

Innovation Practice Program - creating Job Ready Graduates

The [Innovation Practice Program](#) is one of a range of examples of the University of Melbourne initiating teaching-related engagement with industry that are helping to enhance the work-readiness of our undergraduate students.

Administered by the University's Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, the Program matches organisations from industry and government with Masters students from Engineering, Biomedicine, Business and IT. A mentor from the partner organisation works with a dedicated student team over 12 weeks to develop an innovative proposal for a product, service, or organisational change in response to an organisational innovation opportunity.

The Program comprises two interdependent streams, one for students and one for industry mentors:

- **For Students: 'Creating Innovative Professionals' (CIP)**

CIP is a designated innovation subject, with three contact hours per week. Students learn to innovate, working in teams on ambiguous, conceptually challenging projects. At the end of 12 weeks, student teams are expected to produce an innovation proposal that is technically feasible, economically viable, socially desirable, and aligned with the sponsor's strategy. Students are assessed on the value created for the partner organisation, and on a 'Personal Innovation Plan' which includes the student's reflections on the project.

- **For mentors: 'Leading Innovative Teams' (LIT)**

Industry mentors participate in a 2-day leadership intensive workshop and one 90-minute leadership class per week, as well attending the three-hour innovation classes with their student team. LIT provides mentors with an opportunity to develop the coaching and leadership skills required to guide innovation projects and take the next step in their careers.

Participating students and industry mentors are supported by a delivery team from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. The team includes an Innovation Instructor, a Leadership Instructor, Innovation Consultants (who work closely with industry mentors), Academic Coordinators, and a team of assessors. To date, the University has partnered with more than 120 organisations through the Innovation Practice Program to deliver more than 275 innovation projects. Partner organisations have included AECOM, Telstra, the Westgate Tunnel Project and the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Roughly 100 industry mentors and over 1,300 students have benefitted from the program.

Outcomes

The Innovation Practice Program is generating substantial benefits for both students and for industry partners. CIP provides students with an opportunity to establish a foothold in the labour market, and assists in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset, a focus on productive workplace relationships, and a focus on ensuring that technical solutions are in the service of the value creation.

For industry partners, the benefits of participating in the Program include:

- *Upskilling individuals*: innovation and leadership skills development for industry mentors.
- *Relationship building*: projects provide University of Melbourne students and academic staff with an insight into a given organisation's challenges, in some cases, leading to further collaborations, e.g. research engagement.
- *Innovation concepts*: partner organisations gain access to fresh data, insights and ideas about how to tackle current challenges their organisation is facing.
- *Access to talent*: many partner organisations offer internships and graduate positions to university students who worked on their project.
- *Influencing graduate attributes*: through their participation in the Program, partner organisations help to develop the attributes they are looking for when hiring graduates.

Possible Government support

The cost of delivery of the CIP subject is considerably higher than other Engineering subjects, and higher than the CSP funding rate. This constrains the capacity for universities to deliver and expand upon industry-partnered programs. Targeted support would help drive the benefits delivered by this and similar programs.

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Australian Government consider targeted support for programs such as the Innovation Practice Program that embed students in industry organisations as part of their degree training.