

STATEMENT OF INTENT

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING - STRENGTHENING UNIVERSITY AND BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

The opportunity

Universities and enterprises working together improve the quality and capacity of education and the innovation, breadth and competitiveness of our economy. This statement of intent proposes a practical and timely approach to improve the scale, breadth and value of work integrated learning to meet the challenges and opportunities of our rapidly developing society, economy and environment. The statement is aimed at:

- **Improving the work-readiness of university graduates** and enhancing the opportunities for them to develop and apply their skills and knowledge to best effect in the workplace;
- **Enabling employers to better utilise the skills and productive capability of their workforce;**
- Helping to foster **an environment in which entrepreneurship and innovation** can thrive; and
- **Strengthening the critical partnerships that will drive our national competitiveness.**

Australia is facing a time of challenge and opportunity. We are more exposed to global change and competition than ever before. Global political, technological and economic developments are shifting rapidly. We are well placed to meet these challenges, but have no cause for complacency. Opportunities need to be recognised, acted on and even created. Our capacity to realise opportunities depends on how well we equip ourselves to respond in an environment which is faster moving, more complex and less certain.

Many advanced and rapidly transforming economies have or are building deep relationships between universities, entrepreneurs, industry and communities. Australia also needs to extend multi-faceted alliances between our key capacity-building institutions and encourage enterprise, in a framework of respectful autonomy. Our future will be shaped by how well we ingrain a culture of understanding and trust, a preference for partnership, and engagement on a scale that bolsters our competitiveness.

What is Work Integrated Learning (WIL)?

Work integrated learning (WIL) is an “umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum”.¹ Specifically, WIL is aimed at improving the employability of graduates by giving them valuable practical experience which is directly related to courses being studied at university. WIL also improves the transition from university to work and improving the productivity outcomes for the employer and the economy.²

¹ Patrick, C. Peach, D. & Pocknee, C. (2009) *The WIL (Work Integrated Learning) report: A national scoping study*, Australian Teaching and Learning Council

² Brimble, M. & Freudenberg, B. (2010) Will WIL'ing Work?, *B-Hert News*, Issue 28, April 2010

The challenge

We know that work integrated learning (or WIL) can have a positive impact on graduate competitiveness and work readiness. It is also valued by employers. As a community we already understand the crucial value of WIL - often described as internships, placements or practicums – in areas such as teaching, health care and engineering. Research and practical experience shows the potential value of WIL applies across all disciplines. However, we do not have sufficient knowledge of the extent to which WIL is being used in Australia, the potential to expand opportunities and what obstacles it faces.

Australia has strong advocates for building closer ties between universities and business, the signatories to this statement among them. Australia's Chief Scientist is also among the strongest and most active. He has given particular focus to advocating for programs that allow undergraduates of science, technology, engineering and maths (the STEM disciplines) to undertake accredited placements with business and to work on accredited business-related research projects, noting the value this provides in workplace experience and skills. Like the Chief Scientist we recognise Australia has many examples that demonstrate what might be achieved when universities and employers work together on a broader scale. The Chief Scientist has argued that at least 50 per cent of STEM undergraduate students should complete a work-related placement or project during their course, ie around 25,000 - 30 000 students should engage with business each year³. To advance this effort the Office of the Chief Scientist in 2013 established an Industry Working Group -bringing together the signatories to this statement among others - to recommend a road map to improve the preparedness of graduates to meet Australia's future workforce needs. This objective has also been highlighted in the work of the Australian Workplace and Productivity Agency (AWPA) and the Commonwealth Government's Office of Learning and Teaching.

As AWPA found in their 2013 report *Future Focus*, growth in demand for highly skilled and qualified people is set to continue, at between 3 and 3.9 per cent per annum in the foreseeable future. An increasing portion of Australia's future workforce and business leaders – 1.2 million students - are currently enrolled in Australia's universities. We want them to be well equipped for the workforce. That demands a joint commitment by educators, employers and students who are looking to attain the skills to succeed in the emerging workforce and as entrepreneurs.

As representatives of Australia's universities and of our business and industry sectors, we are committed to the development of our nation's human capital.

Authentic learning experiences, involving placements and projects, where industry and community have input to the educational experience, make a real difference to skills and capacity. It helps students and graduates to apply the knowledge gained through education, to adjust to the workplace, meet challenges and improve outcomes. For employers, it means gaining the latest knowledge and skills for their workforce and how to engage it effectively.

Leveraging our strengths

Australia has a dynamic and globally focused business community and university sector. Our international companies and partners have strength and reach. Our large SME sector is vibrant and diverse. Our universities rank among the best in the world, as strong research performers, and as a destination of choice

³ Office of the Chief Scientists Top Breakthrough Actions for Innovation PMSEIC, DECEMBER 2012. http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Item_3-Breakthrough-Actions.pdf

for international students seeking the advantages of a world class education. Many leaders in higher education, business, industry bodies and research institutions are working to strengthen the relationship between business and higher education. We aim to leverage the combined force of these assets. There is scope for us to improve our performance overall.

In addition to the direct benefits to students and employers of work-integrated learning, there are some less direct but no less important benefits as well. Stronger and deeper links between businesses and universities can, for instance, improve the ability of businesses to adopt the best new ideas and technologies from around the world. Stronger links can also help in the development of innovations that are new to international markets, an area on which Australia's performance is weak compared to other OECD countries⁴. Building the collaboration between universities and industry is crucial to improve our performance in developing and adopting new ideas.

Clearly WIL has the potential to benefit Australia directly as we engage and compete in the modern world. It offers the prospect of other benefits, such as drawing on the business potential that's embedded in our university sector. We have over 850,000 Australians studying at university and over 330,000 international students, choosing to study here because an Australian higher education prepares them for well-paid and interesting jobs, potentially anywhere in the world. This has made education Australia's fourth largest export earning industry, worth in excess of \$15B per annum. Developing our skill base and relationships with many of the worlds' best and brightest provides opportunity to strengthen our future in research, innovation, business opportunity and the development of specialist networks. WIL provides many opportunities for Australia.

OUR COMMITMENT

Through this statement we agree to collaborate in:

- *Establishing a profile and baseline of what happens now and what works*
- *Drawing on the resources and expertise that already exist, and developing them further*
- *Identifying, promoting and disseminating best practice*
- *Facilitating university business partnerships through WIL and making it easier for participants - employers, educators and students - to find and work with the right people*
- *Assisting our members to identify opportunities for increased scale, breadth and quality of WIL placements*
- *Advocating for the research, scholarship and development of the evidence base to improve WIL effectiveness and outcomes for participants*
- *Identifying and addressing impediments to these objectives*
- *Better informing students of opportunities through WIL*
- *Assessing our progress, identifying what remains to be done, and reporting on it*

⁴ Australian Government, 2012, Australian Innovation System Report—2012, Department of Industry, Canberra, <http://www.innovation.gov.au/science/policy/Pages/AustralianInnovationSystemReport.aspx>

Universities and businesses working together can improve the currency, quality and capability of our education programs and our global competitiveness.

Belinda Robinson
Chief Executive

Jennifer Westacott
Chief Executive

Jenny Lambert
Director, Employment,
Education and Training

Innes Willox
Chief Executive

Judie Kay
President

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INDUSTRY**

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