

## Career Development Learning and Work-integrated Learning Practices in Australian Universities

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This paper is an overview of the field of career development learning practice in relation to graduate attributes and work-integrated learning within the Australian higher education sector. The presentation highlights research conducted by the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) on behalf of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). The research project explored the contribution of career development learning to work-integrated learning in Australian universities. This project has significant implications for career development practice within the higher education sector, particularly in relation to the preparation of graduates for the workforce. The project entailed extensive national surveys, interviews, and focus groups, involving career development practitioners, academics, and employers, along with a national symposium “think tank” in which key stakeholders contributed to the development of models for career development learning being used a pedagogical framework for work-integrated learning. The key results of the research project are presented along with recommendations for future practices.

Work-integrated learning refers to learning which is embedded in the experience of work. Learning may occur whether the work is paid or unpaid; or full-time or part-time; or formally endorsed as part of a university course; or extra-curricular and complementary of studies; or totally independent of studies; in the past, present, or future. Work is made meaningful for a student when it is engaged with, or reflected upon, in terms of personal development and career development learning.

Acting on behalf of NAGCAS, and with the support of the majority of the Career Services of the twenty-seven other universities across Australia, the project team (authors) conducted a significant national study of career development learning applied to work-integrated learning in higher education. The project’s significance is surpassed only by the major national review of career development in Australia conducted by the OECD (2002) and the DEEWR (2008) review of career development services in Australia’s tertiary education sector.

### Methodology

The project was conducted over a period of approximately 18 months, commencing in October 2007. The project took an applied research and development approach with an emphasis upon action research methods through which knowledge and solutions would be generated by and for the key stakeholders.

Stakeholders for this project were university staff who provided career development services and/or work-integrated learning (e.g., career development practitioners, placement coordinators, lecturers); organisations that provide paid or unpaid work-integrated learning opportunities (e.g., supervisors, employers, mentors); professional associations which influence degree program

requirements pertaining to industry experience; and university students.

The research process included preliminary focus group studies involving career development practitioners. Online questionnaires were subsequently administered to distinct stakeholder groups to gather their appraisals of their work-integrated learning programs and their links to career development learning; career services personnel; university academics involved with work integrated learning programs within their academic program; industry employers or community providers of placements; and a worldwide questionnaire to gather information about work integrated learning and career development practices outside of Australia.

A core of the project’s research process and outcomes was the *National Symposium on Career Development Learning and Work-integrated Learning*, held in Melbourne, June 2008. The National Symposium brought 168 stakeholders together to conduct concentrated discussions around crucial themes. The symposium was followed by the *Student and Employer Forum* in which over 60 participants refined the outcomes of the symposium.

Having gleaned a significant body of data from the literature review, questionnaires, and focus groups, a series of case study analyses of exemplary programs were conducted.

### Results

A set of principles for the conceptualisation and delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning were derived from the action research process: (a) flexible partnerships support effective career development learning; (b) workplace experiences can provide genuine career development learning opportunities for all students; and multiple experiences and contexts enrich this

learning; (c) career development learning is student-centred, and designed to engage actively students in the workplace experience; (d) career development learning supports quality student-centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students' lives; (e) universities encourage students' career development and workplace learning by supporting their capacity to systematically reflect, record, and articulate the acquired skills and experience; and (f) .quality assurance across the experience contributes to better outcomes.

The research process also validated the DOTS framework (Watts, 2006) which conceptualises career development learning as four key elements: self-awareness, opportunity awareness, transition learning, and decision making.

To complement and extend upon the principles of practice, graphical models were developed to assist the conceptualisation of career development learning as a pedagogical framework for reflective practice and work-integrated learning. The model depicts the career development and work integrated learning relationship, and it can be applied in the curriculum in Australian university programs as a learning resource.

A draft language/terminology matrix was developed to capture the meaning of the key elements of the career development learning framework DOTS. This serves as a basis for the future development of nationally agreed or understood terminology.

An online resource manual was developed for staff working in universities, business and industry who facilitate work-integrated learning experiences. The manual provides resources to support student learning and teaching activities (e.g., readings, templates for learning agreements, assessment, case studies). The manual is to be located within the NAGCAS website at [www.nagcas.org.au](http://www.nagcas.org.au).

The preliminary foundations for a framework for a quality system of career development learning and work-integrated has been drafted and presented in this report. The framework is informed by the standards set down by the Career Industry Council of Australia.

### Recommendations

As it is valuable to provide a wide spectrum of workplace experiences to facilitate student involvement, curriculum development, learning tools and resources need to be addressed to ensure wider access to career development learning and work-integrated learning across the sector. This approach will require increased support for career development learning within the curriculum—made possible through curriculum renewal processes, where career development staff are resourced appropriately to provide input to the educational reform processes.

The research process identified the value of providing a wide spectrum of workplace

experiences to facilitate student involvement. Opportunities need to be created to embed career development learning and structured work-integrated learning models. The scope of service learning, and many extra-curricular activities, has to be fully optimised and exploited for student learning. Students' engagement in paid work roles, such as casual and part time work, also needs to be fully addressed in terms of its capacity to broaden students' learning opportunities. Including extra-curricular and paid employment will provide a richer source of experiences for transformational learning through reflection and articulation, and for incorporation into future academic, career and life planning. To facilitate this wider spread of activity and improve student access, consideration needs to be given to strategies to monitor and validate student involvement, such as informal transcripts, or the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement.

If workplaces are to obtain the best outcomes from work-integrated learning, then career development support needs to be explicit and articulated in the workplace for students and employees.

To foster improved inclusion and participation rates, resources need to be identified which are pinned to diversity practices which facilitate appropriately designed and embedded career development learning in curricula and increased opportunities for placements.

To enhance further developments and program innovations and development of widespread good practice, funding and recognition of programs are required to foster stronger collaboration and sharing processes. An associated issue is the pressing need to provide professional development to university staff in the disciplinary fields of career development learning and work-integrated learning.

There is a need to expand resource allocation to the sector to support career development learning, employability enhancement and workplace learning initiatives.

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