

Bridging the Skills Gap



Enhancing the Employability of International Chinese Students

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Summary

Key findings	2
Recommendations	3
Background	5
Methodology	6

Findings

Industry's openness	7
Recruitment channels	9
Graduate pathways and programs	11
Screening and interviews	13
Skill gaps	15
Chinese students' self assessment	17
Summary	19
References	20

Key Findings



Employability skills are framed in different ways and the construct itself requires contextualization

For international students, employability extends beyond academic achievements to include essential job-seeking skills, soft skills and country specific employability skills.



The job market for Chinese international students is expected to be both challenging and highly competitive

Employment outlook in China is challenging. Local Chinese businesses are placing overseas and domestic students on the same level for employability, using criteria specifically tailored to the local Chinese context.



There are fundamental differences between the labor markets in Australia and China

Labor markets are diverging between Australia and China in areas of recruitment channels and processes, and hiring people with certain characteristics.



Mastering digital channels and networking skills are essential employability skills for international students

Centralized digital platforms such as WeChat and Zhaoping.com emerge as key recruitment channels in China, while Australian digital platforms are more diverse.

In Australia, effective networking is characterized by proactive outreach through informal channels and active engagement.

In China, networking depend on strong familial and parental connections, and referrals after internships.



Australian and Chinese businesses are hiring graduates with certain characteristics

Australian firms prioritize values, personal narratives and life experiences of the graduates.

Chinese companies emphasize relevant internship and work experience, relevant professional skills, and formal qualifications and certificates.

The increased use of AI in the hiring process has introduced challenges for international students.



Chinese international students face critical soft skill gaps

Industries in both countries have pinpointed six critical skill gaps for Chinese international students: communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, problem solving, adaptability, and personal integrity.



There are country specific employability skill gaps to bridge for international Chinese students

Australian employers believe that Chinese international students could enhance skills in critical thinking, innovative thinking, and conflict management.

Chinese businesses believe that students could enhance their skills in systematic thinking, social compatibility, and multi-disciplinary knowledge.



Effective career planning and preparation are vital

Despite varying characteristics demanded by employers in different countries, there is a universal expectation for candidates to be well-prepared, qualified, passionate, and committed to their roles.



Universities must adopt an evidence-based approach to ensure that international students achieve successful employability outcomes

GOS results show that Business School students report improved soft skills. However, the survey does not fully capture their confidence in the specific employability skills demanded in their home country labor markets,

Recommendations

For Universities

• Integrate Career Learning Across All Degrees:

– Ensure that career development is embedded as a degree level learning outcome and scaffolded throughout the entire degree, as students generally nowadays seem more strategically focused on their degree helping them get a job. This requires investing in specialized teaching staff who are experts in career development and industry engagement.

– Foster environments that challenge students to reflect on how they want to be perceived professionally and what realistic career expectations they should have, early. This will involve shifting some responsibility back to students, urging them to engage actively, early and continually with all available resources to enhance their employability, including connections with industry.

• Adopt an Evidence-Based, Contextualized Approach:

– Adopt a contextualized approach to employability, recognizing its multifaceted nature.

– Allocate more resources directly to faculties and programs to develop tailored employability sessions and skill development workshops that address the specific needs of diverse student cohorts and aligns with the dynamic demands of the job market.

• Upgrade Educator Training:

– Invest in development programs that keep educators up-to-date with diverse labor market trends, digital recruitment platforms, country specific and industry specific demands.

• Enhance Career Support Infrastructure:

– Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and the necessary resources to ensure accountability and effective support for student career development.

– Strengthen internships, networking opportunities, and career counseling specifically towards international students.

• Strengthen Mentorship and Guidance:

– Facilitate the integration of employability mentorship programs into existing student networks and associations, career guidance initiatives that encourage students to reflect on their professional identity and plan their careers early.

For Educators

• Build employability into curriculum and teaching:

– Co-develop industry-centric curricula and assessments in collaboration with both local and international partners.

– Undertake curriculum enhancement requires regular involvement with industry at local and global levels.

– Help students connect their education to real-world outcomes, boosting motivation, skills, and confidence for future success.

• Facilitate Experiential Learning:

– Incorporate real-life case studies from diverse markets and industry guest lectures to build both soft and technical skills, and ensure such activities include global perspectives and career development learning specific to students home countries.

For Students

• Take Charge of Your Career Planning:

– Engage actively in career development workshops, internships, and mentorship programs and take leadership of career planning and development at the early stage of study, holistically.

– Cultivate a motivated and positive mindset as part of university studies that centers on education aspirations and potential career paths

• Develop Dual Competency Sets:

– Customize approach to align with the unique values and expectations of employers across diverse countries.

– Enhance universal soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, adaptability) while also focusing on region-specific competencies, such as leveraging digital platforms like WeChat or proactive networking strategies.

• Utilize Available Resources:

– Leverage university career services, alumni networks, and industry partnerships to gain practical experience and real-world insights.

For Industry

• Enhance Engagement with Educational Institutions:

– Reassess recruitment channels and collaborate with universities to design graduate programs and internships that reflect the demands of both local and global markets.

• Invest in Talent Integration:

– Acknowledge the strengths that Chinese learners bring, honed by deep learning, practice, and repetition in the workforce, including hiring processes.

– Dedicate resources to support the professional development of international graduates through mentorship, clear career pathways, and ongoing training initiatives.

• Tailor Recruitment Strategies:

– Adjust job descriptions and screening processes to acknowledge the unique strengths of international students while clearly outlining the technical, practical, and cultural competencies required for success.



Background

Australia’s education sector is a cornerstone of the nation’s economy, ranking as its fourth-largest export industry. Australia is one of the most popular international destinations for Chinese students. As of November 2024, 188,347 Chinese students were enrolled in Australian educational institutions (Figure 1), comprising 22% of all international students in the country (Department of Education, 2025).

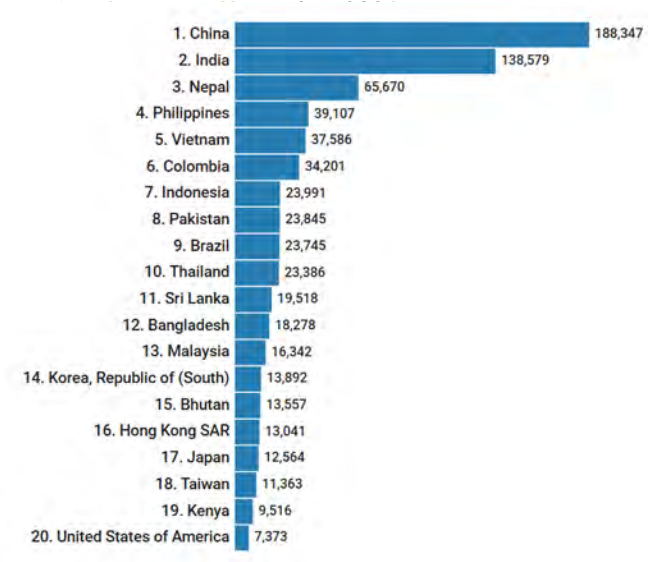
Although Australia remains a favored destination for education, Chinese international students encounter growing challenges when transitioning from academia to the workforce. In China, where many of these students return, the labour market is rapidly changing and characterized by intense competition and a tepid demand for graduates.

China currently has a significantly high youth unemployment rate (see Figure 2).

Similarly, in Australia, emerging research highlights that international graduates, including those from China, struggle significantly to secure employment post-graduation, reflecting broad challenges in the pursuit of successful career outcomes (Blackmore et al., 2014). These challenges stem from a range of factors including mismatches between labor market conditions across countries, insufficient preparation for competitive job markets, and unrealistic expectations regarding employment experience pre-graduation, internship processes and career learning and development opportunities. Furthermore, the graduate recruitment timelines differ markedly between Australia and China, adding complexity to the job-seeking process for Chinese students overseas. Gaining relevant career and internship experiences, which are essential for enhancing employability, proves difficult for many students during their studies due to language deficiencies and visa restrictions.

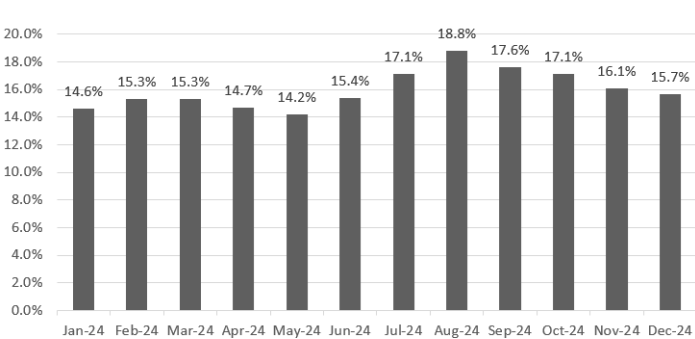
The challenges facing international Chinese students in securing employment post-graduation calls for an urgent and comprehensive re-examination to enhance their employability as part of university study. This will involve re-aligning educational outcomes more closely with the dynamic and evolving demands of the labor markets in Australia, China, and globally.

Figure 1: International student numbers in Australia, by



Source: Department of Education, 2025

Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate in China, January to December 2024



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

Methodology

For this report, the authors integrated both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Following Williams, et al. (2016), it was hypothesized that “employability” as a construct needs to be contextualised and is multifaceted.

Our project distinguishes itself from previous employability studies (Jackson, 2024; Bennett, 2019; Brinkley, et al., 2012; Bowman, 2010; Jackson, et al, 2019; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2023, 2025) by delving into industry perspectives from both countries, exploring the underlying reasons for the challenges and barriers around employability issues encountered by Australian and Chinese students. This report marks the beginning of such an initiative, presenting preliminary insights from a two-year research endeavor aimed at better understanding how to equip international Chinese students for global careers. The research not only seeks to improve the career prospects for these students but to enrich the discourse around developing employability skills, career learning and development as part of a purposely-designed curriculum for both international and domestic students who chose to study and work in Australia and/or China.

Our research focuses on exploring industry perspectives from both China and Australia on the career preparedness (or underpreparedness) of international Chinese students—a viewpoint often overshadowed by research that centers on university-centric and/or student-focused analyses. Our inquiry delved into several key areas: current recruitment practices and channels used by companies, the perceived employability (or non-employability) of international Chinese students by industry experts, and the identification of key strengths and skills anticipated to be in high demand over the next 5–10 years.

The research received human research ethical approval (2024/HE000479) from The University of Sydney.

The data collection presented here, included:

a) **Textual Analysis:** A textual analysis of internship and graduate program recruitment requirements from 62 leading companies in Australia and 45 in China, across five industries: Accounting Services, Finance, Banking, Management Advice and Consulting Services, and Computer System Design and Related Services (Technology and IT). These companies were selected based on their prominence in industries where international Chinese students typically find employment. The textual analysis provides significant insights into the recruitment practices and labor market differences between Australia and China.

b) **Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 10 employers and HR experts across Australia and China to gather nuanced perspectives on the employability of students and the skills they seek in graduates.

c) **Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) Analysis:** Responses from the Australian national Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) were analysed, specifically focusing on feedback from Chinese students who completed business-related courses in Australia. The GOS is an annual survey administered to all Australian university graduates six months after graduation, designed to collect data on their higher education experiences and employment activities post-graduation, including employment status.



Finding 1

Industry's Openness

Table 1: Industry's Openness to international Chinese students

	Australia	China
Common	• In general, industries welcome international students.	
Country specific	• Visa success is a key concern.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Returned Chinese students are increasingly being evaluated by the same criteria as students from domestic universities.• Recruitment criteria, including internship, certificates, and awards, are tailored to the local Chinese context.

Industries in Australia generally welcome international Chinese students, recognizing their strengths in international experience, diversity, and work ethic.

The labor market disparities between China and Australia are substantial, and this gap presents considerable employment challenges for countries with such differences. Despite these challenges, our analysis finds that the Australian industry, overall, is welcoming to international students and recognizes their strengths in international experience, diversity, and work ethic.

Visa success for employment external to a student's home country is a key concern for Australian companies to recruit international students.

However, a significant challenge remains with visa issues, and many websites indicate either a refusal to accept international students or maintain ambiguous policies, leading many international students to feel they are ineligible for certain positions.

For example, a key finding from the text analysis of internship and graduate program recruitment requirements is that only 17% (of the analysed) Australian companies explicitly offer employment opportunities to international students.

In China, industry also generally welcomes former international students, particularly valuing their English communication skills and global perspective gain.

Former international students are highly regarded by multi-national companies in China. These students also benefit from favorable local government talent acquisition policies, particularly if they graduate from highly ranked global institutions. Such policies frequently grant them work rights, enhancing their employability. For example, in 2024, Beijing and Shanghai specifically targeted graduates from the top 100 institutions for certain recruitment initiatives.

Increasingly, local Chinese businesses are placing overseas returned and domestic students on the same level for employability, using criteria specifically tailored to the local Chinese context.

The overall sentiment is about leveling the playing field. The early advantage international students had once they had completed their studies overseas is diminishing. For instance, some of our study's interviewees mention a devaluation of overseas degrees.

Of the 45 Chinese companies analysed for this study, only a handful of technology companies and financial investment firms dedicated recruitment programs for returned overseas students. However, positions in these programs were limited. In other companies, our text analysis notes that the recruitment criteria and initiatives show that increasingly, criteria used are specifically tailored to the local Chinese context. Internship experience, certificates and awards are highly appreciated in China. For example, a major Chinese bank's selection criteria emphasize honors and rewards that are culturally specific, such as receiving an Outstanding Student Cadet Awards or Triple A Outstanding Student Award or Outstanding Graduate Award. The emphasis on Industries in China placing local credentials as important means that both overseas and domestic graduates are now on an equal footing for gaining graduate positions.

“Industry-wise, I think most of the companies are concerned whether the people got the visa. ... This makes a lot of companies hesitate to recruit international students.”

A HR consultant in Australia who has worked with Chinese international students

“There are now many returned overseas students, and we currently evaluate their work capabilities on the same platform as students from domestic universities. We also consider what kind of foreign universities they attended.”

A HR manager from a state-owned Chinese company

Finding 2

Recruitment Channels

Table 2: Recruitment Channels

	Australia	China
Common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rise of digital platforms as recruitment channels. Traditional methods like campus recruitment, referrals and networking play a significant role. 	
Country specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital channels are diverse. Networking including reaching out through informal channels, engaging proactively, and interacting with others is important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised platforms such as WeChat and Zhaopin.com dominate. Family and personal networks and professional referrals after internships are important.

There is a notable divergence in the digital technologies employed in recruitment in Australia and China.

As recruitment infrastructure and channels have increasingly moved to digital platforms, our research finds that this adds another layer to the complexity of international Chinese students navigating Australia and China’s employment market for job opportunities. This can further limit the information that is accessible and complicate the application process for these students, which is dependent on student’s familiarity with each system.

In Australia, the approach to digital recruitment is more diverse and varied.

Many companies maintain a strong presence on their own websites, but platforms such as GradConnection and Prosple are becoming increasingly popular for aggregating job opportunities. These platforms offer students access to a wide range of graduate programs, albeit creating a more fragmented experience.

In China, WeChat and centralised recruitment platforms such as Zhaopin.com dominate the recruitment landscape.

Among the Chinese companies analysed for this study, approximately 80% of them use WeChat, and as their primary communication and recruitment channel. This platform acts as a centralized hub, facilitating multiple functionalities through built-in mini apps that streamline the application and communication process.

Traditional methods like campus recruitment continue to play a significant role in both countries but opportunities remain less accessible to international Chinese students.

Despite the shift to digital, we find that two traditional channels continue to play a crucial role in recruitment. One significant channel is the campus fairs. However,

opportunities remain less accessible to international Chinese students. Many job opportunities showcased at these fairs in Australia remain less accessible to international students due to work right constraints. In China, the reliance on in-person presence also excludes international students, as they are often unable to participate in these in-person campus recruitments due to the mismatch of graduate recruitment timelines in Australia and China: the academic year in Australia ends in December, but in June in China.

While both Australia and China companies highlight networking and referrals as effective job acquisition channels, the nature of networks varies significantly between Australia and China.

In this study’s interviews, another traditional recruitment channel emerged as being significant, which is networking and referrals. Furthermore, we find that the nature of these networks varies significantly between Australia and China. In Australia, networking and referrals for international Chinese students are about actively reaching out through informal channels, engaging proactively, and interacting with others in meaningful ways. Employers often prefer these networks for sourcing overseas Chinese candidates who possess highly credible backgrounds and qualifications, viewing them as a testament to a candidate’s professional capabilities and cultural fit.

In China, networking often hinge on familial and parental connections and professional referrals after internships. Several HR experts in China highlighted the growing importance of these personal networks. For instance, it is noted that securing positions in management training programs at state-owned enterprises and major banks frequently necessitates “having the right connections”. This reliance on relationships underscores the role of personal networks in navigating the competitive landscape of the Chinese job market, where familial ties can often determine access to opportunities.

"If you're an international student looking for opportunities, I'd say give the informal channels a go. Get on LinkedIn, join local group and industry events, and don't overlook employee referrals or word of mouth. It's a great way to build genuine connections and open doors that might not be available through the usual formal routes."

An experienced HR consultant based in Australia

"WeChat is a significant tool, and other domestic comprehensive recruitment platforms, such as Zhaopin.com and social platforms like Xiaohongshu provide extensive information on employment and job positions. "

An experienced HR consultant based in China

Finding 3

Graduate Pathways and Programs

Table 3: Graduate Pathways and Programs

	Australia	China
Country specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-structured yet flexible. Emphasize the individual identities of candidates and their initiative and passion for work when it comes to job seeking. Interest in the personal growth and diverse academic backgrounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathways may not be as elaborately detailed. Prioritize candidates with specific academic credentials, internship experience, and technical capabilities. 5-7 series of rigid application steps for students, which can include a combination of online tests, written assessments, and multiple interviews.

Recruitment pathways and programs are pivotal in shaping how graduates envision and navigate their potential career trajectories within organizations. Our research highlights that the recruitment approaches in Australia and China reflect differing emphasis on personal development and structured networking reflecting the distinctive recruitment dynamics in Australia and China.

Overall, Australian companies offer more flexible graduate programs and welcome candidates from different academic backgrounds.

In Australia, employers' graduate pathways and programs are typically well-structured yet flexible, ranging from 12 to 24 months. These programs focus on developing a broad skill set, fostering leadership potential, and fast-tracking career growth. In these graduate pathways and programs, companies often emphasize the individual identities of candidates. This focus demonstrates the organization's interest in the personal growth and diverse academic backgrounds of potential employees. For instance, many large enterprises in Australia demonstrate an openness to candidates with diverse backgrounds and educational attainment. There are often multiple career pathways within the firms.

While clear career pathways are generally accessible across various departments, graduates often need to actively seek out this information through company websites and other channels, such as emails, mentorships and word-of-mouth. Many Australian firms provide resources such as mentoring programs and share success stories from past applicants to support new hires in visualizing their future within the company and navigating the early stages of their professional development.

In Australia, there is a significant emphasis on a candidate's initiative and passion for work when it comes to job seeking.

This focus aims to identify individuals who not only have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications but also

demonstrate a proactive attitude and genuine enthusiasm for their work, qualities that are highly valued in the Australian workplace culture.

Chinese companies prioritize streamlining the recruitment process and providing clear, detailed job descriptions focusing on professional and technical skills.

Chinese companies tend to prioritize graduates with specific academic credentials and professional capabilities. They also highly value correct moral character, a positive work attitude, and a sense of collective responsibility among their employees. Job descriptions often aim to ensure that graduates have a thorough understanding of the role, covering aspects like responsibilities, logistics, and expectations. While career pathways in Chinese companies may not be as elaborately detailed as their Australian counterparts, they still exist and are often embedded within broader recruitment strategies. More recently, we have seen the emergence of postdoctoral pathways, reflecting the phenomenon of potential academic over-qualification in the Chinese market.

In China, there is a strong focus on graduates' commitment and performance throughout the job search process.

The job market dynamics in China are characterized by a strong presence of private and state-owned enterprises, which dominate over multi-national corporations in recruitment volumes. Securing a job typically involves a more extensive (5–7) series of rigid steps for students, which can include a combination of online tests, written assessments, and multiple interviews. This approach, reminiscent of China's ancient Imperial Examination System, emphasizes meritocratic evaluation through systematic testing. The process is akin to an "adult version" of the National College Entrance Exam, embodying the high-pressure exam culture integral to China's educational ethos.

"In our selection process, we delve into more than just academic qualifications. We're keen to understand the graduate's passions and how they envision their professional journey. What inspires them? How do they see their career facilitating their personal growth? It's no longer just about obtaining a degree and fitting into a predefined role within a company. We want to know how well they can apply their life experiences to their work and grow within their role."

A HR executive from a major professional service company based in Australia

"It is frustrating that sometimes candidates come to interviews without a clear understanding of the job or what it entails. They seem lost and often expect me to explain not only the role but also why they should be interested in it."

A HR manager from a multinational company based in China

Finding 4

Screening and Interviews

Table 4: Screening and Interviews

	Australia	China
Common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of AI in both Australia and China in initial screening. 	
Country specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly emphasize the life experience and individual identities of candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly value formal qualifications and certificates and internship and work experience The rise of AI video interviews.

Australian companies highly emphasize the life experience and individual identities of graduates, making these narratives central to their screening and interview strategies.

We find that Australian companies (reviewed for this study) value the personal passion and unique life experience and backgrounds of potential candidates and seek adaptable, well-rounded graduates. The initial CV screening leads to assessment centres and case interviews, which focus on a broader range of criteria such as teamwork, problem-solving skills, and cultural fit, rather than solely on exam performance.

In our study, an Australian HR manager explained how hiring practices have changed. In the past, companies mainly focused on academic degrees and expected employees to simply follow instructions. Now, they look for more than just qualifications. Employers want to see that students and graduates are passionate about what they do and interested in growing both professionally and personally. They care about how candidates plan to advance their career and how that growth helps them as an individual.

Our study’s text analysis of internship and graduate program recruitment requirements and interviews highlighted that the recruitment approaches in Australia and China reflect differing perceptions on personal narratives and structured network efficiencies, further showcasing the importance of deeply understanding the distinctive recruitment dynamics in different countries.

Chinese companies highly value relevant internship and work experience, relevant professional skills, and formal qualifications and certificates.

Chinese companies hold high standards and specific expectations regarding the qualifications and professional demeanor of their prospective employees.

In addition, our study’s interviews indicate that Chinese firms highly value internship and relevant workplace experience within leading companies or sectors as part of their screening criteria. They assess the relevance of these experiences, considering whether they are within the same industry or from different sectors, as well as the prestige of the organizations where the internships occurred. For example, internships at globally recognized institutions, such as Fortune 500 companies, are particularly esteemed and can significantly enhance a graduate’s attractiveness to potential employers.

A common trend in the screening and interview process is the use of AI in both Australia and China, which has introduced new challenges for international students.

In Australia, AI can be used to evaluate simple, specific criteria such as work rights, visas, language proficiency, location, and fundamental skills. For highly sought-after positions, where hundreds of applications are received, AI can assess the overall match between a candidate’s resume and the job requirements, generating a comprehensive score to rank candidates. This allows for a fast-paced way to consider applicants.

In China, an increasing number of companies not only use AI to filter resumes but also to conduct initial AI-centric interviews. These interviews are typically used in the preliminary screening stage, especially by internet companies hiring for technical roles where the interview questions are relatively standard and basic. This method suits positions that require specific technical skills. On the other hand, AI poses challenges for candidates who may not have high academic qualifications but possess strong professional capabilities and emotional intelligence. In traditional interviews, such candidates could leverage their strengths effectively, but AI-centric interviews might filter them out before they have a chance to showcase such abilities.

"In recent years, Chinese companies have evolved: both private and state-owned enterprises have raised their standards. They now have clear demands regarding educational qualifications, the prestige of the graduation institution, and the skills and capabilities of individuals."

An experienced HR consultant based in China

"More and more domestic Chinese students are taking internships [in China] at companies while they continue their studies. This gives them a competitive advantage in terms of work experience during the employment process compared to returned Chinese students."

A HR manager from a major tech company in China

"Our selection process isn't just about ticking boxes against rigid criteria. We employ AI technology to determine how well a candidate's resume aligns with the specific demands of the job they're applying for. The system generates a comprehensive score reflecting this match, which we then use to rank candidates. This approach enables us to assess each candidate holistically."

A HR manager from a major Australian company

"When selecting graduates, we consider a variety of factors. The primary factor is the graduate's relevant internship experiences and social practice, followed by the direct relevance of the graduate's major to the position. Thirdly, we look at the potential and adaptability of the graduate."

An experienced HR consultant based in China

Finding 5

Skill Gaps

Table 5: Expected employability skills for international Chinese students

	Australia	China
Common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Interpersonal skills • Teamwork skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving skills • Adaptive skills • Personal integrity
Country specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Innovative thinking • Conflict management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic thinking • Social compatibility • Multi-disciplinary knowledge

Six key skills that are highly valued in both countries include communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, adaptive skills, and personal integrity.

Our research indicates that six key skills are highly sought after by employers, yet universities in both Australia and China may not be sufficiently developing these competencies in students. These essential skills are: communication, interpersonal abilities, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and personal integrity. They are critical for navigating workplace environments effectively. Employers in both countries stress the importance of these attributes, noting their role in facilitating successful collaborations and organizational performance in a globally interconnected market. This finding provides insight into the benefit of universities offerings bespoke and general employability enhancement programs, career learning and development to help address any gaps for graduate success.

It is noteworthy that personal integrity frequently emerges as a key theme in interviews from both Australia and China, albeit with different cultural interpretations. In Australia, personal integrity is often associated with making responsible decisions, reflecting a broad expectation for ethical behavior in both personal and professional contexts. Conversely, in China, the emphasis on personal integrity tends to focus on political correctness and maintaining a positive attitude towards work such as dedication, loyalty and hard work.

Besides the six key skills, in Australia, employers believe that Chinese international students could enhance their skills in critical thinking, innovative thinking, and conflict management.

These areas are seen as crucial for graduates full integration and success in the Australian workplace, emphasizing the need for abilities that support effective

problem-solving, creativity in solutions, and adept handling of workplace disagreements. Compared with Chinese companies, there is more focus on soft skills such as openness and self-drive. These traits are especially critical for individuals participating in graduate programs, where the ability to assimilate into the company culture and operate independently is often as crucial as possessing technical know-how. This emphasis on soft skills is designed to complement the industry-specific hard skills that are essential for career advancement.

In China, employers believe that Chinese international students could enhance their skills in systematic thinking, social compatibility, and multi-disciplinary knowledge.

There is a growing demand for students with a blend of specialties in hard skills—such as those combining business acumen with expertise in biomedicine, big data, and AI. For instance, a major publishing company in China who took part in this study suggests that candidates need to possess expertise in data mining, database management, and video editing. Alongside professional and technology capabilities, Chinese companies also expect candidates to exhibit adaptability, cultural alignment, and the ability to effectively collaborate within teams.

Chinese international students have a unique opportunity to leverage their international experience and diversity.

During this study’s interviews in both China and Australia, it was consistently mentioned that Chinese international students have a unique opportunity to leverage their international experience and diversity. An HR consultant from China noted that as Chinese companies expand globally, there is a significant demand for students who possess international experience and capabilities.

"As an HR manager in Australia, I've noticed that while international graduates excel academically, they often need to strengthen key employability skills. Employers highly value strong communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, along with soft skills like adaptability, people management skills and conflict management."

A HR manager from a finance company in Australia

"A key trend in our industry is we highly value graduates with practical attitudes and multi-disciplinary training and knowledge in digital intelligence, operational skills, and management capabilities. "

A HR manager from a major e-commerce company in China

Finding 6

Chinese students' self-assessment

Building on the findings presented so far, the authors now draw on data from the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) and further examine Chinese students' self-assessment of employability skills. The GOS is an Australian-based annual survey designed to collect feedback from all Australian university graduates about their higher education experiences (six months post-graduation) and their activities post-graduation, including employment outcomes.

This study focuses on the Graduate Attributes Scale in the GOS. GOS measures graduate attributes from three dimensions: 1. Eight foundation skills indicators (labelled as GFOUND1-8), 2. Six adaptive skills indicators (labelled as GADAPT 1-6), and 3. Five collaborative skills indicators (labelled as GCOLLAB 1-5). Participants were asked to self-assess each skill indicator on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree".

To better understand Chinese students' perceptions of their graduate attributes, we mapped the 19 attribute indicators into seven categories of employability skills adapted from the CareerEDGE Employability Development Profile by Dacre Pool et al. (2014) and tailored it to align with the study's unique context and objectives. Table 2 presents the mapping of GOS graduate attributes with the employability skills.

For this study, the GOS data was pooled from six consecutive years which occurred from 2017 to 2022, focusing specifically on the responses of Chinese students who completed business-related courses in Australia. The dataset encompasses responses from 5,906 undergraduate and postgraduate business graduates from one Australian university.

This comprehensive data set offers a unique opportunity to re-examine how Chinese business students in Australia perceive their employability skills while providing a blueprint for others to follow, building upon the findings presented here.

We discovered that based on data from the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS), Chinese international students tend to rate themselves highly on soft skills that are critically valued in both Australian and Chinese job markets.

The skills where these students show the most confidence include problem-solving, embracing diversity and international experience, collaborative skills, adaptability, and communication. These competencies align well with the key employability skills identified as important in both countries.

This positive self-assessment not only underscores the strengths of these students' perceptions of the importance of such skills but also highlights the advantages of the Australian education sector, helping to equip Chinese international students with essential global skills.

Although the GOS survey provides valuable insights into the general soft skills of Chinese international students, it reveals less about their confidence in employability skills required in their home country labor markets, as the survey does not specifically capture these nuances, nor has a comparison research study been conducted to investigate China's national employability outcome statistics for Chinese domestic students.

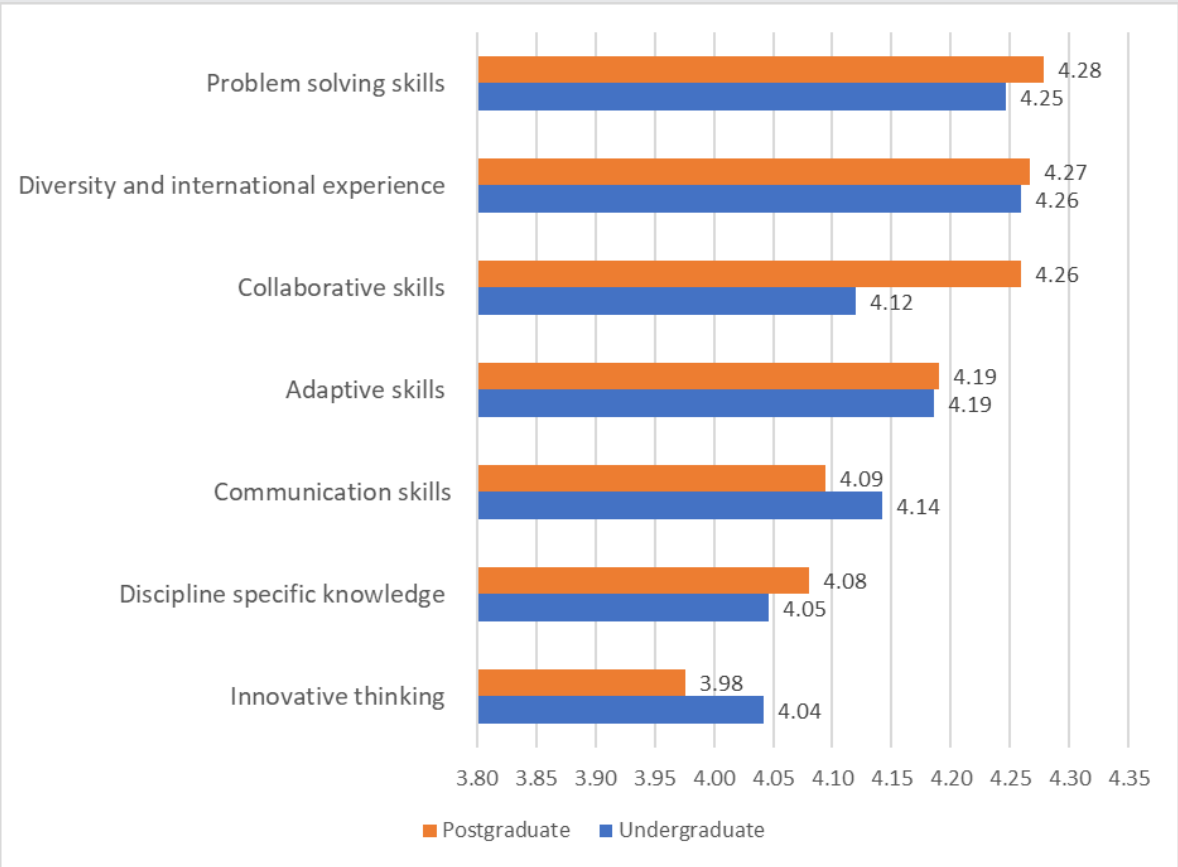
Notably, the GOS results indicate that Chinese students demonstrate lower confidence in innovative skills, a key competency highly valued in the Australian job market. This gap underscores the need for educational institutions to potentially re-focus on re-evaluating and adapting career development curriculum to better address the specific requirements of the local workforce as well as for those students returning to their home country once they have completed their studies in Australia.



Table 6: Employability skills captured by the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey

Communication skills -Oral communication skills (GFOUND1) -Written communication skills (GFOUND2) Problem solving skills -Ability to solve problems (GFOUND6) -Ability to integrate knowledge (GFOUND7) -Ability to think independently about problems (GFOUND8) Adaptive skills -Ability to adapt knowledge in different contexts (GADAPT4) -Ability to apply skills in different contexts (GADAPT5) -Ability to develop relevant knowledge (GFOUND4) -Ability to develop relevant skills (GFOUND5) -Capacity to work independently (GADAPT6)	Collaborative skills -Working well in a team (GCOLLAB1) -Getting on well with others in the workplace (GCOLLAB2) -Working collaboratively with colleagues to complete tasks (GCOLLAB3) Discipline specific knowledge -Numeracy skills (GFOUND3) -Broad general knowledge (GADAPT1) Diversity and international experience -Understanding of different points of view (GCOLLAB4) -Ability to interact with co-workers from different or multicultural backgrounds (GCOLLAB5) Innovative thinking -Ability to identify new opportunities (GADAPT3)
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Figure 3: Chinese international students’ self-assessment of employability skills upon graduation



Summary

This research indicates that the construct of employability skills requires contextualization and regular involvement with industry at a local and global level. Additionally, Chinese students in Australia face a complex array of employability skills demands.

Distinct labor market demands exist at industry level, in recruitment channels, graduate pathways and degree programs, such as job screening, interviews and skill expectations. There are fundamental differences between the labor markets in Australia and China, including country-specific career development learning requirements. Understanding and mastering the top employability factors valued by employers in both Australia and China is crucial.

For Chinese international students, employability extends beyond academic achievements to include essential job-seeking skills, soft skills and country specific employability skills. During their brief period of study abroad, especially for those without a clear career plan, there is a tendency to prioritize more tangible employability skills through formal qualifications and certificates, often at the expense of developing other skills. This focus can lead to an imbalance in bespoke and general skill set development, potentially affecting graduates' adaptability and success in the diverse job market in Australia and in China.

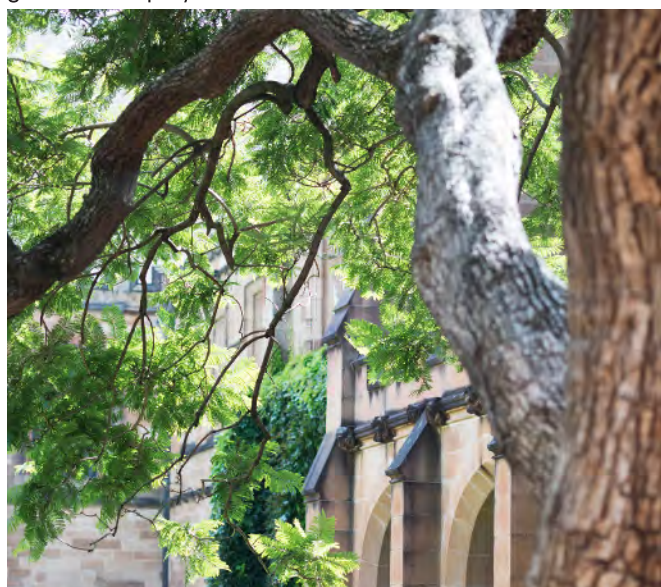
Effective career planning and preparation are vital for Chinese international students that reflect graduate destination, Australia and/or China. International students should proactively consider their future employment prospects early in their educational journey. It's important for them to identify potential employers, understand the types of jobs available in their field of interest, and recognize the specific skills these positions require. With this knowledge, students can strategically focus on developing the necessary skills throughout their academic

studies, including the relevant country's recruitment requirements and processes.

Despite varying core competencies demanded by employers in different countries, there is a universal expectation for candidates to be well-prepared, qualified, passionate, and committed to their roles. This emphasizes the importance for job seekers, particularly for international students, to customize their approach to align with the unique values and expectations of employers across diverse markets and countries.

Universities, educators and career development learning services could play a significant role by tailoring their programs to better prepare students for these varied approaches, working more closely with industry in different countries. For example, regularly integrating case studies and real-life examples from both Australian and Chinese markets (and globally) into career preparation workshops could equip students with the skills needed to navigate these diverse environments effectively. Additionally, fostering partnerships with companies in both countries to provide direct insights and engagement opportunities could enhance students' readiness and confidence in their job search and securement efforts.

Next steps: Other universities, disciplines, and researchers can build upon the findings presented here to deepen insights into the challenges and opportunities in international higher education career development learning. This evidence-based approach will help enhance graduate employment outcomes.



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