

# An employer guide to work activities for students

AUGUST 2021



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This guide covers:

## Benefits

- Connects you with graduates with relevant work experience
- Injects new thinking and ideas
- Builds a talent pipeline
- Assists with short-term projects
- Boosts employee mentoring skills
- Improves work culture
- Builds connections with universities

## Types of involvement

- Assigning projects to students
- Providing student placements
- Offering your company as a case study assignment
- Hosting student field visits
- Participating in university classes
- Assisting to design university assessments to shape students' learning

## Getting started

- Use our university contact points
- Discuss with the contacts:
  - Your available projects/roles
  - Your company expectations
  - Support provided to students
  - Mutual rights and responsibilities
  - Learning outcomes
  - Timing to suit your schedules

## Legal requirements

- Students must be paid if an employment relationship exists
- Vocational placements that meet FWO criteria are lawfully unpaid
- Universities commonly provide insurance for students undertaking vocational placements
- Rights and responsibilities agreement

## Tips for successful student involvements

- Provide an introduction to your company
- Establish expectations
- Nominate an employee with strong people skills as a mentor
- Ensure student feels welcome and a part of the company
- Provide meaningful learning
- Provide as much industry exposure as possible
- Give regular feedback and support

## Examples

- It helps to see what other companies are doing. Our brief stories provide information regarding:
  - How the company got involved
  - How they managed the student
  - How the company benefitted
  - How work readiness improved
  - Talent pipeline growth
  - How meaningful projects were given to the student

# Benefits for your business

Employers have been reporting that higher education graduates are not work-ready – that they are often lacking fundamental employability skills. Employers surveyed by Ai Group in 2018 expressed their highest levels of dissatisfaction for recruited graduates in the areas of self-management, planning and organising; literacy and numeracy; teamwork and communication; and knowledge of chosen career.

Exposing students to workplace experiences does not only give them an opportunity to practice what they have learnt and build some new skills, but will also improve their employability upon the completion of their studies.

Whilst students are on the receiving end of new skills and techniques, companies significantly benefit from engaging with them as part of their studies such as:

- receiving an injection of new thinking and fresh ideas from technologically savvy students
- assistance with projects that otherwise would not be possible
- developing connections with universities for research and development
- boosting the mentoring skills for your existing employees
- improving employee engagement and workplace culture through enthusiastic students
- connecting with Masters students and PhD candidates to scope research projects
- improving your corporate image by giving back to the university and industry sector
- connecting with students who graduate better prepared for work
- trialling a potential recruit at your company
- building a skilled talent pipeline
- supporting the development of a multi-generational culture in your organisation
- developing a global understanding of business etiquette, communication styles, cultural differences and intelligence about overseas markets if engaging with international students.
- presenting your company to other industry leaders and competitors as an example of best practice

## Types of involvement

Even a small involvement can greatly assist your company. Students begin to become more employable and grounded in workplace practices, cultures and systems from any level of industry exposure. There are numerous ways to connect with students, and your involvement can range from small to large. Examples include:

- assigning projects/activities to students, e.g.: conducting research; analysing data & trends; report writing
- placement of a student in a new or established role
- offering your company as part of a case study assignment
- arranging a student to shadow you or your employees in the workplace
- hosting field visits for students in your workplace
- being a guest at a university class to discuss a typical day at your business
- having input into the type of learning students undertake by assisting to design or deliver curriculum or assessments that are relevant to industry
- engaging a multi-disciplinary team of students to solve a problem for the company
- engaging research candidates to assist in scoping and conducting research projects.

The students' benefits are maximised when their university integrates the authentic work activities into the learning in their course, thereby creating opportunities for them to understand how it links and to explore what meanings it is making for them. Universities term this Work Integrated Learning (WIL), combining theory with practical learning experiences in workplace environments.

## Innovative models of work integrated learning

The Australian Technology Network (ATN) Project, in partnership with Australian Industry Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce, has investigated innovative ways of engaging students from tertiary institutions for placements or projects particularly for small to medium enterprises and community partners. The project identified five innovative models, including:

<b>Micro-placements</b>	Typically involve short periods in the workplace ranging from two to ten days
<b>Online Projects or Placements</b>	Involve students and industry working online
<b>Hackathons/Competitions and Events</b>	Events typically involve students working in teams on one-off intensive activities for and/or with industry partners or with university-based activities
<b>Incubators/start-ups</b>	WIL students are undertaking placements or projects in or for start-up businesses or in incubators
<b>Consulting</b>	Students providing consultancy services and information to others, including other students, industry partners and community organisations

Additional resources to support successful engagement with innovative models are available for download, including *Maximising the Benefits of Innovative Engagement with Uni students: A Guide for Industry and Community* accessible via:

<https://acen.edu.au/innovative-models/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WIL-Industry-and-Community-Guide.pdf>



APC Technology with work-integrated learning students in South Australia (Image: Simon Casson)

## Do you need to pay if you are placing a student in the company?

Depending on the engagement, the activities may require payment if there is deemed to be an employment relationship. You should be aware of the relevant Fair Work regulations, and the student must be paid if an employment relationship exists as follows:

- the student undertakes work beyond that required by the university (e.g.: filling in for a sick employee)
- the placement exceeds the duration of time required by the university
- the work undertaken by the student is integral to the running of the company
- the focus of the arrangement is on productive work rather than meaningful learning for the student
- the company is predominantly benefiting; in a lawfully unpaid arrangement, the main benefit should go to the student.

If the arrangement is considered to be an employment relationship, the student must be paid the minimum entitlements and there must be an employment agreement.



The student can be unpaid as part of an approved and recognised curriculum activity (i.e.: work integrated learning). The only current exemption from payment is if the activity is a requirement of an education or training course. If your involvement includes a vocational placement, it is lawfully unpaid only if it meets all of the following criteria:

- there must be a placement; this can be arranged by a university or a student directly
- the placement must be undertaken as a requirement of a student's course or training
- the placement must be approved by the educational institution.

For further information please refer to the Fair Work Ombudsman's student placement and unpaid work factsheets:

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/student-placements>

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/unpaid-work-unpaid-work>

The Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) has resources for employers available on its website, accessible at <https://acen.edu.au/>

## Is the student covered by insurance?

If the student activity is a lawfully unpaid vocational placement, students are not considered to be employees and do not need to be covered by your insurance policy. Universities provide insurance for unpaid student placements that are a requirement of their course. The development of an agreement that outlines roles and responsibilities should include legal requirements. This is something the university will discuss with you prior to your involvement with the student.

Students attending your workplace for tours or other activities are covered by your public liability insurance.

## Tips on supervising and mentoring students

Students may not be familiar with the workplace so will require guidance, support and feedback on their performance. The better connected students are within your workplace, the more benefits your company can gain. Here are some tips to ensure students are as productive as possible:

- give students an induction to your company including your mission, history, values, challenges, WHS
- procedures, facilities, protocols and local norms
- go through the agreement that outlines learning objectives with the student and their rights and responsibilities
- brief students on your expectations, the types of tasks/projects they will undertake and the team(s)
- with which they will work
- where relevant clarify intellectual property guidelines
- assign an experienced employee as a mentor/supervisor whom the student can approach for advice
- assign a buddy who can be responsible to integrate the student faster into the culture and activities of the organisation
- ensure that the student is made to feel welcome and part of the company (e.g.: inclusion in social activities)
- provide as much industry exposure as possible (e.g.: meetings with clients, presentations, industry expositions)
- regularly check on their progress and provide honest feedback and support. In particular, discuss the development of the student's employability skills that are important for your company (e.g.: initiative, teamwork, communication, problem solving)
- provide training and support to mentors assigned to students.

# Examples of student/employer connections

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## Redarc



Redarc designs and manufactures a range of electronic voltage converters and associated products. It has taken students on placements for several years now. The placements are generally full-time and are of either twelve or twenty week's duration depending on the course requirements. Once they start a placement, all students are allocated a buddy to help them through day-to-day queries and ensure they feel a valued part of the team. The students spend time in different areas of the business over a two - four week induction period. Following this, the students work on assigned projects that align with their skill set, course requirements and business needs. They are given a detailed project brief and receive regular support from their team leader.

A HR staff member coordinates a pool of potential projects, and uses this to match students with projects available.

Placements with Redarc are highly sought after so accepted students value the experience they are offered. Because of this Redarc has found the students to be willing learners who are always keen to impress and make an impact in their short tenure. The dedication of students to their assigned projects has led to many improvements in the company over the years. Furthermore, Redarc has retained high-quality talent by employing previous students as permanent employees and plans to continue doing so as vacancies arise. Among these employees are Engineers Australia Medallists as well as High Achiever Recipients.

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## Barker Trailers



Barker Trailers manufactures semi-trailers from two plants in Victoria. They are an industry host partner of the Swinburne Industry Based Learning (IBL) program. Students need to have completed two to three years of their degree before they are eligible to be placed with a company full-time for a duration of either six or twelve months.

Barker Trailers is currently hosting their second mechanical engineering student. The student serves as an extra resource, undertaking tasks that vary from basic drafting to complex designs. Engineering Manager, Kevin Hooper finds the students adjust very quickly and become a real asset. The company is always looking to upskill the engineering department, and the IBL program presents a great opportunity to do so. At the end of the twelve month program it has access to a qualified engineer with proven experience, who knows the company and brings along the latest industry knowledge learned at university.

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## The ANCA Group



Another industry host partner of the Swinburne IBL is The ANCA Group, a company specialising in the design and manufacture of machine tools, motion control systems, waterjet cutters and metal fabrication. The ANCA Group liaises with the university to select students with relevant skills.

Introducing young and eager talent has been a refreshing addition to the company. The students often talk about the skills and latest knowledge they have learned at university, teaching The ANCA Group new and improved processes. Keeping staffing models as lean as possible is important to the company, often making the allocation of projects a difficult task. Having a student available to take on a project is a welcome relief and alleviates the pressure on existing employees. Finally, the company uses the IBL program as a screening process for potential employees. It currently has a number of former students holding senior positions and values the opportunity to scout for potential employees with a genuine passion and talent for engineering.

### **Tours**

The ANCA Group has also hosted workplace tours from RMIT University. The students that visit are 2nd and 3rd year engineering students who have never been exposed to a manufacturing environment. Visiting the workplace provides these students with valuable insight into the industry and the roles undertaken by employees, increasing their work-readiness.

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## **Siemens**



Work-based placements form an important part of Siemens' talent acquisition, learning and development as well as employee engagement strategy at Siemens. Siemens believes it does not only contribute to society by taking time and making space for work integrated learning students but that it hugely benefits from the skills, new ways of thinking and enthusiasm to make progress that students bring to the organisation. Siemens does not have a 'one-size-fits all businesses in Siemens' approach and so offers student placements that are short term, project based, internships or permanent graduate programs.

*"Having personally worked with most of the students we host in Siemens Australia, I have been pleasantly impressed by the value they can add to our teams, our work and our culture and I encourage any employer to reach out and just try it once."*

Nicolette Barnard, Regional HR Speaker - ASEAN-Pacific/Head of HR Pacific.

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## **QMI Solutions**



QMI Solutions is an organisation that works with Australian businesses to improve their competitiveness. They had advertised a Data Analysis position for a significant period of time without finding any suitably qualified or experienced applicants.

As an alternative to this, the company took on an economics student from the Queensland University of Technology for their vocational placement. The university offers placement programs of differing lengths and frequency to suit employers. QMI Solutions opted to take on the student one day per week for twelve weeks which best suited their capacity. The placement began during the quiet time in January to minimise the impact on the organisation and met the needs of the organisation.



## Katanning Landcare

Katanning Landcare's core business is to regenerate degraded land. Operating as a small not-for-profit regional organisation, it runs a volunteer management program through grant funding to implement a variety of ongoing projects.

An opportunity arose for a student to assist in these projects, working across Eco Week events, tree orders, business development through media and communications channels and overseeing the completion of grant funding applications. The student was supported by the District Landcare Manager who has significant project management experience.

Over the course of a 100-hour unpaid vocational placement, the final year University of WA Bachelor of Commerce student majoring in Marketing, Communications and Media was able to apply concepts from her education to real-world situations in an organisation with limited resources. Given the regional location, the organisation reimbursed the student for the cost of regional travel and arranged local farm stay accommodation and provided some meals for the student over a two-week block in the mid-semester break. The arrangement was supported by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's Work Integrated Learning advisory service. Katanning Landcare said the key to the successful placement was starting with a clear plan of what could be achieved. Katanning reviewed the plan with the student and honestly discussed their strengths and weaknesses as well as their schedule.

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## Monash Industry Teams Initiative with NAB and VicRoads

As an industry partner of the Monash Industry Teams Initiative, NAB became involved with this program that connects multidisciplinary teams with industry partners for twelve weeks. During this time students collaborate to design innovative solutions to real-life issues facing companies. A student team at NAB worked to deliver a data-driven tool that enabled the planning team to make better decisions about the network. This project created a prototype that could be used to address the issue of how best to optimise the entire network and make data-driven decisions- one of the main problems faced by the NAB planning team. Following their submittal, NAB requested that the team produce similar tools for other application areas.

*"I think the quality of the students was outstanding. The exposure to new skills, new methodologies, new ways of thinking completely exceeded our expectations"*

Con Nidras, Head of Customer Analytics, Relationship Marketing (Consumer), NAB.

Another team of students from the Monash Industry Teams Initiative worked to review the engagement approach VicRoads used to connect with research organisations such as universities, commercial and government organisations. Their submittal included a range of creative solutions to existing issues with VicRoad's research program. An alternative process was recommended that optimised relationships with these research organisations, delivering long term value for VicRoads.

## PACE Program - Guest Company Lectures

These lectures are one initiative of Macquarie University's Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) program, an active learning program that embeds real world activities into degrees. Over six weeks, representatives from various companies delivered guest lectures on current issues facing the accounting industry. At the end of the program students worked on innovative solutions for these issues and presented their results to industry representatives.

*"I was really amazed at the variety and polish of the presentations that I had the opportunity to judge."*

Kamlee Coorey, Deloitte

Another PACE Program student spent 13 weeks assisting with event management at Accessible Arts, an arts and disabilities organisation in New South Wales. The student became an extra set of hands for the organisation, helping to organise volunteers, photographers, venues, health forms, first aid and ticketing. CEO Sancha Donald was so impressed by the student's enthusiasm and the value she brought to the organisation that a paid position was offered.

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For further case studies on university-industry activities please visit: <https://acen.edu.au/case-studies-2020/>

# Where do you start?

For your company to benefit from these student/employer connections, a good start is to get in touch with the relevant contact from your local university. Many universities now have dedicated staff who link with industry, focusing on work integrated learning opportunities and student placement programs. It will help if you are ready to discuss:

- the specific projects/roles a student can undertake
- the requirements and expectations of your company during your involvement with the student/s
- the support and mentoring to be provided to students
- the learning outcomes for the student and how they can be linked into their course
- a timeline for the activity to occur.

Your university contact should maintain contact and provide support throughout your involvement.

The Australian Collaborative Education Network has compiled a list of Work Integrated Learning Coordinators and relevant contacts at each of the higher education providers in each Australian state and territory. This list can be accessed via this link: <https://acen.edu.au/wil-contacts-in-universities/>. Please note that this list is subject to change and contacts may periodically change.

For further information, please refer to the following Australian Collaborative Education Network resources:

## **Industry Guide – make the most of WIL**

Includes an industry guide, key terms and definitions, and checklist for work integrated learning

<https://acen.edu.au/resources/industry-guide-make-the-most-of-wil/>

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## **Innovative Working Integrated Learning Models**

This Australian Technology Network (ATN) Project in partnership with Australian Industry Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce has investigated innovative ways of engaging students from tertiary institutions for placements or projects particularly for small to medium enterprises and community partners.

<https://acen.edu.au/innovative-models/>

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## **Guide to legal agreements for domestic placements**

A guide to preparing agreements between universities and host companies to support student learning through work integrated learning placements in Australia.

<https://acen.edu.au/resources/guide-to-legal-agreements-for-domestic-placements/>

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## **Workplace Learning: Get Engaged**

Get Engaged is an online resource for supervisors of university students in industry placements. Its purpose is to help you make the most of your effort in student supervision through building effective engagement strategies with universities and students.

<https://acen.edu.au/workplace-learning-get-engaged/>

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### **Guides for Online WIL Placements and Projects**

A guide intended for industry and community partners, not-for-profit organisations and government bodies who are considering offering placements or projects in an online (virtual, digital, remote, tele-) work environment.

<https://acen.edu.au/resources/guide-for-online-wil-placements-and-projects/>

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