



**GUIDE FOR ENHANCING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT IN WORK INTEGRATED
LEARNING (WIL) AND THEIR
EMPLOYABILITY**

Overview

This guide has been developed as part of the Best Practice International Student Engagement project, funded by the Australian Government through the International Education Innovation Fund (IEIF). The core aim of this project is to develop a series of guides and resources to enhance international student engagement.

The evidence-based guides and resources have been developed through:

- Desktop analysis of existing literature and examples of innovative practice.
- Three surveys, capturing over 6,000 responses from international students, graduates, education providers, government, community and professional organisations.
- 11 consultation workshops with 213 stakeholders.
- Interviews with 40 key stakeholders.

This research has identified the key themes involved in international student engagement and examples of innovative practice.

This guide is part of a series of six guides and a Guiding Framework intended to improve policies, practices, and programs to enhance international student engagement.

A complete list of the guides is below:

- Guide for enhancing international student engagement through teaching, learning and language
- Guide for enhancing international students' intercultural and community engagement
- Guide for enhancing international students' mental health and wellbeing
- Guide for enhancing international student engagement in work integrated learning and their employability
- Guide for supporting international students with accommodation
- Guide for supporting international students with crisis navigation
- A framework for developing innovative programs to enhance international student engagement.

Authors

Ly Tran, Jill Blackmore, Danielle Hartridge, Helen Forbes-Mewett, Renata Aldana and Diep Nguyen

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank:

Advisory Board members for providing valuable advice on the direction of this project and feedback on the draft guides and resources:

John Molony (Chair), Chris Beard, Jon Chew, Thomson Ch'ng, Sharon Cook, Gary Lee, Caroline Miller, Sophie O'Keefe, Oscar Ong, Felix Pirie, Heidi Reid, Simon Ridings, David Riordan and Milton Wan.

International students, graduates and stakeholder participants in the research for sharing significant insights which provided the evidence base for the development of the guides and resources.

Organisations providing case studies: Study Melbourne, University of Technology Sydney, RMIT University, Queensland University of Technology, Curtin University, University of South Australia, StudyAdelaide, and Study NSW.

Insider Guides for providing technical support for the project: James Martin, Sam Trezise, Raphaela Oest, Carl McGee and Josh Trezise.

Graphic designers: Renata Aldana, Sergio Arevalo and Peter Muntz.

Australian Government Department of Education Team for providing advice and feedback to support the project: Heather Kettle, Larissa Woolfield, Hayley Manning, Ben Sladin, Joel Manning and Sonali Mudaliar.

Reviewers for their valuable feedback on the guides and other project components:

Trevor McCandless, Emily O'Callaghan, Huyen Bui, Mark Rahimi, Huong Phan, Alam Ikhlas, Thanh Huynh, Nate Henderson, Sojen Pradhan, Judie Kay, Tran Nguyen, and Danny Ong.



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What do we know?	2
What helps international students with work integrated learning and employability?	3
What hinders international students with their work integrated learning and employability?	4
What can providers do?	6
Guiding Principle 1: Career orientation and advice	7
Career orientation and advice	8
Good practice example	11
Good practice example	12
Guiding Principle 2: Developing a professional portfolio	13
Developing a professional portfolio	14
Guiding Principle 3: Enhancing employers' understanding of international students	15
Enhancing employers' understanding of international students	16
Good practice example	18
Guiding Principle 4: Collaboration between education providers, employers, and professional and community organisations	19
Collaboration between education providers, employers, and professional and community organisations	20
Good practice example	22
Good practice example	23
Reflective Activity	24
Resources	25



Introduction

This guide is designed to assist practitioners and staff working for education providers and organisations who are involved in providing career and employability support services to international students.

Employability, access to safe and secure work, as well as post-study work rights are major considerations for international students, as is access to and engagement in work integrated learning (WIL).

Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge and understanding that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful¹.

WIL refers to various forms of linking theories to work experiences. These include work placements, internships, practicums, field work, service learning, work-based projects, industry projects, industry experience, co-operative education, and job shadowing².

Gaining work experience and participating in WIL enhances international students' employability in an uncertain and ever-changing global labour market.

International students do not participate in WIL at the same rate as domestic students. Education providers can partner with organisations to provide WIL opportunities to their students and support and encourage international students to participate in WIL.

This guide offers principles and strategies designed to engage students in developing their career goals, accessing WIL and employment opportunities, and enhancing their employability.

The guide builds on research findings from desktop analysis, consultation workshops, surveys and interviews with international students, graduates, education providers, government, community, and professional and community organisations.

¹ Bennett, D. (2018). Embedding employABILITY thinking across higher education. Australian government.

² Jackson, D. (2015). Employability skill development in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice. *Studies in HE*, 40(2), 350–367; Smith, M., et al., (2009). Career development learning: Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning to the student experience. Project Report, University of Wollongong; von Treuer, K. M., et al., (2010). Evaluation methodology for work integrated learning - placements. Paper presented at the ACEN 2010 Conference. Queensland.

What do we know?

Education providers and related organisations play an important role in supporting international student engagement in WIL, employment, and their overall employability following graduation.

The [*National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*](#)³ requires education providers to deliver an orientation program that gives information about student employment rights and conditions, and how to resolve workplace issues through organisations like the Fair Work Ombudsman.

Education providers may offer career support services or refer international students to affordable, externally-provided services designed to support their employability and career development goals.

³ [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018](#). Australian Government Department of Education.



What helps international students with work integrated learning and employability?

■ Support from education providers and other stakeholders

Finding suitable WIL and employment requires local networks which many international students cannot access on their own. Partnerships between education providers and employers, professional organisations, and government bodies facilitate access to WIL and employment opportunities.

■ Ongoing employability development

Reminding students of the importance of employability throughout their studies is key and gets them thinking about opportunities that will improve their employability.

■ Employer understanding

International student access to WIL and to the Australian labour market is improved when employers have a clear understanding of the value of international students, their abilities, skills and visa conditions.

■ Partnerships

Access to WIL and employment outcomes for international students improve if education providers create partnerships with a range of stakeholders who can support and provide opportunities for these students.

■ Local knowledge and networks

Encourage students to develop their employability by networking and getting to know the local employment landscape.

■ Management of expectations

Managing the expectations of international students about available WIL and employment opportunities helps to avoid unreasonable expectations.

■ Awareness of career and employability support services

Promotion of career and employability support plays a key role in encouraging international students to engage with these services early on and throughout their student journey.

What hinders international students with their work integrated learning and employability?

■ Not understanding the importance of WIL and the link to their employability

International students may not understand the benefits of WIL and therefore may not develop their employability skills until very late in their studies.

■ A lack of self-belief

Some international students may lack self-confidence which undermines their ability to gain WIL, work experience or secure a job in Australia.

■ Fears

International students may not report problems in their workplaces as they fear losing their student visa.

■ Exclusion and discrimination

Research findings from interviews, surveys and consultation workshops suggest that international students have fewer internship opportunities than domestic students, and can experience discrimination in the workplace.

Employer recruitment policies and practices may limit hiring international students and graduates due to their temporary visa status and cultural differences.

■ Employer understanding

Employers may lack an understanding of international students, the benefits of employing them and how to support their development in the workplace. Employers may use WIL programs to identify potential graduate employees, but not understanding graduate visa conditions may be a barrier to employers offering these opportunities to international students.

■ Low English language proficiency

English language proficiency is critical to international student work readiness and employability. Low proficiency is a barrier.

■ Lack of knowledge of work rights

If international students do not know their work rights in Australia, it is difficult for them to seek help if needed.

■ Limited local knowledge and networks

International students may have insufficient local knowledge or no networks to enable them to access work experience. They may not have knowledge of Australian workplace culture which can make employment and WIL programs more challenging.

■ Lack of awareness of career support programs

International students may be unaware of available career support programs, or may think they are unlikely to help them.



What can providers do?

Guiding Principles

International students are more employable when they are provided with effective career support and have a keen awareness of the local labour market and Australian workplace culture. They should also be aware of their work rights.

International students are more employable when education providers and stakeholders implement the following:

1. Deliver career orientation and advice
2. Encourage students to develop a professional portfolio
3. Enhance employers' understanding of, and appreciation for, international students
4. Facilitate collaboration between education providers, employers, and professional and community organisations



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1:

CAREER ORIENTATION AND ADVICE

Career orientation and advice

Many international students do not know that career support services exist, or how to access them.

To maximise career opportunities for international students, education providers should give information on employability, career pathways and WIL early in the students' study programs, and throughout their studies.

The following strategies are recommended when providing career orientation and advice to international students:

- **Provide career counselling to international students at various stages of their studies**

Career counselling increases student employability. Education providers should highlight the importance of students developing their employability early and the importance of good English proficiency.

- **Communicate information about WIL, visa conditions and work rights**

Education providers must provide accurate information to international students regarding their visa conditions, WIL, and work rights.

Ideally, information is in plain English and is provided early in the students' studies to help manage expectations about the challenges of accessing WIL and being successful in the labour market.

Some providers give students information which they can take to employers outlining their visa conditions.

■ Understand Australian workplace culture

Understanding Australian workplace culture supports successful work placements and employment for international students.

Education providers can encourage volunteering opportunities for international students during their studies. These experiences will familiarise them with local workplace culture, enhance their employability and expand their networks with prospective employers.

There are online modules on [Understanding Australian Workplace Cultures](#) that can help international students understand workplace culture.

■ Use alumni networks

Alumni networks can assist international students with WIL and employment opportunities. Education providers can use alumni networks to facilitate access to WIL. Many education providers have a dedicated international alumni office which focuses on building career opportunities.

For example, the Australian National Internships Program (ANIP) alumni network at The Australian National University brings together graduates from government, business, academia, and the public service to share experiences on their internships and to help inspire future students.

■ Access to existing programs targeting specific age cohorts

International students study in Australia at different stages of their career. Programs can target specific age cohorts to provide tailored support for their current career phase.

For example, RAISE Youth Mentoring offers trained volunteers to mentor school students.

CPA Australia provides a mentoring program for mature international students.

Rotary offers a dedicated International Student Mentoring Program with 12 sessions over six months.

■ Leverage social media platforms

Students actively engage with social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. These are among the most popular and rapidly-growing online platforms.

Education providers can work with organisations to leverage these platforms to provide international students with guidance about developing their employability, and promote accurate and current information about WIL, visa conditions, work rights and workplace culture.

Some education providers offer microcredentials and workshops on WIL opportunities, visa conditions and work rights for international students. These may encourage students to use social media to develop local networks to access WIL opportunities, as well as to understand the various pathways to employment after graduation.



■ **Provide dedicated WIL and career support to international students**

Education providers should provide formal career advice and professional development programs to international students to maximise WIL opportunities and prepare them for the labour market.

Swinburne University offers the Professional Purpose Program, which is a WIL unit for all undergraduate students which includes guaranteed placements.

■ **Engage with professional year programs**

Professional year programs enhance a graduate's employability through structured development of networks and workplace capabilities. Currently, professional year programs exist for information technology, engineering, and accounting.

For example, both CPA Australia and Engineers Australia offer professional programs that are highly regarded by employers.

Good practice example:

Study Melbourne Career Catalyst

The Study Melbourne Career Catalyst is a comprehensive employability and career-development program created by Study Melbourne for Victorian international students. This program features a student-centred, strengths-based approach to retention of skilled talent and graduate pathways.

All events and initiatives under Study Melbourne Career Catalyst are free, inclusive and can be accessed both online and in person from the Study Melbourne Hub and other locations in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Delivered by InternMatch, Study Melbourne Career Catalyst offers an exclusive suite of free services: one-on-one coaching, practical in-person and online workshops on various employability topics and premium networking events. In the career development workshops and webinars InternMatch delivers, international students can polish and fine-tune their resumes, write and improve their LinkedIn profiles, write job applications, or discover employment opportunities in various businesses.

The Study Melbourne Career Catalyst's career development services are designed to support international students and recent alumni on their journey when searching for jobs and preparing for their first interview. Each student/alumnus can register for two 30-minute sessions per calendar year.

In these one-on-one sessions, InternMatch's experienced staff provide career advice as well as resume or CV, and employability guidance to international students and recent graduates. Students are also linked to other Study Melbourne employability events/ services to give them the best chance to enter the workforce.

Career Catalyst's premium networking events provide industry guest speakers to help students practise their networking skills and build their connections with industry and their fellow students.

The initiative has supported many international students and alumni and has achieved an average 85% student satisfaction rating. It has significantly strengthened the connections between employers and the international student community. It also ensures that Victoria remains a competitive study destination by offering both a free and premium career development service.

Study Melbourne Career Catalyst is available at:

www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/empowered-series/career-catalyst

Good practice example:

WIL to Work

WIL to Work is a collaboration between RMIT University, University of Technology Sydney, Queensland University of Technology, Curtin University and the University of South Australia.

The project comprises 4 online credentials and 12 student and staff resources to support international students to succeed in their Australian WIL experience. Co-designed with international students, the credentials build the students' capability to optimise their employability through WIL. The interactive content was determined through large-scale surveys of international students and employers and includes topics such as understanding Australian workplace culture, and strategies to undertake online WIL.

A web-based version enables full access for the Australian tertiary sector with 1,437 users since May 2021. The credentials are also embedded into the learning management systems (LMS) of partner institutions. Examples from project partner institutions demonstrate their success, with RMIT achieving 479 enrolments from 2021 -2023, and UTS from winter 2022 to autumn 2023 achieving 609 enrolments.

Student feedback is overwhelmingly positive with 88% of students indicating the 'Understanding Australian Workplace Cultures' module made them feel confident that they understood Australian workplace culture. Almost the same percentage of students were either 'highly likely' or 'extremely likely' to recommend the module to a friend.

Qualitative student comments include:

This credential dives deep into all the dimensions of Australian workplace culture. I believe it is a good chance to know more about working standards in Australia in a professional way, such as working hours and working rights.

An extremely important credential, especially for international students who knows little of the work environment here in Australia.

WIL to Work is available at:
www.international-students.acen.edu.au.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2:

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

Developing a professional portfolio

Helping international students develop a professional portfolio during their studies enhances their professional development and future career prospects.

The portfolio can help international students demonstrate their experience, capabilities and strengths to potential employers.

It is important to help international students develop a professional portfolio which charts their study and extra-curricular activities.

The portfolio should showcase the student's potential and preparedness for employment while reflecting on their career goals and their efforts to achieve these throughout their time in Australia. A professional portfolio could include:

- educational achievements
- work
- work integrated learning
- volunteering
- internships
- participation in professional seminars and programs
- awards and acknowledgments
- career and career planning

Many education providers have courses which encourage professional portfolios. Examples include the University of Technology Sydney and James Cook University. The University of New South Wales offers a 6-credit unit named Professional Portfolio with the same fees for domestic and international students.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3:

ENHANCING EMPLOYERS' UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Enhancing employers' understanding of international students

Employers in Australia and abroad use multiple criteria when recruiting graduates. This may include assessing their credentials, generic skills, personality traits, local knowledge and how they best fit with the organisation.

International student visa status and insufficient understanding of the benefits international students bring to an employer's organisation can lead to discrimination.

Education providers play an important role in promoting the benefits of international students to potential employers and WIL providers. It is important that employers are provided with sufficient information about international students' work rights, needs, abilities, skills and visa conditions. When employers understand these, they are more likely to hire international students or engage them in WIL programs.

The following strategies can help employer understanding of the benefits of having international students in the workplace:

- **Encouraging industry and professional organisations to recognise and address negative cultural stereotypes**

Employers may hold pre-existing negative stereotypes with respect to international students from particular cultural backgrounds, and question whether they can fit into their workplace culture. Such thinking leads to international students being treated differently and sometimes unfairly compared to domestic students. A more welcoming and open-minded attitude is encouraged.

Education providers can help to counteract these stereotypes by equally showcasing both domestic and international students' capabilities and what they can offer to employers.

For example, the Diversity Council of Australia offers workshops to industry groups to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

■ Recognising the diverse values, abilities and skills, international students can bring to the workplace

When employers value the diversity, multicultural aspects and skill sets of international students, they are more likely to be welcoming and supportive.

Institutions could advocate for connections between international students and employers and promote the benefits of engaging an international student.

■ Educating employers about international student visa status and work rights

Industry and community organisations need to be aware of current international student rights, visa conditions, how to support international students through their learning, and the benefits of having international students in their workplace.

Education providers can work with state and territory study clusters to raise employer awareness of international student work rights and visa conditions and promote this cohort as suitable interns and employees.

■ Involving employers and industry as co-designers of study programs

Involving employers in designing study programs enhances their engagement with international students and their understanding of international student skills, needs and ways of thinking.

Education providers could invite employers to discuss their workplace challenges with students who could then propose solutions based on their knowledge and experience.

Good practice example:

University of Technology Sydney AusLEAP - volunteering opportunities for international students

The **AusLEAP** program, facilitated by University of Technology Sydney and funded by Study NSW, connects international students in New South Wales (NSW) with established community projects, charities, not-for-profit and social enterprise organisations to undertake training and volunteering placements. AusLEAP has partnered with leading educational institutions in NSW (universities, colleges, and training providers), and several community organisations since 2021.

In the AusLEAP program, students participate in work-based volunteer opportunities and contribute to a social cause they care about. The workshops equip participants with essential and transferable skills in networking, communication, and team building. This encourages students to develop a holistic perspective to tackle social and environmental challenges and prepares them for success in their future careers. This may include other work-based volunteering activities with community organisations.

Through volunteering, participants engage in opportunities to strengthen their confidence, enhance their understanding of workforce culture, and form new community connections. This experiential learning and the ability to build strong connections provides a pathway to new opportunities, engagement with local communities, and improves their employability.

AusLEAP program is available at:

www.uts.edu.au/study/international/ausleap-volunteering-opportunities-international-students



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4:

**COLLABORATION
BETWEEN EDUCATION
PROVIDERS, EMPLOYERS,
AND PROFESSIONAL AND
COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS**

Collaboration between education providers, employers, and professional and community organisations

Employers use multiple selection criteria when offering work placements and employment opportunities. These criteria may depend on the size and focus of their business.

Some education providers partner with professional organisations to offer highly-regarded graduate courses in Australia and overseas.

Many employers, professional and community organisations help international students negotiate challenging local and global labour markets.

Education providers, employers and organisations can improve how they work together for the benefit of international students through the following strategies:

■ Improving pathways into the workplace

Education providers should be aware of organisations that support international student pathways into the workplace.

For example, Study NSW partnered with employment platform SEEK, education providers, and NSW employers to deliver NSW Jobs Connect for International Students. This program supports international students to access WIL placements and internships, and enhances their graduate employability.

The City of Sydney has partnered with local government employees, community organisations and international student groups to provide a program which offers international students free training, WIL and volunteering opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and workplace experience.

The Regional NSW Career Toolkit is an initiative of Global Study Partners Pty Ltd and Successful Graduate Pty Ltd, partly funded by Study NSW. The toolkit outlines study and career pathways for international students in three sectors: Allied Health, Information Technology and Education in regional NSW. The project provides:

- an online course to support career preparation for international students in prioritised industries and to improve their employability outcomes in targeted regions.
- a pilot digital search function for international students that ties career outcomes in several key skill shortage areas to university course offerings.

Good practice example:

StudyAdelaide's Job Shop for international students

Job Shop is a unique initiative connecting international students seeking part-time and casual roles with vetted employers through the StudyAdelaide website.

StudyAdelaide works with each employer to understand the roles available and how the recruitment criteria and process can be modified to ensure international students are seriously considered even if they have not yet arrived in Adelaide.

Job Shop was launched in January 2022 when the hospitality industry, recovering from the pandemic, was still suffering major staff shortages. At the same time, StudyAdelaide was preparing for an influx of returning international students, with many keen to start part-time or casual work while studying. Job Shop provided a means to connect students, new to the Adelaide job market, with a 'one stop shop' of employment options with organisations aware of their circumstances.

Job Shop has since expanded organically to include industry sectors as diverse as aged care, early childhood education, and manufacturing. The program is complemented by specific Job Shop student engagement programs that support students with the application process.

Promoted via StudyAdelaide's student newsletters, social media channels and member communications, Job Shop has been a great success story for both students and employers, with one employer alone recruiting over 200 international students in the first 12 months of the program.

StudyAdelaide's Job Shop is available at:

www.studyadelaide.com/jobshop

Good practice example:

NSW Jobs Connect for International Students

NSW Jobs Connect for International Students is a Study NSW initiative connecting international students with employers to kick start their global careers.

NSW employers add #NSWJobsConnect to their job ads on SEEK and international students use the hashtag to search for jobs.

Employers in the program sign up to a Business Charter which commits them to respecting the rights of international students. The program was launched in November 2022. As of March 2024, more than 200 NSW employers signed up, more than 2,400 job ads were advertised with #NSWJobsConnect and over 82,000 applications were started for ads including #NSWJobsConnect.

The program is beneficial to:

- employers by addressing skills shortages, including by raising awareness of the value of international students as a talent pool.
- international students by providing opportunities for them to work during and post study, building their resumes with real job skills, and supporting their cost of living expenses during their stay.
- education providers by highlighting NSW as an ideal place to study, work and live.

NSW Jobs Connect for International Students is available at:
www.study.nsw.gov.au/work/nsw-jobs-connect

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Organisations are encouraged to discuss the following questions with colleagues and fellow organisations to examine and reflect on their programs to support international student engagement in WIL and employability:

- ▶ What strategies can we adopt to help international students through their study journey to understand the importance of employability and increase their knowledge of the labour market and employment requirements?
- ▶ What can we do to assist teachers, practitioners and career support services to embed graduate employability activities into the curriculum from the first semester rather than at the end of a student's study program?
- ▶ What strategies can we put in place to leverage the coordination of different departments within our institution (career support services, international student support services, alumni office, and faculty/school/department/offices) to facilitate WIL for international students?
- ▶ What approaches to providing extracurricular and volunteer experiences can we implement to help students use this when looking for employment?
- ▶ What can we do to improve international students' confidence in their employability?
- ▶ How can we collaborate with other organisations to mobilise resources and create opportunities for employment and WIL for international students?

Resources

These are some WIL and employment programs and initiatives that support international students:

- **Study Australia Employability Hub** provides international students with tools and information to enhance employability and job readiness, including a career matching tool, Study Australia Industry Experience Program, and other resources.
- **StudyAdelaide Job Shop** is a portal that connects international students seeking part-time and casual jobs, with potential employers.
- **Study Melbourne Career Catalyst** offers a suite of services that empower international students to unleash their career potential.
- **Study Melbourne Leadership Labs** provides opportunities for international students to develop their leadership and employability skills.
- **NSW Jobs Connect for International Students** connects international students with employers.
- Study Tasmania provides a **jobs portal**, and **I-PREP Work Ready Program and employability workshops** to enhance students' employability and work readiness.
- **IEAA Employable you: an online guide for international students** provides essential tips and practical steps to help international students on their employability journey.
- **WIL to Work** program offers online credentials and resources supporting international students to succeed in their work integrated learning.
- More resources and programs to support international student WIL and employability are available via the Virtual Map. The Virtual Map is available at www.isengagement.org/virtual-map.

