

Producing employable graduates

- initiatives by New Zealand's universities

New Zealand's universities educate our future leaders and innovators, generate new ideas and knowledge, and earn export income. They are all committed to producing employable graduates, and contributing to New Zealand's economic growth and social well-being.

Research shows that New Zealand graduates experience excellent outcomes. On average:

- graduates earn \$1.1m more over their working lives than non-graduates or pre-degree level students;
- graduates earn 1.65 times more than school-leavers;
- bachelor-level graduates have higher rates of employment and lower use of social welfare benefits;
- graduates achieve pay off their investment in a university education by age 34;
- graduates pay back tuition subsidies and another \$81,000 in income taxes to the government over their working life (before GST and company taxes).

Preparing graduates for the future

Universities provide students with core competencies and discipline-specific knowledge. These skills strategically position graduates so they have the best chance of gaining employment and having successful careers.

They also prepare graduates for their future, although many of tomorrow's roles don't yet exist today. Graduates therefore need to be future-fitted with additional skills, such as problem-solving, the ability to quickly master complex information, and adaptability to work effectively in different roles across any number of sectors, nationally and internationally.

To achieve this, universities work closely with industry, businesses, and communities – locally, nationally and globally to deliver programmes that meet students' and employers' current and longer-term needs.

Delivering quality academic programmes

Universities New Zealand has a statutory responsibility to ensure the quality of academic programmes and the integrity of the university system. It manages a robust national system for the approval and accreditation of all academic programmes.

In addition, each university is also audited every five years by an independent body, the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, to ensure the quality of academic processes.

All university programmes have a graduate profile statement which describes the knowledge, skills and attributes graduates should gain from the programme. It is mandatory for universities to engage and consult with relevant stakeholders including employers, industry, professional bodies, communities and Māori, when developing or amending programmes.

Universities engage with and respond to industry and stakeholders in a range of ways including formal panels and committees, as well as through formal agreements with industry bodies.

Examples

- Massey University has agreements with the New Zealand Defence Force, Customs and the Police involving defence and security studies. It has forged relationships with regional and local policy makers to ensure it is aligned with their needs for knowledge transfer and the educational needs of regions.
- Auckland University of Technology has 39 Industry Advisory Committees, which were commended in its last academic audit for ensuring alignment of programmes with industry needs and ongoing relevance.
- Many university qualifications are accredited, for example Lincoln's new Bachelor of Land and Property Management degree has received RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) accreditation for international relevance and graduate employability.

Providing valuable work experiences

All New Zealand universities recognise the value of work experience and how it enhances the employability of students. All of the universities provide students with opportunities to learn more skills for the world of work through internships or work placements/practicums.

About 32% of all university graduates in 2013 completed a professional qualification. Courses such as engineering, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, teaching, and clinical psychology all include a work placement as a requirement for professional accreditation.

Examples

- The University of Auckland has a practical work component for all professional degrees; in Engineering alone over 1,000 students are involved in practicums per year. The University has piloted cross faculty internships for PhD students, and a work experience programme for undergraduate Māori and Pacific students.
- Auckland University of Technology has developed a unique programme called AUT interNZ, designed to match students with NZ companies for internships. Initially launched in conjunction with Callaghan Innovation to cater to their R & D grant recipient companies, AUT interNZ has since broadened and now matches students from all disciplines with internships in all industries. So far over 300 students have registered to be eligible for roles since launch in July this year.
- At least 70 University of Waikato programmes offer work placement or a practicum component, which in one year exposed almost 2000 students to first-hand industry experience.
- Massey University uses a range of learning opportunities including: work integrated learning, service learning, simulations, laboratory experimentation, and scenarios. They use practicums (Bachelor of Sport and Exercise, Bachelor of Engineering); professional practice (Bachelor of Resource and Environmental Planning, Graduate Diploma in Teaching); clinical placement (Bachelors of Veterinary Science, Nursing, Speech Language Therapy respectively); field work (Bachelor of Science, Masters of Applied Social Work), and project-based group learning (Bachelors of Engineering, Food Technology and Veterinary Sciences).
- Victoria University's Bachelor of Arts Internship programme, sees students work voluntarily for up to 100 hours, and as part of a taught component, they share and discuss what they have learned in the workplace.
- In 2015 the University of Canterbury established a new Centre for Entrepreneurship to build and strengthen entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities and ultimate employability of its students. The Centre offers both for-credit and extra-curricular options for students and builds on existing entrepreneurship and innovation courses and works with the long standing student-driven club, Entre, for budding entrepreneurs.
- Lincoln University has a practical work component built into 60% of their programmes.
- The University of Otago offers a pre-employment training programme for students applying for internships. It negotiates paid intern positions with about 60-100 businesses every year, some lasting up to 15 months.

Building strong relationships with sector and stakeholders

A key role of universities is to drive innovation and growth. University staff work closely with a wide range of sectors and stakeholders, including industry, business, and professional bodies to ensure programmes are aligned and to transfer knowledge. These relationships benefit students, universities and employers and sectors alike.

Many university staff are appointed to expert advisory groups, government and private sector boards, and work with iwi and/or hapū. Many others undertake industry research, develop and deliver professional development courses for stakeholders, or work with corporates to secure sponsorship.

These linkages often lead to the development of new programmes and work-integrated learning opportunities. They include co-operative education papers, clinical practice, teaching practicums and industry and post-graduate research projects.

Examples

- **Lincoln University together with three Crown Research Institutes and DairyNZ (the industry body for New Zealand's dairy industry), have formed a hub aimed at exposing students and staff to leading employers and commercial practices. The Hub will work very closely with industry, in the future increasingly exposing students and staff to leading employers and commercial practices.**
- **Lincoln has also partnered with ANZCO and China's Yili Industrial Group Research and Development, who are co-located on campus and work alongside postgraduate students and staff.**
- **At Massey University, research-led science programmes provide students with the fundamental knowledge and develop problem solving skills relevant to modern markets. Papers like the Bachelor of Science's Nanoscience Research Project offer students the opportunity to provide solutions to industry projects. Graduate students are encouraged to be both innovative and develop their own ideas and potential new businesses, and to work on projects funded by the industry and supported by research providers.**
- **The University of Waikato Co-operative Education Unit through active relationships with employers has created 300+ work placements each year for students in specific Science, Computer Science and Engineering undergraduate degrees. This comprehensive programme includes a compulsory pre-placement paper which covers CV, interview preparation and professional behaviour.**
- **The University of Auckland has an employability strategy document which focuses on building relationships to support students to become 'work ready' for better employment outcomes.**
- **Auckland University of Technology's Bachelor of Business offers a co-operative education paper where students complete a nine-week placement in industry, an academic programme of study, and produce an applied research project that demonstrates learnings from both their study and work experience. 120 AUT students participated in the 'Match Ready employability workshop' this year, which offered students first-hand insights from employers on the subject of 'soft skills' such as interview technique and CV writing. 100% of surveyed attendees felt 'more confident to gain employment' as a result of the event.**

Tailored career support for students

All universities offer programmes of support to help students increase their employability skills and realise their career opportunities.

Specialist career services teams deliver individual and group skills, advice, workshops, websites like NZUniCareerHub, publications and careers expos, as well as customised workshops for specific disciplines.

Universities also encourage students to get involved in extra-curricular and volunteer activities alongside their studies to develop teamwork and leadership skills, so they can offer employers a richer skill set.

Examples

- The University of Otago's Volunteer Centre connects community organisations with students who wish to develop their employment skills. Otago also offers the "Passport to Employability" programme which works with employers to help students gain critical pre-employment skills. Otago's "International Get Job Ready" Coordinator, facilitates workshops designed to assist international students to transition successfully into the New Zealand work force.
- The University of Canterbury's new co-curricular record (CCR) initiative, recognises student development outside of the classroom, and provides an official record of students voluntary and work activities at UC, while also facilitating reflection on learning and development through these activities. Online Career Development Modules have also been developed which are being increasingly integrated into academic programmes. These assist students as part of their studies to develop career management competencies.
- Massey University provides numerous learning opportunities and activities collectively known as "Leadership through Service". These provide valuable complementary opportunities to enhance students' professional and personal development. Activities include: student liaison representatives, the Massey University student leadership programme, residential assistants and peer-assisted learning coordinators, even volunteers and open lab projects.
- Victoria University of Wellington offers the "Victoria Plus" Programme to all students at any level to develop leadership, social responsibility and employability skills. Similarly, Victoria's "Alumni as Mentors" programme, sees alumni share post-study professional experiences with current university students in a one-to-one mentoring relationship to help graduates prepare for the world of work.
- The University of Auckland offers "Passport to Business", a 10-week career development programme to help students create individualised career plans. Industry professionals are actively involved in the programme. High-performing students also secure an interview simulation with industry representatives.
- Auckland University of Technology's "Shadow a Leader" initiative sees Business and Law students follow a business leader for a day to understand what it takes to succeed in the leader's field of endeavour. The AUT interNZ international programme pairs AUT students with US based companies (including New York, San Francisco) to complete three month off-shore internships. AUT interNZ offers tailored support for candidates including customised 'how to interview via Skype' sessions.
- The University of Canterbury offers Online Career Development Modules which are being increasingly integrated into academic programmes. These assist students as part of their studies to develop career management competencies.
- All Lincoln bachelor degree students take LINC101 – a course designed to put their specific discipline learning into a broader context, giving them the ability to understand the world around their own specialist area, and contribute more to their chosen career path as a result. They also all take LINC102, a mandatory Research and Analytical Skills course, valuable regardless of the industry they end up in.

Evaluating what works

Universities actively monitor and evaluate current student, graduate and employer views to ensure the continuing relevance of programmes. This is done formally through programme review cycles; and through other mechanisms to gather feedback. Several universities are carrying out studies to identify what graduate qualities employers most value.

Universities New Zealand has commissioned the Graduate Longitudinal Study of nearly 9000 graduates from 2011 to track graduates and understand the ongoing impact of a tertiary education. A report on their progress after two years in the workforce will be available in late 2015.

Examples

- The University of Canterbury undertakes a Graduate Destinations Survey every two years to capture the views of graduates 6-9 months after graduation. Graduates are encouraged to report on many aspects of their current employment and its relationship to their previous study, as well as to identify useful skills and experiences gained during their time at Canterbury. The Graduate Destinations data informs career education, curriculum development and programme review.
- Victoria University is carrying out an employability review. Key focus areas include: work-integrated learning; increasing the range of extracurricular programmes; embedding employability in the curriculum; university commitment through an employability steering group; enhancing the role of career support services; and strengthening external partnerships.
- Massey University has an employability framework in place. The University collects and analyses feedback from students on its activities to support employability and it also administers a Graduate Destination Survey every year to all graduates who had degrees conferred in the previous academic year.
- University of Otago graduates complete the Graduate Opinion Survey about 18-24 months after graduation. Graduates are asked to report skills they have used in employment since they graduated and this information is used to make programmes more relevant. Otago is also surveying around 500 employers and information from this study will inform the development of courses and programmes to meet employer requirements, and to further prepare graduates for professional careers.
- Auckland University of Technology undertakes an annual Graduate Survey which provides insights into the destinations of its graduates and their experiences of transition into the workforce approximately six months after completing their qualification. AUT has also recently undertaken interviews with large scale employers in Auckland. Students at the bottom end of the graduate destination survey will be offered targeted employability coaching to lift their employability scores year on year.
- The University of Waikato's Curriculum Enhancement Project is reviewing current academic programmes and how they provide future career opportunities. The project aims to increase work placement and work-integrated learning into a broader range of areas of the curriculum. One such initiative builds specific work-readiness skills into doctoral programmes.
- The University of Auckland is completing an audit of all practicums, internships and work experience. It will be used to inform future employability strategies, programmes, processes and systems.

For more information contact:

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