

ACEN Response to the Draft National Strategy for International Education

ACEN Overview

Established in 2006, ACEN, the Australian peak body for work integrated learning (WIL) in Australia, is internationally recognised as a leader in WIL practice, curriculum, research and scholarship. The ACEN President represents Australia on the Board of the World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) - the only international professional organization dedicated to developing, expanding, branding and advocating for cooperative & work-integrated education programs within industry and educational institutions.

The ACEN vision is based on intentional collaboration with stakeholders including higher education sector staff and students, industry partners, community and government representatives.

The objectives of ACEN are to:

- promote and enhance WIL throughout Australia and the Asia Pacific Region
- facilitate the development and sharing of knowledge and practice in WIL for the improvement of the student experience
- enhance partner/industry involvement with the higher and vocational education sectors for the provision of WIL opportunities
- foster and facilitate research and scholarship initiatives in WIL

ACEN welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft National Strategy for International Education.

Feedback

The ACEN Board broadly endorses the draft strategy and the inclusion of work integrated learning and the key role it plays in achieving positive student experience and quality graduate outcomes for students, employers and the economy of Australia. The National WIL Strategy <http://cdn1.acen.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/National-WIL-Strategy-in-university-education-032015.pdf> developed by ACEN in partnership with Universities Australia, Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry group and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry provides not only a comprehensive set of key actions required to enhance WIL generally in Australia, but also the additional actions required to address specific issues facing international students. The National WIL strategy provides the Federal Government with a unique opportunity to capitalise on this emerging collaboration between Universities and Industry groups.

The ACEN Board would like to make the following specific comments in relation to the Strategy:

- The terms 'work experience' and 'work integrated learning' are used interchangeably in the document, which is confusing: these are two separate and distinct areas. Work integrated learning is necessarily connected to academic credit and learning outcomes: work experience is not. Each area and its associated issues need to be dealt with separately for clarity
- WIL, the nationally accepted term for credit based experience that is intentionally linked to a student's course of study, is not given enough prominence in this strategy. Issues relating to international students failing to gain equitable access to WIL has been well documented since 2008 (Patrick et al 2008). ACEN

would urge the federal Government to use this opportunity to highlight the importance of this, and address the issues involved

- The inclusion of an additional Strategic Action against Goal 5 is suggested :
 - Enhance access to work integrated learning opportunities
- The Strategy's Measures of Success currently relate to employment after graduation but do not address equal participation in, and access to, work integrated learning for international students during their studies. In order to not only reinforce the critical link between WIL and graduate employment, but also to address the international students' dissatisfaction regarding their involvement in WIL, ACEN suggests the following additional measure
 - *Increased level of engagement in WIL by international students*
- In recognition of the key role of employers in providing WIL opportunities ACEN also suggests an amendment to the measure :
 - *More collaboration between private firms and universities for research and development to **More collaboration between private firms and universities for research , development and work integrated learning***
- Key areas relating to international education addressed in the National WIL Strategy that need to be highlighted for international students in the International Education strategy include :
 - Strategies to overcome barriers and preconceptions employers may have to hosting international students for WIL
 - Strategies to increase awareness by employers of the benefits of international students undertaking WIL with their organisations including possible incentives
 - Provision of clear information about visas, post study work rights for international students and students undertaking WIL from other countries
 - Guidelines for third party providers
 - Support for better preparation of international students to undertake WIL

ACEN strongly urges the Federal Government to consider the importance of WIL as distinct and separate to work experience, and as fundamental to the success and employment outcomes of students. The issues relating to WIL, especially for international students, should link directly to the National Strategy on WIL in University Education

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