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learning abroad

in Australian universities



IEAA

International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) is Australia's leading association for international education. We strive to empower professionals, engage institutions and enhance Australia's reputation as a provider of world-class education. We provide advocacy; deliver high-quality professional learning; and drive new research to highlight emerging trends, inform strategy and policy, and enrich the sector's knowledge.

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Foreword

Learning abroad has become an essential and vibrant feature of modern Australian education; one that transforms our students and positively impacts their families and communities as well as Australian institutions.

As this White Paper states, global research now confirms learning abroad as one of the most important experiences an undergraduate student can undertake. Learning abroad not only fosters globally engaged citizens and leaders, but also connects young Australians to global democracy and foreign policy initiatives. Learning abroad also positively impacts students' experience of, and engagement with, higher education and improves their employability and graduate outcomes.

Of particular note is the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan, which was introduced in 2014 and has transformed learning abroad opportunities for Australian students in the Indo-Pacific region. By 2019, nearly half (49%) of all learning abroad experiences undertaken by Australian undergraduate students were in this geo-strategic region. The growth of the Indo-Pacific as a learning abroad destination has almost entirely been driven by New Colombo Plan funding ensuring that a generation of Australian students live and learn in this important region and mobilising an alumni community that currently numbers 70,000+.

The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) and the Australian Universities International Directors' Forum (AUIDF) have always been proud advocates of learning abroad programs and their positive impact on young Australians. We must now intensify our advocacy efforts to ensure that participation in learning abroad programs by our young people returns to, and exceeds, pre-COVID-19 levels.



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Introduction

The expansion of higher education learning abroad programs is one of the great success stories of international education in Australia. This White Paper pinpoints why learning abroad matters to Australian students, to Australian communities and to Australian institutions.

Learning abroad, or global mobility, programs have developed well beyond semester-long reciprocal exchange programs to embrace credit-bearing and extra-curricular short-term experiences; faculty-led and centrally-designed global study tours; global health placements; global studios and research experiences; as well as global internships and work placements.

Australian university educators and learning abroad teams have changed institutional culture to embrace international education opportunities for all students. Much effort has been undertaken by practitioners and academics alike to research and validate the impact, value and outcomes of these experiences.

As a result, and over the past decade in particular, national participation in learning abroad has grown from 15,058 students

in 2009 to 58,000+ in 2019, or 19% of the graduating cohort at all study levels¹. No longer anecdotal, global research now firmly establishes learning abroad as one of the most important experiences a student can access during their undergraduate years; it improves their learning outcomes and future opportunities. Australian students have voted with their feet; in 2019, one in four Australian undergraduate students completed a learning abroad experience during their degree, with around 25% participating in more than one program².

Global research now firmly establishes learning abroad as one of the most important experiences a student can access during their undergraduate years.

¹ Australian outbound mobility data kindly provided by [Australian Universities International Directors' Forum](#) (AUIDF).

² D Potts, [Career outcomes of learning abroad: National report](#), International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), 2020.

This growth has been supported through smart policy settings and financial support such as the former University Mobility in the Asia Pacific (UMAP), International Student Exchange Program (ISEP) and the Endeavour Awards, and now through OS-HELP and the New Colombo Plan. In particular, the introduction of OS-HELP, a deferred loan program to support overseas study³, was a true 'step change' that enabled many more Australian undergraduate students to access learning abroad programs.

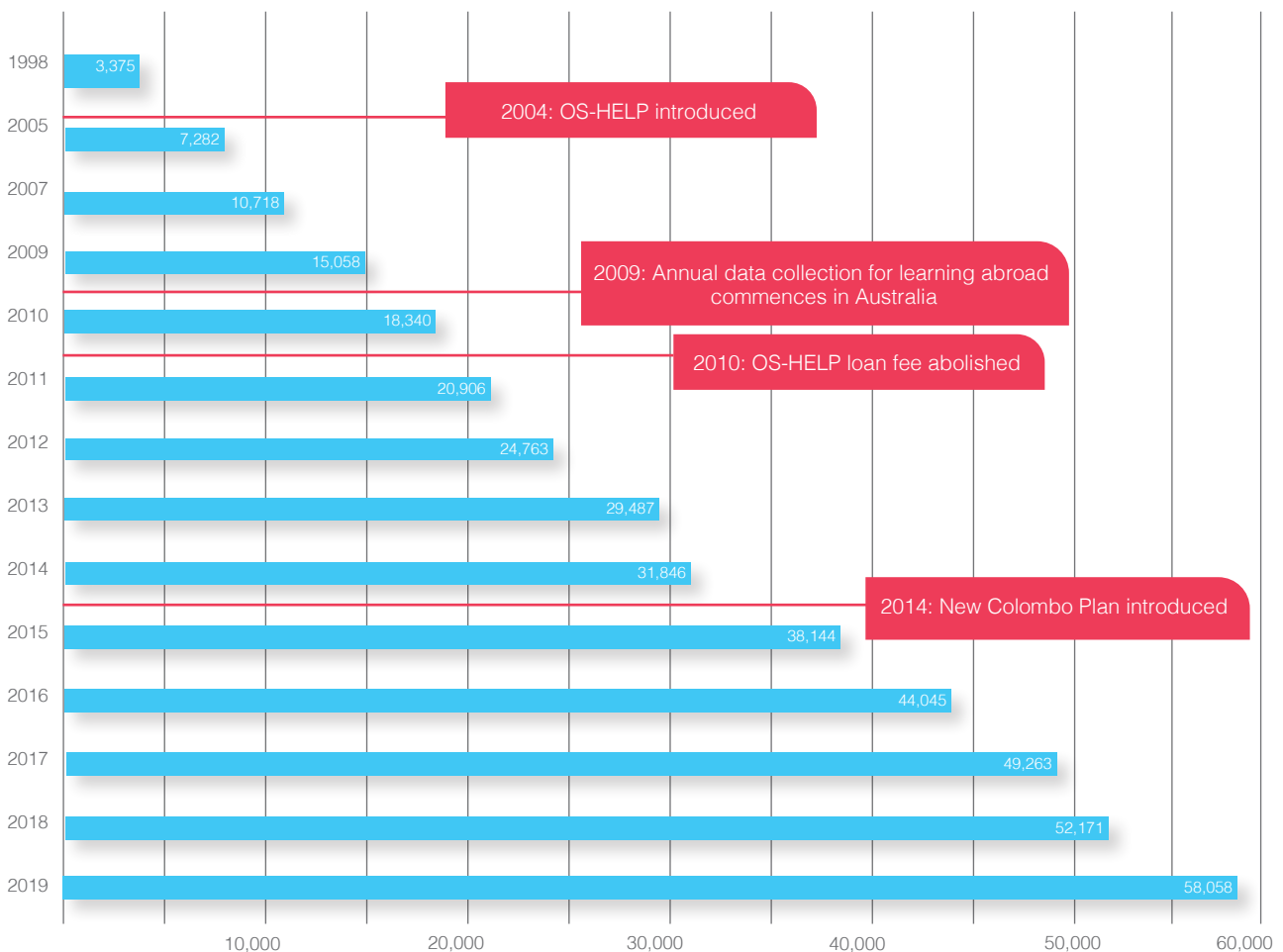
This growth has also been spurred by the work of third-party providers, that is, suppliers of learning abroad programs based outside of formal education institutions. They have been critical in expanding the number, types and duration of learning abroad programs

3 Part of the Australian Government's Higher Education Loan Program, see: <https://www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/os-help-and-overseas-study>

available to Australian students; have enabled universities to address risk as well as to facilitate greater student access; and have contributed to high-quality resources and research. Third-party providers are part of a healthy, burgeoning learning abroad sector.

COVID-19 has profoundly impacted learning abroad opportunities for Australian university students. One of the many untold stories of the pandemic is the 120,000 to 180,000 young Australians who will miss out on the opportunity to participate in a learning abroad experience and thus to gain the critical skills and knowledge outlined in this White Paper. And while we may never be able to make it up to the 'COVID generation', we must ensure we 'double down' on a decade of progress and ensure that opportunities abound for future generations in ways never seen before.

Figure 1. Australian outbound mobility



Outbound mobility data sourced from Australian University International Directors' Forum (AUIDF).



The recently launched [Australian Strategy for International Education 2021–2030](#) notes the importance of connecting Australian students with the world through learning abroad opportunities. Future policy and programs should also specifically address equity to ensure all students, regardless of background, their chosen education institution or academic discipline, can access learning abroad opportunities and benefit from the new skills, knowledge and future career and study paths that we know learning abroad makes possible.

This White Paper makes clear why learning abroad matters to Australian students, to Australian communities and to Australian institutions. This is demonstrated through evidence-based research across six key outcomes: globally engaged leaders; global citizens; Australia's relations with the world; student experience; employability and graduate outcomes; and student recruitment. For each outcome, a list of further resources has been provided as well as specific calls to action that can be implemented by senior leaders across institutions and through learning abroad teams.

One of the many untold stories of the pandemic is the 120,000 to 180,000 young Australians who will miss out on the opportunity to participate in a learning abroad experience.

A person with dark hair, seen from behind, wearing a backpack and looking out a large window. Outside the window, a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds is visible. In the lower right, a white airplane is partially visible, parked on a tarmac. The window frame is dark, and the overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Australian learning abroad pre-COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, learning abroad had grown significantly to become a distinctive feature of Australian university education. In 2019, 58,058 students at Australian universities participated in learning abroad, an 11% increase on participation in 2018 and up nearly 400% on participation ten years earlier in 2009. At the undergraduate level, Australia had become a world leader in learning abroad. In 2019, almost one in four (23%) Australian undergraduate students participated in learning abroad compared to 7.4% of comparable students in the UK in 2018–19, 16% in the US in 2018–19 and 11% in Canada in 2017.

A primary driver for Australian participation in learning abroad since 2014 has been the New Colombo Plan. This is a signature federal government program and has the explicit goal of lifting knowledge of the Indo-Pacific region among young Australians, providing them with a 'rite of passage' to future career and life opportunities. The New Colombo Plan supports a range of learning abroad experiences through scholarships and mobility grants and has enabled mobility to new learning abroad destinations across the Indo-Pacific. It has also spurred participation across diverse academic disciplines with programs designed to address significant challenges in our region, including public health, climate change, sustainability, urban planning and disability inclusion.

Australian learning abroad pre-COVID-19⁴

380,000+

students at Australian universities participated in university-based learning abroad programs between 2009 and 2019.

58,058

students at Australian universities participated in learning abroad in 2019, **up 11% on 2018 and up nearly 400% on 2009.**

2019 snapshot



1 in 4

Australian undergraduate students participated in learning abroad (23%).

compared to

16% **USA**
(2018–19)

11% **Canada**
(2017)

7.4% **UK**
(2018–19)⁵

Indo-Pacific region

49%

of **all learning abroad experiences** by Australian undergraduate students in 2019 were in the **Indo-Pacific** region.



The New Colombo Plan

- The growth of the Indo-Pacific as a learning destination is almost entirely driven by **New Colombo Plan** funding.
- Through the **New Colombo Plan**, the Australian Government has committed more than \$400 million to supporting learning abroad experiences in the Indo-Pacific from 2014 to 2024.
- The **New Colombo Plan** has mobilised an alumni community of more than 70,000 since its inception in 2014.

⁴ Australian outbound mobility data kindly provided by [Australian Universities International Directors' Forum](#) (AUIDF).

⁵ L Tran, H Bui and D Nguyen, [National Report: Australian student mobility to the Indo-Pacific region through the New Colombo Plan](#), Research For Educational Impact Centre, Deakin University, 2021, p. 3.

Six outcomes of learning abroad

Outcome 1: Globally engaged leaders

Learning abroad develops globally engaged community and business leaders.

Outcome 4: Student experience

Learning abroad positively impacts student engagement, retention and satisfaction.

Outcome 2: Global citizens

Learning abroad fosters a global outlook which is critical to citizenship in a multicultural society and an increasingly connected world.

Outcome 5: Employability and graduate outcomes

Learning abroad develops employability skills and improves graduate employment outcomes.

Outcome 3: Australia's relations with the world

Learning abroad connects young Australians to global democracy, foreign policy and soft power initiatives.

Outcome 6: Driver for student recruitment

Learning abroad supports domestic recruitment into Australian universities for both undergraduate and postgraduate study.



Outcome 1: Globally engaged leaders

Complex global environments demand leaders who are globally connected. Australia's future leaders must be skilled in working with people who are different from themselves in order to solve global social, political, environmental and economic challenges. This has been overwhelmingly apparent as Australia participates in global responses to COVID-19.

Australian organisations – of all sizes and purposes – benefit from leadership that connects with our region and our world

With the launch of the New Colombo Plan, then Foreign Minister Julie Bishop advocated for the deep and enduring impact of learning abroad experiences on an individual's future contribution to the world. We all know stories of individual community and business leaders who studied abroad and continue to draw on these international experiences in their personal and professional lives. In fact, three of Australia's last five Prime Ministers studied abroad as university students.

Australia needs a global outlook for future economic success

Australian businesses need to be globally engaged for the economic success of our country (Australia in the Asia Century Taskforce, 2012). The mindset of leaders who have first-hand experience of living and studying abroad is shaped by those experiences. They develop deep understanding and empathy for overseas partners, customers and other stakeholders. Their global knowledge, experience and networks also provide a competitive advantage.

Learning abroad participants are more likely to contribute to their local communities

The SAGE Project (Paige et al, 2009), a retrospective trace study of 6,000 study abroad participants in the US up to 50 years post-graduation, found that learning abroad promoted higher levels of civic engagement, philanthropy and volunteerism in graduates.

Alumni Profile



Elise Giles, Business leader

Elise graduated from a Bachelor of Business at Griffith University in 2013, which included participating in learning abroad experiences in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. She has since worked in Vietnam, Indonesia and Hong Kong. Elise previously led the advocacy portfolio at Asialink Business where she drove public conversation and debate on Asia capabilities through a range of Australia-wide advocacy activities, engaging thousands of individuals from business and government and raising their awareness of the opportunities in Asia. She is currently a Board Director of the Australia-Vietnam Leadership Dialogue, an initiative established to nurture collaboration between Australian and Vietnamese leaders. Elise is adamant that her learning abroad experiences were pivotal in her decision to dedicate her career to focus on Australia's Asia engagement.

Alumni Profile



Deborah Zhang, Community leader

Deborah completed a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Master of Teaching at The University of Melbourne, where she undertook learning abroad experiences to China, France and the UK. Deborah is now a secondary school English teacher and an active community volunteer leader. She is a recent National President of the Australia-China Youth Association and is currently Senior Operations Manager at CHASE (Community Health Advancement and Student Engagement), a not-for-profit organisation which delivers a preventative health curriculum to educate secondary students about health issues relevant to their communities. Deborah is an enthusiastic advocate for learning abroad, having experienced first-hand their ability to impart international outlooks and improve career prospects. She firmly believes that learning abroad participation is crucial to fostering global perspectives of education and facilitating effective cross-cultural communication.

Calls to action

1. Provide learning abroad participants with opportunities to further hone their leadership skills following completion of their learning abroad experience. For example, ensure they are connected to existing leadership development programs delivered at your institution.
2. Ensure alumni teams at your institution identify, network with and profile former learning abroad participants who now hold community and business leadership roles.
3. Establish and promote the outcomes of learning abroad programs to internal stakeholders at your institution and to the broader local community.



Outcome 2: Global citizens

The purpose of our work in learning abroad is to cultivate within students an ability to contribute positively to society and to become citizens of an increasingly connected world. Learning abroad programs are proven to equip our students with intercultural intelligence and global competencies as well as seed meaningful, deep and lasting international connections.

Your institution's graduate attributes likely demonstrate that embedding intercultural and global perspectives in learning and teaching design is an explicit priority and that experiential learning abroad programs are one of the primary ways to achieve this.

Global responses to COVID-19 and the current dialogue around Australia's international relations, including bilateral complexities such as with China and France, highlight the need for Australian students to be able to think, act and work globally. Fostering a global outlook in our students has never been more important.

Learning abroad is proven to increase participants' intercultural sensitivity and empathy

Studies across a range of countries confirm that learning abroad positively affects the development of participants' intercultural competence (Roy et al, 2019). Interpersonal encounters and 'out of comfort zone' experiences have also been found to facilitate 'comparative thinking' and 'connecting knowledge across contexts' in learning abroad participants, helping them to become global citizens (Lilley, Baker and Harris, 2015).

Studying another language whilst participating in learning abroad ‘supercharges’ intercultural competence

Not only has learning abroad been found to improve intercultural competence but stronger results have been noted for participants who combined their learning abroad experience with studying another language (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton and Paige, 2009). The intercultural competence of participants who studied in a target language for a semester or longer progressed in the range of 30–40% (Engle and Engle, 2004).

Learning abroad participants are more capable members of the global workplace

A recent, large USA study found that more than 31 million job openings required skills that a student acquires while learning abroad and employers spent more time seeking qualified applicants for these positions compared to average job openings (NAFSA, 2020). These include skills which are essential in many industries and occupations such as communication, leadership, problem solving and time-management.

Learning abroad has a greater impact on intercultural competence than travelling for recreational purposes

This includes more significant increases in multiple dimensions of intercultural competence such as the ability to understand the complexity of global issues; applying disciplinary knowledge in global contexts; having competency in at least one other language; and working with people from other cultures (Stebbleton, Soria and Cherney, 2015).

Learning abroad is a critical component in the development of a more engaged, interculturally-aware and productive campus

When Australian students undertake learning abroad opportunities, the foundation for greater engagement on Australian campuses is established; those students return more attuned to and better able to engage effectively with their international peers. Learning abroad also generates far greater cohort diversity on Australian campuses as institutions host students undertaking reciprocal programs from Europe, the Americas and other countries not strongly represented in full degree cohorts, such as Japan and South Korea.

Calls to action

1. Use evidence, such as references included in this White Paper, in communication campaigns that highlight the benefits of learning abroad to students at your institution and to your institution’s stakeholders.
2. Work closely with languages educators in your institution; learning abroad participants who also study other languages are likely to be ‘star alumni’.
3. Ensure learning abroad participants are engaged in campus life on their return, particularly in international student engagement programs. They can assist to address common challenges such as the need for structured peer-to-peer engagement between international and Australian students.



Outcome 3: Australia's relations with the world

The connection between learning abroad, foreign policy and soft power might just be the greatest legacy of learning abroad programs. Student mobility has been a critical component of global diplomacy since the end of World War II when the Fulbright program was established in the US. In our own region, Australia responded through the Colombo Plan – part aid, part education, part diplomacy. This continues today through the New Colombo Plan which has firmly positioned learning abroad as an instrument of soft power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Learning abroad participants are unofficial ambassadors for Australia in our region and across the world and they are an important component of the reciprocity of international education.

People-to-people connections foster networks which underpin our success as a nation

By actively engaging in education institutions around the world, our students forge people-to-people connections that will endure the turbulence of formal diplomacy actions.

In-country experiential learning opportunities build a framework for critical self-reflection, which can lead to new perspectives on historical relations between nations (Sobocinska and Purdey, 2019).

Learning abroad contributes to foreign policy priorities

Learning abroad and international education promote public diplomacy through relationship development with regional and international institutions and the facilitation of the mobility of students across borders (Adams, Banks and Olsen, 2011). When leveraged successfully, international education is a prime vehicle to contribute to a nation's foreign policy priorities and interests, including its soft power profile (Byrne and Hall, 2014).

Learning abroad promotes interest in an international career

Across a range of countries and regions including Australia, the US, Japan and Europe, learning abroad experiences

have been found to generate interest in an international career (Bracht et al, 2006; Hubbard and Rexeisen, 2020; Norris and Gillespie, 2009). A recent study of New Colombo Plan alumni found that mobility to the Indo-Pacific had significantly contributed to Australian students' interest in looking for a job in the region or a job in Australia related to their Indo-Pacific host country (Tran et al, 2021).

The outbound mobility of Australian students is a critical component of reciprocity in international education

Learning abroad contributes to the social licence of our education institutions. It is critical for our communities to see their young people studying overseas and returning home to share their experiences with family, friends and networks. Learning abroad makes Australian students genuinely curious about international students studying on their campuses and gives their families and networks a different understanding of international students in our communities. The significant growth in the number of Australian students learning abroad in the past decade has helped to counteract global perceptions of Australia as only interested in the 'commercial' benefits of international education and signals our commitment to genuine internationalisation and reciprocity in student mobility.

Alumni Profile



Cameron Allan, Young diplomat and youth leader

Cameron graduated from the Australian National University in 2020 with degrees in Law and International Security Studies, including a major in Indonesian. As the New Colombo Plan ASEAN Fellow in 2019, Cameron studied and completed internships in Indonesia and Singapore. During this time, he co-founded the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership, a non-profit organisation providing opportunities for young Australians and Southeast Asians to meet, learn together, collaborate on projects and contribute youth perspectives to policy issues. Cameron has now commenced work as a Graduate Policy Officer with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade where he is learning the foundations of effective foreign, trade and international development policy. He attributes his career ambitions to his learning abroad experiences and the vibrancy of the international education community.

Calls to action

1. Ensure your institution's learning abroad strategy considers equity and access. Advocate – nationally and globally (through APAIE, EAIE and NAFSA) – for the creation and continuation of programs which enable access for diverse student cohorts, such as the New Colombo Plan.
2. Lead collaboration with alumni teams at your institution to track the impact of learning abroad on alumni, celebrate their achievements and – where appropriate – create and connect profile stories to institutional recruitment campaigns.
3. Encourage your institution's senior leaders to highlight learning abroad programs in community engagement strategies. Focus on the role of your institution in developing young people in the local community who are more successful in connecting with the world *because* of their learning abroad experience.



Outcome 4: Student experience

An international study experience gives Australian students new frames of reference for understanding their world. They gain new knowledge, are cognitively challenged by new ways of knowing and are provided the opportunity to synthesise, integrate and apply classroom learning in a new environment (Gonyea, 2008). This is also driven by the holistic experience of living and learning in a new country which transcends and complements academic learning.

Participants of learning abroad programs are more engaged in their learning and their community when they return to campus

Research from the US classifies learning abroad as a 'high impact practice' that increases student engagement and is positively correlated with deep learning, especially integrative and reflective learning (NSSE, 2007). Following a learning abroad experience, students tend to be more engaged in their studies and more motivated to learn for pleasure rather than for grades (Hadis, 2005).

One large Australian university has found that learning abroad has a profound effect on student's rating of their overall university experience. Students who participated in learning abroad were 50% more likely to rate their experience as 'excellent', rather than 'good', compared to those who did not participate in a learning abroad experience. This aligns with research on the ERASMUS program in Europe which found that 90 to 96% of former participants agree with the statement: 'I appreciate my home university more now than before' (European Commission, 2014).

Learning abroad improves academic achievement, retention and progression

Universities in the US have demonstrated that learning abroad leads to higher graduation rates, when controlling for a range of background and academic variables (Barclay-Hamir, 2011; Sutton and Rubin, 2010). Several studies conclude that learning abroad may provide the greatest benefit to low-performing students compared to their peers (Malmgren and Gavin, 2008; Sutton and Rubin, 2010). It has also been found that US learning abroad participants completed their degrees with a higher GPA than non-participants, when controlling for academic performance and major variables (Indiana University, 2009).

Participants of learning abroad programs are also more likely to progress in their degree at all major stages, that is, from first-to-second year, from second-to-third year and from third-to-fourth year (Huckel, Potts and Ramirez, 2016).

A learning abroad experience fosters career direction in students, motivating degree completion and success

From Australian studies, we know that learning abroad helps participants to develop career direction (Potts, 2015; Tran et al, 2021). By stepping out of their comfort zones, students are encouraged to try new experiences that may lead to new interests and help them to develop career goals. Indeed, many Australian students embark on a learning abroad experience with the specific intention of further exploring a defined career interest (Tran et al, 2021). Upon return, they may be more motivated to complete their degree, pursue their desired profession and, for some, consider graduate study.

Calls to action

1. Use institutional data sets to examine connections between learning abroad, student satisfaction and student success. Also consider other studies that support our understanding of the impact of learning abroad on the overall student experience, for example, NSSE, 2007, and CASSIE, 2021.
2. Review academic selection criteria for your institution's learning abroad programs to align with program objectives rather than using GPA as a default screening tool. Ensure students who are likely to gain the most benefit and other target cohorts can access learning abroad and consider open access programs that fit within academic progression frameworks for your institution.
3. Target financial support for learning abroad participation to equity and at-risk student cohorts to further support their engagement, degree progression and completion.



Outcome 5: Employability and graduate outcomes

From the Australian study, Career Outcomes of Learning Abroad (Potts, 2020) and similar research, we have a good understanding of how former participants perceive learning abroad and the impact on their career outcomes. There are key connections to soft skills development, influencing career direction and building self-confidence. Learning abroad also contributes to the development of participants' 'career capital' through the knowledge acquisition and individual growth they experience (Inkson and Myers, 2005).

Learning abroad enables participants to step outside their comfort zones to experience new things and to test out possible career paths. We know from experiential learning theory that experiences which create discomfort provide an opportunity for learning and growth. This is at the heart of learning abroad.

Well-designed programs of short duration can also lead to positive career and employment outcomes. Given that these programs also improve accessibility and inclusion, they should now be an essential feature of every Australian institution's learning abroad portfolio.

Learning abroad supports the development of key soft skills which are important for future employability

In a recent Australian study which surveyed learning abroad alumni (Potts, 2020), 85% of respondents agreed that during their learning abroad experience they developed skills that supported their future professional roles. Furthermore, 75% of international internship and practicum alumni agreed that their experience helped them get their first job.

Across the globe, research confirms the value of learning abroad for soft skills development from the perspective of former participants who are now in the workplace (European Commission, 2014; Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen, Tilman and Matherly, 2020; Yokota, 2016). Commonly cited skills include interpersonal and communication skills; critical and analytical thinking; teamwork; adaptability; and problem-solving. These skills generally align to those in demand as reported by agencies such as the World Economic Forum (2020).

Many employers value international study experiences when they are recruiting

In a global study of employers, 62% indicated that they seek or attribute value to an international study experience when recruiting (Molony, Sowter and Potts, 2011).

In Australia, market research has also shown that 72% of employers indicate that second language skills are viewed positively in the graduate recruitment process and may lead to career opportunities in the future (Prospect Marketing, 2006). International study experiences are associated by Australian employers with the development of key employability characteristics such as tolerance, open-mindedness, creativity, initiative, the ability to take on responsibility, empathy and respect (Crossman and Clarke, 2009).

University graduates who participated in learning abroad find jobs more quickly and are less likely to be unemployed

Alumni who have participated in learning abroad programs may experience a shorter job search time period than those who did not study abroad (Bracht et al, 2006). The most recent ERASMUS study reported that the unemployment rate for former learning abroad participants was 23% lower than for non-participants five years after graduation (European Commission, 2014).

Former participants associate learning abroad with positive long-term career prospects

Former learning abroad participants are very positive about their future careers and attribute learning abroad as a contributing factor. Across Europe (53%), Australia (63%) and the US (66%), former participants of learning abroad programs rated learning abroad as worthwhile or very worthwhile for their long-term career prospects (Anderson et al, 2015; Bracht et al, 2006; Potts, 2020).

Calls to action

1. Ensure learning abroad teams at your institution continue to work closely with careers teams to connect returning students to relevant services. Develop pre-departure and post-return opportunities for learning abroad participants to plan and reflect on their career development goals as part of their learning abroad experience. This is particularly important for short-term programs and should be embedded in faculty-led programs.
2. Ensure senior leaders at your institution are aware that institutional investment in learning abroad can provide greater returns for graduate employment.
3. Foster collaboration with alumni sponsors and key graduate employers to create funded global internships for target students, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds. For an interesting example, see the [Iacocca International Internship Program](#).



Outcome 6: Driver for student recruitment

Over the last ten years, learning abroad has become central to the domestic student recruitment package for most Australian universities. It is now clear that many year 11 and year 12 students are interested in pursuing learning abroad whilst in higher education and they seek information about these learning abroad programs when choosing their post-secondary program.

Timing is a key challenge for increasing participation in learning abroad in Australia. The three-year undergraduate degree structure, combined with accelerated degree models at some institutions, can make it difficult for students to fit international study into their degree. By working with prospective students through their school influencers and career counsellors, students can start to plan for their international experience from the start of their post-secondary studies. Active communication around program models, grants and OS-HELP can make a real difference in building aspirations for learning abroad.

Learning abroad opportunities are key differentiators in competitive recruitment markets

Research from the US (Hubbard and Rexeisen, 2020) demonstrates a growing connection between a student's interest in learning abroad and their choice of college, with up to 40% of learning abroad alumni surveyed reporting a moderate to strong influence on college choice.

As competition for students in Australia intensifies, learning abroad can be positioned as a defining feature of an internationalised Australian education. Each institution should consider how to shape their learning abroad strategy to provide a distinctive offer for future students. We also know that once at

university, learning abroad opportunities are deeply valued by students. In a recent study of students impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions, 84% of respondents rated the importance of international study as part of their degree as fairly or very important (Ramirez, 2020).

Learning abroad is a powerful bridge between secondary and higher education

Research confirms that participation in an international program as a school student leads to a much greater likelihood of participation in learning abroad at university (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Potts, 2020). Higher education institutions can advocate for high school international programs through school partnerships, including assisting with capacity development for key staff at local schools. International opportunities can help students connect their high school experience to tertiary study and career aspirations as well as languages education.

Learning abroad increases interest in postgraduate study

Several studies support a link between participation in a learning abroad experience and increased interest and enrolment in postgraduate study, including in Australia. One alumni study reported as many as 60% of former learning abroad participants had pursued an advanced degree (Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow & Nam, 2009). In an Australian study, 47% of respondents indicated that learning abroad piqued their interest in further study (Nunan, 2006).

Calls to action

1. Ensure your institution's domestic recruitment team is:
 - aware of secondary school international programs within your institution's local community and are able to specifically target these cohorts;
 - well equipped to promote your institution's learning abroad program and relevant funding opportunities such as OS-HELP, scholarships and institutional grants; and
 - informed of the links between learning abroad participation and postgraduate study, which might inform recruitment strategies.
2. Build access and equity considerations into institutional funding, financial support and advisory services and promote these opportunities to prospective students.
3. Embed learning abroad pathways into degree structures to increase their attractiveness to prospective students and to bust myths that learning abroad is an 'administration burden' for students. Promote early engagement in learning abroad to increase opportunities for returned participants.

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Outcome 3: Australia's relations with the world

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