Development of Strategic International Industry Links to Promote Undergraduate Vocational Training and Postgraduate Research Programs

Assoc. Prof. Sylvester Abanteriba
Director
RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program
RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria

Paul Birch
General Manager, Human Resources
Siemens Lt
885 Mountain Highway
Bayswater Victoria 3153
Melbourne

Abstract

This paper describes the efforts undertaken over the past 12 years to develop a comprehensive program, known as the RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program (RIIERP) that enables students of all disciplines at RMIT University to access a myriad of vocational training and research programs at international companies and research institutions around the globe. The rational behind this program derives from the fact that it is impossible for a University to have the infrastructure to completely meet the diverse aspirations of all its students in terms of vocational training and research programs. By developing links to companies with state of the art vocational training and research facilities, successful and mutually beneficial programs have been established between various disciplines at RMIT University and about 130 companies in 10 different developed countries. Currently each year about 160 students are selected from about 300 applicants across all the disciplines at RMIT University and sent overseas for vocational training and research programs. On average international companies each year contribute about $1.9 million in terms of living allowances for the undergraduate vocational training programs. When the access to infrastructure and supervision at the companies is taken into consideration the pecuniary value of the commitment is more than doubled the above stated amount. In the case of postgraduate research programs, the resources committed by international companies in the form of grants amount to about $6120,460 per annum. Currently there are 14 postgraduate research grants offered to RMIT students by international companies through RIIERP. The grants awarded over the life of the current postgraduate research programs amount to about $1.6 million. It is also important to observe that when pecuniary value is assigned to the students’ access to the state of the art research facilities and expert supervision at the companies the total benefit for the postgraduate students is much higher than the figure indicated above.

Key words: Work ethic, Global Industry Advisory Board, Virtual Research Infrastructure, global perspective, Cultural environment

1. Introduction

The RMIT International Industry experience and Research Program was established to achieve the following goals:

(i) To facilitate the development of graduates who are worldly in their outlook and hence globally employable
(ii) To provide students/graduates with the opportunity to carry out their industry experience training projects at international companies, and in the process to get them exposed to work ethic in different cultural environment.
(iii) To provide students/graduates with a wide range of facilities for the development of their vocational and research skills.
(iv) To provide RMIT the means of assessing the quality of its students/graduates from a global perspective.
(v) To promote RMIT University’s interaction with companies/institutions, which have best practice in the requisite areas of interest.
To be able to achieve these defined goals it was necessary to establish links to global companies and research institutions with the desirable expertise. A comprehensive program of vocational training and research needed to be designed and operated as smoothly as possible to meet the diversified aspirations of the students. RIIERP was therefore conceived and established with the structure indicated in figure 1.1 below.

![Structure of the Program](image)

Figure 1.1 Structure of the Program

The program is set up with clearly defined undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and postdoctoral components. Each of these components of the program is designed to meet the specific needs of the students. However, it has been observed that during the course of study at RMIT some students often undertake more than one of the components of the program.

There are three main stakeholders who benefit from the various components of the program. These are the students, RMIT University and the participating companies. The Australian industry currently is, to a large extent, an impassive stakeholder, in that as a future employer, it benefits from the skills the students acquire from the overseas companies, however it does not at this stage get actively involved in the process. In general in establishing such a comprehensive international industry experience and research program each group of stakeholders have to be made unequivocally aware of their responsibilities, and the benefits that may accrue to them. The benefits and responsibilities are outlined below for each program segment.

1.2 Vocational Industry experience Program

Generally vocational industry training of students during the course of their university program of study is invaluable to the development of the practical skills necessary for their future profession. In developing the RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program, the benefits for the different stakeholders in the case of the vocational training program were evaluated and demonstrated to them. In order to ensure that this segment of the program operates at the level that would satisfy all the stakeholders, extreme care is taken in the selection of student participants. The selection process is based on academic performance, which constitutes a maximum of 60% of possible points and an interview, which makes up a maximum of 40% of the assessment of the student’s ability to participate. The interview is important in establishing whether the student understands the goals of the
program, and whether the desire to participate is to fulfill those goals, which pertain to his or her own professional development needs. At the interview students must also be able to indicate clearly the reasons for the choice of companies and must demonstrate a good knowledge of the companies’ activities, especially the companies’ strengths in the areas they want to pursue the vocational training. Once selected students are made aware of the companies’ expectations and work culture through departure sessions. The University therefore has the responsibility to ensure that the students sent to various companies have the appropriate skills and the correct attitude to undertake the tasks at hand. Survey of the international companies, which participate in RIIERP clearly demonstrates that RMIT University has been very successful in fulfilling this aspect of the process. The international companies, which receive the students, on the other hand are made aware of the RMIT University’s expectations of the vocational skills to be acquired, as well as other aspects of the training stipulated in the goals of the program.

### 1.2.1 Benefits for Students

The industry experience segment of the program for undergraduate students is aimed principally at providing the students of RMIT University with the opportunity to carry out their vocational training projects overseas at best practice international companies. Under this segment of the program students can work at the overseas companies for periods varying from 3 to 12 months. Its obvious benefits for the students are (i) the opportunity of an early exposure to a global work environment in different cultural and ethical settings, (ii) acquisition of the requisite vocational skills necessary for professional development, (iii) the opportunity to improve students’ employability later as graduates (iv) generous levels of remuneration by companies during the periods the projects are carried out.

There is evidence to indicate that some of the international companies, at which students carry out their vocational training, do make them job offers years later after they graduate. This number has risen to 10% of participants. This should not be seen as a case of brain drain since experience has shown that this small number of young graduates only stay with the overseas companies for periods not exceeding five years and later return to Australia with valuable experience.

![Fig1.2 What do you think you gained from the program?](image)

The opportunity for students to work in different cultural environment, and at the same acquiring simultaneously knowledge of the subtle differences in work ethic in these different cultural settings while having access to state of
the art infrastructure is an invaluable educational experience for any student. This in the end will make them globally employable.

Fig. 1.3 Do you think your participation in the program has improved your employability:
(a) Within Australia (b) Both within and without Australia?

Fig. 1.4 How will you rate the program in your professional development?

A couple of extracts from a survey of participants in figures 1.2 and 1.3 clearly demonstrate that the students strongly believe in the benefits of this part of the program for their professional development.

1.2.2 Benefits for RMIT University

As an educator a university should strive to provide its graduates with the attributes that will give them an edge in the global job market; this has become evermore imperative as the world economy becomes increasing globalize. The very fact that the RMIT University is able to provide opportunities for its students to do their practical work experience projects at reputable high technology companies in highly sophisticated economies around the world does definitely raise its profile as far as prospective students are concerned. This does serve as a strong selling point in the promotion of the various programs of the University to both local and international students. As a result of the strategic links built to companies through RIERP, it has become a common place for some of the overseas companies seeking graduates for employment to indicate their preference for RMIT University graduates. Some of these companies even approach RMIT University to interview and shortlist its graduates for possible employment. A survey of the local companies overwhelmingly illustrates that about 80% of them would
preferably employ a graduate who has, during his or her studies, undergone international industry training program in conformity with goals stipulated by the RIIERP (figure 1.4).

Fig. 1.5 As an employer, you have two new graduates with all other attributes being the same if one of them has undertaken overseas work experience at an international company, during his or her studies; will this fact favour the applicant in your eyes? Yes/No.

The University is therefore being considered by the local and global industries as a source of high quality graduates and prospective industry leaders. Since the ultimate goal of both local and international students is gainful employment after graduation, RMIT University’s good relations with the international industry engendered by this program does strongly raise its profile, in the eyes of these young clients and the community at large, as an institution with a dynamic curriculum relevant to the needs of industry. The feedback from companies about the performance of the students provides an invaluable performance assessment tool for the University’s programs. This enables RMIT University to adjust its curriculum with regards to reinforcing the aspects, which are considered as the strengths of its courses while taking remedial steps to eliminate any weakness brought to light. This component of the program also goes a long way in helping the departments and hence the faculties to contribute towards the University’s policy of internationalization of the Curriculum.

1.2.3 Benefits for the participating Companies

It is an accepted fact that the employees of any company constitute its most valuable resource. The development and acquisition of this resource will undoubtedly occupy a very important place in the company’s long term strategy to develop a sound, competitive and dynamic business. The vocational industry training segment of RIIERP gives companies, without any commitment, the opportunity to observe in house the performance of young, bright and highly motivated prospective employees. It allows the companies to be involved at an early stage in shaping the attitudes and skills of the future labour force for the requisite industry area. Since the development of the labour force for any company in terms of its unique strategic and ethical requirements is a long term process, the involvement of companies at this stage of the professional development of the students is highly invaluable.

Surveys of participating companies have clearly illustrated that they appreciate the skills the students bring to their tasks. This segment of the program thus allows companies to tap into the skills of the students for particular tasks at affordable living allowances without further pecuniary commitments.
Companies at an early stage of interaction with the future labour force will be able to gauge the trends in and level of training being provided by academic institutions. In the context of RIIERP the companies are encouraged, through surveys, and individual assessment of students, to comment on the performance, and to specifically indicate the strengths and weakness of the students. One recurring comment about the weakness of RMIT students has been the fact that they are generally monolingual. Displaying the typical responsiveness of RMIT programs, the Faculty of Education Languages and Community Services, introduced a 12 credit point German language course in 2002.

On the positive side, a survey of German companies, indicate in an overwhelming agreement that the RMIT students are comparable in every way to their peers in German Universities; in addition to this, RMIT students were considered to be diligent, and independent workers. Figures 1.4-1.7 illustrate some of the desirable qualities the companies established in the students.

Fig. 1.6 How do you rate the RMIT students you have supervised with regards to their ability to carry out tasks?

Fig. 1.7 How do you rate the RMIT students with regards to their ability to work in a team?
The global industry thus through its feedback does indirectly exercise influence on the content and operation of the University curriculum. This in the final analysis ensures, to a significant degree, that the companies’ skill base and leadership requirements are taken into account in the development of the programs of the University.

![Bar chart showing integration of RMIT students into the social environment of the company]

**Fig. 1.8** How did the RMIT students integrate into the social environment of your company?

### 1.3 Student Exchange Program

Universities in Australia and elsewhere in the world will usually have exchange programs of study with other Universities around the globe. These generally provide students with the opportunity to spend one or two semesters at partner universities, studying subjects of interest and learning about the cultures of the host countries. RMIT University runs active exchange programs with many universities around the world through its Education Abroad Unit.

One of the limiting factors, especially in the case of Australian University students, is the fact that most of them are monolingual, as far as the world’s major languages are concerned. It is usually impossible for RMIT students to participate in lectures at German or French Universities for example. Active student exchange programs are therefore generally limited to English speaking countries. In the context of RIIERP, a novel way has been adopted to overcome this handicap. Within the framework of RMIT University’s education abroad program, RIIERP has made arrangements with partner universities in the non-English speaking countries, which require them to serve as conduits for RMIT students’ entry into industry programs in the respective countries. This helps to maintain a balance in the numbers of students exchanged since RMIT is a very popular destination especially for European students.

#### 1.3.1 Benefits for Students

This segment of the program, on the whole, seeks to play a significant role in RMIT’s policy of internationalisation. It enables RMIT students to carry out part of their studies at overseas universities in different cultural environment and to exchange ideas with peers from other parts of the world.

Under the international program a number of components are being introduced into the student exchange segment. These components include (i) Participation of RMIT students in international interdisciplinary projects in real time through the use of ISDN-facility. This allows a large number of students to participate in virtual multicultural working environments. (ii) Access to facilities not available at RMIT. The facilitation of industry placements by partner universities under this segment of the program helps to significantly increase the number of participating companies available to students as well as a diversification of projects available. (iv) The presence of the students of partners Universities at RMIT enables the majority of RMIT University students to experience multicultural interaction even when they are unable to avail themselves of the opportunity of a sojourn at overseas universities.
1.3.2 Benefits for RMIT University

The exchange program does raise the profile of RMIT University with overseas partners. This encourages overseas students to come to RMIT University as exchange students thus enriching the cultural exchange component of the curriculum. As RMIT University becomes well known overseas, the proportion of study abroad students who come here will significantly increase. Since study abroad students pay tuition fees, this becomes a significant source of income for the University. By promoting the profile of the University through this segment of the program high quality students can be attracted from overseas into both the undergraduate and postgraduate programs of the University.

1.3.3 Benefits to the participating Companies

The current trends in the globalisation of the world economy, places certain requirements on companies. The work force must have a global outlook, exhibit a significant degree of flexibility and mobility. Graduates, who during their studies have spent time in foreign countries, are likely to be equipped with these desirable qualities.

1.4 Bachelor Degree Theses

The aim of this segment of the program is to enable students to have access to the state of the art research facilities for the execution of their final year projects. In setting up this segment of the program, care was taken to clearly outline the benefits for the stakeholders. The envisaged benefits, which have been achieved under RIIERP, are outlined below.

1.4.1 Benefits for Students

Final year Bachelor Degree Theses with overseas companies are aimed at

(i) providing students of the University, at an early stage, access to state of the art research infrastructure. This will enable them to develop their applied research skills in a sophisticated industry environment (ii) creating conducive conditions for company/institutional grants for postgraduate research for the participating students concerned or their peers in the respective discipline areas of the University.

In the exchange of students with other universities where lack of language knowledge makes participation of RMIT students in lectures impossible, RIIERP has arranged with the partner institutions to provide undergraduate final year research projects, and ensure that supervision can be provided by an English speaking academic. The arrangement also ensures that the projects are industry funded or have patronage from other sources that will allow the students to be paid living allowances.

The capacity to provide an opportunity for an undergraduate student to work at a high technology research facility under the supervision of highly knowledgeable people while interacting with peers from different countries is in itself highly important and constitutes an essential factor in the professional development of the student.

1.4.1 Benefits to RMIT University

The ability to ensure that final year Bachelor degree projects are carried out by students at overseas companies/institutions

(i) has the capacity to relieve pressure on research facilities in the University
(ii) engenders the flow of knowledge back to the University from the myriad of research projects undertaken
(iii) create opportunities for grants from overseas companies and institutions for postgraduate research
(iv) helps to develop to some extent a virtual research infrastructure for the University.
1.4.3 Benefits to the participating Companies

The Research and Development branches of companies operate a myriad of research projects to develop new products or improve existing ones. Within such projects there are stages at which final year students can provide very useful, cost effective middle level research with minimum supervision. This can be highly useful to the company’s bottom line. It also enables the company to be involved in developing its prospective researchers. This segment of RIIERP is thus quite popular with companies. Experience has shown that students, who have undertaken the undergraduate work experience program at the companies, are usually invited to carry out their final year projects there. This segment allows companies to evaluate the student’s potential as a researcher. In many cases companies have provided postgraduate research grants for PhD programs after the students have completed a final year undergraduate projects with them. Typical examples are Robert Bosch in Bamberg and Volkswagen in Wolfsburg in Germany.

1.5 Industry Trainee-ships for New Graduates

The graduate industry training program is aimed at smoothing the entry of new graduates into the global job market. The duration of this part of the program is about 12 months. It brings significant benefits to the three main stakeholders. These benefits are outlined below.

1.5.1 Benefits for Students

This segment of the program seeks to provide new graduates of RMIT University with the opportunity to work at some highly reputable international companies for periods ranging from 6-12 months, immediately after graduation. This is aimed at improving the vocational skills of the graduates before their final entry into the global job market. The survey of Australian companies indicates that 80% of them will preferably employ graduates who have undertaken international industry experience during the course of their studies (fig. 1.4). These companies also indicate that such graduates will receive higher starting salaries than their peers who have not obtained such experience. About 12% of participants in this category get job offers from international companies. This confirms one of the stated goals of RIIERP, which seeks to make graduates globally employable. Hence the benefits of this part of the international programme to the new graduates are evident, and include

- improved vocational skills, which engender professional self-confidence
- improved graduates employability globally
- improved professional standing

Figures 1.3 extracted from a survey of past participants clearly indicates that the participants believe that their participation in the program has clearly improved their employability within and without Australia. The fact that the graduates are able to spend the first year of their professional life at an international company undertaking tasks under partial supervision does smooth the path of their entry into the global job market, and bodes well for their professional development.

1.5.2 Benefits to RMIT University

The fact that the University is able to facilitate the entry of its graduates into the global job market with the provision of immediate vocational training places after graduation does improve the profile of the University as far as prospective students and the general community are concerned. The University through this segment of the program does ensure the inflow of vocational skills from overseas industries to Australian industry. This is a tremendous gain taking into consideration the fact that the local industry has not in any way invested in the development of those skills. This in a way goes a long way to foster the development of better collaborative relations between the University and the local Industry. In the case of RIIERP this is assuming a considerable significance.
Invariably during RMIT’s Open Days the questions often raised by prospective students and their parents/guardians pertain to the employment prospects after graduation. A better working relationship with both the local and international industry to foster the employability of RMIT graduates does put the University in a good stead not only with students and parents or guardians but also with the community at large.

Working closely with companies in the area of vocational training of graduates may lead to other benefits such as postgraduate research grants, consulting projects, or even the provision of continuing education course material for staff of the companies concerned. These levels of cooperation have, as initially hoped, begun to take hold significantly in the case of RIIERP.

1.5.3 Benefits for the Companies

This segment of the program does give companies the opportunity to evaluate the performance of young highly motivated graduates in house for a period of one year without prior commitment of long term employment. These graduates therefore serve as pool from which the hosting companies can seek future full time employees. Over a period of one year the companies by paying a trainee wage, usually below that of a full time employed engineer salary plus the on costs, can benefit from high quality engineer level work provided by the graduate trainees.

1.6 Postgraduate Research Program

This segment of RIIERP aims to create a virtual research infrastructure for RMIT University around the globe. It covers the areas of postgraduate Research. The participants are usually RMIT Masters by research and PhD students, who are selected after very rigorous interviews and awarded grants by the international companies or research institutions, which enable the students to carry out part of their research in the laboratories of those companies or research institutions. The inclusion of this segment in the structure of RIIERP, has been necessitated by the realization that no University or academic institution for that matter can provide, cost effectively, research facilities to meet the aspirations of all its potential postgraduate students. However by building collaborative links to many high technology companies and research institutions with state of the art research infrastructure around the globe it is possible to dramatically increase the research capability of a University. Involvement of a company in this segment of the program entails the commitment of significant resources in pecuniary terms, as well as the time of company experts with the relevant expertise. Hence in the development of this program segment, companies and institutions have to be convinced of the envisaged benefits that will accrue to them. The benefits that can be accrued to the main stakeholders, in this case, are outlined for each group below.

1.6.1 Benefits for Students

This segment of the program makes it possible to provide postgraduate students with access to world-class research facilities and generous scholarships. Invariably Universities are often confronted with the case where highly gifted graduates are interested in pursuing a higher degree in areas where the institutions in question may lack the proper research infrastructure. RIIERP has therefore tried to overcome this handicap by building research links to a large number of high technology companies and research institutions around the world to facilitate joint research. Since the incorporation of this segment into RIIERP in 2000, several postgraduate students have benefited from it. For most students the access to research infrastructure, which may not be available at RMIT or even in Australia constitutes the greatest benefit. There is a student currently undertaking his PhD in the area of space Navigation at the German Aerospace Centre-Space division in Oberpfaffenhoven. Without the links established by RIIERP his desire to do this type of research would have remained a mere dream.

As can be seen from Table 1.1 the students receive awards from the participating companies, which far exceed the scholarships usually awarded to students in Australia. The postgraduate students have unlimited access to state of the art research facilities and excellent company expertise in the form of joint supervision provided with RMIT University. The auspicious research environment enables the participating students to complete their research programs on schedule. Students in this category are also able to publish more frequently in prestigious journals than their peers who are not on RIIERP postgraduate research scheme.
On completion of their programs participants in this category are often sought after by both research institutions and high technology companies as researchers.

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Table 1.1 Current Grants Postgraduate Research grants awarded to RMIT students through RIIERP

This segment of the program is therefore highly beneficial to the students in many ways including the provision of auspicious conditions for the development of their research skills, and opportunities for good jobs in industry and academia.

1.6.2 Benefits for RMIT University

The benefits for the University are quite significant. By allowing students to enrol in its programs while carrying out their research work at the facilities of overseas companies or institutions, under the joint supervision of the University and highly knowledgeable people from those overseas organisations, confers upon the University a virtual research infrastructure capability. The access to state of the art research infrastructure can be worth millions of dollars. The grants awarded to the students by the companies, and access to the additional research infrastructure provided by the companies allows the University also to increase its postgraduate student intake. It enables an effective increase in the number of scholarships that the University can offer students. The size of some of the grants, which are even larger than a senior lecturer’s salary enables the University to attract high quality graduates to its postgraduate research program.

Research collaboration with overseas companies or research institutions does in many ways secure the flow back of knowledge/expertise to the University. Promotion of active collaboration of the research centres associated with the various discipline areas of the University and the international companies can be carried out through this segment of the program. This interaction has been shown to foster the flow of research and consulting projects to the centres from overseas companies. As can be seen from table 1.1 this segment of the program currently brings in postgraduate research grants worth about $612,460 per year. As this segment of the program expands it will significantly contribute to the University’s basket of scholarships.

The research carried out under this component of the program at the overseas companies/institutions has to be completed within strict timelines for competitive reasons. This is achieved without any sacrifice to the quality of the research, and in complete conformity with RMIT Procedures and Regulations for higher Degrees thanks to the availability of first class research facilities. Hence the completion rates of this category of postgraduate students relative to those of their peers at home are much higher. Quick completion rates are of enormous benefits to the University in terms of DEST regulations.
Due to RMIT University’s strong involvement through the senior level supervision provided, as well as the management of the research program in accordance with the University’s guidelines for higher degrees, there will be a high level of interaction between the University and the respective companies involved. This may promote collaboration in other areas of research and lead to joint publications. All these go a long in promoting RMIT University’s image in the international research community.

1.6.3 Benefits for the participating Companies

Through the postgraduate research program companies will be able to tap into a pool of highly motivated and brilliant young researchers at very low cost. They will have the opportunity to train and select researchers whose attributes are in conformity with their strategic goals. Through the co-supervision of the students with RMIT University’s academic staff the companies will be able to tap, free of charge, into the pool of expertise that exists at the level of this University.

The marriage of a well grounded fundamental research, best done at the academic institutional level, and applied research normally pursued at the industrial level is mutually beneficial to the companies and the University. It is important to note that the integrity of products derived from applied research is greatly enhanced by the science of fundamental research.

1.7 Postdoctoral Research Program

This segment of the program provides new doctoral graduates and academic staff of the University the opportunity to expand their horizons by getting involved in top level research at highly reputable institutions and high tech companies around the globe. This segment of the program facilitates the access to state of the art research facilities around the globe. RIIERP’s activities so far have established that high technology companies and research institutions put high premium on interaction at this level.

1.7.1 Benefit for the University and Researchers

This segment is directed towards promoting the University’s active involvement in high quality research programs at the international level. Links to organisations such as the National Aerospace Laboratory of Japan, the German Aerospace Research Establishment, and high technology companies such the Trane Company, BASF AG, etc enables promising researchers at RMIT University access to state of the art research infrastructure to carry out their research in areas of their choice. Subsequent publications in reputable journals and conference proceedings from such high quality research do reinforce the University’s position as a reputable dynamic research institution of international repute.

The individual researchers will be able to build their reputations as researchers of international repute, through such publications. Researchers of this calibre have better chances of winning Australian Research Council grants, which represent a yardstick by which the research credentials of academic institutions are measured in Australia.

This segment of the program, through the use of research infrastructure of overseas institutions, confers upon the University a very significant virtual research infrastructure capability.

1.7.3 Benefits to companies and research institutions

Companies and research institutions participating in this component of the program will have unfettered access to highly qualified and motivated young researchers, who can contribute to their research efforts. Companies can usually avail themselves of this high level of expertise without making long term commitment, since the researchers may reside at the companies for about a period of only two years. The companies through the postdoctoral research fellows also have significant access to expertise at the University. This often leads to the development of mutually beneficial collaborative research in other areas.

1.8 The Global Industry Advisory Board

In 2002, the director of the RIIERP set up a Global Industry Advisory Board, the members of which are drawn from the executive level of major corporations in Australia, as well as some staff from RMIT senior management (table 1.2).
The board in its advisory role meets every three months to deliberate over ways in which the training programs of RIIERP could effectively be directed towards meeting the needs of the local industry. The summarized brief of the board is indicated below:

- The main task of the board will be to explore ways of helping RIIERP to achieve its strategic goals stipulated in the policy document entitled International Industry Experience and Research Program: Benefits for the Stakeholders.

- The director of RIIERP will rely on the expert advice of the board in matters pertaining to the local and global industry needs, as well as issues related to the further development of the program.

- It is hoped that the members of the Advisory Boards, who occupy substantive positions in their own companies and have enormous industry expertise will help to expand the program significantly in terms of increasing industry placements and further diversification of the program.

- The board will play an active role in defining and advising on policies, which will lead to the achievement of the program goals, as well as proposing new avenues for the program development.

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ABB Australia Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Senior Vice President -Head of Process Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Siemens Ltd</td>
<td>General Manager (Human Resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chair of the Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>GKN Engage</td>
<td>Manager (Technical Support Division)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Accenture</td>
<td>Recruiting Director (Australia &amp; New Zealand)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Goethe Institut Inter Nationes</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Colesmyer</td>
<td>General Manager, Recruitment</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Boeing</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Battenfeld</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>BASF</td>
<td>Human Resources Manager</td>
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<td>GM Holden</td>
<td>Human Resources Director</td>
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<td>Arup Australasia</td>
<td>National Manager-Human Resources</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Robert Bosch Australia</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>ABB Australia, Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>RMIT UNIVERSITY MEMBERS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chancellery</td>
<td>Pro Vice-Chancellor</td>
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<td>Pro Vice-Chancellor</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>School of Aerospace, Mechanical</td>
<td>Head of School Manager</td>
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<td>Manufacture Engineering</td>
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<td>Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>VET Manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Corporate Affairs</td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Director -RIIERP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2 Members of the Global Industry Advisory of the RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program.
Since the founding of the board in March 2002, the board members have worked assiduously to help expand and diversify the program. Their efforts have helped to increase the number of international companies participating in the program from 105 to 130. The board also brought along invaluable expertise and advice, which helped to retarget the training programs of RIIERP. Some of the board members provide departure sessions for participants in the program who are selected for work experience at branches of their companies overseas. Siemens Australia and BASF Australia are quite active in providing help in this area. The companies of the board members see a mutual benefit in helping to manage the program. They have strategies in place for branches of their companies anywhere in the world to have direct access to any graduates who have participated in RIIERP during their course of study at RMIT. This has greatly increased the interest of both local and international students in the program.

1.9 Benefits for the Australian Industry

All the six segments of the RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program equip participants with the relevant expertise that may not be readily attainable in Australia. Extracts from the survey (fig. 1.4) of the local industry clearly indicate that companies in Australia place high premium on graduates who have, during the course of their studies, undertaken industry work experience programs overseas. One company executive even indicated in the survey that his company equates 6 months work experience in Germany with two years industry experience at home. The local industry therefore sees great benefits in the activities of RIIERP.

1.10 International Industry Experience courses

All the international industry activities under the various components of the program illustrated in figure 1.1, require a lot of effort by the participating students. The usual time commitment is about 35 hours per week. It is therefore logical that these activities be so structured to enable the students to get academic credit for their participation. Three courses have therefore been developed for the enrolment of the participants. These courses have the following number of credit points depending on the duration of the program at the company:

- Students who spend three months at a company must enroll into a 12 credit point course known as International Industry experience 1, while sojourns of 6 and 12 months require enrolment into respectively 24 and 36 credit points courses. The latter two are known as International Industry Experience 2 and 3.

Students receive intensive pre-departure sessions, which deal with company corporate culture, work ethic and performance expectations. The course guides give very detail guidelines vis-a-vis the execution of the projects, progress reporting, etc. The students also always required to keep journals about cultural events. At the end of the training all participants are required to produce discipline and cultural based reports.

The discipline based report covers the project work at the company. The cultural report on the other hand deals with the socio-economic life of the country in which the work experience is undertaken. Furthermore it covers the impact of the company’s activity on the socio-economic life of the country in which that company is based.

The overall assessment of the performance of the students comprises the following:

1. Performance assessment given by company supervisor: 30 %
2. Assessment of discipline based report by RMIT: 20%
3. Oral presentation of discipline based report at RMIT: 10%
4. Assessment of cultural report by RMIT: 20%
5. Oral presentation of cultural report at RMIT: 10%
6. Journal: 10%

The courses are designed to quantify the activities of the students both in the discipline and cultural sense. The feedback from the stakeholders so far is positive; the educational value of the process has been reinforced. Fees
generated by participants’ enrolment into these courses contribute towards a financially sustainable operation of the program.

1.11 Summary and Conclusion

The RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program has through its six segments developed comprehensive industrial links at the international level that effectively provide vocational training, middle level research and advanced research skills. Judging from the substantial commitment in resources that the international companies were required to make available it was initially difficult convincing them to get involved in this revolutionary partnership with an academic institution. However the growth of the program and the diversification of its branches bear testimony to the fact that the alliance has turned out to be beneficial for all stakeholders. The feedback from the student participants overwhelmingly indicates that they believe their participation in the program has influenced the course they have taken in their professions. The Global Industry Advisory Board that was set up in 2002 has brought invaluable expertise to the program and has improved the networking with both local and international companies. A strong network of about six hundred alumni of the program worldwide has begun to make a significant contribution towards its effective operation, in terms of mentoring, financial contributions and the further forging of links with the global industry.

RIIERP has demonstrated that by setting clear goals, it is possible to convince the global industry to make serious commitment for the vocational training of tertiary students independent of their countries of origin. The local industry, given a clear set of goals for the development of the vocational skills of students, as has been demonstrated by the case of the Global Industry Advisory Board, is prepared to deploy the skills and time to help universities in their efforts to produce graduates with the attributes necessary for a competitive industry in a globalize economy. Today international companies see themselves as international corporate citizens. Hence apart from the definite benefits that companies get through their participation in this program, the efforts they make to help develop the professional skills of the future labour force can also be seen in the context of a service to the community at large. Nowadays most companies strive to be good corporate citizens. They do this by adhering to the principles of sustainable development and rendering service to the community. Helping RIIERP to promote the skills development of RMIT students, who come from many countries, is one sure way of rendering service to the world community.

1.12 Bibliography

1. Abanteriba, S., Role and Challenges of the University in the 21st Century

