

# English Language Proficiency and Employability Framework

*For Australian higher education institutions*

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Centre for the Study of Higher Education  
The University of Melbourne

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Department of Education.

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## Executive Summary

This report presents the *English Language Proficiency (ELP) and Employability Framework*, which has been designed to inform and support higher education institutions' (HEIs) policies and practices on ELP and graduate employability. The Australian Government Department of Education provided funding for this research in order to inform consideration of the report *Australia: Educating Globally* (IEAC, 2013), which included a recommendation about ELP<sup>1</sup>. The *Framework* was developed through a review of the national and international literature on initiatives and programs aimed at developing both students' general and discipline specific language skills, as well as their general and professional employability. The *Framework* also benefited from an expert review using roundtable discussions with sector representatives in three cities.

The *Framework* development process was followed by interviews with 40 staff across 25 Australian universities with specialist expertise in programs supporting ELP, employability, or both, as well as senior university leaders whose responsibilities included language and/or employability. Linking ELP and employability together in the *Framework* was supported by the general agreement in the literature that communication skills are highly valued as a graduate attribute for employability, both in Australia and internationally. The interviews and consultation with the sector, the examples of practice and the case studies have been presented here to offer a broad summary of the types of practices that currently exist in universities. The term 'HEI' is used throughout this report to refer to higher education institutions. Although the examples used in the report are from Australian universities, many are relevant to institutions engaged in higher education.

The report's emphasis is on international students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). This group of students comprises a key stakeholder group for the sector, and is particularly important to Australia's ability to maintain its share of the international student market. International students expect outcomes from their investment in an Australian education, and increasingly one of those outcomes is employability. While there are a number of factors that influence graduate employability, the focus of this report is on ELP as it has been identified in the research as important for international students. ELP, as used in this report, includes aspects of oral and written communication, as well as workplace interactions.

The findings from the project indicate that Australian HEIs have in place a number of initiatives for developing international students' ELP, and making English language development a central element of their learning and teaching. Strategies include: institutional strategic plans; monitoring and evaluating English language entry requirements; diagnostic testing; and integrating communication skills as learning outcomes within disciplinary teaching. There is also an increasing focus on assessing students' ELP towards the end of their course of study, although this tends to be

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation B.8, page 4: *Require providers to establish processes that ensure international students maintain adequate English language proficiency throughout the duration of study to prepare graduates for work experience and employment opportunities.*

mainly in professional accredited programs such as Engineering and Veterinary Science.

This report provides a practical platform from which HEIs can address the challenge of developing students' ELP for employability. The *Framework* itself provides a broad typology of institutional initiatives for developing ELP and employability. It offers HEIs a way of mapping their curricula and co-curricula activities, and integrating practices along a continuum from entry to exit. Importantly, by linking ELP to employability, the *Framework* assists HEIs to address perceptions that international students graduate without developing threshold levels of ELP suitable for their future employment, by providing case studies showing the range of good practice in place across the sector.

### Five key points of focus to guide practice

The diversity of institutional missions across the Australian higher education sector rightly necessitates a corresponding diversity in the specific practices and programs supporting ELP and employability suitable to the institutional setting. However, there are some key foci that should shape broad ELP and employability offerings:

#### ***Assurance of ELP learning outcomes of international students***

HEIs are increasingly doing more to integrate ELP teaching and learning and assessment within disciplinary curricula. This is most visible where assessment frameworks and rubrics that focus on ELP or communication skills are embedded in the curricula. Evidence from the project suggests that HEIs are focusing on defining ELP exit standards and aligning them with learning, teaching and assessment practices in order to ensure that students graduate with the English language skills needed for employment or further study after graduation. The holistic integration of English language and literacy assessment within and throughout courses of study can effectively build upon the groundwork established by professional associations. In making these connections more explicit, HEIs and professional associations can work more effectively together.

#### ***Increase students' awareness of developing their professional identity***

For international students, developing employability skills can be difficult, as they tend to be more focused on their studies than their future careers, and employability is something they might only consider towards the end of their course of study. Given the Australian Qualifications Framework's focus on graduates' knowledge and skills for professional work, many HEIs are developing programs that highlight the importance of students developing their professional identity throughout their studies. Increasingly, employment and careers staff are working with academics to develop students' skills across degree programs. Some of these programs are in the early stages of development. Underlying this is the view that students benefit from planning their post-university careers and taking responsibility for developing their own professional identity from the first year of their studies.



### ***Integrate ELP and employability within learning and teaching***

One of the main findings from the project was the importance of integrating curricula and co-curricula activities. Traditionally, both ELP and employment support services have operated as activities which are outside of disciplinary teaching and learning (commonly referred to as 'curricula'). In the current higher education context curricula are diversifying, and more is expected to be taught and assessed within curricula. The challenge lies in how to best integrate ELP and employability within curricula and to develop appropriate assessment practices. A further challenge is to integrate these across the course of study, from entry through to exit.

One method of achieving this is through course mapping, where attention rests on defining what graduate capabilities students should develop by the end of the degree, and where these capabilities will be taught and assessed across the course of study. This is relatively easy, as most institutions routinely engage in course mapping activities. However, driving change in terms of responsibility for teaching and assessing graduate capabilities for ELP and employability can be more difficult, as these activities have existed mainly with career support services, and usually occur towards the end of the course of study. What is required are integrated approaches to course design and delivery, which incorporate academics and support services, and clearly identify graduate capabilities and how these will be assessed across the course of study.

### ***Promote international students' graduate capabilities and collaborate with employers to counter potential prejudice regarding international students' ELP***

In recent years there has been some negative media coverage regarding the ELP levels of international students who graduate from Australian universities. It appears from both the research, and views expressed during the consultation phase of this project, that some employers are reluctant to offer international students work placements for work-integrated learning. Part of the reason for this is that some employers have negative views about international students' ELP levels. Paradoxically, employers who employ international students or offer them work experience are generally satisfied. Stronger relationships need to be formed between employers and HEIs to enhance employers' awareness of international students' capabilities. One possibility is to involve employers more closely as co-designers of curricula, learning activities and assessment at the course of study level, rather than simply as supervisors of students in the workplace. Also HEIs have an opportunity to promote international students' graduate capabilities, including alumni testimonials or case studies where appropriate.

### ***Strengthening the evidence base of good practice***

A major finding from the literature review was the lack of available research on evaluation that might provide a strong evidence base to support practices supporting international students' ELP and their employability. This is in part due to institutions collecting evidence internally to inform their practices. ELP initiatives following the introduction of the Higher Education Standards Framework are relatively new, as is the focus on developing graduate employability. A strong, publicly available program of research and evaluation needs to be developed and used to identify good practice across the sector.

## Project aims and methodology

The purpose of this project has been to identify examples of good English language proficiency (ELP) practices that enhance international students' employability after graduation, with a view to informing policies and strategies for higher education institutions (HEIs). Identifying the volume, quality of rigorous research, and evaluation support for ELP and employability is a particularly important objective. This work has resulted in the development of the *ELP and Employability Framework*, which proposes a broad typology of practices from commencement to graduation, and including curricula and co-curricula activities.

A primary goal of the project has been to examine evidence of efficacy for the range of ELP practices designed to enhance international students' employability. Specifically the objectives of the project were to:

- Identify the range of ELP practices designed to enhance international students' employability in a range of professions;
- Summarise and evaluate the evidence of the effectiveness of the initiatives identified as priority areas;
- Identify the extent to which timing or other contextual factors may impact on the efficacy of a given initiative; and
- Where possible, identify what works best in particular contexts.

To achieve the required objectives for the project, the research methodology incorporated two main phases:

Phase 1 – In the first phase, available literature relating to ELP initiatives and practices which support international students' employability after graduation in higher education were reviewed. This review included examples of good practice from English-speaking countries. Based on findings from the literature and pedagogical assumptions about ELP and employability for international students, the effectiveness or 'plausibility' of the examples of good practice in the literature were assessed, as well as important factors affecting the efficacy of an initiative. Research evidence was also reviewed to determine the level of evidential support for these pedagogical assumptions. The result of the literature review was the development of the *ELP and employability framework*.

Phase 2 – In the second stage of the project, the framework developed in Phase One was populated with strategies and case studies from Australian HEIs. This was achieved by consultation with the sector involving (i) interviews with Deputy Vice-Chancellors Academic and International (or their nominees) to elicit examples of good practice and identify people to invite to three subsequent forums; (ii) forums in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne where the framework for ELP and employability was presented for consultation and discussion; and (iii) follow-up interviews after the forums to gather examples of good practice.

The report's emphasis is on international students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). Throughout the report the term 'international students' is used to

refer to this group. However, it is noted that English language and literacy learning outcomes are important for all students in higher education, and therefore many of initiatives in this report are relevant to all students.

### The policy context

Australia has been a major force within the international student market and has been very successful in recruiting international students. Since 1994 the number of international students in Australian higher education has expanded from a figure of around 35,290 to 231,386 students in 2013 (Australian Education International, 2014). These students now come mainly from Asia. The largest group is from China, with Chinese students comprising around 40% of all international students in Australia. International education has been a key source of institutional revenue for many educational providers for more than two decades. In 2012, international student enrolments provided 17 percent of higher education funding, the highest of OECD countries (OECD, 2013). It goes without saying that international students are an important source of funding for Australian universities. With increasing competition from China, Hong Kong and Singapore, which are developing international education hubs in the Asia-Pacific region, Australian HEIs will need to address some of the concerns regarding international students' teaching and learning experiences in order to maintain and grow their share of the international student market.

The growth in the number of international students in Australia has coincided with the massification of higher education, one outcome of which is the entry to university of people wishing to study for degrees regardless of their prior educational experiences (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010; Trow, 2006). This broader growth in student numbers is in part due to government policy promoting widening participation and advocating increases in the number of low socio-economic background students, many of whom are local EAL students. University students are more diverse in backgrounds and preparedness than ever before (Baldwin & James, 2010). At the same time, employers, universities and governments have become concerned about the employability of graduates and whether graduates have the high level oral and written communication skills sought after by employers (Australian Education International, 2010; Graduate Careers Australia, 2012).

In Australia, the ELP of both university entrants and graduates has been a matter of much discussion over the last ten years, with some researchers raising concerns about whether Australian universities are graduating students who have adequate levels of English language for further study or for employment. Birrell's study (2006) was one of the first to place the spotlight firmly on English language standards. He found that three years of study in an English speaking university does not necessarily improve the ELP of EAL international students. Birrell concluded that students were graduating with less than adequate English language levels of attainment.

Since Birrell's study there has been much activity in the sector to develop policies and practices which more directly address concerns regarding international students' ELP levels upon graduation. In 2009, the Australian Federal Government released the *Good Practice Principles for English language proficiency for international students*. These principles were developed to guide university practices:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Universities are responsible for ensuring that their students are sufficiently competent in the English language to participate effectively in their university studies.</li> <li>2. Resourcing for English language development is adequate to meet students' needs throughout their studies.</li> <li>3. Students have responsibilities for further developing their English language proficiency during their study at university and are advised of these responsibilities prior to enrolment.</li> <li>4. Universities ensure that the English language entry pathways they approve for the admission of students enable these students to participate effectively in their studies.</li> <li>5. English language proficiency and communication skills are important graduate attributes for all students.</li> <li>6. Development of English language proficiency is integrated with curriculum design, assessment practices and course delivery through a variety of methods.</li> <li>7. Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment.</li> <li>8. International students are supported from the outset to adapt to their academic, socio-cultural and linguistic environments.</li> <li>9. International students are encouraged and supported to enhance their English language development through effective social interaction on and off campus.</li> <li>10. Universities use evidence from a variety of sources to monitor and improve their English language development activities.</li> </ol> |
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**Table 1: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, p.3.**

These principles outline general statements for universities to address within their context. They were developed in consultation with Australian universities in 2009 on what they thought good practice concerning the effective development of ELP for EAL international students would involve. They were also based on research leading up to 2009 which identified problem areas to be addressed in order to achieve greater ELP outcomes for EAL international students. In sum, the principles reflect a holistic institutional approach for ensuring effective English language practices. They were used by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) as part of its university quality audits.

Of the ten principles, the one that appears to have been taken up by many universities is the seventh principle, which is that 'Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment'. Of the 39 Australian universities, 27 currently use some form of Post-entry Language Assessment (PELA). These range in format, design, content, students targeted, feedback processes and follow-up (Dunworth, 2013). There is much debate and mixed reports about the usefulness of PELAs. While the intent is to raise students' awareness about developing their ELP and for academics to be aware of how they can assist students in this area, there is some evidence to suggest that this does not necessarily occur (Arkoudis, 2014; Ransom, 2009). On the other hand, it appears that if PELAs are integrated within subjects, then students undertake the test and academics use the results to inform their curriculum design (Arkoudis, 2014; Harris, 2013).

There has been some criticism of the Good Practice Principles (GPP) since their release. These critiques are mainly concerned with definitional issues concerning the

use of ‘English Language Proficiency’ within the document (Murray, 2010) and the inclusion of international students and the exclusion of other cohorts (Harper, Prentice, & Wilson, 2011). The critiques demonstrate an important point – the higher education landscape has changed in Australia since the GPP were written. Perhaps PELAs are no longer a useful use of resources within a demand-driven system where students enter their studies with different levels of ELP preparedness. Maybe resources might be better placed in developing ELP within disciplinary learning rather than on resourcing PELAs (Arkoudis, 2014).

With the development of the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (2011), the focus of attention has shifted from entry to exit standards. The Framework highlights that on completion of a degree program, students will have demonstrated the learning outcomes specified by the degree. Traditionally, HEIs have relied mainly on English language entry requirements to protect ELP standards. However, attention has shifted from ELP entry to ELP exit standards, and this has required HEIs to adapt teaching, learning and assessment practices that show students have achieved the required ELP learning outcomes.

### Models of ELP development within HEIs

In Australia, the responsibility for English language learning in universities traditionally falls to Academic Language and Learning (ALL) advisors. All 39 Australian universities have at least one ALL unit or centre. Central units or centres offer academic language and learning support to all students and work with disciplinary staff across the university. The table below presents a summary of the main ALL activities, a general definition used to categorise them activities and the number of universities where particular activities operated in 2007, 2011 and 2013.

ALL activity	Definition	Number of universities		
		2007	2011	2013
<b>Integrated credit</b>	Discipline specific credit bearing subject(s)/units embedded within courses, sometimes compulsory, usually owned by faculties and frequently co-developed/co-taught by ALL and faculty staff	13	19	21
<b>Integrated non-credit</b>	Discipline specific non-credit subject(s)/units or workshops embedded within courses, normally noncompulsory, usually developed/taught by ALL staff	26	34	36
<b>Generic credit</b>	Non-discipline specific credit bearing subject(s) (e.g. Essay Writing 101, EAP), sometimes compulsory, usually available to all students, often as electives, owned by faculties or ALL units and usually developed/taught by	13	14	14

	ALL staff			
<b>Generic non-credit</b>	Non-discipline specific non-credit bearing courses/workshops, usually available to all students, usually owned by ALL units and usually developed/taught by ALL staff	28	37	38
<b>Support for research students</b>	ALL courses/workshops available specifically to postgraduate research students	30	34	35
<b>One-to-one consultations with students</b>	Individual appointments and/or drop-in services/facilities	38	38	38
<b>Educational development</b>	ALL educators involved in curriculum and/or staff development activities with faculty staff	26	32	32
<b>English as a Second Language (ESL) tuition</b>	Provision of ESL support to enrolled students (mainly international) with limited (below required IELTS) English proficiency	16	23	23
<b>Diagnostic assessment</b>	Post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) of student cohorts	18	25	27

**Table 2: ALL activities in Australian universities (adapted from Barthel, 2013, p. 1)**

University provision for each type of ALL activity listed in Table 2 has increased from 2007 to 2013. The most popular activities given by 38 out of a total of 39 universities, are generic non-credit and one-to-one consultations with students. These are traditional program types and have existed in universities for a long time. They are predicated on the idea that English language proficiency can be addressed through short-term programs. There is very little research evidence to support this idea. Second, many of the activities listed in Table 2 are not necessarily linked to disciplinary teaching and learning. Of the nine activities listed, only two are linked to working with disciplinary academics. These are integrated credit units and educational development. All of the other activities are more or less separate from disciplinary teaching learning and assessment practices.

ALL advisors have attempted to move to provide English language development activities within disciplinary curricula. There are a number of studies that provide evidence to support the move in this direction. First, it is argued that a non-compulsory model outside the curriculum does not target the right students, given that students who have less significant English language development needs are more likely to attend ALL workshops and sessions, and those who are ‘weaker’ students may avoid attending (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012, p. 42; Watkins, 2007; Wingate, 2006). Second, there is some evidence that attendance at support programs does not necessarily lead to improved learning outcomes (Baik & Greig, 2009; M. James, 2010), in which case they are not necessarily the best use of resources. Third, some of the studies indicate that there are low attendance rates in workshops (Harris

& Ashton, 2011; Rochecouste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010) and the main reasons for this are that students who are struggling with their studies would rather work on their studies than attend ELP programs (O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009), and it is difficult to force students to attend (Ransom, 2009). The international literature reviewed for this guide supports these findings (for example, Garcia, et al, 2013; Cots, 2013; Wilkinson, 2013).

However, most of the examples of good practices have been initiated by academics and ALL advisors who decide to work together to develop students' ELP within disciplinary teaching (Baik & Greig, 2009; Kennelly, Maldoni, & Davis, 2010; Mort & Drury, 2012). These studies provide evidence of students' ELP development. Nevertheless these micro-level approaches are difficult to sustain over time and do not necessarily result in systematic and integrated change. For example, the program developed by Baik & Greig, and often quoted in the literature as an example of good practice, only operated for two semesters. Therefore, the critical issue is not only about what options work best, but how universities can develop sustainable and integrated whole-of-university approaches to assure graduates' ELP outcomes.

The OLT fellowship by Arkoudis (2014) has explored this issue. The main findings from the fellowship are that the assessment of oral and written communication skills should be core business in university teaching and learning, alongside assessment of disciplinary knowledge. How can this be achieved? The impetus for change will come from universities adopting the stance that students will not be able to graduate from their university courses unless they can demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills.

The fellowship findings suggest that while a number of higher education institutions have developed institutional strategies for assuring the communication skills of their graduates, practices can be disjointed and not connected to disciplinary assessment. It is not possible to protect minimum standards for oral and written English language and literacy skills unless these are assessed, and the most appropriate place for this assessment to occur is within disciplinary teaching and learning. However there is still much debate about who is responsible for developing and assessing students' communication skills. What is required is an integrated approach that includes a variety of strategies that fit together to develop and assess students' communication skills. This does not mean that it is shared evenly, but rather that it is distributed according to the professional responsibilities of key people involved in teaching and learning. The idea of distributed responsibilities is useful in considering how various approaches contribute to ensuring students have attained threshold levels of English language communication upon graduation. Distributed responsibilities include the following:

- **Teaching and Learning leaders** (can include Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Associate Deans Teaching and Learning) – What is the evidence base that graduates have attained threshold oral and written communication skills upon completion?
- **Course coordinators** – What communication skills are students expected to have on completion of the course? Where and how are these assessed during the course of study?

- **Teaching academics** – What are the learning outcomes for the unit in terms of communication skills? How will these be taught and assessed?
- **Academic Language and Literacy Advisors** – How can course coordinators and teaching academics include ALL advisors in developing resources for teaching communication skills?

All of the above should increase students' awareness of their responsibilities towards developing their communication skills and of the importance of their communication skills for success in study and employability.

### Research on ELP and employability

There are a number of skills that are relevant to graduate employability, however the focus of this report is on ELP. ELP plays an important role in the employability of international students (Arkoudis et al., 2009). Employers in Australia and overseas stress the importance of English language skills when recruiting graduates (Graduate Careers Australia, 2012; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Tymon, 2013). Research also establishes that international students struggle to find employment in their field of qualification due in part to a lack of ELP (Blackmore et al., 2010-2012). The issue of ELP and international students' employability cannot simply be addressed by exit tests (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009). As research demonstrates that international students should develop their ELP while undertaking their studies, what is currently missing is a developmental model of ELP which can enhance international graduates' employability, and includes evidence-based examples of good practice.

The 2009 study on the impact of ELP and workplace readiness of tertiary international students (Arkoudis et al. 2009) highlighted the importance of ELP for the employment opportunities of international graduates. It also stressed that both written and oral communication skills are important, and noted that tertiary institutions have short-term programs, usually in the form of one-off-workshops, to assist international students. Some examples of different approaches were emerging in different institutions at the time the study was conducted, and now with the growth in capstone experiences, Work Integrated Learning and work placements, institutions should have developed more evidence-based approaches to determining what works best in assuring international students' ELP and their graduate employability. The recent National English Language Symposium highlighted the importance of international students developing their ELP during the course of their degree, and indicated that we have very little information about what might constitute good practice (International Education Association of Australia, 2013). HEIs in Australia need to find cohesive methods for assuring that international students graduate with a high level of ELP, as this is essential to their capacity to attain employment (Gribble, Blackmore, & Rahimi 2014).

In light of the research into ELP and employability, and employers' claims of the importance of ELP to employability, questions arise about what employability is and just how ELP relates to it.



## Employability: What is it?

As the notion of ‘employability’ has become more central to the way in which higher education is valued, a large number of definitions have emerged (for example, Hillage and Pollard 1998; Bowden et al. 2000; Knight and York 2004; Bridgestock 2009; CBI/NUS 2011, all cited in Cole and Tibby 2012). Knight and York’s 2004 definition has been particularly widely used. They describe ‘employability’ as:

*A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (p. 4).*

Using this broad definition of employability, Knight and York developed the ‘USEM Model’ of the components comprising employability. The model emphasizes the interrelated nature of skills and attributes that together constitute a graduate’s employability:

Understanding (of disciplinary subject matter and how organisations work);

Skilful practices (academic, employment, and life in general);

Efficacy beliefs (reflects the learner’s notion of self, their self-belief, and the possibility for self-improvement and development);

Metacognition (complements efficacy, embraces self-awareness, how to learn and reflection. It encompasses knowledge of strategies for learning, thinking and problem solving, and supports and promotes continued learning/lifelong learning). (Knight & Yorke, 2004, p 37).

Cole and Tibby (2013) assert that a successful definition of what employability is must also include what it is not. In particular, they argue that ‘employability’ is not the same as ‘employment outcomes’ of the type measured by graduate destination surveys. They provide the following broad definition:

Employability - what it is

- It is a lifelong process.
- It applies to all students whatever their situation, course or mode of study.
- It is complex and involves a number of areas that interlink.
- It is about supporting students to develop a range of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes and attitudes which will enable them to be successful not just in employment but in life.
- It is an institution-wide responsibility.
- It is about making the components of employability explicit to students to support their lifelong learning.

Employability - what it is not

- It is not about replacing academic rigour and standards.
- It is not necessarily about adding additional modules into the curriculum.
- It is not just about preparing students for employment.
- It is not the sole responsibility of the Careers Department.
- It is not something that can be quantified by any single measure (Cole and Tibby 2013: 5-6).

The attributes set out by Knight and York, above, are all attributes of the learner. However, as Pegg, Waldock, Henty-Isaac & Lawton (2012) point out, the ability of the learner to make use of these attributes is mediated by their social circumstances.

In particular, they refer to: the status of the institution from which an individual has graduated, labour-market factors affecting the value of the subjects an individual has studied; ethnicity, and socio-economic background (Pegg *et al.*, citing: Brown and Hesketh 2004; Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009; Purcell and Elias 2004; AGCAS/HECSU 2010; Blasko *et al.* 2002; and Riddell *et al.* 2010). Pegg *et al.* conclude that:

*The issue for higher education is what it should do to enhance the employment potential for the full spectrum of its graduates, while acknowledging that economic forces, of various kinds, will influence the graduates' success. However, continuing to make assumptions that students can all be treated in the same way, and have equal confidence in dealing with the labour market, runs the risk of perpetuating disadvantage as the relatively advantaged are able to maintain their position (Pegg *et al.* 2012: 8).*

While part of the role of higher education institutions in preparing students for employment will be preparing them to navigate the uneven playing field of the labour market, developing the kinds of skills set out by Knight and York in their USEM model will be their main focus. The aspects of employability which international students often need to develop are distributed across the range of attributes described by Knight and York. As has been widely reported, there is a perception among Australian employers that international graduates lack 'soft skills' for employment in Australia, although there is evidence that employers are generally satisfied with discipline specific skills (Gribble and Balckmore 2012 citing: Arkoudis *et al.* 2009; Jackling, 2007; Lawrence, 2011; Naghdy, Hayes, & Purser, 2009; Yong, Ryan, Yap, & Goela, 2011).

These skills can be developed at various phases during the students' experience in higher education, which we set out in the main part of this paper using the ELP developmental continuum.

### The complexity of evaluating ELP and workplace readiness initiatives

Although student employability programs are widespread, it is difficult to assess their relative merits on evidence, for there is no objective 'employability index' to use as measure. Indeed, Pegg *et al.* (2012) observe that:

*Because employability development is multi-factorial and context dependent, and may in many cases be long-term, any attempt made to evaluate a particular pedagogical approach will be limited, for example by the nature, volume and relevance of the evidence. A common approach is therefore to ask students to self-assess their skills after trialling one or other pedagogical tactic. Such feedback is useful and should not be simply discounted; however, it can result in findings that are either trivial or fail to demonstrate whether or not students have actually become more employable (Pegg *et al.* citing UKCES 2008).*

Similarly, there is no definitive way of measuring ELP. Currently, there is no stated ELP levels that students should achieve before they can graduate (Arkoudis & Doughney, forthcoming). There are a few exceptions. In the field of Education, students will need to demonstrate their levels of achievement before they are able to graduate from their course and gain teaching registration. A national test for all teacher graduates is being developed. There are a number of professional associations that use standardised English language test scores to make decisions about minimum

levels of ELP for employment and professional registration. It could be argued that professional associations are setting the benchmark for ELP and international students employability. It has been suggested that this is ‘an acute case of the dog wagging the tail’ (Arkoudis, 2010), and that HEIs should be setting ELP achievement levels upon graduation. The main concern about the use of standardised English language tests for employability is that there is little evidence to suggest that they are valid and reliable for assessing ELP for employability purposes, given that they were designed to assess ELP as readiness to commence tertiary study (O’Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009). Research indicates that it can be difficult for international student to gain required English language test scores required for employment by professional bodies (Craven, 2012). Yet students pass their courses. Key stakeholders such as employers, government and professional associations appear to want some assurance of ELP standards by HEIs, or otherwise they seek to set their own.

#### Key points:

- The research indicates that ELP is important for the employability of international students who have English as an additional language
- Recent studies distinguish between employability and employment outcomes of the type measured by graduate destination surveys.
- Within HEIs, there are a number of initiatives that aim to develop international students’ ELP, as well as Work Integrated Learning and capstone experiences<sup>2</sup>, which enhance students’ workplace readiness. There has been limited, if any, evaluation of these programs.
- Although student employability programs are widespread, it is difficult to assess their merits on available evidence. In addition, ELP assessment within disciplinary learning is a hit and miss affair, and therefore it is difficult to assure whether international students graduate with the necessary ELP levels for employability.
- Providing career advice to international students from entry into higher education is considered important, as many international ESL students lack awareness of the skills and experiences which they need to develop to increase their employability upon graduation. There is therefore an argument for implementing early initiatives aimed at improving international students’ understanding of their responsibility for developing their ELP (both academic and social communicative ability) and the role of ELP in enhancing their employability.

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<sup>2</sup> Capstone experiences occur towards the end of the degree program and are designed to demonstrate the culmination of students’ knowledge (see page 43 for further information and examples of practice).

## ELP and employability framework

The acquisition of knowledge and the development of personal and proto-professional aptitudes and academic skills occur as part of a process as students enter, progress through, and exit higher education. The sites of these aspects of learning lie both inside and outside the classroom. In light of this, the experiences of students during their tertiary studies are usefully considered in terms of a developmental continuum constituting a ‘student lifecycle.’

For example, the UK Higher Education Academy situates its learning research within an international student lifecycle comprising: Pre-arrival and pre-sessional support; Induction; Teaching & Learning in the ‘classroom’ (teaching context, teaching approaches, learning, curriculum and intercultural competencies); life outside the ‘classroom’ (adjustment, social and emotional well-being, making friends and building networks, engaging with the broader community, etc.), and finally Employability & next steps (HEA 2014). Conceptualising learning in this way shifts focus away from the classroom alone, and towards a more holistic understanding of the diversity of experiences that constitute student learning.

Such continua are useful not just in describing the diversity of the sites of learning, but also the manner in which proficiencies develop and mature as students move through higher learning. For example, O’Loughlin & Arkoudis (cited in Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012) describe the development of ELP within a continuum beginning with basic communicative skills brought in at entry to higher education, through the development of discipline specific language skills acquired through study, and finally to the professional language skills students take with them on exiting their studies.

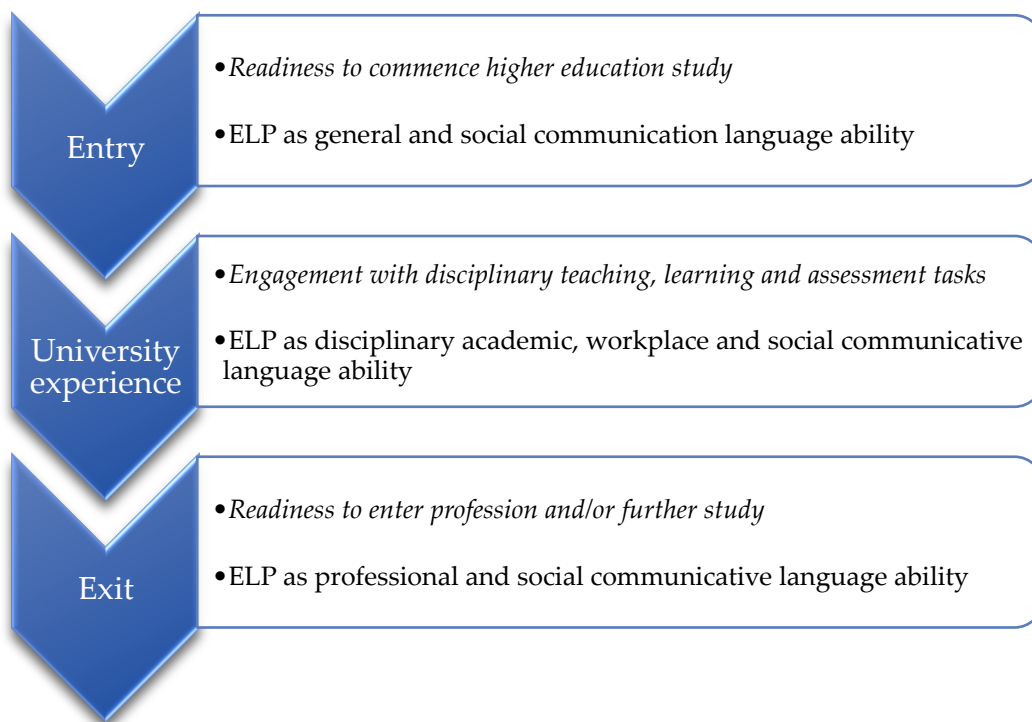


Figure 1: ELP developmental continuum (Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012, p.13)

Here, the ELP developmental continuum is used as the basis for the *ELP and Employability Framework*, which provides a broad typology of institutional initiatives to develop ELP and employability. As stated earlier, the framework was developed from a review of the literature, interviews with key staff responsible for ELP and/or employability practices within HEIs, as well as roundtable discussions conducted in three cities. The aim is to inform practices within higher education and provide examples of good practice. The initiatives have been organized according to their main purpose/aim:

***ELP for Learning*** refers to those English language programs and activities that aim to develop students' ELP for study. These include short courses, units of study, workshops and other activities that develop students' academic language and learning skills. Some of these are integrated within the core curricula of a degree program, and others are co-curricula.

***ELP for Employability*** is used to describe those programs and activities that aim to develop students' ELP for the professional workplace. We include both curricula and co-curricula initiatives to recognize that while the traditional site for ELP interventions for HEIs lies within the formal learning environment, increasing attention is being given to the role of extra or co-curricular activities in developing ELP and employability.

***Other career support*** is used to describe programs and activities that do not have a direct focus on ELP development, but aim to support students' employability and work-readiness. Common examples include workshops and tutorials on CV writing and interview preparation.

While the framework attempts to capture the broad types of institutional initiatives, it does not show the broad range of examples of programs and activities that take place in institutions. Instead, we have included several examples and case studies of good institutional practices for each type of initiative on the framework. The purpose of the framework is to evaluate current initiatives and inform future directions.

## ELP and Employability Framework

<b>ELP developmental continuum</b>	<i>Upon entry</i> <i>Transition to higher education study</i>  ELP as general, entry-level academic and social communication language ability	<i>During study</i> <i>Continued engagement with disciplinary teaching, learning and assessment tasks</i>  ELP as disciplinary academic, workplace and social communicative language ability	<i>Upon Exit</i> <i>Readiness to enter professional workplace</i>  ELP as professional and social communicative language ability
<b>ELP for learning</b>  <i>Curricula</i>	First year orientation and transition programs for ELP  Foundation subjects in first year	Subject curriculum integrating ELP and disciplinary learning and assessment  Subject curriculum design for fostering interaction between local and international students  Units of study focusing on ELP	Capstone experiences
<i>Co-curricula</i>	Student advising  First year orientation and transition support programs for ELP	Various academic language and learning programs and workshops  Individual tutoring/mentoring	
<b>ELP for employability</b>  <i>Curricula</i>	Units of study focusing on ELP for the workplace	Whole of program design for professional ELP  Units of study focusing on ELP for the workplace  Work Integrated Learning	Capstone projects/subject  Hurdle Assessment on ELP for employability
<i>Co-curricula</i>	First year orientation and transition activities for ELP and or employment/careers	Workshops and activities on improving ELP for employability	
<b>Other career support</b>	First year orientation programs to raise awareness of activities to enhance employability	Volunteer programs Mentoring programs Workshops on improving employability Social peer mentoring programs Career mentor programs Work experience within the institution	CV writing and interview preparation Careers and employment support



## Case studies and examples

The following section presents examples of activities contained in the *ELP and employability* framework from Australian higher education institutions, as well as more in-depth case studies of large programs.

### UPON ENTRY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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#### First-year orientation and transition programs

The importance of students' first-year experience, particularly their transition into university is well known and most, if not all, universities offer a range of orientation programs aimed at helping international students transition to universities. While many of these activities focus on the cultural aspects of studying in an Australian institution, most universities also offer transition programs focusing on raising students' awareness about academic expectations, and developing their academic language and learning skills. These can be curricula or co-curricula, and are outlined below.

#### Examples of practice

##### *Curricula*

Curricula efforts that focus on first year transition are often tutorials and workshops embedded in first year core subjects on academic skills and conventions. These are generally for all students and not international students only.

As part of the core unit *Legal Process* in the Bachelor of Laws at Southern Cross University students must attend a program of compulsory workshops. These workshops aim to prepare students for the academic expectations held of them in their degree programs, and to help students develop relevant study skills to approach their undergraduate careers, like a capacity for critical analysis and effective communication.

##### *Co-curricula*

Co-curricula efforts include orientation days on settling in to a new environment, and also programs and workshops designed to help prepare international students for the ELP requirements of future study.

The *Skills for International Postgraduates (SKIP)* program is a compulsory preparatory course provided to new higher degree international students at James Cook University. It is a 12-session course that is designed to help prepare students for the type of academic writing that is expected of them throughout their degree. Subjects covered include literature reviews, paragraphs and abstracts, and introductions and conclusions. As part of the program students must develop a sample of their work for review by the course coordinator, and present a synopsis of their research project to the class. Programs of this type are also offered at other institutions across the sector, such as the *International Bridging Program – Research (IPB-R)* at the University of Adelaide.



The *International Student Centre (ISC)* at the University of Adelaide run an orientation program for new international students each semester. The aim of this orientation is to help international students settle in at the University, and to meet other students, and members of the local community.

The *Deakin University English Language Institute (DUELI)* provides a voluntary five-week program to newly enrolled international students called the *Intensive Academic Program (IAP)*. The IAP consists of a series of sessions aimed at enhancing students' English language capabilities as they apply in an academic context, and preparing them for the requirements of future study. This includes ELP skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The program is available to students who have achieved above 6.5 in an IELTS test, or an equivalent result in another English language test.

## UPON ENTRY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Foundation subjects in first year undergraduate programs

A growing number of universities are introducing foundation units in the first year of undergraduate courses. Some of these are for all students, and others are specifically designed for international students. While most foundation subjects aim to develop academic language and learning skills (academic literacies) required in the discipline, they vary in their degree of discipline specificity – some foundation subjects are generic, or interdisciplinary, and others focus on a particular core subject in a discipline.

### Examples of practice

Griffith University, as part of the Griffith English Language Enhancement Strategy (GELES), has introduced compulsory for credit units for international students who enter with an overall IELTS score (or equivalent) less than 7.0 or via a non-test pathway. There are five different English language units of this type provided across the institution, each tailored to the type of discipline international students enter. These include *Language and Communication for Business and Commerce* and *English for Music*. The aim of the units is to prepare students for the type of ELP requirements they will face in their courses.

At Murdoch University, a for credit elective subject called *Writing Academic English* is provided to students with English as a Second Language, including international students in their first year of study. The unit focuses on ELP as it relates to an academic context, and is primarily designed to help students develop the skills they will need in their academic careers.

In the United States, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) subjects are often mandatory for international students who do not perform to an adequate level in their initial IELTS entry tests (These are often called 'placement tests' in the US. See Garcia, et al, 2013, p. 188; Jamieson, et al. 2013).

## **CASE STUDY 1**

### *Communication and Thought*, University of the Sunshine Coast

#### Context:

*Communication and Thought* is a compulsory foundation subject for all first year students at the University of the Sunshine Coast and has been provided since 2011.

#### Aims/Purpose:

To develop students' generic skills, in particular communication skills, and so prepare them for the requirements of their degree programs and their professional careers following graduation.

#### Description:

This foundation subject is a generic skills subject, with a particular focus on the development of students' communication skills for both academic and professional contexts. Its aim is to enhance students' communication skills early on, particularly those students in disciplines that do not often receive any direct assessment in oral and written communication. The focus on communication skills is not discipline specific in this subject, but is instead at a broad enough level of generality to be applicable to all students. The skills targeted include academic writing, and delivering oral presentations. In the subject both formative and summative assessments are provided which focus on the development of students oral and written communication skills.

#### Supporting material:

Around 2100 students are expected to take *Communication and Thought* in 2014. The subject has had a low attrition rate of students of around 6.75% (See Nash and Oprescu, 2013), and has received consistently high overall student evaluations. For further information on the subject see: <http://www.usc.edu.au/course-outlines/cor109-course-outline-semester-2-2014.pdf>

For further information, please contact Dr. Greg Nash ([gnash@usc.edu.au](mailto:gnash@usc.edu.au)).

Student advising early in degree programs is offered to both international and domestic students across the sector, typically to raise students' awareness about the kinds of ELP and other skills they will need to study at university. Most student advising activities are provided outside the core curriculum, but in some cases they can be closely aligned with curriculum or in adjunct form. For example, modules can be developed by academic language and learning advisors, or library staff, and can be integrated within the subject LMS so that students have access to advising and support relevant to their subjects. Other examples of student advising include peer support, where students mentor or support each other with the demands of coursework, including ELP.

### Examples of practice

At Griffith University, *Student Success Advisors* within different faculties provide students advice on their study, university life, and transition to employment. One of their particular responsibilities is to identify students who are at risk, and provide them tailored support, so as to enhance retention at Griffith University.

The University of New England has *First Year Advisors*. Their role is to provide advice to new students who can meet them on a drop-in basis. One of their areas of advice concerns how students can develop the kind of ELP required in their discipline area. To do this they offer different advisors for different courses, who are capable of providing students with advice on the kind of ELP they will require in that course.

At the University of Adelaide, international students receive peer-mentoring support through the *International Student Centre (ISC) Peer Mentor Support Program*. The mentors are both domestic and international students who have completed at least one year at the university, and who have at least one full year remaining in their degree. The main role of the mentor is to help new international students settle in to life at the University of Adelaide.

The University of Western Sydney Library has a range of modules available to students who are seeking assistance in developing a range of generic skills, including ELP. Most of these are designed to give students advice on the kinds of skills they need for their careers as undergraduate students. However, one of the modules is specifically developed to give students pointers on good written communication skills as they relate to a business context in 'business writing', which focuses on writing emails and reports for the workplace.

## UPON ENTRY: ELP FOR EMPLOYABILITY

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While most activities that focus on ELP for employability take place during students' course of study or towards the end, universities are increasingly seeing the importance of supporting students' ELP for employability from entry. Some of these efforts are part of the formal curricula, while others are co-curricula. These are outlined below.

### Examples of practice

#### *Curricula*

At some institutions there are early units of study that focus on developing students' employability. The aim of these subjects is often to develop students' skills so that they have a platform for developing higher-level employability skills later in their degree programs, or for raising awareness to students of the importance of developing their employability. ELP as it relates to employability is often touched upon in these units.

As part of the *Business Edge Program* at Edith Cowan University (described in detail in case study 7) a first year subject is provided to students in the Bachelor of Business called *Business and Communication Analysis*. This aims at enhancing students' employability, including their communication skills as they apply in a professional context. The aim of the unit is also to prepare students for the more advanced employability skills that are developed in the two units provided in the later years of the *Business Edge Program*. In this unit students also take a Post Entry English Language assessment, with the aim of providing feedback to students on their ELP development, as well as giving early identification of students who need ELP support.

The Common Unit Program at Charles Darwin University (CDU) requires all first year students who are enrolled in bachelor's degrees to complete two units of the program. This has some focus on the development of ELP skills (see Rolls, et al, 2011). It also focuses on the employability skills of students, and gets them to focus on those employability skills specific to their discipline area.

#### *Co-curricula*

Some institutions provide orientation and transition workshops and programs for their students. While these are often not exclusively about ELP as it relates to employability, an aspect of these programs is to raise students' awareness of the importance of developing their ELP for professional contexts.

The *First STEP (striving towards excellence program) Mentoring Program* at Macquarie University provides a structured mentoring relationship for first year students with an academic mentor, in the Faculty of Business and Economics. The aims of the program include giving students career advice, and providing the opportunity to help students develop their graduate capabilities, in particular their communication and interpersonal skills.

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Subject curriculum integrating ELP with disciplinary learning outcomes

Integrating ELP with disciplinary learning outcomes in the curriculum of a subject can assist students to develop their ELP. There are a variety of ways that this can be achieved, and the main principle is that ELP is explicitly taught and assessed within disciplinary learning.

### Examples of practice

Under the *English Language Proficiency (ELP) Strategy* at Edith Cowan University each course must have *Prescribed Units* in which ELP is assessed and marked explicitly. ELP is commonly a part of the learning outcomes of these units, and teaching and learning activities are often developed to help students approach the ELP component of their assessment. The *ELP Strategy* itself was developed to assure that students graduate with appropriate levels of ELP for their discipline area, and these units play an important role by assuring that only those students with appropriate levels of ELP pass through these subjects in their degree programs.

The unit *Professional Communication* is provided to first year nursing students in the Bachelor of Nursing at the University of Western Sydney. Key learning outcomes of the unit are written and oral communication skills for both academic and professional contexts. Some of the assessment in this unit has been developed by academic language and learning staff in conjunction with nursing academics in order to best assess students on their written communication skills for a professional context.

At the University of Queensland, students in the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy take the second year subject *Becoming an Occ Thy Practitioner: Managing Complex Clinical, Cultural and Communication issues*. This subject is a preparatory unit for students' clinical placement as an occupational therapist, and key outcomes of the subject are developing students' oral and written communication skills as they apply in occupational therapy. A range of teaching and learning activities are provided to develop students' communication skills so that they achieve these learning outcomes, including weekly fieldwork, and workshops.

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Curriculum design for fostering interaction between local and international students

Developing effective interactions between domestic and international students in class time is a major strategy for facilitating the development of international students' ELP. There is substantial research on the nature of interactions between international and domestic students in class time, and how best to facilitate effective interactions between them (Bennett, et al. 2013; Cruickshank, et al, 2012; Kimmel, and Volet 2012; Rientes, et al, 2013). It is argued that developing interactions between international and domestic students is an important tool to develop the intercultural competence of both groups. A lack of interest from domestic students is identified as a blocker to effective interactions between international and domestic students in class time. Reasons for this include the belief among some domestic students that international students are not good partners in group work and that their ELP difficulties will have a negative impact on group grades (Harrison and Peacock, 2010).

### Examples of practice

Regarding in-class interaction, *The Finding Common Ground: Enhancing Interactions Between Domestic and International Students* provides a framework and strategies for disciplinary academics to develop meaningful interactions between domestic and international students within class time (Arkoudis, et al, 2010).



## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Units of study focusing on ELP

Some institutions offer subjects for students that have an ELP focus. Some are credit bearing English language or Communication subjects that focus on the development of students' ELP in an academic context. Often these subjects are discipline specific, and focus on the kind of ELP required for further study in that discipline. These subjects can occur at any point during a degree program. Some subjects like this are developed specifically for international students, while others are designed to develop the ELP of all students.

### Examples of practice

Macquarie University provides a first year elective subject called *Academic Communication in Business and Economics* for students studying in degree programs offered by the Faculty of Business and Economics. The aim of this subject is to help students develop their academic communication skills as they relate to the disciplines of Business and Economics, and so prepare them for the type of discipline specific ELP that is required of them in their courses. The subject is developed with the specific needs of international students in mind, and is recommended to those students with the equivalent of an IELTS score of 7 or less.

In 2015 Deakin University will offer a subject called *Research Communication* for students enrolled in the Masters of Science. The aim of this subject will be to develop science students' communication skills as researchers. This includes the development of students ELP skills' in writing papers, giving presentations, and presenting research proposals.

*Communication for IT Professionals* is a core first year subject for students in the Bachelor of Information Technology at the University of Technology Sydney. The aim of the subject is to develop students' oral and written ELP in ways that prepare them for the requirements of their future studies in IT at UTS. While the primary aim of the subject is to prepare students for the ELP requirements of future coursework, there is some focus on students' ELP as it relates to their future roles in the IT industry. In the first week of the subject students take a language task. The results of this task determine the weekly workshop group that students enter for the rest of the semester, with those students with particular ELP needs entering a workshop group that provides extra ELP support throughout the semester.

Students can take an elective subject called *English in Spoken Interaction* in a range of Bachelor degrees and in the Masters of Communication at Victoria University. The subject can be taken in any year in which students have available credit points to take

an elective. This subject focuses on developing students' oral ELP in both formal and informal contexts. The majority of assessment in this subject is oral communication activities. It is a subject that is developed with the specific needs of EAL international students in mind, and can also be taken as part of the Advanced English for Speakers of Other Languages (AESOL) course at VU.

At Victoria University students enrolled in a range of Bachelor degrees can take an elective subject called *Communication for Academic Purposes A* at any stage during their degree program. The aim of this subject is to enhance students oral and written ELP as it applies in an academic context. The subject is designed with international students ELP development needs in mind and has an explicit focus on raising students' awareness of Australian cultural and societal norms.

## CASE STUDY 2

*Fundamentals of Science Communication*, Master of Science and Master of Public Health, University of Wollongong

### Context:

Fundamentals of Science Communication is a core, foundational subject for all students using English as an additional language (EAL) in the Master of Science and the Master of Public Health degree programs at the University of Wollongong.

It is designed primarily to address needs of new international students, and is open to other students as an elective.

The subject develops English language proficiency in ways most relevant to specific disciplines within the sciences.

### Aims/Purpose:

The primary purpose of the subject is to give attention to aspects of students' English language and multimedia communications on which their learning depends throughout their Masters degree program.

Another objective of the subject is to develop students' ability to communicate disciplinary content to different audiences.

### Description:

The subject is designed and taught by an Academic language and learning educator, in collaboration with academics from the Faculty of Science. It is based around three interrelated task-based modules. In the first task, students write a critical review of recent literature on a topic of relevance to their degree program (for example, a literature review relevant to physics, or to biology). The second has them working in groups to present a selected journal article as a poster and a slideshow talk, in class, conference-style. In the third, students develop an open educational resource, sharable with other students online, reflecting on a personally important aspect of their learning in the subject. In all three tasks, student work is of immediate relevance to their field of study and profession.

### Supporting material:

For further information, please contact Emily Purser ([e.purser@uow.edu.au](mailto:e.purser@uow.edu.au)).

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Co-curricula programs and activities

Academic language and learning (ALL) centres across the sector provide students with a range of co-curricula programs and activities that are designed to enhance their English language proficiency. These include workshops and programs that focus on developing ELP for academic purposes, as well as one-on-one sessions in which academic language and learning advisors provide direct ELP support to students on their assessment or other matters. ALL centres and advisors also provide a range of other co-curricula activities to enhance students' ELP (for a table outlining the types of activities of ALL centres across the sector, see Barthel, 2013).

### Examples of practice

The *Higher Education Language and Presentation Support (HELPS)* centre provides Academic Language and Learning support to students at the University of Technology Sydney. It is centrally located, has high staff numbers, and provides students with a range of support including typical generic consultations ('HELPS you learn programs') and content-based consultations ('HELPS' you pass programs'). *HELPS* is easily accessible for students who have not made any appointments and are seeking a drop-in consultation. This accessibility resulted in 1700 students attending the Centre for workshops, consultations, and other services last year. Over 2200 students are expected to attend this year. Around half the students who attend *HELPS* for support are international students.

The University of South Australia's *Language and Learning (L<sup>3</sup>)* team provide a wide range of ALL services such as workshops, one-on-one consultations, and training programs to enhance students' ELP across the institution. *L<sup>3</sup>* also has a student resources hub for students within different disciplines so that the support they offer to students is discipline specific and can help students develop their ELP in ways that are relevant to their discipline area (<http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=3613>).

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR LEARNING

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### Units of study on ELP for the workplace

Credit-bearing units of study that are designed to enhance students' ELP as it relates to a professional context are provided across the sector. These subjects are provided in disciplines ranging from the psychological sciences to engineering. Some are specifically for international students, and others are for all students. These can occur during any year of a course, although they are more likely to be provided after the first year, given their focus on professional ELP and not ELP for learning. Often the aims of these subjects are for students to develop the kinds of skills required to find work placements in their discipline area, and they focus on the kind of discipline specific ELP required in a discipline area. However, others are generic elective subjects designed to enhance students' ELP for employability in a general workplace setting.

### Examples of practice

At Curtin University, *Effective Communication 200* is a core second year unit for students in the Bachelor of Science (Exercise, Sports and Rehabilitation Science). The subject focuses on the kinds of professional communication skills that students' need in roles such as being a personal trainer, gym instructor or exercise scientist. Targeted communication skills include listening skills, interviewing skills, and 'incongruent non-verbal communication'.

In 2015 Deakin University will provide a subject for first year students in the Bachelor of Arts called *Professional Writing for Work*. This unit will focus on the development of students' employability, in particular their written and oral communication skills as they apply in the workplace. In the subject, students will be taught to write reports and media releases, to provide effective presentations, as well as a range of other tasks that focus on enhancing students' ELP for employability. A key feature of the subject will be the development of students' understanding of the relationship between effective written and oral communication.

The University of Melbourne provides a second year subject to students in the Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) called *Introduction to Media Writing*. This subject aims to develop students' written communication skills in a range of areas that are relevant within Media and Communications industries. This includes the ability to communicate clearly and effectively to large and diverse audiences, how to edit their own and others' work effectively, and various different writing styles in media writing. Part of the aim of this subject is to act as a precursor for the capstone subject *Writing Journalism* in the students' final year.

*From University to Workplace* is an elective subject at Murdoch University, and is popular with international students. It is a practical 'hands on' unit that has a focus on the general kinds of skills students need to enhance their employability, including their English language proficiency for employability. Students are encouraged to focus on those professional skills that are relevant to their discipline area, and assessment is related to applying for and maintaining jobs within that discipline area. Tasks including a job application portfolio are part of this subject. Preference for places in the unit are given to those students in their final year of study. This unit is developed and provided by staff within the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (an ALL unit) in conjunction with the Careers Centre at Murdoch.

The subject *Professional Communication in Human Services* is an Honours year subject for students in the Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Professional Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. The subject focuses on developing students' communication skills, in particular their oral and interpersonal communication skills, as they are applied in human services workplaces. 30% of the assessment in this subject is derived through students' participation in communication skills workshops.

## CASE STUDY 3

*Professional Engineering Practice Preparation*, Engineering courses,  
University of Technology Sydney

Context:

*Professional Practice Preparation* is an elective subject for undergraduate and postgraduate Engineering students who are not completing a Diploma in Engineering Practice in addition to their core course of study.

Central to the subject is the development by students of essential professional strengths, including their employability and English language proficiency.

Most enrolments are by international students, aspiring to employment-based and/or entrepreneurial futures.

Aims/Purpose:

To increase student competence, confidence and judgment about what is required to develop and manage career strategies in support of their own professional aspirations.

To encourage students towards self-directed professional development. This includes the key graduate attribute of oral and written English language proficiency, specifically as this relates to effective workplace interactions with supervisors, colleagues and clients.

To facilitate the professional readiness of students when they are ready to source industry placements (of a minimum of 12 weeks).

Description:

This subject is facilitated by a staff member within UTS:Careers, who also co-designed it alongside disciplinary and English language experts. The format of the subject is not typical lecture/tutorial. Rather, it consists of a sequence of seminars underpinned by learner-centred ('flipped') and experiential learning approaches. It enhances the professional preparation of students by introducing, developing and assessing the transferable (non-technical) strengths most needed within their vocation. Students learn how to interpret, negotiate and apply the guidelines on professional conduct of the relevant professional accreditation body (in this case, Engineers Australia).

The development of students' English language proficiency as it relates to their employability is one of the key points of the subject. Therefore all assessments contain criteria addressing English language competency. During a six-week major project in professionally-facilitated small groups, students must demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly and effectively with a client via a written proposal, a field survey and a presentation. At other times students demonstrate their ability to communicate appropriately with industry by preparing application documents, a mock interview, a self-reflection report and a professional development plan.

To develop and assess the above tasks, the assistance of a number of Academic Language and Learning advisors has been embedded into the subject. These specialists provide guest workshops, as well as consultation appointments at targeted

times throughout the learning program.

Supporting material:

For information on this subject see:

<http://handbook.uts.edu.au/subjects/details/41002.html>

For further information, contact Seymour Maddison: [seymour.maddison@uts.edu.au](mailto:seymour.maddison@uts.edu.au)



## **CASE STUDY 4**

*Communication and ICT Workplace Practice*, Master of Engineering Studies, University of Wollongong

Context:

This is a compulsory credit-bearing subject for English as an additional language (EAL) international students enrolled in the University of Wollongong's Master of Engineering Studies course. It focuses on developing students' employability, in particular their English language proficiency as it relates to employability.

Aims/Purpose:

To develop students' English language proficiency as it relates to their employability.

To demonstrate to international students the relationship between graduate attributes and employability in an Australian context.

Description:

This Engineering and Information Sciences faculty-based subject is designed and taught in collaboration with the special development units for Careers and for Academic language and learning at the University. Three interrelated modules are taught over the length of the semester. These focus on English language proficiency, seeking professional employment in Australia, and working in a 'virtual workplace' respectively. A variety of tasks throughout the three modules develop students' capacity to communicate effectively. These concern things like oral presentations, job seeking resumes and interviews, and formal project reporting. Students also develop an e-portfolio to document and reflect on their work and development of skills relevant to English language communications and employability.

Supporting information:

For further information, please contact Emily Purser ([e.purser@uow.edu.au](mailto:e.purser@uow.edu.au)).

Work experience has been conclusively shown to have a positive impact on employability (Hall et al. 2009; Mason et al. 2006; High Fliers 2011; Mendez and Rona 2009). WIL includes work placements as part of assessed learning or as a capstone unit, and compulsory post-course placements or residencies. The value of WIL is hardly surprising in view of the abundant literature on the efficacy of pedagogies that emphasise ‘learning by doing’ (Aldrich 2005; Kolb 2005; Andresen 2000). Indeed, Pegg *et al.* (2012) argue that:

*There is strong evidence to indicate that authentic work experience contextualises learning, has a strong influence on graduate employment and should be integrated into course curricula wherever possible. In order to maximise learning for employability and the academic subject it is important that this should be a pedagogically supported experience, which includes reflection and articulation of the learning achieved (Pegg et al. 2012).*

Despite work-related learning being arguably the primary resource for enhancing employability, it can be difficult to put in place. Some difficulties are specific to providing WIL to international students. For example, international students may be limited by the extent to which they can take part in WIL or in paid employment due to work restrictions that are part of visa conditions. Institutions need to be aware of the way in which WIL and work-based capstone experiences might impact upon students’ conditions of stay.

### Examples of practice

Griffith University’s *Industrial Affiliates Program (IAP)* enables honours year engineering students to participate in a detailed project report via WIL. The program has been particularly successful with international students.

Queensland University of Technology’s *International Work Placement Scheme (IWPS)* allows students to complete their study in Australia, but to undertake WIL in their country of origin (Gamble, Patrick and Peach 2010).

As part of the Bachelor of Science (Sport Science) at the University of Western Australia, students undertake a core WIL subject called *Professional Practice* in their third year. Split over two semesters this subject comprises tutorials and workshops, along with two 70-hour placements in workplaces in the area of Sports Science, Exercise and Health. In this subject written and oral communication skills as they relate to the workplace are key learning outcomes, with students assessed on their oral communication skills in an interview, and required to develop their written communication skills in job

applications, and in work related tasks.

*Internship in Social Research* is a third year WIL subject that students can take as part of the Bachelor of Arts or the Bachelor of Social Science at Swinburne University. This subject comprises two days a week with an employer working on a project, and three contact hours on campus. Generic skills outcomes of the subject include developing students' writing and public speaking skills. Assessment includes an oral presentation and a written research report.

## CASE STUDY 5

*Learning in the Workplace*, Master of Engineering, University of South Australia

Context:

This Work Integrated Learning subject is a core subject in a range of Master of Engineering programs (Electrical Power, Engineering Management and Telecommunications) and is offered at the University of South Australia. It involves a 13 week in-class component provided concurrently with a 13 week project with an employer.

While components of the course content have been designed specifically for the needs of international students, the course welcomes domestic and Non-English Speaking Background students.

Aims/Purpose:

To enable students to plan, experience and critically reflect on their learning in the workplace in preparation for working as a professional, through completion of a workplace based development project and through the tutorial content and related activities.

To develop a range of transferable (employability) skills, in particular communication, interpersonal and teamwork skills, through in-class content and on-site project experience.

Description:

This subject aims at enhancing students' awareness of the Australian workplace and employment trends through tutorials that focus on different areas of students' employability, as well as a work placement project that is organised with an employer. Tutorials cover a range of topics but have a strong focus on students' oral and written communication and presentation skills in the Australian workplace context.

These topics include business communication, reflection, teamwork, intercultural communication, career development, networking practice, business report writing and Aboriginal cultural communication. Guest lectures are provided by Engineers Australia, industry and an expert on Aboriginal cultural communication.

Work placement project providers in this subject are a diverse group and have included SA Power Networks, Cutler Brands, Spotless, AMCOR, Maxiplus, Spring Gully and the Mallala Council. In most cases, students complete project work in teams. They do so in an area of focus most closely aligned to their degree, or in a related area which provides them the experience and engagement with an Australian workplace.

Students complete a range of assessments in the course, including writing a project report from their placement experience, as well as completing an assignment on transferrable (employability) skills, and presenting an oral report.

Supporting material:

For detail on the subject see:

<http://programs.unisa.edu.au/public/pcms/course.aspx?pageid=101722>

For more information, contact Roopa Howard ([Roopa.Howard@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Roopa.Howard@unisa.edu.au)).

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR EMPLOYABILITY

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### Whole of program design for professional ELP

In courses at some institutions whole-of-program designs have been created for developing students' ELP to a professional level by the exit point of a degree. This can involve mapping the teaching and learning/assessment of communication skills across all levels of a degree program in a framework, by the development of particular units in the course to assure that students develop the requisite skills, or through a range of other possible methods.

### Examples of practice

The *Communications Skills Framework* was developed at the University of Western Australia (UWA) to map out how communication skills in four areas (writing skills, oral and presentation skills, critical information literacy and interpersonal skills) should be effectively integrated within disciplinary curricula. It was first implemented in 2011. Under the model taken by UWA, all course coordinators plan how they will assess, teach, and define communication skills across their degree programs, in the way stipulated in the framework. They then have to have this plan accepted by the board of coursework studies at UWA. In the framework the final level of communication skill development to be assessed and taught in a course is 'professional communication'. Examples of how this has been addressed in a course include the Bachelor of Science (Sports Science) where communication skills are targeted in a work-integrated learning context to assure that students have achieved the level of professional communication skills appropriate to their discipline area (in the *Professional Practice* subject described earlier).

The *Student Literacy Strategies (SLS) Program* in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Western Sydney is an example of how professional ELP can be embedded within disciplinary curricula across a degree program. The *SLS* is applied across the Bachelor of Nursing so that students can develop their professional and academic ELP across their course of study, and have the requisite ELP to meet registration requirements, and the requirements of everyday work as a nurse, when they graduate. The *SLS* involves the provision of clinical communication workshops for students, embedding academic language and learning staff within core units across the degree, incorporating ELP within learning outcomes and assessment in core units across the degree program, and raising students' awareness of the importance of developing ELP for professional contexts.

## CASE STUDY 6

*Communication competency framework, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, The University of Melbourne*

Context:

The *Communication competency framework* maps the teaching and assessment of communication skills across the four-year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) course.

Students undertake a placement year in the final year of the course.

Around 30% of the students enrolled in the course are international students.

Aims/Purpose:

To provide a structured environment in which students progressively develop their communication skills to a professional level for their future careers.

Description:

The type of English Language Proficiency (ELP) taught in the DVM is aimed directly at enhancing students' employability. This includes teaching students the ability to communicate with clients with sensitivity, as well as how to communicate with a scientific audience in highly complex ways. The *Communication competency framework* scaffolds the teaching and learning, as well as assessment of students' communication skills across the DVM. Some teaching and learning activities in the framework include workshops tailored to teaching communication skills, role-play activities, and group dissection activities. Assessments mapped across the degree program by the framework include formative and summative communication skills assessments, as well as communication skills assessments that involve peer review. One example of an assessment activity described in the framework is the 'Veterinary Oral Communication Exercise (VOCE) assignment' in first year. In this assignment students develop a video in which they explain a concept to a lay audience. They then upload the video to a password-protected site similar to YouTube and their peers assess them on their communication of the information.

Supporting material:

The following 2014 course handbook contains general information about the DVM. Elements of the communication competency framework can be seen throughout the handbook: <https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2014/MC-DVETMED?output=PDF>.

For further information, contact Elise Boller ([elise.boller@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:elise.boller@unimelb.edu.au)).

## DURING STUDY: ELP FOR EMPLOYABILITY

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### Workshops and activities on improving ELP for employability

Institutions across the sector provide workshops and activities that are developed to target students' ELP as it relates to a workplace setting. These can be generic, and focus on students' ELP as it relates to communicating in job interviews, or in other workplace contexts. Workshops of this kind are commonly co-curricula, and are provided by careers offices. Other workshops can be discipline specific and concern the development of students' ELP for professional contexts. Many of these are provided within disciplinary curricula, and can come in a range of forms including guest lectures by industry experts, role play activities which are designed to enhance students' oral ELP in workplace contexts, and workshops that focus on developing students oral or written ELP for workplace tasks in that discipline area.

### Examples of practice

As part of its *International Students' Careers Week* of workshops and activities, Careers and Employment at UNSW provides a workshop for international students called *English Pronunciation: Speak clearer, more confident English*. As the title suggests, this workshop is based around enhancing international students oral ELP in both pronunciation and clarity. However, this is specifically for an Australian context.

As part of the *Accomplish International* program (described in detail in case study 9) at Monash University, students are provided with workshops on networking and communication, on interviewing skills, and on resume writing, which all aim at developing students' ELP for a professional context.

In the second year of the *Doctor of Veterinary Medicine* at the University of Melbourne, students engage in a two-hour oral communication skills workshop to help them engage effectively and empathetically with clients, as well as attain informed consent from them.



Capstone experiences and projects are designed to demonstrate the culmination of students' knowledge over their degree program. As the name suggests, they are intended to 'cap' off a students' course of study and represent the opportunity for students to demonstrate their capacity to integrate the skills and knowledge which they have learned throughout their degrees. These experiences and projects can come in a range of forms. They can be capstone subjects designed to demonstrate that students have the requisite set of skills required in that course of study. They can be short activities that draw upon the range of skills that students have acquired over their degree program. They can also be more substantive projects where students have to draw upon these skills. Part of the aim is to demonstrate the preparedness of a student for employment or further study. One benefit of capstone experiences and projects is that they allow for the assessment of ELP at the end of a degree program, and can help assure that students have a level of ELP appropriate for their discipline area. Capstone experiences and projects are generally designed for all students, and not just for international students.

### Examples of practice

The University of Melbourne provides a final year arts subject called *Writing Journalism* for students in the Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications). This subject focuses on developing students' written ELP for a professional journalist context. In particular, students are taught to recognise the different styles of writing required in different types of media, such as in blogs and opinion pieces. Students are also taught how to enhance their writing style to make it more clear and concise. It is a subject that is intended to draw together skills that students have learned earlier in their degree programs, such as in the ELP-related subject *Introduction to Media Writing*.

*Client Advocacy and Communication Skills* is a final year subject for students in the Bachelor of Laws at the University of Canberra. The aim of the subject is to teach students oral and written communication skills that will be relevant to them in their roles as lawyers, in particular in those skills that are required for advocacy. Areas of focus include client interview skills, written submissions, and tribunal appearances.

The *IT Capstone Project* is a core third year project for students to complete in the Bachelor of Information Technology at the Queensland University of Technology. In this project students work in groups of four or five to address an area of practical need in the area of 'business problems', 'real market needs', or 'real research problems'. Students' assessment is determined by the project area they choose, and they are expected to draw on the skills they have developed in the previous years of their degree to engage in the project. An aim of the project is to enhance students' employability, and in particular to develop students' communication skills as they relate to a professional context.

## CASE STUDY 7

### *Business Edge Program, Bachelor of Business, Edith Cowan University*

#### Context:

The *Business Edge Program* at Edith Cowan University is a course wide program in the Bachelor of Business that comprises three core subjects at different year levels (foundational, mid course and capstone). The aim of the program is to develop skills central to students' employability, and provide graduates who are successful in a workplace context.

#### Aims/Purpose:

To enhance students' employability by developing the key skills central to employability, including their written and oral communication skills as they apply in a workplace context.

#### Description:

The *Business Edge Program* was developed to enhance Bachelor of Business students' Employability in three subjects in different years, so the teaching of skills is scaffolded throughout the degree program. First, there is a foundational subject called *Business Communication and Analysis*. This is aimed to develop students' employability skills early on, so that they have the base from which to further enhance their employability skill set in later years. Students receive diagnostic testing on their English language proficiency in this subject through the use of post-entry language assessments. These are designed to raise student awareness of the importance of their English language proficiency, and to identify students in need of support. The second tier of the program is a second year subject called *Business Professionalism and Career Management*. This subject aims to build upon the skills developed in the first subject, while at the same time providing skills development tailored to those students who have entered Edith Cowan University through articulation agreements with TAFE and other vocational education providers. Post-entry language assessments are also used in this subject. The capstone subject *Business Capstone* requires that students demonstrate mastery over the employability skills they have developed over the course of the *Business Edge Program*. It is also intended to demonstrate their preparedness to enter the workforce. In each subject oral and written communication skills for a workplace context are taught and assessed. Academic language and learning advisors and other staff at the institution have strategic interventions to ensure that students within these subjects effectively develop their English Language Proficiency.

#### Supporting material:

For an account of the program, including student testimonials on its efficacy see: <http://www.ecu.edu.au/faculties/business-and-law/study-areas/ecu-business-edge>

For further information, contact Tina Fleming ([t.fleming@ecu.edu.au](mailto:t.fleming@ecu.edu.au)).

Hurdle assessments can assure that students have appropriate levels of ELP for the professional workforce. They can be integrated within particular subjects in a course, or can alternatively be a requirement for students to complete independent of any subject. They may be for international students only, but are often developed for all students. The timing of a hurdle assessment within a course varies and can range from first to final year. One reason for their development can be for students to satisfy the requirements of industry accreditation bodies' professional communication standards.

### **CASE STUDY 8**

#### *Skills Towards Employment Program (STEP) and Engineering Practice Hurdle (EPH), Masters of Engineering, The University of Melbourne*

##### Context:

The *EPH* is a hurdle assessment which all students enrolled in the Master of Engineering at the University of Melbourne must complete before they are able to graduate. *EPH* targets written and oral communication skills. To aid in completing this hurdle, the *STEP* program provides a set of voluntary workshops to help students develop the skills they are required to demonstrate in the assessment.

Many of the students who attend the *STEP* program are international students.

##### Aims/Purpose:

To assure that all students who graduate from the Master of Engineering reach an appropriate standard of written and oral communication skills, specifically as they relate to employability.

##### Description:

In the *EPH* students develop an e-portfolio that comprises a total of six assessment pieces. Of these, three target oral communication and three written communication. For either skill the assessments are a preparation piece, a 'reflective' improvement plan based on feedback to the first piece, and then a final piece based on the previous two items. For oral communication skills, the final piece is a recorded presentation and for the written communication skills, the final piece is a written report. The *EPH* is designed to meet the accreditation requirements of the Australian accreditation body for engineers, Engineers Australia.

*STEP* is a program designed to assist students to complete the *EPH*. In it, workshops are developed to help students with each of the tasks that comprise their e-portfolios. Workshop topics include: presentation design, presentation delivery, writing style, and report content.

Supporting material:

For information on the EPH see: <http://www.eng.unimelb.edu.au/elu/activities/eph/>

For information on STEP see:

<http://themelbourneengineer.eng.unimelb.edu.au/2012/06/taking-the-first-step-to-an-engineering-career/>

For further information, contact Brice Shen ([bshen@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:bshen@unimelb.edu.au)).

## OTHER CAREER SUPPORT

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There are many examples of workshops, programs and other activities offered by universities that are designed to support students' employability and workplace readiness. These include, but are not limited to: volunteering programs, social peer mentoring, career mentoring and planning, CV writing, workshops on improving employability, interview preparation and so on. While the objectives of these programs may not explicitly be about ELP development, active participation is often designed to have benefits for students' oral communication and interpersonal skills.

### Examples of practice

The *Support, Opportunities, Advice and Resources (SOAR) Centre* at Edith Cowan University aims to increase transferable employability skills for all graduate research students, but has been particularly successful in attracting international students. *SOAR* seeks to improve students' employability skills and includes project management, working with communication technology and developing career planning skills. The program is a peer-to-peers service, with the training of '*SOAR Ambassadors*' overseen by a paid manager (Jones 2013).

At the University of New South Wales, an *International Students' Careers Week* provides a range of workshops from industry professional and Careers staff at UNSW. Some workshops regard finding work as international students in certain disciplines such as accountancy. Other workshops are generic and focus on things like techniques in finding part-time work, casual work and internships, as well as strategies for effective interviewing, resume development, and understanding visa restrictions.

The University of Sydney CareerHub provides a workshop exclusively for international students called *Australian Resume Basics*. The workshop focuses on how to prepare a resume specifically for employment in an Australian context.

The *Global Mentoring Program* at RMIT University is intended for international students who seek to find employment in East Asia after graduation. In the program, students are paired with a mentor who has experience working in a leadership position in an Asian context. Among other things, students are provided with advice on job search strategies, networking, moving from study to work, career development, and working in a globalised context.

## CASE STUDY 9

### *Accomplish International*, UTS: Careers, University of Technology Sydney

#### Context:

*Accomplish International* is a co-curricula program for international students provided by UTS: Careers. It runs over the course of an academic year and comprises a series of workshops and events aimed at enhancing students' employability. International students also receive the opportunity to apply for internships as part of *Accomplish International*.

It is available to international students in the final two years of their degree.

Around 200 students were involved in *Accomplish International* in 2013.

Employers of all types (not for profit, small businesses, multinational companies) are encouraged to offer internships, or paid work to the international students in *Accomplish International*.

#### Aims/Purpose:

To increase international students' employability by targeting generic skills that may not receive sufficient attention within disciplinary curricula.

To enhance international students' oral and written English language proficiency for securing and maintaining employment (i.e. communicating effectively in job applications and interviews, and in the workplace).

#### Description:

There are a total of 16 hours of workshops and events over the course of an academic year in *Accomplish International*. The workshops include 'resume writing', 'networking and communication', and 'interview skills'. Events include an 'Aussie rules' seminar where students are informed of their visa restrictions and work rights, a networking event with employers, and a mock interview organised with local employers. To graduate and receive a certificate for the program students must attend 7 of the 8 workshops and participate in the mock interview at the end of the program.

Some students receive an internship as part of the program. Potential employers initially advertise these positions to the program coordinator of *Accomplish International*. The program coordinator then holds a screening interview with interested students, and offers a shortlist of students to the potential employer, who can choose to offer an internship to students. Students need to participate in 100 hours of work across the year in their internships across at least two different employment activities.

UTS: Careers provides *Accomplish International* along with two other similar programs based on workshops and events aimed at enhancing students' employability. These are called *Accomplish Award*, and *Accomplish Intensive* respectively. They differ from *Accomplish International* as they are for all students and do not include the potential for internships. *Accomplish Intensive*, unlike the other two programs, is run once per

semester over three days, and is offered only to final year students.

Supporting material:

For detail on the program, see the website: <http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/opportunities/career-development/work-ready-programs/uts-accomplish-award>

For further information contact Julieanne O'Hara ([Julieanne.Ohara@uts.edu.au](mailto:Julieanne.Ohara@uts.edu.au)).

## CASE STUDY 10

### *Monash Innovators*, Employment and Career Development, Monash University

#### Context:

In this daylong co-curricula multi-disciplinary program organised by Employment and Career Development staff at Monash University, teams of students compete to provide the best solution for a challenging problem provided to them by an employer.

Around 60% of the students involved in the program are international students, most of whom come from Business and Commerce courses.

Employers range from local government, to large businesses.

Sometimes Innovators programs are run specifically for international students.

#### Aims/Purpose:

To give students the opportunity to enhance a range of employability skills including problem solving, teamwork and communication skills in a workplace environment.

To give students the opportunity to make workplace contacts.

#### Description:

The Monash Innovators Program partners groups of students with organisations. The organisation comes with a 'real' problem and works with Employment and Career Development staff at Monash University to refine the challenge. Groups of students (typically about 15, divided into two or three teams) compete to find a solution. A recent example involved a group who worked with the City of Melbourne on a responsible drinking project. Council employees, licensees and the police presented the problem and the students came up with ideas. The sessions are usually one day or two half-days (the first solving the problem and the second presenting the solution). The students may also have a preparatory session involving a 'taster' problem to solve. The organisation retains the intellectual property of the ideas, and often adopts and implements ideas and strategies presented. In applying to take part in Innovators, students need to show how they think taking part will develop their employability, and also describe the skills they presently have. A post-program workshop facilitates reflection on the experience, identification of skills developed, how to promote the experience in job applications, and ways to leverage networking opportunities.

#### Supporting material:

The Monash Innovators website can be found here:

<http://www.monash.edu.au/careers/students-grads/innovators.html>

For further information, contact Michelle Maes ([michelle.maes@monash.edu](mailto:michelle.maes@monash.edu)).



## CASE STUDY 11

### *Professional Development Program for International Students, Careers and Employment, UNSW Australia*

#### Context:

In this program, international students attend a 3-day training event on developing their employability for a general Australian workplace environment. Many of these students go on to receive an internship within the various schools and faculties within UNSW Australia.

139 students were involved in the program overall in 2013, and of these 118 were placed in internships (unpaid, structured placements).

The internship lasts a total of 50 hours.

#### Aims/Purpose:

To enhance international students' employability by focusing on their general workplace skills (i.e. communication for interaction in everyday contexts) rather than technical skills.

To develop international students ability to communicate effectively in an Australian workplace context.

#### Description:

This program begins with a 3-day training event for international students. In this, students are taught a range of general workplace skills to enhance their employability, including their English Language Proficiency. For example, the event has a focus on oral English Language Proficiency with role-play being one of the major activities provided across the three days. At the end of the seminar program, students participate in interviews to compete for available internship placements across the institution. The internships last for 50 hours, are provided in a range of faculties and departments across UNSW Australia and are determined by need and availability within the institution. In the internships students, are supervised by professional staff to provide student services, and work on projects to enrich the student experience.

#### Supporting material

For detail on the program see: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/professional-development-program-international-students>

For further information, contact Taye Morris ([t.morris@unsw.edu.au](mailto:t.morris@unsw.edu.au)).

## Annotated Bibliography

In the following, a synopsis of literature which sits at the intersection of research concerning international students, employability, and ELP is provided. Several key features are prominent, and are bolded throughout. The first of these is that Work Integrated Learning and work placements are increasingly important to international students' career prospects, and so universities should consider efforts to provide opportunities for international students to engage in WIL and work placements during their course of study. Second, international students' ELP, specifically as it relates to the workplace (that is, discipline specific ELP as well as everyday ELP in work contexts, such as communicating over the phone or in emails), is a concern held by employers and is a potential blocker to international students receiving graduate employment, as well as WIL and work placements. Finally, a lack of equity and access for international students in WIL and in work placements throughout their degree programs is of concern, in particular in Australia, in part due to negative employer perceptions.

**Arkoudis, S. (2014). *Integrating English language communication skills into disciplinary curricula: Options and strategies*. Sydney: Office of Learning and Teaching. Retrieved from [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis\\_fellowship](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis_fellowship).**

This fellowship provided options and strategies to move the Australian higher education sector forward regarding the issue of students' communication skills. Among the range of contributions provided by this fellowship was the **concept of distributed responsibilities**. This is based on the idea that while responsibility for the development of students' communication is shared by different groups involved in teaching and learning across any given higher education institution, it is not necessarily shared evenly, but is rather distributed according to the professional responsibilities of these different groups. In the fellowship suggestions were offered for institutional leaders, course coordinators, disciplinary academics, and academic language and learning advisors based on the responsibilities they have in assuring that students' develop, and graduate with, an appropriate level of communication skills.

**Arkoudis, S., & Doughney, L. (2014). *Good Practice Report: English Language Proficiency*. Sydney: Office for Learning and Teaching.**

Several recommendations for future research into and funding of ELP were provided in this Good Practice Report (4-8), along with an analysis of contemporary literature concerning ELP from both Australian and International sources (9-18). Relevantly, it was stressed throughout the report that **ELP development should be considered an issue for all students and not just international students**. Other key points were that there should be attempts to explicitly assess ELP (15), and that **capstone subjects can play an important role in assessing ELP** (17). In the report an account of OLT/ALTC projects either about or related to ELP issues was provided (19-30). Many of these include **projects that focus on international students' ELP development**.

**Arkoudis, S., Baik, C., & Richardson, S. (2012). *English language standards in higher education*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.**

In this book a comprehensive analysis of the issues surrounding English language development in the context of Australian higher education was provided. The contributions of this book include an account of the difficulties faced in the dominant model of giving ELP development largely outside of disciplinary curricula, an analysis of the importance of

English language development within students' studies, and a range of insights into how English language development could be best approached within disciplinary curricula. As with the current report, the ELP Developmental Continuum was used to guide the insights of this book. The eighth chapter of the book is particularly relevant as it concerns the role of ELP in EAL graduates' workplace readiness (131-155). In this chapter it was stressed that **employers value communication skills highly and increasingly see EAL graduates' ELP as an issue**. Issues addressed included job interviews, job performance, social interaction and cultural fit, and possible employer prejudice.

**Arkoudis, S., Hawthorne, L., Baik, C., Hawthorne, G., O'Loughlin, K., Leach, D., & Bexley, E. (2009). The impact of English language proficiency and workplace readiness on the employment outcomes of tertiary international students. Canberra: DEEWR.**

This study focused on the impact of ELP on the employability and employment outcomes of international students and graduates who seek employment in Australia after skilled migration. In the project it was identified that ELP is extremely important to the employment outcomes and employability of international students and graduates. However, it was also found that **ELP is not necessarily the only, or primary determining factor of whether or not international students find employment, or the most important determinant of how employable they are perceived**. Instead, **strong profession specific skills were identified as the primary requirement of employers**. The 'well roundedness' of graduates (i.e. their work experience and cultural fit within a workplace, among other qualities) was also identified to be a factor that was as important as ELP in employer perceptions and hiring decisions (10).

A variety of conclusions were drawn from the study. These included that ELP is considered by graduates to be an essential factor in maintaining and advancing in a job (17), that data demonstrates that ELP is a key predictor of successful employment outcomes for international students (17), and that international students, regardless of their discipline, seem to have some difficulty finding employment (18). Along with these conclusions came six recommendations for ensuring better employment outcomes for international graduates. Two relevant strategies for HEIs to take were recommendation two and three, which are:

**Recommendation 2**

That education providers develop closer links with industry and employer groups in order to assist in work placements and internships specific to the students' field of study in Australia, as well as offering advice regarding employability skills that can be embedded within for-credit curriculum teaching and assessment.

**Recommendation 3**

That universities and VET providers consider developing English language support programs, which prepare students specifically for their internship/workplace placements, including programs in developing oral and written communication skills relevant to their workplace (19).

**Connor, H., & Brown, R. (2009). Global Horizons: Recruiting international students and graduates from UK universities. London: Council for Industry and Higher Education.**

This report was designed as a resource to assist employers in the UK in hiring international graduates. The kinds of benefits that international graduates can bring to employers, as well as insights into the issues that employers face in hiring international graduates and how to overcome these, are outlined in the report. The benefits identified included greater flexibility, bringing diversity and cultural broadness to a workforce, and the capacity to tap in to new

international markets (25). Issues faced were primarily employers' understanding of legal restrictions (13-14), which the paper seeks to address by recommending that information on employment rules and regulations needs to be made accessible in one 'official online resource' (25). Other issues included ELP, but this was noted only to be considered an issue for some but not all employers (14). The report concludes with a recommendation that HEIs strive to develop international students' employability skills during their course of study, and **emphasise the importance of employability skills like ELP in finding work after graduation to international students**. Employers are suggested to have a role in this process, by collaborating with universities and providing events on campus, and by giving more opportunities for work experience for international students (26).

**Gamble, G., Patrick, C. & Peach, D. (2010). Internationalising work-integrated learning: creating global citizens to meet the economic crisis and the skills shortage. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 29(5), 535-546.**

This paper addressed the role Australian universities can play in the skill development of international students through WIL in order to satisfy the requirements of multinational businesses, who increasingly argue that there is a shortage of appropriately skilled candidates for employment. In the paper several examples of practice in WIL that cater to the needs of international students were described. These include: The Industrial Affiliates Program (IAP) at Griffith University (537-541), the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience hosted at Swinburne University (537), and the 'Real World Learning' Project at the Queensland University of Technology (541-542). It was argued in the conclusion of the paper that universities should internationalise their WIL programs and provide opportunities in them for international graduates, as WIL programs are increasingly becoming a key driver behind international students' choice of destination for higher education study (542-545).

**Gribble, C. (2014). Employment, Work Placements & Work Integrated Learning of International Students in Australia. *Research Digest 2. International Education Association of Australia*, retrieved from <http://www.ieaa.org.au/iern/research-digests>**

This report provided a broad insight into issues surrounding international students' employability in Australian higher education, including accounts of the importance of and difficulties with attaining work placements and WIL in an Australian context. In particular, it was identified that **work experience during international students' course of study is an increasingly important factor in finding employment after graduation**, both within an Australian context and overseas. The report outlined **the difficulties for international students to attain appropriate work experience from placements and WIL** during their studies, due to a range of factors including perceived difficulties with ELP (5), visa restrictions (4), and the attitudes and perceptions of employers (5-6). In light of these difficulties, and the importance of WIL and work placements to international students' career prospects, it was suggested HEIs should consider how they are going to address the provision of work placements for international students (6).

**Gribble, C. & Blackmore, J. (2012). Re-positioning Australia's international education in global knowledge economies: implications of shifts in skilled migration policies for universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(4), 341-354.**

This article provided a critical review of the Australian context over the past decade as it relates to international students in Australian higher education as well as government policies for skilled migration. In particular, it outlined the 2011 Knight Review of the student visa program which identified that to enhance the attractiveness of Australia as a destination for study for international students, the government could, amongst other things, provide post-graduation work visas to help international graduates find employment in Australia (these are now implemented, see <http://www.immi.gov.au/Visas/Pages/485.aspx>). However, in the paper it was stressed that in order for this to be effective efforts need to be made to resolve other issues for international graduates, such as addressing **negative employer perceptions of international students' employability skills, including their ELP** (347-348). To alleviate these concerns a variety of strategies for HEIs to enhance international students' employability during the course of their degree programs were outlined. These included **efforts to provide work experience for international students during their degree programs, given that experience from graduates is one of the major things sought by employers (349), and providing international students careers advice from the start of their degree programs, rather than late on in them (349)**. Pertinently, **efforts from HEIs in the curriculum to develop international students' ELP to enhance their employability** was one of the key areas identified in the discussion (350-351).

**Harrison, G., & Ip, R. (2013). Extending the Terrain of Inclusive Education in the Classroom to the Field: International Students on Placement. *Social Work Education, 32(2)*, 230-243.**

This article reviewed many of the issues faced by international students in taking on social work placements in Australia, and raised questions about how best to approach them. ELP as it relates to the workplace was identified as an issue, with the authors raising international students' 'communicative difficulties that stem from not being able to comprehend local colloquialisms, discipline specific language, acronyms, idioms and accents' as a concern (235). Adding to this, the authors also identified that **agencies are reluctant in taking on international students on placements on the basis of fears that they do not have the requisite ELP to work effectively**. Other issues identified included the difficulty international students can have in adjusting to cultural values in Australian work placements (235). Solutions posed to these issues were the possible placement of international students in agencies that cater to their needs, and most forcefully **developing international students skills, like their ELP as it relates to a workplace context, prior to placement**. At the conclusion of this report a range of considerations were provided. One of these was that effort should be expended to ensure equitable access to placements for international students, and that educators should attempt to prepare potential placement supervisors for accommodating international students in placements (239-240). The authors also stressed that it is the responsibility of universities to make serious efforts in this area, as they should ensure that all students receive equitable access to placements, and that international students, which they rely on for funding, should receive the education that they pay for.

**Higher Education Academic (HEA). (2014). International Student Lifecycle Resources bank. Retrieved from <http://wales.heacademy.ac.uk/international-student-lifecycle>.**

This resource from the UK provides a variety of information on how best to approach international students' particular learning needs in their higher education life cycle. It provides links and detail in all areas, from entry to exit, with **employability and transition into employment** being one of the categories.

**International Education Association Australia (2013). Five years on: English language competence of international students - Outcomes Report. Retrieved from <http://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/54>.**

This report contained three background discussion papers that were provided for the symposium *Five Years On: English Language Competence of International Students* held in February 2013, as well as an overview of the issues discussed in and outcomes of the symposium. The outcomes of the symposium included several priority areas for suggested research, as well as suggested institutional priorities for English language development (16-19). Of particular relevance here was the suggestion that there be further “[r]esearch into the role English language proficiency plays in access to and success in Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experiences and the transition to work” (19).

In the first of the three discussion papers in the report by Arkoudis and O’Loughlin (2013, 23-51), an in-depth analysis of issues surrounding international student entry pathways to Australian higher education was provided. Issues discussed included the lack of comparability in the preparedness to study that different entry pathways provide to international students (32), and the difficulty in predicting whether or not international students will be successful in their studies based on their results in entry pathway English language tests like IELTS (33).

The second paper by Dunworth (2013, 52-74) provided an analysis of in-course English language development for students in Australian higher education. A range of examples aimed at developing students’ ELP was discussed including: English language embedding activities within the disciplines and particular courses (58-60), online English language tools and resources (62), credit bearing ELP development units (62), peer to peer programs (62), and PELAs (64-65). The deficit model used by ALL advisors was also discussed in this paper, where a range of literature that questions the efficacy of extra curricula workshops and one-on-one consultations was identified (61). Several key points were argued in the discussion section of the paper, including the need for (i) **further discussion on how to situate English language development as central to teaching and learning** and (ii) professional development for disciplinary academics to approach the English language development of their students, perhaps by ALL advisors (66).

The final paper by Humphreys and Gribble (2013, 75-103) focused on international students’ English language development at exit, and on their transition to future work and study. In particular the paper addressed the impact that ELP has on students’ opportunities for further study and employment. The view that employers expectations of students’ ELP are not being met, and the possibility of an ELP standard for students at graduation, were discussed in the report (81). Exit testing for ELP at the end of students’ degree programs was raised as a possibility, with the various points for and against this idea laid out (85-86). Pertinently, an analysis of the **benefits of WIL to students’ employment outcomes, and of the difficulty that international students often have in attaining adequate access to WIL**, was provided in the paper (92). It was suggested that **universities should do more to provide opportunities to international students opportunities for WIL within their courses, and to provide them with extra preparation for work placements** (94). Developing students’ employability throughout degree programs was also recommended as a method that institutions across the sector should take seriously.

**Murray, D., Blackmore, J., Gribble, C., & Hall, R. (2012). Internships and work placement opportunities for international students in Victoria. Melbourne: International Education Association of Australia.**

This report concerned what can be done in Victoria to positively effect international students’ move from study to employment, with a particular focus on how studying and working in Victoria could enhance their employability (4). As with other literature, **negative employer attitudes towards international students, in particular as they concern their ELP**, were

raised as an issue (23). Possible options for the Victorian government and for education institutions to take were also provided in the report. Most relevant of these were that the government could:

Consider making a public case to Victorian employers and to the Victorian community about the value of using international students in work experience settings, in the interests of Victorian business and long-term international connections (6).

In terms of those recommendations aimed at Victorian education institutions, the following recommendation was prominent:

[Education institutions could help] bridge the gap between international students' employability skills and employer expectations, within the curriculum, and by assisting international students to prepare work oriented portfolios (6).

Issues concerning international students' ELP were raised in the report. These included that WIL can help international students develop the kind of ELP they need to 'fit' into the Australian workplace environment (12), and that institutions should offer opportunities for international students to develop their ELP within the curriculum as this can help them in a marketing capacity (12).

**Murray, D., Hall, R., Leask, B., Marginson, S., & Ziguras, C. (2011). State of current research in international education. Background paper prepared for AEI supported International Education Research-Policy Symposium. Melbourne, The LH Martin Institute.**

This paper provided a broad analysis of issues pertaining to international education. In the document, it was suggested that international students' choice of courses is often determined by perceptions of employability (4). It was argued that enhancing the international student experience, and developing measures to improve their employability, is essential to the ongoing competitiveness of the sector in the international student market (7). It was also suggested that **HEIs need to take the development of ELP – in particular ELP for a workplace context – more seriously** (10).

**Nash, R. (2011). Promoting resilience and effective workplace functioning in international students in health courses, Final Report. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.**

This report outlined a project in which the objective was to improve the learning experiences of international students in the disciplines of nursing, public health and nutrition, and dietetics. The focus of the project was on their learning experiences in an everyday university teaching and learning environment, and a clinical WIL setting. Relevantly, **discipline specific issues surrounding international students' ELP as it relates to the workplace were raised in the report, which include that international students are often unaware of the types of abbreviations and colloquialisms used in 'medical English'** (12). One outcome of the project was the development of the Resilience and International Student Education (RISE) model, which provided a range of resources to improve the learning experiences of international students. In the conclusion of the report it was stressed that HEIs need to develop effective models (like RISE) to help international students learn in both university and clinical environments. It was also argued that strategies and resources are required to help international students and the staff who supervise them in clinical contexts be aware of potential issues and overcome them. It was suggested that this had the capacity to overcome perceptions about international students not being prepared to work within a clinical context.

**Orrell, J. (2011). Good Practice Report: Work-Integrated Learning. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.**

This good practice report provided a literature review of issues surrounding Work Integrated Learning (WIL). It contained several recommendations for future research and efforts in the area, as well as ten good practice principles for the implementation of WIL programs at HEIs. The report also gave a synopsis of relevant ALTC projects and fellowships that relate to WIL. Pertinently, there are several points in the report that concern international students and WIL.

To begin, one of the recommendations from the report concerned **equity and access for certain groups of students to WIL, including international students**. In this recommendation, it was suggested that consideration should be given to **the impact of WIL on international students' career prospects**, as well as the opportunities that international students have to access WIL during the course of their degrees (16-17). This recommendation was supplemented by one of the ten good practice principles for implementing WIL programs, which is that 'all students have equal access to full participation in a WIL experience where a degree program offers such experiences' (20). Another of the good practice principles concerns international students directly. This was that 'international students receive support to understand and adapt to Australian socio-cultural workplace environments, and their personal cultural background and prior knowledge are recognised as valued attributes'. The idea that international students' own experiences have value to bring to WIL was stressed in other places in the report. In particular the report was critical that little existing literature concerning WIL identifies and supports the positive contributions that international students can add to WIL programs through their cross-cultural knowledge (12).

**Pegg, A., Waldcock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S., & Lawton, R. (2012). Pedagogy for employability. York: The Higher Education Academy.**

This resource from the UK provided a comprehensive account of different pedagogical techniques for enhancing students' employability and discussed a range of topics that are of interest when considering the concept of employability. Issues that were addressed include how employability can be defined (4-5), the way employability has been perceived and approached in the UK higher education sector (6-9), models for developing student employability (21-29), and how employability can and should be approached in the curriculum (30-44). Thirteen case studies, which focus on examples of practice in enhancing student employability, were also developed for the guide. These range in their content. Some focus on developing student employability through assessment (34), others describe work placements (36), and others describe capstone experiences which focus on preparing students for the workplace (40-41).

**Tymon, A. (2013). The student perspective on employability. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(6), 841-856.**

Through a study of students' views in the UK, this paper attempted to determine what students' conception of employability is like, what their perceptions are of efforts to develop their employability in higher education, and how much they believe employability matters. Students were found to have a view of employability that is far narrower in scope than employers do, and for it to concern a group of skills that have a short term application to serve in the initial acquisition of employment, rather than a skillset that is integral to their ongoing career prospects (852). However, the skills comprising employability as conceived by students had some similarities with those of employers, with students most commonly selecting communication skills and teamwork skills as central to employability. Within the paper an international analysis of employer and government views on the types of skills that comprise graduates' employability was also provided. It is identified that **across countries, communication skills are considered to be essential to students' employability** (844).



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