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The report is designed to amplify Australia’s presence at the 2019 Asia Pacific Association of International Education (APAIE) conference in Kuala Lumpur, from 26–28 March.

The paper reflects the central theme of the APAIE 2019 Australia Innovation Lounge: international student employability and entrepreneurship – through Australian innovation in education.

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Welcome to the first of Austrade’s Education Insight series. This series will examine issues that are critical to Australia’s international education sector. By harnessing insights from key sector stakeholders and subject matter experts, we will identify how Australia can best play to its strengths in response to local and global influences.
This edition – Innovation in Employability – showcases employability programs delivered by Australian study destination agencies in partnership with education institutions, and education and technology service providers. All Australian states and territories are implementing strategies and initiatives to enhance the employability skills of international students. These initiatives are helping international students in Australia obtain the employability skills, knowledge and attributes necessary for global career success. Drawing on a broad cross-section of contributed perspectives, this report of the Education Insight series maps the current international education landscape and looks to the future. It begins to uncover the depth of investments in the international student experience, to create the innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

**Challenging convention**

Rob Lawrence’s essay encourages us to challenge convention. Rob has been at the forefront of the education industry for 25 years, undertaking research and developing strategies that have helped shape the face of Australian international education. Rob situates the Australian experience within a global context, illustrating how cultural, historical and geographical factors – along with the efforts of the sector – have positioned Australia as an employability world leader. He describes employability as the development of work- and life-ready graduates – graduates with a propensity for action and a capacity for application. These attributes are just as important as technical skills and knowledge. Using the concepts of enterprise and impact, Rob discusses the breadth of Australian education initiatives that are helping students develop creative and entrepreneurial mindsets.

**Success stories from Australia’s international students and alumni**

This section highlights the achievements of Australian international students and alumni. We introduce enterprising individuals who have developed innovative products and services during and after an Australian education. This includes Zaim Mohzani, Ecosystem Development Lead at the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), a government agency promoting innovation in entrepreneurship. Our student and alumni stories demonstrate the importance of opportunities provided by study destination agencies and education institutions. Australia’s alumni success demonstrates how an Australian education supports graduates to work in different environments, locations, industries and roles. Australian-educated graduates have a global impact.

**Industry perspectives**

Leaders from employability and technology service providers share insights on work-integrated and tech-enabled learning. They discuss how online and digital modes complement face-to-face teaching, increasing student access to work experiences. Early data and analysis from some of these contemporary approaches indicate unique benefits for institutions, employers and students. High-tech, online models supported through study destination funding and strong partnerships between education institutions, government, industry and community organisations, are increasingly prevalent in Australia.

**Next steps**

This report provides a snapshot of Australia’s innovation in employability. However, our work to showcase and promote Australia’s excellence is ongoing. Given the future of work and the needs of industry 4.0, our education sector must also continue to learn and evolve. Consider this Education Insight series report as the start of a conversation.

edinsights@austrade.gov.au

Rebecca Hall is Austrade’s global education lead
INTRODUCTION

Australia is a dynamic, contemporary and progressive country, enjoying global standing and recognition. In addition to our world-class education, international students are drawn to our creative, enterprising and forward-looking society.

While academic standards in Australia are consistently high, what sets our education providers apart is their universal focus on helping students develop professionally and personally, so they’re better equipped to achieve success in their careers. Enterprise skills and entrepreneurial mindsets are critical for global career success. In Australia, study destination agencies, education institutions, policy makers, industry, and community organisations are working collaboratively to execute innovative approaches to careers development and employability.

On-campus incubators, careers fairs, digital platforms and mentoring are now standard practice. These build on Australia’s flexible curricula, encompassing both technical depth and interdisciplinary breadth, producing adaptable and pragmatic graduates who can think critically and solve problems creatively. Australia’s employability programs increasingly target international students. This is in recognition of access and equity challenges, as well as the intercultural benefits that accrue to domestic students and businesses.

This edition of the Austrade Education Insight series describes programs and partnerships that are enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of all Australian graduates.

Australia is a world-leading destination for employability skills

Australia’s education sector has embraced its role in fostering critical thinking, a commitment to lifelong learning and access to industry-relevant work experiences during study. Education institutions and government bodies help connect students with potential employers via employment hubs, job boards and industry networking events, in every state and territory. As Australia’s education institutions evolve, they are continuously enhancing the role of support services, including careers offices, alumni engagement and links to professional networks.

Alumni also expect opportunities to continue developing their professional skills, experience and networks after graduation. Australia is committed to engaging with international student alumni, whether they remain in Australia or return home. Nurturing lasting connections between alumni and their place of study reinforces Australia’s reputation as a destination that prioritises the employability of all graduates.

Employability is key to our continued success

Developing international students’ employability skills – during and after studies – is a key objective of the Australian Government’s National Strategy for International Education. International student employability is also central to all Australian state and territory international education strategies. This is because Australian governments understand that the nature of work continues to change.
Students throughout the world expect a tertiary education to equip them with the skills, knowledge and attributes to thrive. This is about working across cultures, engaging with the gig economy and moving between several occupations during a career. This anticipated transience has shifted student and employer demand from technical, job-specific skills to broader capabilities. Employers seek people who can solve complex problems, use design thinking principles, and understand and select appropriate technologies. In the 21st century, it is not just knowledge that is important. The ability to execute in contexts characterised by change and ambiguity is crucial. Australian education providers know that employability is essential to a quality tertiary education. It is also central to a quality international student experience.

In Australia, employability is not an addition to a formal qualification – it is a core component of the overall study experience.

**International students face unique barriers**

Most international students study abroad to improve their career prospects. However, some barriers are unique to international learners. Understanding these challenges, and responding through innovative and collaborative solutions, is a key theme of this report.

Through the concerted efforts of Australia’s study destination agencies, and the dedicated and targeted supports available through our education institutions, Australia is working hard to ensure equitable access to employability skills for all students and graduates.

In a practical sense, Australia’s visa framework affords international students generous work rights, both during and after their studies, to enhance their employability and career outcomes.

Australia’s Fair Work Ombudsman complements these work arrangements and plays an important role in ensuring international students’ work rights are protected. The Study in Australia website provides information about workers’ rights for international students and includes a link to the Fair Work Ombudsman website.

**Employability skills can be developed through a range of approaches**

In Australia, employability skills are acquired through a broad range of activities spanning all education sub-sectors and all fields of study. Increasingly, Australian higher education providers are embedding employability skills within formal qualifications, for example, by engaging industry in curricula and assessment. Other approaches include co- and extra-curricular activities. These facilitated activities include virtual teamwork, structured business analysis, industry engagement, access to workshops and seminars, volunteering, and assistance developing and building networks.

Australia’s broad and flexible range of options presents significant challenges for curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment. The complex and multifaceted nature of employability skills makes them difficult to quantify – calling for multiple means of assessment, including qualitative and reflective methods.

In Australia and internationally, online platforms are integrating formal and extra-curricular learning in new and interesting ways. Technology is opening opportunities for delivery on a far larger scale than has previously been possible. Digital tools use cutting-edge learning methods such as gamification, online diaries and guided critical self-reflection. By extension, we are seeing rising global attention given to micro-credentials. Micro-credentials recognise skills that are directly relevant to the immediate needs of learners. The increasing popularity of micro-credentials, and the role these qualifications continue to play as an integral component of global education systems, is discussed by the industry contributors to this report.

**Benefits to employers**

Businesses and community organisations play a fundamental role in ensuring students receive access to work-integrated learning. Australian organisations that participate in international student employability programs benefit from a steady stream of quality employees linked to a global alumni community numbering several million.

International student graduates are a crucial component of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce. Without a talent pipeline, industry cannot innovate. Without business, graduate careers won’t flourish.
Benefits to employers who offer work-integrated learning experiences to international students include access to overseas markets and the potential to engage multilingual staff. Beyond these transactional outcomes are more transformative effects. Cultural diversity promotes higher levels of organisational innovation and improved communication skills. In Australia, dynamic workplaces will be necessary as we transition to a globally connected services-based economy. Cultural diversity in teams is a valuable resource for solving complex problems in workplaces where international interactions are central to everyday work.

Our education system needs to remain relevant to the industries and societies of tomorrow. The education–industry nexus plays a key role in our global competitiveness; participation from Australian businesses is critical to the ongoing success and competitiveness of Australian international education. It is incumbent on all Australian education stakeholders to continue engaging with Australian employers to understand their needs and expectations.

Looking to the future

Institutions, governments and other sector stakeholders must continue to respond to changing conditions, and the expectations of international students. A commitment to student success necessitates ongoing investment in programs to support a vibrant entrepreneurial culture. Technology will keep shaping the way people engage with education throughout their lives. To keep up, education institutions will need to develop new delivery models to help students meet their study and employment goals.

As the demand for entrepreneurship grows, education institutions, governments and businesses must come together to deliver initiatives that focus on cultivating, supporting and encouraging students to take their ideas to the world. This is vital to Australia remaining a study destination of choice for international students.

In Australia, strong partnerships between study destination agencies, education institutions, and employability and technology service providers are ensuring students’ access to work-integrated learning experiences during and after their studies. Many government-funded initiatives directly target international students. This means all students with an Australian education qualification are equipped with the skills to help their careers take flight.
Australian study destination agencies are investing in innovative projects and partnerships to ensure international students develop employability skills. These skills are in demand from both students and global employers. Employability, as part of the overall international education experience, is essential to Australia’s reputation as a study destination. All Australian states and territories are implementing strategies and initiatives to enhance the employability skills of international students.
Andrew Houey, Director, International Marketing, StudyAdelaide

‘Adelaide’s universities embed innovation, work-integrated learning and experience into the heart of their programs to ensure graduates are career-ready. The Innovation and Collaboration Centre at UniSA, ThincLab at the University of Adelaide and the New Venture Institute at Flinders University provide spaces for new ideas to be developed. In fact, the New Venture Institute was awarded the best university-incubator in the Asia-Pacific – a phenomenal achievement given the calibre of innovators in the region.’

THE STUDYADELAIDE CAREER PROGRAM

All South Australian universities place student outcomes at the centre of their learning experiences. Each university offers centralised career services and support for international students both before and after graduation, along with faculty-led initiatives. StudyAdelaide complements this with our own student engagement program, which includes one-on-one counselling and employability workshops. The state government and universities jointly fund work experience programs for hundreds of students each year. StudyAdelaide has engaged with South Australian exporters to promote the employment of international students and graduates as conduits to expanding exports to markets such as China. To support this, a website connects businesses with international students via their university.

The current focus for StudyAdelaide and our partners is to prepare students for careers regardless of whether they return home or remain in Australia. The South Australian Government is making it easier for talent to remain in Adelaide and to encourage those with an entrepreneurial mindset to develop their concepts here, through initiatives such as the Entrepreneur Visa. For those who return home, the University of Adelaide’s China Career Ready Plus program is one of many exciting initiatives that prepares graduates for successful careers.
Our international students’ success in employability

International education is South Australia’s second largest export, valued at over A$1.6 billion per year, just behind wine. While this number is phenomenal on its own, it doesn’t capture the full contribution that international education provides to the local economy. Here are three examples of international students contributing far more than their annual tuition fees, and as a result, creating multi-million dollar enterprises.

Pixelforce

Pixelforce is a web and mobile app-development studio started by two international students while they were still studying. Beginning life as a ‘mock’ project during a university course, Hinney Lo from Hong Kong and Ben Zhang from China have driven Pixelforce to become one of the fastest-growing companies in Adelaide, employing 26 people. In 2016, Pixelforce launched the Sweat by Kayla app for Instagram fitness guru Kayla Itsines and fiancée Tobi Pearce. Pixelforce helped the couple grow their fitness empire to an annual turnover in excess of A$100 million.

Harbour Bottling

Started in 2017, Harbour Bottling exports more than 400 containers of South Australian wine each year. Prior to starting Harbour Bottling, the four directors – Jason Zhou, Jonathon Li, Simon Hou and Wayne Chao were all international students who have previously found success in business.

Jason Zhao completed a Masters Degree in Oenology, working across the industry before helping to found Orchid Wine Estate. Jonathon Li completed a Masters Degree in Project Management at Wollongong before co-founding Orchid Wine Estate in 2013 after a trip to Adelaide. Simon Hou, a medical scientist by trade, established DG Real Estate – the first Chinese real estate agency in Adelaide. Finally, Wayne Chao completed a Bachelors Degree in Computer Science at Adelaide before building I Age Media, a leading media producer in Adelaide focused on the Chinese community.

These four directors have not only paid for their own education in Australia, they have gone on to create businesses that grow employment and contribute millions to the South Australian economy each year.

Greaton

Nicho Teng completed a Bachelors Degree in Business at Flinders University and now runs two highly successful companies. His first company, Haneco, manufactures LED lighting which is distributed through 800 branches across Australia. The company employs 80 staff with a turnover exceeding A$40 million per year.

Nicho also started Greaton Pty Ltd, a property development company with a development pipeline worth more than A$1.2 billion. This includes the A$300 million West Franklin project in Adelaide, the 285-room Westin hotel in Adelaide valued at A$200 million, and the Ribbon W Hotel, a A$730 million redevelopment in Sydney’s Darling Harbour. These developments create jobs and contribute to the Australian economy.

To put this in context, Nicho has created businesses worth more than A$1 billion – the magic valuation that defines a “unicorn”. This is also approximately the valuation at which Instagram was sold to Facebook in 2013.

Other employability initiatives

› EmployerPortal.com.au. This initiative connects students with businesses looking to boost their export potential and open trade doors faster. The Employer Portal website was created to highlight the potential of international students, explain post-study visas and connect employers to students via the students’ higher education institution.

› The Innovation and Collaboration Centre at UniSA

› ThincLab at the University of Adelaide

› The New Venture Institute at Flinders University. This institute was awarded the best university-incubator in the Asia-Pacific.

https://studyadelaide.com
Amanda Pickrell, Director, International Education, Study Melbourne

‘As more people engage in lifelong learning, we are committed to supporting our alumni to continue developing their professional skills and experience following graduation – whether they remain in Australia or return home.’

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SEND STARTUPS GLOBAL, ONE ‘G*STEP’ AT A TIME

The Victorian Government through its international education brand, Study Melbourne, has invested close to A$4 million in the International Student Welfare Program (ISWP). The ISWP funds projects, and partners with industry to develop and deliver innovative initiatives to enhance the experience of the 200,000 international students living and studying in Victoria.

The challenge and opportunity

International students expect support on their education journey to develop employability skills, knowledge of local business practices, and real-world experience. They bring with them significant lived cultural experiences which are often untapped in an international marketplace. At the same time, Victoria’s early-stage startups often lack the resources – including internationally experienced talent – to enable them to take their ideas global. The extensive pool of international student talent in Australia provides a unique opportunity to tackle these two challenges concurrently, with innovative projects that connect the international student cohort and the startup community.
The solution

The Global Students Entrepreneur Program (G*STEP) is an ISWP-funded initiative that supports international students to develop their entrepreneurship and innovative thinking skills. Students participating in G*STEP gain real-world experience by working within Victoria’s vibrant startup community.

Delivered by the Australia-China Association of Scientists and Entrepreneurs in partnership with the City of Melbourne, 850 international students from 27 countries, industry mentors, and startups participated in a four-month program of structured training seminars, networking events and business pitching workshops.

Teams of students and startups were established and mentored through 150 hours of G*STEP activities. Seminar topics covered finance, people management, intellectual property, business management and marketing pitches. Through this process, students developed their professional skills and networks. They also contributed to the global readiness of the startups in developing their business plans and pitches.

After an internal pitching round, 10 teams were selected for further coaching with an additional 30 hours of workshops, seminars and pitch training. The coaching culminated in a final pitch competition. Uniquely, teams were also graded on engagement with one another, change in global mindsets over the duration of the problem, and how G*STEP added value or changed their world view. The program developed the global mindsets of participants. As a result, business plans were transformed to respond to opportunities that came out of the knowledge-sharing and networking in the program.

Results

An evaluation of the G*STEP program indicated the pilot succeeded in engaging both international students and startups. All participants felt a strong return on their investment of time in the program. Feedback included recurring positive themes that networking and mentor support provided a meaningful learning environment. Overall, 88 per cent of respondents indicated that they would recommend the G*STEP program to others.

Other employability initiatives

For several years, the Victorian Government has partnered with education and training institutions to develop opportunities for international students to access real-world work experience. One example is the Victorian Government’s LIVE (Lead. Intern. Volunteer. Experience.) initiative. A key deliverable is the Live Projects program, which provides team-based project work for international students through projects involving Victorian businesses and local communities. Student participants gain professional experience, and also expand their networks and build their local business knowledge.

Other initiatives include:

- The Talking Circles Program – supporting students to develop English language and communication skills.
- The Design for Diversity Program – bringing together young Victorians and international students to develop their cultural competency through design thinking.
- Resume checking services – providing one-on-one support for students.

https://www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au
Phil Payne, Executive Director, StudyPerth

‘Our research identified the need to improve competitiveness in employability. We’re doing this through several innovative initiatives. StudyPerth’s aim is to establish a comprehensive culture and infrastructure that provides ‘employability and enterprise’ opportunities for all students. We also focus on fostering friendships and improving the communication skills of our international students.’

EMPLOYABILITY PERTH

Research by QS Enrolment Solutions in 2018 for StudyPerth, Understanding the International Student Experience, identified key areas for Perth to attract and retain high-quality international students. This included improving competitiveness in employability, which plays a critical role when international students choose their study destination.

Study Perth commenced the Employability Perth project to:

› create a comprehensive and integrated system of educational projects – that identify and address students’ requirements, especially around employability at the end of their course.

› establish a comprehensive culture with stakeholders – to provide opportunities for all students to advance their employment, entrepreneurial, or enterprise aspirations.

StudyPerth has identified innovative, conceptual development practices to deliver out-of-the-box solutions. Employability programs often offer identical solutions to both domestic and international students. They don’t always consider cultural differences and issues that are unique to international students. StudyPerth’s research identified three main challenges for employability programs for international students:
International students find it difficult to obtain authentic, real life or practical experiences – they may require support to integrate into Australian workplace cultures.

International students often rely on socialisation with their own nationality groups – This may affect their English language proficiency, which in turn impacts on their ability to talk about their achievements and ideas when applying for jobs or engaging in Australian workplaces.

International students often come from cultures prioritising study to achieve high grades and a higher education – this can mean less time to participate in extra-curricular events or activities. These are missed opportunities to establish useful connections.

In 2019, StudyPerth’s Employability Project will:

- deliver comprehensive and integrated systems – to augment and complement programs provided by education institutions, to enhance the employability attributes of international students and assist them in realising a return on investment from their education.
- consider the student lifecycle – from when a student starts to consider studying in Perth to a point after graduation when the student has created enough employment experiences to move towards sustainable employment.
- address the wide-ranging requirements of a variety of stakeholders – including international students, education institutions, governments of all levels, business and industry; and meet the interests of alumni and the community.

Other employability initiatives

StudyPerth recently launched its Action Plan 2019–2025, in response to the Western Australia State Government’s International Education Strategy: Where Bright Futures Begin. The Action Plan identifies several innovative initiatives that aim to provide students with the skills, experience, networks and confidence to launch their careers while they are living and learning in Western Australia.

- **Employability Perth** – an integrated portfolio of employability projects complementing existing services and addressing the specific employability needs of our international students.
- **Passport to Perth** – a gamified program in a mobile app to engage students in a range of extra-curricular activities that foster friendships and improves communication skills.
- **StudyPerth Alumni** – a database of illustrious local and overseas alumni who can be mobilised for mentoring, support and marketing opportunities.
- **The International Student Centre in the CBD** – which offers a series of activities, services and programs that support students’ social, cultural and professional engagement.
Shannon Willoughby, Executive Director, Study Queensland

‘Queensland is delivering employability skills experiences to international students through a transformational state-wide Employability Strategy to the benefit of students, employers, education providers and the wider education and training sector. A strong and coordinated approach to enhancing employability across Queensland will support our international student graduates to effectively transition to the workplace.’

THE GEN[IN] STUDENT INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Employability skills and opportunities are critical destination choice motivators for prospective international students and a key measure of a successful study experience. Through Study Queensland’s enabling initiative – the International Education and Training (IET) Partnership Fund – eight consortia projects have been funded to enhance the employability of international students across Queensland.

Study Queensland works in tandem with the student hubs in Cairns, Gold Coast and Brisbane to deliver professional development workshops and expose international students to various opportunities to build their confidence, skillsets and job-readiness.

A flagship project from the IET Partnership Fund, the gen[IN] Student Innovation Challenge is an internationally focused, state-wide innovation challenge for young people. The project represents strong collaboration between industry, government and the education sector, combining their knowledge to nurture the next generation of business innovators.
Helping international students build connections

Delivered online, the gen[in] Student Innovation Challenge helps young people prepare for their future through ideation and collaboration, encouraging both domestic and international students to connect and collaborate through an engaging and unique educational experience. It represents the state’s first ever innovation challenge to place significant focus on international students, encouraging them to build meaningful connections with local, globally minded students, industry mentors and Queensland as a whole.

Jiyuan (Jack), an international student from St Peter’s Lutheran College in Brisbane, won A$4,000 in last year’s gen[in] challenge for developing a new way for international students to connect with homestay families. He encourages the next cohort to take up the gen[in] opportunity: ‘The gen[in] challenge helped me to build my network and supported my ideas on how to make it evolve. I believe more people should join gen[in] because it’s actually a wonderful program.’

In 2018, gen[in] reached over 150,000 young people through social media campaigns, resulting in over 300 students submitting an expression of interest to be part of the challenge. Just under 150 students registered and participated.

In August 2018, the top 11 teams competed for their chance to win a share of A$15,000 in cash prizes.

The gen[in] challenge has received funding for three years, with matching funds and greater in-kind contributions from the members of the Queensland Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance (QSIEA) led by Indooroopilly State High School (ISHS) in Brisbane. The QSIEA has a long list of members including Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, Creative Enterprise Australia QUT, the University of Queensland, Education Queensland International, the Department of Education and Training International, Little Tokyo Two, Car Advice Pty Ltd, Holden Capital Pty Ltd, ISHS, Sarina Russo Group, Brisbane Marketing Independent Schools Queensland, TAFE Queensland, Lutheran Education Queensland, Be Social. Be Smart, and FUTURE-WE.

Other employability initiatives

› Establishing the role of Innovator in Residence for Employability (currently Beau Leese and Nanette Ripmester).

› Developing a state-wide Employability Strategy – for the benefit of students, employers, education providers, and the wider education and training sector.

› Establishing the Queensland International Student Advisory Panel.

https://www.studyqueensland.qld.gov.au
Peter Mackey, Director of Trade, International Education and Small Business Operations, NSW Department of Industry

‘Study Sydney’s innovative approach to enhancing student employability is founded on the State of New South Wales’ rich ecosystem of startups and entrepreneurial culture. New South Wales continues to invest heavily in the jobs of the future with initiatives that are creating the right conditions for entrepreneurialism to thrive. Indeed, the 2018 Startup Muster report shows New South Wales is now home to nearly half of Australia’s startup founders. As Australia’s leading economy and largest employer, New South Wales has a lot to offer international students.’

SYDNEY SCHOOL OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Sydney School of Entrepreneurship (SSE) is a unique collaboration between 11 New South Wales (NSW) universities and TAFE NSW to drive next-generation entrepreneurship. SSE equips early stage entrepreneurs with the practical skills, connections, and global mindsets they need to create high-growth companies and the jobs of the future.

Founded with cornerstone investment from the NSW Government, SSE launched in August 2017. Since then, SSE has welcomed more than 5,000 participants to learning activities hosted across NSW, including more than 2,000 student entrepreneurs.

While based in Sydney, SSE operates throughout NSW. A diverse and welcoming student community is drawn from a pool of 700,000 undergraduate students at 12 member institutions. They represent a wide range of backgrounds, interests and areas of study. SSE selects students with an equal gender balance; at least 30 per cent of students are from regional NSW, and more than 10 per cent are international students enrolled at a member institution.
Student entrepreneurship

SSE students benefit from the larger common stage created for innovation and creativity to thrive. Students are immersed in experiential, applied studies to develop the entrepreneurial mindset and skills required for successful startup businesses. They build strong connections with like-minded entrepreneurs, academics, mentors, industry experts, policy makers and alumni from across the state and around the world.

International student and SSE Alumni, Sudip Giri, is studying Network Security at TAFE NSW. He said SSE opened his eyes to the possibilities of entrepreneurship and innovation. ‘I had a great experience learning at SSE. The teaching team helped me better understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem and its relationships. I have learned so much from this unit and I look forward to learning more.’

SSE has developed a cutting-edge curriculum of four experiential entrepreneurship units. They deep dive into the core elements of creating a startup company and scaling for success. So far, 200 students have completed an SSE unit of study, and 44 alumni have an early-stage startup.

Beyond academic units, there is something for everyone at SSE. SSE collaborates with partners in government, academia, industry and the community to co-host or co-create nine different learning activities for students, academics and the wider community.

International success

SSE masterclasses and speaker series events showcase local and international speakers. Development activities bring together academics from SSE member institutions to build a community of practice in entrepreneurship education. SSE International Bootcamps send students and startups to global innovation hubs such as Stockholm, Silicon Valley and China.

In 2019, SSE led a Young Entrepreneurs International Bootcamp to India, in partnership with the NSW Department of Industry. Over a 10-day program, 33 NSW startup founders were immersed in India’s dynamic and fast-growing technology and innovation centres in Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Pune.

SSE gained global recognition for its pioneering work, winning the prestigious 2018 Outstanding Emerging Entrepreneurship Centre award at the annual conference of the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centres (GCEC), ahead of a strong international field.

SSE continues to scale the delivery and global reach of its community to make NSW a global destination to drive next-generation entrepreneurship.

Other employability initiatives

› The NSW Global Trade Accelerator Program – led by Practera. This two-week, virtual, work-integrated learning program matches international students to NSW exporters and trade professionals to complete international market research reports. In its pilot phase, the program included 250 students and 31 exporters, and gained a combined satisfaction rating of more than 75 per cent from all participants.

› Study NSW Employability Training – led by Successful Graduate. This program comprises online modules to help international students succeed in a competitive job market. Industry and student insights have informed training that builds students’ self-awareness, improves their job application drafting, and prepares them for their first days at work.

› Sydney Startup Hub – the largest innovation centre of its kind in the southern hemisphere, the hub comprises 17,000 square metres over 11 floors and is dedicated to startups.

› Haymarket HQ – Australia’s first startup hub supporting entrepreneurs to connect to Asia.

www.study.sydney
Rob Lawrence encourages us to challenge conventional thinking about employability skills. In this essay, Rob highlights Australia's unique strengths in producing graduates who are ready for global lives and careers. He outlines Australian contextual factors, and – using the concepts of enterprise and impact – discusses how and why Australian educated alumni make a difference globally.
The world has traditionally looked at employability through the lens of soft skills, including communications, teamwork and problem-solving. And the application of these soft skills has historically varied between different countries, cultures and industries, based around their different stages of economic and social development.

Now, many of these soft skills are taken as given. Most graduate employers expect new employees to be technically competent, articulate, creative and adept multitaskers. They expect them to be capable of working with clients and colleagues alike, and – through their everyday interactions – understand risk, data, finance and research.

The pace of change across different industries is occurring so quickly that few employers have the luxury of equipping graduates with these core skills. This pace of change is extending into the actual role and profile of employers themselves, with the majority of graduates now engaged in the SME and startup space.

Many graduates aspire to work in multinationals and large-scale organisations; however, relative to the number of graduate positions available, the proportion of graduates who arrive in such destinations is low.

Instead, today’s generation of graduates need to be prepared for the gig economy. Whether accountants or doctors, lawyers or engineers, most will be employed through their own enterprise. They will often work on short-term contracts and projects, be reliant upon their own networks to source opportunities, and they will regularly be tasked into initiatives through other third parties. Plus, many graduates will inevitably work in several different fields and industries at the same time.

The nature of future workplace activities will call for 24/7 coverage within an environment that is fluid and dynamic – and which demands flexibility, versatility and portability. Many graduates will be highly mobile in their workplace. Their office will be their own devices and even their local colleagues may well be virtual.

Creativity will be fundamental. To remain relevant, every industry and organisation will need to innovate, re-engineer, invent, solve and differentiate. Many employers already have dedicated creative spaces and employment policies designed to create the space, environment and time to stimulate new ideas.

Creativity equally applies for individual graduates who themselves need to apply new concepts and innovations in building a self-package which enables individual differentiation within a highly complex and competitive world.

Employers once sought graduates who could ‘hit the ground running’. Many still do. But a nomenclature recently raised by a graduate employer was the call for ‘applied relevance’, a term which is now gaining traction as both a concept and a behavioural dictum.

Applied relevance captures the essence of the Australian education proposition. It teaches students to think, reason and act for themselves. Applied relevance calls for the constant acquisition of knowledge to remain informed, and it also calls for the ability to take action within a domain where subject matter expertise is the distinction between self and others.

Institutions across all levels of Australian education have invested in environments that foster innovation and creativity. There are dozens of incubators and hackathons. Many campuses are now labelled as innovation hubs. Platforms have been established to enable industry engagement and intervention. And there are countless vehicles through which students can participate in voluntary programmes, charitable causes, field research, mobility options, leadership and mentoring – all vehicles which ultimately contribute to the experiences needed to enable employability.

Education has now become ongoing, often defined as a stage between different projects. Pedagogical models enable students to vary their acquisition of knowledge around their own individual circumstances, expectations and needs. Alternative qualification and learning models are becoming embedded through the escalation of badged and micro-credentials, as well as intensive short-term options focused around subject matter expertise. These include online programs, pop-up classrooms and mixed-mode delivery.

To complement the activities of institutions themselves, there are numerous packages which students and alumni can access. The alumni are a powerful tool and graduates who have studied in Australia share their footprint in every corner of the world. There is hardly a town or city globally where someone has not experienced an Australian education. These alumni have a connection with Australia and they provide an invaluable outreach which showcases Australia’s pioneering and innovative legacy.
Innovation and creativity have become embedded features of the Australian education landscape. They influence how and where students are taught. However, there are other features of Australia’s education landscape which equally foster employability, two of which are enterprise and impact.

Tens of thousands of Australian students now have their own enterprise. They know how to create, promote, manage and innovate an incredible diversity of products and services. Even students living in remote communities have customers located overseas. This generation of enterprising Australian students are prolific communicators, inveterate travellers and cognisant of the importance of constantly building a portfolio of different skills, experiences, competencies and networks. And this portfolio extends to the way they interact with international students who in turn learn from their shared experiences.

Today’s generation of students in Australia is digitally astute. They know that engagement through digital and social media is the key to unlocking potential and opportunities. The core marketing premise of ‘local and then global’ has never been more relevant than it is today. Digital enables global reach. Digital provides a stimulus for creativity, innovation, community, and enterprise. Digital is a catalyst for change and a metaphor for employability.

Students of the Australian education system learn how to make an impact. They know how to transition knowledge into practice. They understand the unleashed potential to be witnessed and enjoyed, whether making a statement about oneself, or driving an outcome that can enrich millions.

Impact is a product of Australian education’s market ingenuity, which directly enhances employability. Australian educators were early pioneers in building pathways to enable access and opportunity. Australian educators were early entrants into the transnational education space, with millions of graduates across Asia qualified through some form of twinning or partnership arrangement. Today, there are well over 900 embedded marketing representatives of Australian institutions located in approximately 85 countries. These embedded representatives bring much valued knowledge to their institutions about emerging market opportunities, and the needs and priorities of government and industries within these countries. This information directly contributes to teaching and learning frameworks, including frameworks that align with employability.

New market opportunities are constantly being explored. And Australian education providers are mindful that the next generation of industries and occupations will require a constantly updated portfolio of programs, frameworks and services. At the same time, the next generation of industries and occupations will require an entirely new and extended raft of skill sets, both to enable opportunity and to ensure sustainable employability.

Impact can be directly attributed to the Australian education hallmarks of innovation, collaboration, creativity and enterprise. Australian education enables graduate portability, meaning the ability to work in different locations, industries, applications and roles at short notice. Australian education teaches students to have a global perspective and ultimately work in an environment where future employees will need to transition between different locations, societies and systems at a moment’s notice.

An Australian education enables students to embrace the types of attributes needed to underpin graduate outcomes, wherever their eventual destination.

Two such attributes are design thinking and critical reasoning. These reflect the need to map complexity, anticipate outcomes and occurrences, plan resources, mitigate risk, analyse situations and manage disruption. These are all fundamental skill sets sought by employers, given the emergence of new industries and sectors which by virtue of the pace of change and evolution, do not always have access to readily available and experienced human resources.

Some next-generation industries are associated with new technologies and fields which have emerged through disruption and invention. Others are products of social intelligence and reform. Education providers throughout Australia, whether through pedagogy or research, are among the world leaders in such fields as cyber security, data analytics, tropical health, medical devices and immersive technologies.
Just as next-generation industries are evolving, other industries are expanding at a prolific rate. Through their expansion, these industries embrace other options and foster new opportunities. One such example is entertainment, a product of greater discretionary wealth around the world. Entertainment embraces many forms, from games technologies and media, to creative arts and creative industries.

The creative industries have evolved, collectively, into one of the fastest-growing fields of employment. Film production in itself requires an enormous diversity of skill sets, including special effects, animation, software development, marketing and distribution, talent sourcing, composition and set construction.

Every country in the world wants to grow tourism as a source of foreign revenue. The shoreline of Colombo hosts numerous five-star hotel constructions whilst Indonesia has one of the largest aircraft-fleet orders in the world, much of it designed to stimulate and enable tourism. Such tangible features of an economic landscape illustrate future employment demand and the types of skill sets needed to enable specialisation and growth. Equally, many countries are recognised by the Global Innovation Index for core innovation strengths, with countries such as Slovakia and Finland considered world leaders in information and communication technologies.

The strength of the Australian employability proposition is unique, relevant, and robust. What distinguishes Australian education is the consistency of quality across all institutions and the sum of the entire proposition. Every next generation skill set, capability, competency and outcome is catered for in multiple locations.

Further, Australian education providers have enormous outreach in their own right, through campuses, research centres and collaborative networks. Such outreach brings a wealth of knowledge around next-generation demand, which in turn impacts the shape and composition of the hundreds of campuses and operations around Australia.

More than any other sector, Australian education is truly global. Australian researchers and contributors are located in almost every country. And their engagement involves the very latest technologies and applications, discoveries and innovations.

Australia itself is highly educated and this impacts the country’s commitment to progress. Australia’s diverse economy is a reflection of the physical environment and the intellectual environment. Australia is a forward-looking country and this is reflected in a commitment to educating students for the future. Future employability and employment are widely recognised as representing the ultimate return on investment.

Students from around the world are constantly aware that change is ongoing and rapid. Some technologies and applications become redundant even before a qualification related to the field can be obtained. Just as Blockchain was a word that was rarely heard two years ago, Blockchain has evolved into a colloquialism. The same applies to other fields from Bitcoin and augmented reality to cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

Education is no longer a transition from early adulthood to the workforce. Education is now a continuum which builds on other learning experiences gained from travel, networks, media and experiences. Australian education provides the platform for innovation, collaboration, creativity, and enterprise. These are now the fundamentals needed for future employability; and they are all areas where Australia shines as a beacon of world best practice.

Each year, Rob interviews thousands of students, academics, employers and opinion leaders, on behalf of universities, government agencies, institutions and cooperative organisations around the world. At the 2014 Australian International Education Conference, Rob was presented with the highly prestigious, Distinguished Contribution to the Field of International Education award.
In this section we profile current and former Australian international students who are successfully applying their enterprise and entrepreneurship skills. These impressive achievers gained valuable opportunities to unleash their creativity and potential during their studies in Australia. We highlight just some of the initiatives available to international students in Australia through their education institutions, and supported by Australian state and territory governments. The people profiled in this section are making significant social, cultural and economic impacts – in Australia and globally.
I left France in 2013 to study a double degree in Business Management and Communications Design at Swinburne University.

While at Swinburne, I completed the Emerging Leaders Program. This provided me with valuable work experience through internships and helped develop my leadership skills. Through the program, I developed the skills and knowledge to become an entrepreneur.

I believe global sustainability initiatives represent the greatest entrepreneurial opportunity in a generation. There is growing social awareness of environmental issues, and governments around the world are responding, for example by introducing bans on single-use plastics.

In 2018, I founded Little Green Panda, an innovative plant-based drinking straw company to eliminate and replace plastic straws. The company has grown rapidly and now delivers products to five global markets; Australia, the United States, France, Hong Kong, and New Zealand.

We produce sustainable and ethically made reusable bamboo straws, and wheat-based single use compostable straws for commercial and individual use. Through our global distributors and restaurant partners, we have the capacity to supply seven million wheat straws every month.

In my experience, I found it easier to start a company in Australia than in Europe. People in Australia are open-minded and encouraging. Starting a business requires many physical and emotional steps. I’ve been lucky to find people willing to help and guide me throughout this journey, and provide me with the resources to succeed.

Having an entrepreneurial mindset is seeing a problem and thinking outside the box to solve it.
Originally from Hong Kong, I came to Australia in 2016 and have been studying at the University of Queensland. During my first year at uni while pursuing my Marketing Degree, I worked for different startups and a global sportstech accelerator. I was absolutely amazed by the startup scene in Australia. Not only the technology and innovation, but also the energy and vision that startup founders embody.

Since then, I have been testing my ideas, and helping other founders and young entrepreneurs with my expertise, experience and connections through my organisation, Startup Interns. Startup Interns connects international students to the startup ecosystem in Australia.

In 2019, Startup Interns is running a Student Employability Accelerator Program (SEAP). Twenty students will receive five weeks’ experience in active-learning environments with two Queensland tech startups or scaleups. These students will learn by doing. Working on uncertain projects, initiatives and ideas forces students to challenge themselves and to learn new skills in the real world.

This SEAP is funded with support from the Study Queensland International Education and Training Partnership Fund. It has received valuable support from the Queensland Government and the SEAP consortia, which includes universities, TAFE innovation hubs, and edtech startups.

Entrepreneurial people consistently learn to define problems, collaborate with people, validate a hypothesis, execute ideas and elevate solutions. These are the 21st century skills educators need to deliver to international students.
In 2012, I received a scholarship to travel from Vietnam to Box Hill Institute. I completed a Masters Degree in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Swinburne University of Technology in 2016.

In 2018 I founded HopeBox, a non-profit organisation supporting rural Vietnamese women who have fled domestic violence. Through the sale of nutritious lunch boxes, HopeBox provides paid work, accommodation and the tools to enable women to be financially independent. HopeBox also provides scholarships to children who have been affected by domestic violence.

When I was 12 years old, my mother became very sick. I left school to work and support my mother and siblings to remain at school. I worked long hours, baby sitting and selling rice on the streets. Despite enormous challenges, my passion for study never stopped. I registered for night school and through Vietnam’s Know One Teach One (KOTO) social enterprise, I gained employment at the Intercontinental Hanoi Hotel Westlake.

In 2012, I received a scholarship via KOTO and Box Hill Institute to study in Melbourne. In November 2013, I was awarded Victoria’s International Student of the Year – Higher Education, along with the Premier’s Award – International Student of the Year.

While studying in Australia, I founded the Taste of Vietnam project. The project delivers authentic Vietnamese food to Australian families and friends with all profits directly supporting Pink Hope Community Australia, KOTO and the Breast Cancer Network Vietnam.

After finishing a Masters Degree at Swinburne, I worked for InfraRisk Melbourne as a business analyst. In 2017, I returned to Vietnam to work for KOTO, as Director, Marketing and Partnership Engagement. It was important to me to give back to the organisation that helped change my life.

**Education; it’s a way to change your life**
I arrived in Australia from India in 2014 and completed my Masters Degree in IT and an MBA at James Cook University in Brisbane in 2016.

My IT company, BRIKS, specialises in web and mobile apps, e-commerce, cloud solutions and artificial intelligence. We provide solutions to the healthcare, education, training, accounting and data-visualisation industries.

We are helping international students find courses and job opportunities using artificial intelligence. We also help medical practitioners with consultation bookings, documentation, invoicing and billing. One of our platforms is currently being trialled at St. Vincent’s Hospital, Brisbane.

The Australian startup eco-system is very supportive of international students, encouraging us to start our own businesses and promoting entrepreneurship. I gained a lot through initiatives such as QUT Bluebox, UQ iLabs and River City Labs. Regular events, workshops and meetups helped me to network with experts. I found people to be very welcoming if you have good ideas and are passionate about them.

As an entrepreneur, I learnt to dream big and never be scared of dreaming big. I am passionate about solving problems by building innovative solutions that make people’s lives better.
Being an entrepreneur in Australia has been an incredible experience. The support networks throughout the university and major cities have been incredibly important. Through the iLab UQ Accelerator program, we received a A$10,000 grant and a place on a three-month startup program.

We built a platform that includes all the tools we wish we had at our university economics classes. Model Econ connects students and teachers to quality interactive content, giving teachers the tools to do more. They use real-world data, create content, collaborate with other teachers and enhance student outcomes. Five Queensland schools are currently participating in trials with over 200 students.

An entrepreneurial mindset is about growth and creating opportunities. It’s also about learning from the past and being committed to a vision.

Originally from Mexico, I graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Economics from the University of Queensland and am currently completing my Honours year.

I am an economist who wants to make an impact on education. Along with fellow student, Jhon Treyes from Ecuador, I co-founded an education startup called Model Econ. We wanted to create a platform to collect economic data from several sources and automatically update statistics to ensure academic articles retain their relevance.
I arrived in Australia from Colombia as a postgraduate international student in 1999. I completed a Graduate Diploma in Design Science (Energy Conservation) and a Masters Degree in Multimedia Design (Honours) at the University of Sydney.

My career in communications and marketing evolved from working on publications for the university’s Architecture faculty, including the faculty’s website.

I am the Founder and Director of Bedssi Accommodation Solutions and host of a bilingual podcast called Innovator Diaries. I founded Bedssi Accommodation Solutions to help international students find accommodation, based on my own experiences. Through my Innovator Diaries podcast, I interview influential people to provide practical advice to emerging entrepreneurs and graduates who are transitioning into the workforce.

In Australia, people give you a chance if you demonstrate your passion, deliver what you promise, work hard and focus on solving problems. People are supported to start new businesses and there is a ‘have a go’ attitude. There’s also great government support and a lot of guidance available.

Australian institutions provide opportunities to work as an intern or get involved in community engagement activities. Taking advantage of these and getting practical experience is one of the best ways to really understand if you are passionate enough to start a new business.

An entrepreneurial mindset is when you see an opportunity and are driven to act on it.
We are a husband and wife team who both received scholarships from Colombia to study in Australia. In 2018, we enrolled in English language pathways courses. This year, Mauricio commenced a Masters Degree in International Business at the University of Melbourne, while Nathalia enrolled with Monash University to study business law.

Coming from a long line of Colombian coffee farmers, we identified a business opportunity when we discovered the sophistication of Melbourne’s coffee culture. We introduced our specialty products: Colombian coffee roasted beans and coffee shells, under the brand ‘BC COFFEE’.

As international students, our biggest challenge was a lack of local knowledge and networks. Through the Study Melbourne Student Centre we were introduced to La Trobe’s International Students Pre-Accelerator Program (ISP) in partnership with Outcome.Life.

Our program mentors connected us to local networks and helped us understand Australia’s business culture. Through the weekly workshops we were encouraged to test our project idea. We also received support when we faced the market – real customers and real clients. Through this experience we identified and solved real-world problems. In the customer-discovery phase of our project we spoke to hundreds of stakeholders including baristas, roasters, distributors and coffee drinkers.

In Australia there is a strong focus on practical experience. We are given opportunities to put the theories we learn in the classroom into action in the market.

Being an entrepreneur in Australia requires hard work, passion and a willingness to understanding your customers’ needs. Entrepreneurs have the potential to change the world.
I came to Australia from Malaysia in 2008 and studied a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in Political Science at Monash University in Melbourne.

I am the Ecosystem Development Lead for the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), a government agency promoting innovation in entrepreneurship.

At Monash, I was given the freedom and flexibility to explore leadership opportunities. The university proactively encouraged students to volunteer, travel and learn new skills. I joined a student representative council and learnt management skills; from writing meeting minutes to securing corporate sponsorships. The rich diversity of the student community allowed me to expand my horizons, especially in discussing and debating seemingly sensitive issues.

I benefited tremendously from Monash Training and Professional Development short courses. For example I improved my communications skills by attending a course in public speaking. My Australian experience harnessed my leadership skills to ultimately attain employment.

Now, through MaGIC and in partnership with global organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme, I am supporting young Malaysians to develop innovative solutions to global issues, such as financial inclusion and income-generation for undocumented persons.

Graduates today need to be entrepreneurial. Being an entrepreneur means being a problem solver, risk-taker and having empathy. These are important traits for graduates to survive in the age of disruption. I learnt this from my Australian education experience.
This section provides insights on current and emerging challenges and opportunities in the area of graduate employability in Australia. Contributions encompass demand for traditional internships through to new technology-enabled experiential approaches, and the rise of micro-credentials.

This section also considers the ways that global forces and factors – such as technology and automation – are impacting demand for employability skills. The implications for education institutions and partner organisations are discussed.

The contributors to this section of the report represent a fraction of the organisations in Australia that are working in partnership with education institutions to enhance employability skills. Austrade works with a range of exporters, edtech companies and service providers that offer innovative solutions for global education.

Discover more at www.austrade.gov.au/edtech/
ONLINE LEARNING, EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING DESIGN ARE KEY TO EMPLOYABILITY

Not long ago, a student would choose their career by deciding on an undergraduate degree at university. Degree in hand, graduates had little trouble finding a ‘job for life’.

Around the world, technology and automation are significantly impacting employability — disrupting but also creating new industries, services and jobs. Advancements in the fields of science, engineering, and humanities require the continued pursuit of new knowledge and continuous upskilling.

The World Economic Forum’s *Future of Jobs Report 2018* tells us that by 2022, 75 million jobs will be lost to automation, but 133 million will emerge as technology advances. Ernst and Young’s *University of the Future Report 2030* has identified a demand for skills-focused courses, based on feedback from 84 per cent of prospective, current and past students who believe these skills are necessary to remain competitive in the workplace.

**The power to adapt**

These challenges present unique opportunities to Australian educational institutions, as well as to education technology service providers.

To adapt, universities have started to re-package postgraduate programmes into non-accredited short courses which focus on emerging knowledge and skills. Traditional undergraduate degrees are being transformed through blended learning, flexible subject selection and open online delivery to reach new markets and better align curricula to the needs of industry. Graduates may emerge with several ‘micro-credentials’ for the targeted short courses they completed alongside their traditional degree.

Higher education providers now partner with a new category of large-scale learning platforms such as OpenLearning, Coursera and FutureLearn, to help them build, recruit for and deliver online programs. Since 2012, OpenLearning’s partnerships and growth in Southeast Asia have directly benefited Australian educational institutions, enabling them to cost-effectively penetrate new markets: over 70 education providers have delivered over 10,000 courses and reached over two million students.

The economic advantages are evident. International students contribute more than A$30 billion to the Australian economy each year, and the demand for specialised ‘single subject’ courses presents a great business opportunity for Australia’s higher education providers.

**Course unbundling and micro-credentials**

However, the pace of change puts new pressure on higher education providers. Short courses from universities in Victoria or Queensland now compete with those from California, Singapore and Beijing. New modes of delivery require new approaches to learning design, facilitation and assessment. Institutions need to increase their investment in people, technology, marketing and training to deliver a globally competitive learning experience.
As postgraduate degrees are unbundled and micro-credentials become more relevant, we need an updated accreditation and recognition framework to instil student and industry confidence. The review of the Australian Qualifications Framework looks set to deliver one of the world’s most robust micro-credential frameworks, which will create a competitive advantage for Australian universities.

To deliver strong learning and employability outcomes for both domestic and international markets in the future, higher education providers will need to adopt and implement appropriate new technology and processes to complement face-to-face delivery.

The quality of Australia’s higher education sector has given rise to new technology companies that intersect technology and education. At OpenLearning, we see the world through the eyes of the learner and the learning designer, ensuring universities can deliver the outcomes that society expects.

Delivering these results requires an end-to-end pathway. This means taking students from education to employment, and right through to professional development. This approach empowers a new generation of lifelong learners who view continually learning new skills as normal. Australian universities and education technology companies are well positioned to create this future, and in the process they will create more opportunities for graduates to gain employment.

Adam Brimo is the CEO and Founder of OpenLearning.com, an Australian education technology solution that enables education providers to deliver MOOCs, blended learning, professional accreditation and micro-credentials to students worldwide.
REAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE EQUALS BETTER EMPLOYABILITY PROSPECTS

Fact: It is more difficult for international students to secure career-related employment when they graduate than their Australian peers.

This is because the professional networks of international students are in their country of origin. The popular phrase, ‘It is not what you know but who you know’, is alive and well. Compared to their Australian peers, however, international students have very few connections. Therefore, international students must work ten times harder to build their professional networks.

Fact: Businesses today expect graduates to have work experience before they graduate.

There have never been more people in the world with Masters Degree qualifications. A Masters Degree is no longer a differentiator; work experience gives international students the edge in employability and getting that job. Having placed thousands of international students into internships, I’ve found that businesses are less focused on technical skills and more on attitude, critical skills, and cultural fit. Graduates will learn the technical skills on the job and in any case, creative software has reduced the need for graduates to be technically strong. Employers are more likely to ask new recruits the question: ‘Do you know and understand the software we use in our organisation?’ The graduate who answers this question comprehensively is more likely to be hired.

Fact: Real-life industry experience gives students the competitive edge.

For some time, Australian education providers have been shifting towards a model of work-integrated learning. Work placements, or internships, are the main feature of this model. This shift has largely been driven by students now choosing their education provider based on whether they will have the capacity to get work experience as part of their education.

As the demand for internships increases at a record rate, the challenge is for education institutions to provide sufficient work placements. Specialist, third-party internship placement providers – often with a particular focus on placing international students – now commonly work in partnership with education providers. Australian education providers are allocating budgets to scale up their internship placements as the demand from students continues to grow. Internships are now a prerequisite in the employability landscape. Australian education institutions increasingly offer international students real industry experience as part of their higher education, which delivers better employment outcomes.

Gerard Holland is the founder of Outcome. Life and InternMatch.io. These organisations focus on creating employment opportunities for international students.
Employability – what? When I attended university 25 years ago, I didn’t have a single conversation with any of my fellow classmates or lecturers about getting a job.

In 2019 expectations have changed

Back in the early nineties it never crossed my mind that I was going to university to get a job. I went to university so I wouldn’t have to get a job – at least for a few years. Many academics would have been offended by the notion that the purpose of university was preparation for employment.

Jobs and skills are today’s goals

How things have changed! In just a few years the landscape has completely transformed. Now employability and career options are top of mind for most students, especially for international students looking for a demonstrable return on investment of their time, effort and tuition. Student-led demand has meant most universities are scrambling to transform themselves from citadels of knowledge, to clearing houses of skills.

Employability and work-integrated learning are the buzzwords of every education conference. University marketing materials are filled with phrases like ‘real world,’ ‘job ready,’ ‘industry driven’ and ‘21st century skills’. Strong graduate employability metrics have moved from ‘nice to have’ to mission critical.

Australia is paying attention to employability

So how is Australia faring in this space? Are we just window dressing, or are we creating meaningful employability programs with impact?

There’s a lot of promise in Australia, with lots going on and significant grass-roots enthusiasm. Education leaders are increasingly updating their courses with real-world content, placements and industry experts. The conference landscape is awash with events and presentations about employability. Internships, professional development programs and work-integrated learning are on the rise. Soft skills such as communication and creativity are in demand from industry, and they are being embedded into more academic programs.

State and territory governments are getting on board: they are not just talking about employability, but promoting meaningful and innovative programs to boost international students’ employment skills and opportunities.

These initiatives help position each state front and centre in employability, in the eyes of current and prospective international students.
Some examples include:

› Study Melbourne’s LIVE Projects program – connecting real businesses, mentors and students to work together on real business problems on the Practera platform.

› Study Perth’s launching of Employability Perth – backed up with a call to market for vendors to create an integrated portfolio of employability projects.

› Study NSW funding of employability projects – these include Bridging the Gap, which is delivered in partnership with Successful Graduate and several NSW institutions.

The private sector joins in

In the private sector, exciting things are happening in the area of virtual internships, with Inside Sherpa; soft skills for the future of work with the Plato Project; outsourced work-integrated learning placements through ReadyGrad; experiential learning programs via Intersective; an internship marketplace with InternMatch; and scalable online employability training with Successful Graduate, to name a few.

What’s next?

Now that Australian education is on a clear employability trajectory, do we just wait it out and see what works and what grows?

There’s a much bigger opportunity here. Demand for employability is global. Australian universities, in partnership with the private sector and government have a vast opportunity to co-create and package employability and skills-development solutions that are compelling and scalable for the global marketplace.

How can this be done? Education institutions should open up to a little risk and enter into meaningful partnerships with entrepreneurs. Active collaboration with industry and dedicated employability innovators is critical to test and improve services with staff and students. Successful solutions can then be scaled and commercialised. Federal, and state and territory governments can help by supporting this process and facilitating the global promotion of local successes.

Mark Pettitt is the founder of Edified Education. Edified Education is a consultancy that helps clients make rapid and meaningful improvements to student acquisition, student retention and student success.
INNOVATION AND FLEXIBILITY ARE CRITICAL FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

By 2030 the world is expected to spend US$10 trillion on education and training, including government, individual, parent and organisational spending. Almost 40 per cent will be from higher education, corporate training and ongoing upskilling.

More people than ever before are participating in higher education and training, with many governments setting participation targets in excess of 40 per cent. International student enrolments continue to climb and are estimated to reach seven million by 2020, and ample evidence shows that higher education leads to better economic and personal outcomes.

At the same time, we are seeing the beginnings of fundamental shifts in the nature of work, and the knowledge and skills required to succeed – and be productive – in the workplaces of the 21st century. Key global forces are set to re-shape many of the world’s economies. Globalisation; economic growth and the rise of emerging markets; population growth which will see almost 500 million more post-secondary learners by 2030; changes to work and skills through automation and advances in technology – all these forces are changing the way we live, earn and learn, and will together have a profound impact on education and training, both as challenges and opportunities.

Once considered separate realms, the boundaries between higher education, work and skills are dissolving fast. The notion that higher education might provide (some) learners with (some) internship/work experiences through their course is now considered totally inadequate. Indeed, some Australian universities have committed to providing all students with practical work experience of some type. These are big goals but also difficult to implement at scale.

Technology now provides the opportunity to solve the scale issue, however, and we are seeing a number of innovative edtech solutions – both in Australia and globally – that focus on virtual internships and other project-based work that digitally connects employers and students via a professional project or problem. Despite these early positive innovations, there is still a long way to go in order to support widespread internship and practical work experience opportunities for university students.

Continued focus on, and investment in, digital solutions for practical workplace experience is critical to bridge the gap between learning and work; to support the development of students’ work-ready skills; and to ensure the continued relevance of higher education learning as a path to career success. At the intersection of learning, work and technology, cooperation between higher education institutions, employers/employer groups and edtech firms will be fundamental to successful outcomes in this space. Innovations here could not only benefit Australia’s higher education sector and students, but potentially prove a valuable export opportunity.

Australia is globally recognised for quality higher education and, compared with many other countries, is at the forefront of digital and online learning as a core aspect of most university students’ experience.
University leaders are aware of the importance of digital transformation at their institution. Recent interviews and survey data from university leaders showed that the focus of digital transformation efforts was to improve the student experience through digital, with over three quarters describing their approach as ‘digitising some elements of the current model, while also creating new digital models’. This mostly takes the form of offering one-off units or moving to blended or fully online offerings, and some are actively experimenting across the whole value chain. Extending these innovations and increasing the flexibility of higher education study for international students will also be critical for Australia to remain competitive in a global market for students.

Maria Spies is Co-founder and Managing Director, HolonIQ. HolonIQ supports countries, institutions, firms and investors with data-driven market intelligence to power decisions that matter.

Innovation in Employability
The accelerating pace of technology-driven change is transforming the future of work faster than ever before.

Some 30 per cent of the jobs that today’s students are studying for are under threat from automation by 2030. The World Economic Forum claims that the gap between what people learn and the skills they need is widening, as traditional learning no longer equips students with the knowledge they need to thrive. Global employers like Google, Apple, PWC, IBM and Bank of America no longer require a college degree. Education thinkers like Jack Ma are calling for a revolution in what we teach and how we teach.

The growing value of experience

Experiential learning is a critical tool for higher education providers to meet this challenge. Experiential or work-integrated learning builds employability skills through professional placements, projects, accelerators, internships, mentoring and skills credentialing. These initiatives build trans-disciplinary skills including collaboration, creativity, leadership and resilience. They engage learners with real-world activities and challenges. Innovation in experiential learning is one of the keys to successful education in the 21st century.

Employability and the development of globally relevant skills are very important to more than five million international students and to the institutions who serve them. Australian higher education providers have embraced strategic commitments to deliver this kind of education to every student. However there are challenges: these valuable experiences are often complex, and costly to manage, monitor and quality assure.

These challenges can be overcome with good instructional design, efficient management, and smart technology. In working with many universities, governments and employers in Australia and around the world, we at Practera have observed some common factors in successful experiential learning programs:

› **support for learners** – to apply knowledge to new settings and complex problems

› **meaningful engagement** – with experienced practitioners aligned with program learning outcomes

› **shared, valuable objectives and a common framework** – for student, mentor and educator collaboration

› **facilitation of the critically reflective learning process** – which is required for competency and character development

› **credentialing frameworks** – which link learning and experience to global skills.

Australian state governments are supporting large-scale project networks, which enable thousands of international students every year from Australian higher education institutes to undertake real projects with Australian governments, businesses and community organisations. These projects lead to real outcomes, further work experience and jobs for international students. They may also result in government-endorsed digital certificates, which can be displayed on social media.
Designed on an even larger scale, the New South Wales Government – through Study NSW – recently initiated the Global Trade Accelerator platform built on Practera. This platform connects Australian exporters with international students to complete virtual market research projects on offshore markets. The accelerator platform is supported by Austrade, the Export Council of Australia and the Global Trade Professionals Alliance. Within two months of launching, the platform enabled 31 exporters to receive reports from 250 students from four universities, and achieved a satisfaction rating of 80 per cent from students and 75 per cent from employers.

Programs in Asia

In Asia, RMIT Vietnam has initiated Personal Edge, a global employability skills e-portfolio and micro-credentialing program. All 6,000 students in Vietnam are engaged in Personal Edge employability skills sessions. They are encouraged to seek out experiences and record evidence of their experiential learning aligned to six skill categories, including ‘digital citizen’, ‘confident communicator,’ and ‘cross-cultural team leader’. Students’ reflections are reviewed by RMIT careers advisors and micro-credentialled with open badges on a social media-friendly skills transcripts.

Experiential learning creates opportunities for students. It gives them new employability options and helps them to keep learning new skills throughout their careers.

Practera’s experiential learning and micro-credentialing platform enables students to access and document their activities and experiences. Through this, we help educators make experiential learning more engaging and accessible for millions of students around the world.

Suzy Watson is Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer of Australian edtech startup, Practera. Practera is built for educators to design, deliver and improve any kind of experiential learning program.
ABOUT AUSTRADE

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) is the Australian Government’s international trade promotion and investment attraction agency.

We deliver quality trade and investment services to businesses to grow Australia’s prosperity. We do this by generating and providing market information and insights, promoting Australian capability, and facilitating connections through our extensive global network.

We deliver international marketing and promotion services to the Australian education sector. Austrade highlights the global relevance, practicality and quality of Australian institutions, along with their innovation, creativity and focus on the future.

Austrade also supports Australian education providers through a range of information, advice and tailored services to support their international education engagement strategies. This includes the delivery of accurate and timely market intelligence and opportunities through the Market Information Package, an online portal available on a subscription basis to eligible institutions.

To discover how we can help you visit austrade.gov.au or contact us at info@austrade.gov.au or on 13 28 78 (within Australia).