

24/07

Media Release

29 October 2007

A National Internship Scheme to enhance employment skills

Universities Australia has today released a Discussion Paper, *A National Internship Scheme*, aimed at stimulating debate and action to further enhance the employment skills of university students and graduates.

Universities Australia Chief Executive Officer, Dr Glenn Withers AO said governments, industry and universities agree that Australia needs graduates who are well educated and fully employable.

"The Government has acknowledged the national importance of employability skills of university graduates, most recently in its release this month of the Business Higher Education Collaboration Council report on this subject," Dr Withers said.

"This Discussion Paper is designed to produce discussion, response and action regarding a strategic and focussed approach toward work experience. A cohesive National Internship Scheme would build on current industry and university initiatives by providing for more Australian universities students to undertake structured work-based learning in industry during their studies.

"The professions have long forged close links between the education process and the workplace. And some other areas have followed suit. But there is compelling evidence of an even wider unmet need for generally trained, flexible graduates who are also work-ready. Recent progress in this direction has been impressive, but much more can be done," he said.

"Meeting this need would enhance national productivity and help address growing skill shortages. It would also support rewarding careers for more Australians. Indicative costings by Universities Australia show a very high return on investment here: possibly a benefit-cost ratio of six to one.

"A National Internship Scheme could also result in the potential for providing increased income support for students delivered in a way that complements their studies and increases their future employability and productivity. This enduring problem also needs some fresh approaches; and this Scheme could help here too," he said.

"Graduate employability concerns should not, and cannot be matters for university action alone. That said, the need for universities to continue to embed employability skills as part of the graduate skill set - through curriculum design, course content and classroom delivery strategy - is fully endorsed.

"Naturally this should take place within a framework that continues to refine employability skills through university central and program area services and courses, and that draws upon key partnerships to enhance workforce development and social inclusion, while serving wider university education goals," Dr Withers said.

The Discussion Paper is available on the Universities Australia website at www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/internships

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