

Student and graduate perceptions of preferred places of learning: Getting the balance right

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In an era of global mobility, increasing competition, widening participation, enhanced transparency, and standards-based regulation; student and graduate perceptions are paramount to a university's reputation and sustainability. The employability agenda and expectation that higher education is pivotal to increased economic productivity in Australia is placing pressure on universities to engage with industry and ensure students acquire employability capabilities and career development learning through-out their studies. Furthermore, graduates expect to be more employable with industry networks resulting from their university experience. This study incorporated a mixed methods approach through investigating qualitative and quantitative data from students and graduates from three large undergraduate degrees, all of which undergo rigorous professional accreditation. Student feedback was gathered from the University's online student feedback system. Two sources of data were used to glean graduate perceptions: the Course Experience Questionnaire and the Graduate Employability Indicator (GEI) Survey, both of which provide insights into the graduates' perceptions of the value of the work placements in preparing them for employment. The data enabled a comparison of students' perceptions of workplace units and their overall satisfaction with the course. Comparison with feedback from graduates demonstrates how the student experience translated into graduate outcomes and employment proficiency. The study highlights the challenges of enabling learning and assessment in a place other than the institution and demonstrates student and graduate preferred places of learning for maximising preparation for employment. In addition, the findings inform strategies for improving the students' work place learning experiences to enhance graduate outcomes and perceptions, thereby improving the reputation of the university.