

Enhancing the professional benefits of students' international experience

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Providing students with opportunities for international sojourns is one way that universities and governments hope to prepare students for life and work in a rapidly globalising world. Yet, research shows that learning from international experiences does not occur 'naturally', and that students need support to prepare for, experience, and critically reflect on their experiences (Gothard, Downey, Gray, 2012). While some universities have developed such programs, their focus tends to be on personal, rather than professional development (Potts, 2014). This showcase reports on OLT-funded project, which extended an earlier project, 'Bringing the learning home' (Gothard et al., 2012). The current project produced, trialed, and evaluated a new multi-media, evidence-based program, which supports students' development of professionalism and key employability skills at each phase of their international experience: *Preparing*, *Being there*, and *Coming back*. This program provides students with maximum flexibility – an essential criterion, given the well-known challenges of engaging outbound mobility experience (OME) students who depart and return at irregular times. To inform the development of the program, semi-structured interviews were conducted with returning OME students, recent OME graduates, and employers of recent graduates. The following themes from interview analysis informed the program's design; importance of networking at each OME phase; importance of ongoing development of international capabilities after returning home; lack of appreciation among Australian employers of OMEs and the role new graduates must play in demonstrating their value. Evaluation of the program determined its perceived usefulness to the following groups; university staff (academic and professional); recent OME graduates; and students.

Potts, D.L. (2014). *Exploring the perceptions of the early career value of study abroad for bachelor degree graduates of Australian universities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Michigan State University: East Lansing.