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Strong cross-sectoral support for a National Internship Scheme

Universities Australia has today released a position paper, *A National Internship Scheme: enhancing skills and work-readiness of Australian university graduates*, which calls for collaborative action to further enhance the employment skills of university students and graduates.

This paper reflects widespread consultation on the options for a National Internship Scheme put forward in Universities Australia's October 2007 Discussion Paper.

"Based on feedback from the private sector, community interests and government, there is strong support for a national scheme that further enhances earnings, learning and employability skills through university programs and courses," Universities Australia Chief Executive Officer, Dr Withers said.

"It is agreed that graduate employability concerns should not and cannot be matters for university action alone. This said, the need for universities to embed employability skills as part of graduate capacities through curriculum design, course content and delivery is fully endorsed," he said.

This latest position paper calls for a cohesive National Internship Scheme to build on the substantial experience in place in many organisations and universities, by providing for many more Australian university students to undertake structured work integrated learning during their studies.

"The scheme need not involve a large, new bureaucracy. Rather it should involve enhancement and extension of existing pathways for the work-readiness of Australia's university students to support improved productivity, reduced skill shortages and enhanced equity and access to rewarding careers for graduates," Dr Withers said.

Universities Australia's position paper will be used to promote support for this proposal as a partnership model with government and industry. It also complements the Treasury's priorities for improving the economy through the three Ps: Population; Participation; and Productivity.

The paper proposes that immediate steps to develop and implement a National Internship Scheme should include:

1. a more active commitment by the Commonwealth Government in promoting an expansion of internships and work integrated learning;
2. commitment by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to lead by example through expansion of internship opportunities within their own departments and agencies;
3. establishment of a joint government/industry/university steering committee to define the scope, structure, mechanisms and costs of such a scheme – either as part of the Council of Australian Governments human capital agenda or as a separate initiative; and
4. establishment of a National Internships Council to provide advice to the Commonwealth Government on regulatory and tax expenditure setting for work integrated learning.

"A broad partnership between universities, governments, industry and community organisations to develop a National Internship Scheme will support efforts to address skills shortages and student income support in an effective and structured way," Dr Withers said.

The Position Paper is available at www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/internships

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