker’ and promote rapport between participants. Practicing arts can also have a harmonising effect on all participants, allowing common ground to be established in the communicative process. Arts-based training allows for communication in a non-academic environment and provides a level playing field for home and international students to interact which builds confidence and encourages reflection among participants.

Aston University collaborated with the MAP consortium, a group of artists which a strong record in facilitating creative development for a range of organisations, to develop a two hour workshop. Local and international students enrolled in the School of Business participated in the workshops. The sessions began with warm up exercises, worked towards the creation of a collaborative piece and concluded with reflections on the day. The aim was to further develop students’ mutual understanding within groups so they can be more effective in understanding multiple educational, multicultural and multinational backgrounds. The unique feature of the workshops was that they created a level playing field for students to engage with each other. A pre- and post-intervention survey showed that the UK and EU students reported the most significant increases in their ‘cultural intelligence’ with all students welcoming such teaching methods and calling for sessions to be delivered earlier and more frequently.

For more information see Higson & Liu (2012).

CASE STUDY 5: THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE’S ‘WELCOME TO MELBOURNE’ PROGRAM

The University of Melbourne’s ‘Welcome to Melbourne’ program aims to ease the transition to life in Melbourne for Australia Awards scholarship recipients by connecting them with alumni or staff. The Welcome to Melbourne program is part of a comprehensive induction program which includes assigning international students with a student mentor and a five-week introductory academic program.

Students and hosts are matched, and after meeting at the launch event hosts typically invite students to share a home-cooked meal or a unique Melbourne experience. The advantages of the Welcome Program include enriching the experiences of students by providing connections to the local community and culture and furthering connections between Australia and the broader international community.

The goal of this program is to connect international students with the local community. The advantages of the program is that it leverages institutional alumni to integrate international students into the community and enhance their student experience. While the University of Melbourne’s Welcome to Melbourne program is reserved for Australia Awards scholarship recipients, the model could be emulated in other institutions and expanded to include all international students.

http://alumni.unimelb.edu.au/get-involved/welcome-melbourne
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 6: Provide opportunities for international students to participate in work integrated learning while studying

The link between relevant work experience and graduate employment outcomes has led to growing interest in work integrated learning (WIL) and how it may be used to enhance the employment outcomes of international students. While WIL has long been a key element of many university programs, there is a growing interest in WIL which is seen by universities as a valid pedagogy and as a means to respond to demands by employers for work-ready graduates. Importantly, students are seeking a return on investment and WIL is seen to provide critical employable knowledge and skills (Patrick et al., 2008).

Much of the WIL literature highlights the importance of pre-placement preparation, and this is especially the case for international students (Billett, 2009; Jackson, 2015). Indeed, one of the key findings of a major report on WIL in Australia is that “merely providing practice-based experiences for students is insufficient unless those experiences are enriched through preparation, engagement and opportunities to share and reconcile what has been contributed by these experiences” (Patrick et al., 2008). Preparation is vital for international students who are generally less familiar with the Australian job application process and workplace culture and expectations.

Meeting the growing demand for WIL will require institutions to scale up current provision. Strong university-industry engagement provides the foundation for the development of WIL placements opportunities and relationships with industry must be developed and fostered at all levels of the institution. Industry engagement has long been a feature of the Australian VET sector which offers important insights (see Case Study 7). Importantly, small-to-medium enterprises (SME), not-for-profits (NFP) and local community organisations offer significant untapped potential as both hosts for WIL placements and potential graduate employers. The WIL expectations of international students need to be carefully managed and the benefits associated with gaining work experience in SMEs, NFPs or other community organisations need to be emphasised. Institutions also need to lead by example and offer work placement opportunities. While institutions often provide international students with volunteer experience, they can also engage students to help plan, manage and evaluate events.

Finally, institutions will need to think creatively when it comes to providing WIL opportunities to international students. While there is growing demand for WIL among many international students, not all recognise either the value in gaining practical experience or will be ready to undertake a WIL placement. Alternative programs such as on campus simulated work experience can be offered to ensure that every student is provided with an opportunity to enhance their employability (see Case Study 6).
CASE STUDY 6: WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING, SCHOOL OF IT, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

The employability of graduates is a strategic priority for Deakin University, which prides itself on delivering courses that are valued by industry. The Information Technology (IT) discipline offers key insights into how one school is tackling the issue of work readiness among international graduates. From 2015, Deakin will require all undergraduate IT students to complete a work placement unit involving 100-120 hours of professional work experience with an approved employer. Importantly, the placement is not just about work experience, but rather about improving employability skills including communication skills, teamwork, self-management and lifelong learning competencies.

High numbers of international students enrolled at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as a tendency among IT students to have weaker soft skills than students in some other disciplines, prompted the School of IT to implement a number of strategies designed to improve graduate employment outcomes. Already, students complete a mandatory professional skills unit. This unit exposes students to a range of professional skills such as communication, teamwork, collaboration and negotiation, encouraging students to develop and extend key skills in an IT context. Guest lecturers including employers and recruiters are a key feature.

While the goal is for students to source their own placement in a manner mimicking the job application process, the school recognises that many students (particularly international students) will not yet have the skills, networks and confidence required to independently secure a placement. University sourced placements will also be offered as well as in-house industry projects for those students who are unable to find placements. The in-house industry projects aim to closely simulate a work environment and participating students will be supervised by a manager and be required to work office hours and dress appropriately.

For many institutions meeting growing demand for work placements is a major challenge. However, IT has many advantages and discussions with staff responsible for developing Deakin’s IT WIL program highlighted the broad range of placement options. While high achieving students may find placements with prestigious multinational firms, there is a vast array of options including SMEs, Not-For-Profits, charities, etc. Many organisations welcome the opportunity to host a student who can help with IT projects such as updating their website.

CASE STUDY 7: INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT
LESSONS FROM THE VET SECTOR, WILLIAM ANGLISS INSTITUTE

William Angliss Institute specialises in preparing students for employment in the international events, foods, and tourism and hospitality industries. With international students comprising more than 60 per cent of full-time enrolments at its Melbourne campus, the employability of international graduate is a high priority. In order to maximise employment outcomes, students at William Angliss are provided multiple employment experiences to give them exposure to a wide variety of work environments, geographic locations and customer groups.

Work integrated learning

While Degree and Industry Placement Program (IPP) students are encouraged to source their own placement providers, the institute recognises that international students in particular may require extra support. The institute has a long list of industry leaders who have registered their interest in securing William Angliss students for placements as a result of the institute’s high profile in the industry. The need to provide specialised support to assist international students develop their employability drives the institute’s industry engagement strategy: “It is the reason why we must engage more closely with industry than our counterparts, and why we aggressively build industry connections – our international students need the experience and they often initially need our support to secure the right opportunities for them” (Victorian International Education Awards submission, 2014). William Angliss offers a range of WIL opportunities including internships, work experience, practicum, practical placement, industry-based projects, vacation work and mentoring.
Industry mentoring program

This pilot program matches students with an industry expert to provide social connectedness and one-on-one support in navigating their transition to full-time employment. The career mentoring program matches industry-related professionals (mentors) with students (mentees). Half of the participants are international students. Its purpose is to support students’ formal academic training by providing a link to the profession in a structured and tailored way, and also bring exposure to the practical realities of working in the Events, Foods, Hospitality and Tourism industries.

Industry partnerships

The institute works closely with industry to address current and emerging training requirements, including widespread skills shortages and low retention rates of skilled employees. Over the last two years, this has included:

- Strengthening of industry partnerships and networks, including building stronger relationships with partner TAFEs
- Consultations with a broad range of industry advisory boards/councils both locally and interstate (Institute staff are involved in more than 50 industry networks and professional associations)
- Direct consultations with more than 50 industry representatives and the hosting of industry information sessions at the Institute
- Specific recruitment campaigns conducted across Australia, offering a broad range of programs and services, including skills analysis and compliance
- Supporting a number of industry and government initiatives to address the shortage of skilled hospitality and food industry workers.

The strength of industry partnerships is in part due to the efforts made by staff to support international students to obtain industry placements and employment. Staff at William Angliss are encouraged to ‘go the extra mile’ to make securing industry placements a priority for all international students as is a vital component of their studies and, importantly, it also assists them to feel socially connected to their new home. The institute develops tailored programs in partnership with leading organisations to enable students to gain paid or volunteer experience. William Angliss capitalises on Melbourne’s reputation as a food, wine and major event capital by partnering with the City of Melbourne, State Government of Victoria and others to provide unique employment and training opportunities for international students at high profile events, including the Spring Racing Carnival, Melbourne Fashion Festival and most recently, and the International Aids Conference.

Visiting guest speakers/lecturers

Extensive industry engagement also enables William Angliss to bring industry leaders (many of whom are alumni and/or employers of alumni) into the learning environment to share their expertise and knowledge, adding to the student experience and providing additional networking opportunities. Careers and Employment also organises the annual Careers and Employment Expo and other regular industry networking events to facilitate student employment opportunities via its industry connections, including employer information sessions and on-campus interviews. International opportunities also exist via the Institute’s ongoing relationships with international partners. Direct recruitment of students is conducted by many global brands, including Accor and Intercontinental Hotels Group, Disney resorts, Fairmont Hotels, Sodexo (one of the world’s largest food services and facilities management companies) and Starwood Hotels and Resorts.

Speed networking event

An annual structured social event with industry professionals, Speed Networking is run by Careers and Employment and Events students and provides an opportunity for all students to network with industry leaders, employers and alumni. Over two nights, 70 industry representatives attend and speak with 140 students from all program areas to offer advice, exchange experiences and build relationships.

For more information contact Julie London at julie@angliss.edu.au
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 7: Leverage alumni both in Australia and abroad to provide internship opportunities, mentorship and graduate employment to international students

Former international students who have successfully transitioned into the labour market represent a valuable resource for Australian institutions. Already, many careers and employment services are using alumni as a way of providing current international students with valuable insights into the job seeking process. Institutions can invite alumni as guest speakers to career events to share their experiences with current international students. International career advisers suggest that internationals students are more receptive to advice coming from successful alumni rather than university staff. Alumni offer considerable skills, knowledge and experiences.

Alumni can also offer valuable support to current international students who are preparing to return home. Entrepreneurial alumni can shed light on starting a small business either in Australia or elsewhere. Alumni can offer mentorship, shadowing, work placements and graduate employment opportunities in Australian or in source countries. Over 90 per cent of the mentors involved in RMIT’s industry mentoring programs are alumni. The mentors are from a range of disciplines and are based around the world, supporting returning international students as well as domestic students with international career aspirations.

Fostering alumni relations is one way institutions can enhance the employability of international students but has been under-utilised in the Australian context. Institutions need to examine ways to cultivate strong and enduring relationships with their alumni. Allowing graduates to keep their institutional email is one option. At Harvard University, a post-Harvard email forwarding address allows students to continue to receive mail using a Harvard email address after they graduate. The arrangement is mutually beneficial. Harvard alumni enjoy the benefits of global networking opportunities, while the university draws on their alumni’s wealth of expertise and international connections.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 8: Partner with employers to improve the employability of international students

Industry engagement is central to both enhancing employability and improving graduate employment outcomes, so coordinated efforts to maximise existing relationships and build new links should be a priority at all levels of Australian institutions. Senior staff need to take the lead in developing and nurturing strong partnerships, and in fostering productive relationships with industry at the faculty level. Academics and WIL staff and careers and employment services need to be supported and resourced in their efforts to create effective, long term relationships with industry.

While many institutions have existing relationships with large firms, there is scope to further develop partnerships with SME and NFPs. Often these firms do not fit into the institutional recruitment cycle and many are unaware of how best to access graduate talent. In many cases SMEs and NFPs are more likely to consider taking on an international student for a work placement or to hire an international graduate. While larger firms often have policies in place that prevent international graduates from applying (e.g. permanent residency, very high ELP), SMEs and NFPs are likely to have greater flexibility in their hiring procedures.

Institutions need to encourage business to take on a greater mentoring role. Greater presence of employers on campus and exposure to workplaces will increase international students understanding of the Australian workplace and expose employers to international students. Some institutions have adopted creative approaches to providing international students with greater exposure to industry. For example, careers and employment staff at Griffith University have for a long time attended networking lunches with employers. Realising that international students lacked opportunity to develop key networking skills, careers and employment started to offer international students the opportunity to attend these networking lunches, accompanied by careers staff who coach students on networking skills and provide valuable introductions to local employers.

The Univative Sydney consulting competition is another example of a creative approach to developing employability. The program offers students valuable exposure to industry and encourages interaction between local and international students from a range of discipline areas (see Case Study 13).

Institutions also need to work with employers in order to shift the view of international students as being in deficit. While many employers have concerns about hiring an international graduate, the experience of those employers who have employed international graduates is often very favourable. There are also indications that employers are failing to recognise the benefits of cultural diversity, address biases and stereotypes and leverage the skills and knowledge of staff from diverse backgrounds (Blackmore et al, 2014). Employers need to consider unconscious bias that may be embedded in recruitment practices that prioritise ‘fitting in’ with the cultural norm at the expense of talent from a diverse range of backgrounds. Institutions can work with employers to demystify visa requirements, promote the post study work visa and highlight the benefits of hiring an international graduate.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 9: Ensure that international students have clear and realistic expectations of graduate employment opportunities in Australia

Many international students have unrealistic expectations of the level of effort required to secure work in their field after graduating. International students must be properly informed of the steps required to gain work experience or graduate employment so that they can take action, develop their employability and work toward assembling a ‘career portfolio’ and achieving their employment goals.

Institutional marketing material must not over-promise graduate employment opportunities. Prospective students (and their families) need to be given a realistic understanding of both work experience opportunities and graduate employment prospects in Australia. International students need to be informed well in advance of the importance of developing their employability throughout the student lifecycle and of learning how to articulate their knowledge, skills and experience to prospective employers.

International students need to be encouraged to think outside the box since a narrow focus on a small number of high status companies may prevent some international graduates from pursuing opportunities with smaller firms that offer excellent graduate opportunities. The case study of Meltwater News is an example of opportunities that exist for international graduates who are prepared to consider an alternative path rather than focus on high status multinationals (see Case Study 8).

Institutions can also provide opportunities for international students to develop entrepreneurial skills and knowledge of start-ups. A number of universities have start-up programs designed to promote entrepreneurialism among students. The University of Sydney has its long running ‘Genesis’ program (http://sydney.edu.au/business/genesis), Monash University has ‘Incubate’ while Deakin University recently launched ‘Spark’ http://www.deakin.edu.au/sebe/students/spark). It is unclear whether international students are accessing these programs and further research is required regarding students’ level of engagement in entrepreneurial programs at Australian universities.

International students need to be reminded of the importance of getting their foot in the door and encouraged to set more achievable incremental career goals which can be reviewed over time. Institutions could do more to promote alternate pathways, engage more with smaller companies and ensure that students are exposed to a wide range of employment options, including those in outer-suburban and regional areas.

Finally, resilience is critical to the job seeking process. Navigating the graduate employment landscape in a foreign country can be both stressful and demoralising if students struggle to find work. International students need support in managing stress and recovering from adversity and should be encouraged to access counselling services at their institution if they are not coping.
CASE STUDY 8: MELTWATER NEWS

Meltwater News is an international media monitoring company founded by two Norwegians in 2001, which now employs more than 1000 people and has more than 20,000 clients internationally. The company has around 57 offices in 32 countries and a policy of not having more than 15 people employed in any one office in order to preserve the company’s entrepreneurial, start-up culture. If an office reaches more than 15 staff then talent is exported to start up a new office elsewhere. One of the key challenges facing Meltwater is recruiting staff with the right skill set needed to expand the business worldwide.

The company frequently employs graduates because of their ‘spark’ and their ‘willingness to prove themselves’. The average age of employees in the company worldwide is 27 years. A bachelor degree is a minimum requirement although Meltwater is not concerned by the discipline. At the time of our interview, the Melbourne office had staff with degrees in biotechnology, history and dentistry. The company looks for six key attributes when hiring graduates: personality and humour; communication skills; drive and stamina; team players; management potential and intelligence.

The recruitment process involves sifting through job applications, calling applicants and inviting them to a ‘mingle session’ which closely resembled a cocktail party. The aim being to inform the applicant about the company and the industry and then to gauge how effective the applicant is socially and how they get on with other employees. After the initial introduction to the company, applicants are invited to a group interview where they are asked to talk about themselves and then required to participate in a group activity to determine their capacity to work with others and to test their entrepreneurial abilities. These activities also reveal something about the candidate’s personality and whether they have the ‘X factor’.

Meltwater recruits international graduates and the Managing Director of the Melbourne office is a former international student. According to Meltwater, one of the advantages of hiring international graduates is that because they often have fewer opportunities than local graduates, they give 100 per cent and are less likely to quit if they confront challenges. Knowledge of language and culture in key markets is another advantage. In the past two years, Meltwater has sponsored two international graduates for positions in their Melbourne office.
GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLE 10: Prepare international students for the transition into the home country labour market

While many international students come to Australia hoping to remain temporarily or permanently after graduation, a majority of graduates will return home after completion of their studies or move on to a third country. For many international students, returning home poses many challenges as they grapple with ‘return culture shock’, tough competition for graduate jobs and the weight of family expectations. Having invested considerably in their overseas study experience, many international students return home with unrealistic expectations around job type and salary. The graduate labour market in key source countries such as China and India is highly competitive and returning graduates are competing with a growing pool of well-qualified local graduates who have the benefits of local knowledge and networks. Many returning international graduates struggle with this transition.

A review of ‘return home’ programs at Australian institutions and conversations with staff in careers and employment offices reveals there is scope for institutions to improve the way international students are prepared for returning, particularly around employment related issues. International students require guidance on how to articulate and promote their overseas study experience to employers in their home country. Students need to be encouraged to maintain personal and professional connections in their home country while in Australia and join alumni groups when they graduate. Social media sites such as LinkedIn or Dajie (Chinese equivalent) provide tools for students to both remain connected and establish new professional links while studying abroad. International students can update potential employers in their home country of the skills, experiences and knowledge they are developing while studying in Australia. Returning international graduates can benefit from country specific labour market information. For example, the University of Nottingham in the UK has Global Labour Market Executives in key source countries (China and Malaysia) who provide advice and support to returning students (see Case Study 9).

Resourcing appears to be a key barrier to providing support to returning international students or developing ‘return home’ programs. However, there are signs that some institutions are realising the importance of providing support and cultivating links with employers in key source countries. For example, Deakin has appointed an International Careers Consultant whose core work involves travelling to key sources countries in Asia to develop and foster relationships with potential employers. The aim is expand employment and work experience opportunities for Deakin international graduates returning home. The Re-Entry Program at the American University in Washington provides an example of how expertise from across an institution can be drawn together to prepare students for re-entry challenges (see Case Study 10).

As part of their career planning, international students need to be encouraged to start thinking about returning home from the beginning of the student life-cycle. Academics and staff in careers and employment services can encourage students to clarify what they hope to achieve upon graduation and set actions plans to achieve their goals.
CASE STUDY 9: ‘RETURNING HOME’ INITIATIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

‘Returning Home’ is key focus of the Careers and Employability service at the University of Nottingham. Almost a third of University of Nottingham students are international (27 per cent), while the university also has offshore campuses in China (Ningbo) and Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur).

The Global Labour Market team was created after identifying a need for the university to be more global in their employer relationships. In addition to services offered in the UK, the university now has a small careers teams located at each of their overseas campuses. While the focus of the careers team in China and Malaysia is the employability of students in Nottingham’s campuses in those countries, they also play a key role in building relationships with local employers, developing insights into local labour market requirements, and promoting the benefits of recruiting students returning from the UK.

Importantly, the offshore careers team understands local recruitment methods and can work with employers so that international students, who are currently in the UK and less available for interview, do not miss out on opportunities. The offshore careers team feed information back to the careers team in the UK, make sure that the roles are advertised on jobs board and used it to inform careers blog postings.

Employers in China and Malaysia are encouraged to present to students in the UK, either by video conference, or in person for those actively targeting returnees. The university also runs a one day ‘Going Global’ conference in December which is solely for international students. The conference taps into other university resources such as Passport Career, a resource for students considering a global career, providing advice and guidance on over 80 countries, access to monthly webinars and career, CV, application and cultural advice.

In 2014 the university trialled ‘Welcome Home’ events for students who had been studying in the UK upon their return to Malaysia and China. These events provided returning students with the opportunity to meet relevant member of the Global Labour Market team in country and to network with local employers.

www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers/students/international/opportunities-at-home.aspx

CASE STUDY 10: AMERICAN UNIVERSITY’S ‘RE-ENTRY WORKSHOP’

According to the American University, 74 per cent of graduating international students have concerns about finding jobs back home, while 43 per cent have concerns about cultural transition and adjustment after long absences from home. In response, the International Student and Scholar service developed a re-entry program which aims to ease the transition for international students returning home. The half-day workshop feature a range of speakers and activities aimed at preparing students for any obstacles they might face when returning home. Topics covered include:

- The strengths of a global hybrid identity
- How to market yourself globally
- Ways to cope with challenges of re-entry
- List of resources for effective networking for job market back home
- The strengths of a global hybrid identity
- How to market yourself globally
- Ways to cope with challenges of re-entry
- List of resources for effective networking for job market back home.

The workshop draws on expertise from across the university including the Career Centre, Counselling Centre, School of International Affairs professors and international alumni who had personal experiences of returning home.

http://www.american.edu/ocl/isss/Re-entry-Discussion-and-Resources.cfm
CASE STUDY 11: RMIT UNIVERSITY’S APPROACH TO ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

RMIT University runs a variety of industry mentoring programs for Melbourne-based students and students studying at campuses in Vietnam and Singapore. Over 90 per cent of RMIT’s industry mentors are alumni who come from a wide range of disciplines and are located around the world. Industry mentors support returning international students as well as domestic students with international career aspirations. In 2015 around a third of RMIT’s 450 active mentors are based outside Australia. There are currently also over 200 Melbourne-based international students active in the program who connect themselves to either mentors based in Melbourne or in their home countries. Their mentor choices are based on their preferred career paths after graduation.

“I had never worked in Australia and my lack of experience led me into thinking that I was incapable of achieving anything. I gained strength and confidence from the emotional and career guidance provided by my mentor.”

The above quote is from an international student mentee participating in the 2014 industry mentoring program that supports students transitioning from university into the workforce. This mentee is among the 20 per cent of program participants who got offered a placement and/or employment through their mentoring partnership.

CASE STUDY 12: FLINDERS UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY TEACHING INITIATIVE

Flinders University’s Australian Foreign Policy teaching initiative provides a model of effective collaboration between academics and careers and employment staff to deliver an employability teaching initiative.

The Careers and Employer Liaison Centre combines with the international relations academic teaching team to deliver in-person simulations, with student teams working together on a simulated workplace scenario to collaborate,analyse and provide policy advice. The initiative integrates employability with their academic learning, equipping graduates to transfer knowledge into the professional context. Through the combination of applying knowledge and the development of non-technical and emotional intelligence skills – including, communication, collaboration, negotiation, dealing with change and presentations – the initiative develops technical and non-technical skills for employability, and creates a dynamic learning environment.

The value in this combined approach has been recognised institutionally and nationally. Academic staff have recognised the value and integrated similar initiatives into their topics. The Flinders University Australian Foreign Policy Teaching Initiative has been awarded a Vice Chancellors Award for Excellence in Teaching, and an Office for Learning and Teaching Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning.
CASE STUDY 13: UNIVATIVE SYDNEY

Univative Sydney is a 4-week inter-university consulting competition designed to enhance students’ employability skills. This program is run collaboratively between the career services of the University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong, University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney and Macquarie University.

A major objective is to simulate workplace diversity and this is achieved by each university having teams with a mix of members from various faculties, postgraduates and undergraduates, and domestic and international students.

The universities bring in organisations that have a genuine challenge which student teams can work on. Each company hosts the competing teams for an on-site briefing on their project. Teams then have three weeks to work off-site on the project. In the final week all the teams send a report to their project host which is then followed by a face-to-face presentation. The organisation decides the winning team from their assessment of the report and the presentations.

The program provides students with important career development including critical professional and personal connections. Host organisations benefit from being presented with innovative and creative solutions to business challenges, as well as exposure to potential recruits for their internship and graduate programs. Universities benefit from providing students with key opportunities to improve their employability skills leading to better graduate outcomes.

International students report increased confidence to connect with domestic students both within their university and at other universities. They value the opportunity to engage with local employers and learn about the Australian workplace. The participating universities anticipate that positive experiences with international students via Univative will help shift negative or stereotypical attitudes towards international students by local employers.

Univative Sydney was adapted from UOW’s Univative Illawara in 2011. UOW adapted Univative Illawara from the Higher Education Work Skills Olympiad (HEWSO), a government funded national competition.

For more information, visit http://sydney.edu.au/careers/student_events_workshops/univative.shtml
REFERENCES


REFERENCES

