

Ready123GO: A Novel Course-Wide Employability Intervention

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Abstract

Ready123GO is a novel work integrated learning (WIL) curriculum intervention designed by a Faculty at an Australian University to enhance and track course-wide student engagement in employability learning. Specific objectives include a) improving student employability literacy; b) developing (and assessing) student reflections on employability skills in a discipline-specific context; c) recalibrating student perceptions of their employability confidence based on authentic WIL experiences, and d) capturing and reporting on longitudinal employability learning gain (+/-) data. A critical examination of the intervention is reported via a case study methodology, using an insider researcher perspective combining inductive and deductive analyses of the benefits and challenges of the intervention identified by industry and academic partners (n = 16). The study found that partner perceptions of the intervention's utility and value are contingent upon the extent to which employability skill awareness, development and real-world calibration can be embedded within existing assessment practices. The findings support the design intentions of the intervention. Rather than introducing substantial new curricular components, the light-touch re-design of assessment, via existing discipline-centric WIL units, combined with a co-ordination of course-wide employability curricula, provides a practical architecture for delivering employability learning development. This also functions to provide a curriculum-led process for monitoring lead data necessary for the iterative review of employability gain trends.

Keywords: Embedded work integrated learning (WIL), employability confidence, learning gains, curriculum intervention.

Introduction

The recent maturation of work integrated learning (WIL) and the contribution to graduate employability (Jackson, 2013, 2015) by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Australia has been demonstrated through diverse discipline-specific WIL models (Universities Australia, 2019). These WIL models, which involve the purposeful design of curricula (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Kaider et al., 2017) that intentionally embed the world of work inside formal education (Zegwaard et al., 2023) are where and how students

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sharpen their capacity to learn to work and work to learn (Barnett, 2012; Orrell, 2011). This is why WIL is closely associated with, and recognised as, a curriculum strategy for enhancing graduate employability (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). It also functions as an obvious vehicle for reporting on employability; however, the monitoring of employability learning across a student's learning journey resulting from the purposeful scaffolding of WIL experiences across a programme of study (Dean, 2020) as a means for strengthening employability is complex (Young et al., 2022a). Herein lies a critical current challenge for HEIs concerning how to best deliver scalable and sustainable scaffolded employability development that also provides meaningful lead data relating to employability learning gains.

In response to this challenge, this study investigates a curriculum intervention (Ready123GO) designed and delivered by a Faculty at an Australian university. The Faculty set out to design and deliver a curriculum-embedded approach for supporting (Young et al., 2019, 2022a, 2022b) and monitoring (Young et al., 2025) employability development within existing WIL units (Young et al., 2019, 2024). Findings from an internal WIL Evaluation Project (Young et al., 2023, 2024), which recommended more effective approaches to galvanize and report on the impact of current multiple and varied WIL models (Young et al., 2022a, 2025, 2026), evolved into the idea for an overarching employability intervention, later titled 'Ready123GO'. It needed to balance individualised employability learning with the realities of large and diverse student cohorts so that:

...students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Oliver, 2015, p. 56).

Beyond agreement that WIL is a vehicle for enhancing employability, the lack of a single preferred definition of employability across the sector (Caballero et al., 2026), contributes to varied understandings of how WIL can best impact employability gains. Subsequently, this study adopts the above definition of employability to investigate the relationship between participation in WIL and employability (Jackson, 2013, 2015). It examines if scaffolded compulsory curriculum and assessment opportunities, designed to develop employability awareness and confidence, is valued by educators and industry partners. The goal was to examine the most viable and valuable means for developing and monitoring discipline-centric employability learning for all undergraduate students in the Faculty (Young et al., 2022a, 2026).

Methods

This study forms part of a broader action research programme investigating the Ready123GO intervention within the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment (SEBE). Ethical approval was granted by the University's Human Research

Ethics Committee (Approval No. 379). Two of the researchers (as part of the broader study) were involved in this investigation. These researchers were self-selected, with selection endorsed by the wider research group for bringing a complementary WIL expertise to the study. Researcher (A) contributed 15+ years of experience in curriculum design, curriculum innovation, policy and qualitative research methods. Researcher (B) contributed to 3+ years of experience in large-scale WIL delivery and employability development, with an additional 10+ years in teaching and assessing science curricula.

Approved clearance for use and analyses of academic surveys and industry focus group findings (both examining perceptions of the intervention's design and value) were prioritised as a means to investigate the architecture of the intervention. In particular, whether the intervention is practical, scalable, and sustainable for delivering the development and monitoring of employability learning. It examines whether repurposing existing WIL units offers a practical and scalable mechanism for supporting employability development. It also examines if the Ready123GO architecture, anchored by the Employability Confidence Check-in (ECC) enables the monitoring of employability confidence. The study investigates two key research questions:

- R1: Does Ready123GO intervention incorporate curriculum components capable of supporting employability development and generating evidence of employability learning gains that can be analysed and measured?
- R2: What do academic and industry partners perceive as the value and utility of the Ready123GO intervention?

To evaluate the intervention architecture, five design propositions (P1-P5) were examined:

- P1: The ECC task and associated reflective activities are authentic and meaningful because they are contextualised within students' disciplinary learning experiences.
- P2: The intervention facilitates student-centred employability confidence check-ins across the course.
- P3: The intervention provides a light-touch mechanism through which teaching teams can support incremental employability development without substantial modification to existing WIL units.
- P4: The intervention supports a dual-purpose pedagogy by enabling educators to both foster and monitor employability learning gains.
- P5: The intervention aligns to sector-wide standards of quality WIL.

The final proposition (P5) of this study is directly addressed according to the Quality WIL Framework (Campbell et al., 2019), however propositions 1-4 are investigated according to the evidence from Faculty partners (industry and educator research participants) regarding the value (and concerns) with the concept. In doing so, the study sets out to investigate the evident quality and local value of the intervention in terms of its ability to support existing employability learning across the Faculty in a scalable and sustainable

fashion.

The industry focus group participants ($n = 8$) were purposively recruited through existing relationships with WIL staff in Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment (SEBE). The researchers sought participation from 8-10 industry partners representing the major disciplinary areas associated with the intervention. An expression of interest email was distributed to industry participants. Participants represented the following disciplinary areas: Environmental Sciences ($n=3$); Engineering ($n=2$); IT ($n=2$) and STEM ($n=1$). A two-hour focus group was conducted using a semi-structured question schedule (see Appendix A). Responses were provided anonymously via Padlet, with participants having the option of providing pen and paper response submissions if they chose. Handwritten anonymous responses were transcribed into Padlet following the focus group.

The researchers distributed a Qualtrics survey (see Appendix B) to the 19 Faculty members directly involved in endorsing, designing, or delivering the intervention, achieving a 42% response rate ($n = 8$). The survey was anonymous, which protected respondent confidentiality but prevented us from analysing responses by academic role (e.g., designer vs. delivery staff) or level of programme involvement. To mitigate non-response bias, we conducted a post-hoc review of open-ended feedback to identify implicit markers of respondent role, such as references to endorsement, design, or delivery functions. This review confirmed that responses came from individuals across different programme involvement types ($n > 1$ per role category), suggesting reasonable representation despite the small sample.

The researchers applied a reflexive thematic analysis (TA) framework (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to both participant group data sets. A sequential research procedure, utilising an inductive approach, was applied to identify themes for qualitative analysis. Tier 1 involved an independent deep engagement with the data by both researchers. Coding and then themes were induced via the observation and recording of recurring words and phrases from participant responses.

Tier 2 involved a collaborative reflection and a peer debriefing, including multiple feedback loops between the researchers to lessen biases about the collective interpretation from the two independently produced datasets. A set of shared thematic findings (functioning as a reflexive journal to document moments of resonance, discomfort, and surprise) was discussed during their research check-ins. Potential biases relating to the intervention and the interpretation of the context-centric minutiae were discussed by the researchers. The researchers kept personal records of data procedures, personal interpretations, and inductive coding workings. This active and interpretative process was central to our methodology.

As part of the tier 2 collaborative thematic analysis, the researchers agreed on a set of themes; prior to thematic finalisation the themes were run through a series of

CoPilot prompts for sense-checking of the de-identified data. The intention was to review for the reliability of a) the coding and b) Tier 1-Tier 2 themes and to synthesise if and where researcher judgements were conflicting or limited. The independent manual thematic analysis (using Braun and Clarke's methodology) ensured the researchers maintained direct engagement with the data. Discussions to reconcile our findings through reflexive dialogue, were instrumental to establishing our shared interpretations.

Throughout the inductive part of the study, both researchers explicitly expressed how they were mindful of the co-constructed nature of this qualitative research. In other words, pre-constructed positions and co-constructed meanings informed the coding and the theme generation (Step 1) as well as the insights situated within the quality WIL research (Step 2). In light of this, applying GenAI using Copilot™ analysis, positioning it as a third-party lens to test our emerging themes for missed voices or blind spots, became useful. Rather than allowing AI outputs to shape our interpretation, the above sequencing ensured that concerns about AI congruence in qualitative research were mitigated (Christou, 2024). Our expert judgement as WIL practitioners anchored the analysis; CoPilot brought a level of depth and breadth to our shared understandings, without overshadowing human-generated findings. The process also resulted in minor rewording of the theme phrasing.

Drawing on case study methodology (Lucas et al., 2018), the study seeks to provide a transparent account of both the intervention context and the researchers' insider perspectives (Fleming, 2018). Accordingly, the following case study is presented as a situated account of the Ready123GO intervention, recognising that the findings are informed by both the local context and the researchers' insider perspectives. The intention is not to claim universal applicability, but rather to provide sufficient contextual detail for readers to assess the transferability of the intervention to other settings.

Case Study

The intervention is now in its fourth year of implementation and part of the Faculty's business-as-usual curriculum-led approach to employability enhancement in at least one course in three Schools within the Faculty. Prior to implementation, during the conceptualisation and testing, a thorough review of the literature supporting an intervention like Ready123GO was instrumental to our standard action-research approaches to assessment led reform (Young et al., 2019, 2022a, 2022b).

The existing approaches to WIL were likely to be maintained—with scaffolded experiences across the programmes of study purposed with the intentional connection of existing learning experiences (Dean, 2020; Young et al., 2022a). Increasing attention has been directed towards the recognition and portability of employability capabilities, exemplified by Universities Australia's (2024) advocacy for a National Skills Passport as part of its response to the Universities Accord. However, delivering personalised employability learning at scale (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019) remains a significant and

ongoing challenge (Young et al., 2026). This is because the scaffolding of the transferable skills and employability capabilities, to facilitate relevance to changing labour market contexts (Johnson et al., 2019), are always a focal point. During the initial review of the Faculty curriculum, it was deemed that the existing curriculum architecture was not yet fully realised to support individualised and personalised student employability development. The requirement to design and deliver an assessment architecture that was personally meaningful to students, but also equitable and accessible across whole cohorts, remained key (Johnson et al., 2019).

Explicit attention to employability skill enhancement in structurally unavoidable assessments, to improve student success and employment outcomes (Jackson, 2013, 2015) were a key driver. The authenticity of the assessment, of and for real-world employability learning was critical (Boud et al., 2020; Schultz et al., 2022; Young et al., 2022b, 2026). The quality WIL principles, set out by Sachs et al. (2017) around assessment, in particular assessments that utilised reflective practice relating to employability skills, were positioned as a fundamental pedagogical design principle. There was resounding evidence from the literature that quality WIL design boosts student preparation for, and success in, professional practice (Smith, 2012). The assessments needed to formalise the path toward work readiness (Jackson, 2013, 2015; Jackson, 2019; Knight & Yorke, 2004).

The above decision to support cohort-wide employability development at scale was largely manageable. The added business case requirement to employ curriculum delivery to contribute to comprehensive lead data for monitoring (and reporting) of employability learning gains (+/-) was harder to navigate. Strategic partners deemed the integration of employability data as essential to the sustainability of the model. The literature and our context-centric approaches to WIL evaluation (Young et al., 2023, 2024, 2025) and graduate outcomes (Jackson, 2013, 2015) informed the fundamentals of the design. It needed to develop and monitor employability learning.

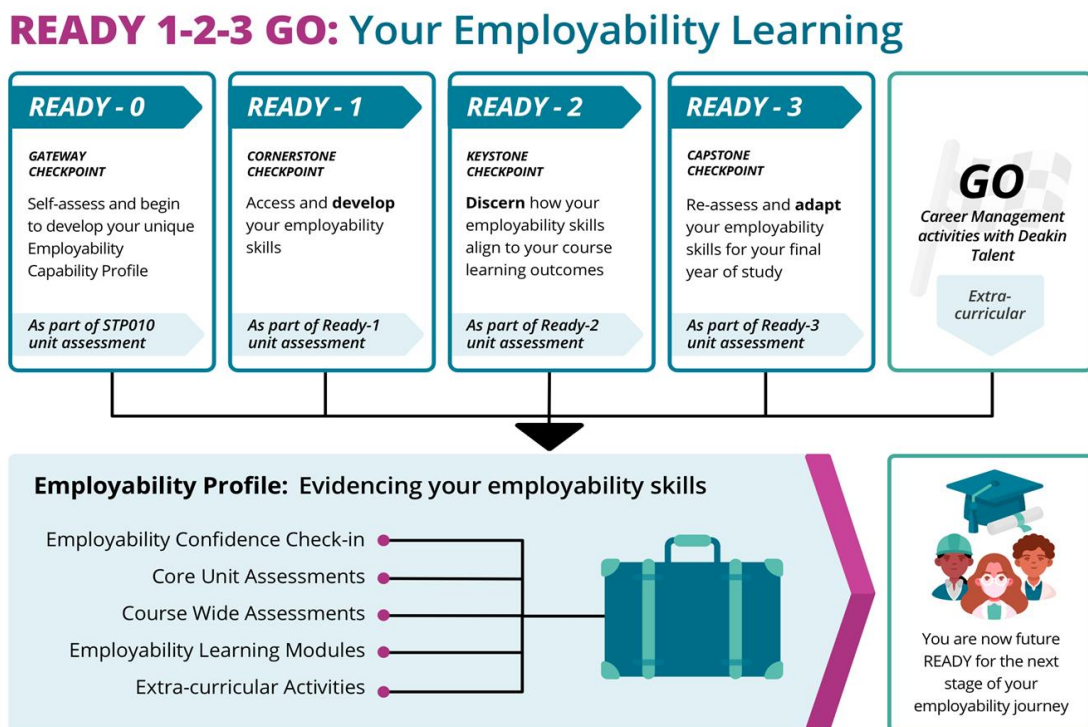
The scholarly approach resulted in the decision to anchor student perceptions of employability confidence to a context-specific employability instrument, called the 'ECC'. The ECC has a dual-function; it is a static pedagogical tool and bounded evaluative instrument, designed to provide a repeatable and sustainable approach for tracking employability learning gains across a student's course of study. The intervention includes elements of self-reporting, anchored by the ECC data, as a benchmarking exercise within a formal assessment. The reflective practice aspect of the assessment task, which wraps around the ECC, provides an opportunity for students to formulate evaluative judgements about their employability. The Ready123GO assessment task incorporates educator recognition of tacit and unconscious skill development. The pedagogical intent and the assessment design inform how students are advised to weave together their academic learning, their career goals and their employability confidence towards their work readiness, multiple times across their course. This is why the ECC remains as a static tool, the intention is that the repeated application of the ECC,

embedded in unique ways when scaffolded at level-appropriate assessments across the course, provide a longitudinal lens for re-calibrating employability confidence as one of the many indicators of their graduate success.

When sharing the core design principles of the intervention with academics, the consistent messaging was that Ready123GO was a course-centred approach purposed with enhancing existing WIL curricula to explicitly include employability learning in a more visible manner. Figure 1 was used as a communication tool to inform academics (and their students) about the overall structure and intention of the novel intervention called Ready123GO.

Figure 1

Ready123GO infographic



The intervention was described to educators as an intervention aimed at:

- Providing a Faculty-led and supported curriculum intervention related to the Faculty's overarching WIL strategy.
- Increasing awareness of student's lived experience and perceptions of employability confidence at key learning moments in time across their course.
- Supplementing existing WIL units, and assessments (with a suite of optional employability resources to embed into existing curricula) to support them to teach and assess student employability awareness.
- Enabling students to monitor changes in their employability confidence and required learning over time.

- Supporting the monitoring of employability learning gains at unit, course, and Faculty levels for quality WIL curriculum enhancement.
- Contributing to the unit, course, School, Faculty-wide evaluation of employability learning gain impact (for quality assurance, unit quality improvement, scholarship and research).
- Strengthening the visibility and celebrating the impact of innovative course-wide employability curricula at all levels of the university (and the sector).

Resourcing was a significant consideration and in our context a reliance on particular technologies (i.e. Feedback Fruits and the Learning Management System) was needed if a light-touch uplift of existing units and the course-wide WIL monitoring of impact was to be successful. The purposeful re-grouping of existing core WIL units that would now focus on employability, ensued. The reorientation of these learning moments across courses (for both students and educators) was ascribed as the means for which scalability and sustainability of a multiplicity-WIL approach for the Faculty could be achieved.

Following the scholarly, 'in principle' examination of the concept, a pulse check was conducted by the research group to ascertain if the intervention met the standards in the curriculum domain of the Quality WIL Standards Framework (Campbell et al., 2019). Figure 2 identifies the areas in which the intervention and the standards were matched and aligned.

Figure 2

Quality WIL Standards – Curriculum Domain

- ✓ WIL experiences are embedded through a whole-of qualification curriculum design underpinned by current research and scholarship.
- ✓ Students and industry are partners in the design of WIL curriculum.
- ✓ WIL curriculum design reflects professional accreditation requirements and ongoing career and employability development.
- ✓ WIL curriculum design provides inclusive, equitable and accessible experiences.
- ✓ WIL assessment design is supported by authentic tasks, aligned with learning goals and graduate outcomes.
- ✓ Student learning gains are measurable against intended outcomes.
- ✓ Benchmarking of WIL assessment and identification of areas for improvement.

The Faculty sought to minimise changes to existing curricula while introducing a deliberately sequenced, course-wide approach to employability learning. In doing so, a range of operational considerations relating to scalability and long-term sustainability

became apparent. Following the success of the Faculty's approach to multiplicity-WIL (Young et al., 2022b), the intervention aimed to provide a light-touch, scalable and sustainable mechanism for strengthening employability learning while preserving existing curriculum structures. Following endorsement from WIL champions, pilot implementation commenced in 2023.

The course-specific units within Ready123GO would be determined based on two criteria: 1) core-to-course WIL units, and 2) existing focus on employability. From there, the chosen assessment within each selected unit would be reviewed for potential light-touch alignment to the purpose-built Ready123GO tool, titled ECC. The ECC was designed (and later enhanced based on feedback from the research participants of the action research study) to capture student confidence across a set of 32 employability statements. Students are required to respond to each statement in terms of their current confidence (at 4 touchpoints across their course – R0, R1, R2, R3). While the ECC is provided as a learner-centered self-review activity, it also serves academic evaluation purposes by providing a set of de-identified cohort responses to employability skills, confidence and reflections, that are encouraged to be used in teaching and analysed to inform teaching. Students are asked to reflect on their results to identify areas of strength and weakness in their employability, how they developed those strengths, and what they might do in future to develop their weaknesses. Reflections on employability literacy and learning within the context of discipline are shaped by both the unit, and the course, learning outcomes. An additional component of Ready123GO is that the in-unit learning (at the discretion of the unit chair) can be complemented by a series of employability literacy modules (called GET SET curricula) and again were specifically designed for Ready123GO. This is how the reflection task becomes the practical means for linking the ECC to the unit learning outcomes. To this end, the WIL units become fully utilised as the primary vehicle for employability (as formally documented as a pillar of the Faculty's 'Education and Employability Guiding Plan' (Young et al., 2023)).

Final agreed themes (as presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below) represent what was consistent, emergent, and pithy in the shared understanding (from an academic and industry perspective) of the overarching benefits and concerns for the intervention (see 'commonality' column). While the responses demonstrate notable convergence around the perceived value and concerns of the intervention, the data also reveal important tensions in how employability learning, confidence, and responsibility are understood across stakeholder groups. These themes are presented as patterns of perception and experience rather than claims of measured learning impact, noting the interpretive limits of this form of qualitative data used in this study. In line with qualitative research principles, we interpret these recurring patterns as indicative of shared experiences rather than statistical proof.

Table 1*Tier 1 Benefits of Ready123GO Initiative*

Academic (A) 'Value'	Industry (I) 'Value'	(A) + (I)
Theme: Responds to the need to enhance student employability • Career Development & Job Readiness • Employability Skills development • Reflection & Self-Assessment • Confidence-Awareness • Strengths and Weaknesses • Real-World Connection • Curriculum Integration	Theme: Responds to the need for improved real-world preparedness (and capabilities) • Awareness, development and evidence of visible job-ready skills • Career development preparedness and confidence around industry & work readiness • Collaboration for improved recruitment and employer insights.	Theme: Responds to collective employability development for work readiness • Working across partner portfolios to achieve shared goals for employability enhancement. • Fosters student development and employability by integrating practical and career-focused learning with reflection, skill tracking, and engagement, while ensuring sustainable implementation.

Table 2*Tier 1: Concerns relating to Ready123GO initiative*

Academic (A) 'Value'	Industry (I) 'Value'	(A) + (I)
Theme: Capacity for educators to meaningfully engage in all stages of the intervention. • Curriculum alignment and unit adjustments is time consuming • Data and evaluation of impact needs workload • Additional workload burden • Student engagement, repetitiveness risks.	Theme: Translation of skills for real world practice. • Possible misrepresentation of skill levels • Misalignment of real-world employability skills • Recalibration of 'confidence' • Repetition (of 'surveys')	Theme: Support required for employability enhancement that impacts student success. • Implementation requires additional support and may result in operational strain. • Student engagement challenges. • Administrative challenges, heavy workloads, and unit strain

Academic (A) ‘Value’	Industry (I) ‘Value’	(A) + (I)
	• Communication about and resourcing of embedded tools.	

While there were different emphases of benefit and concern across the academic and industry partner groups, we deduced that there was a broad goal of enhancing graduate employability—all participants articulated this goal (albeit via different priorities and risk frames). Academics primarily emphasised pedagogical integrations, reflective learning, and the sustainability of curriculum-wide implementation, often foregrounding workload and institutional capacity. In contrast, industry participants prioritised real-world calibration, evidentiary demonstration of capability and concerns about confidence without competence. These differing emphases reveal productive tensions rather than simple overlap, shaping how the value, feasibility and risks of the intervention are variously constructed across partner groups.

Benefits Agreed Theme: “Employability development for work readiness”

This theme captures the research participants’ (industry and academics) responses to a key ‘value’ of Ready123GO. The academic participants were specific about the structured format of the ECC, and the reflection within the assessment, as likely to deepen learning. Academic Participant 6 noted the benefit as: “Getting students to focus on employability skills, which will hopefully lead to better graduate employment outcomes.” The building of confidence was noted as a mutual benefit; however, this emphasis also introduced a tension between confidence as a learning outcome and confidence as a proxy for demonstrated competence. Confidence and competence were discussed by the industry participants, noting the likelihood that the intervention would develop students’ work readiness. Industry Participant 1 expressed how: “Future applicants will be industry-ready apart from having discipline knowledge.” Readiness speaks to the enhancement of the job-ready/work ready graduate (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019), where the technical skills of the discipline domain and transferrable skills are seen to be of benefit to the employer, but also to the sector. This suggests that while employability development is widely valued, our partners diverged in how readiness should be developed, evidenced, measured, and assured.

Concerns Agreed Theme: “Support for operational strains”

This theme captures research participants’ most noted ‘concerns’ for Ready123GO. The common thread related to resourcing and the support structures for the intervention to continue as business as usual. Some academic participants reported concerns about the actual or perspective extra workload involved in implementing Ready123GO (i.e. revising unit content, updating online platforms, handling student queries, and verifying task completion). Academic Participant 8 noted: “Workload

associated with adjusting existing tasks (and justifying the change), updating unit site and answering questions from students.” This workload concern intersects with a broader comment raised by Industry Participant 1: “I believe it is a great initiative but how [it is] embedded into units needs to be considered carefully.” Rather than functioning as isolated implementation issues, these operational strains expose a structural tension between aspirations for scalable WIL and the resourcing required to sustain curriculum-embedded employability learning with integrity. A recurring concern related to the rationale for repeated administration of the ECC. This speaks to a slippage in shared understanding about the rationale for the repeated use of the ECC across the course. This concern highlights the potential pedagogical risk if the purpose of repeated (scaffolded) curricula is not made explicit to the teaching teams.

Following the inductive phase of the analysis, Researcher A set out to unpack the relationship (if any) between the perceived utility and value of the intervention (based on iterative analysis of the concerns and benefits) and the sector-wide framing of quality WIL principles and standards (see Campbell et al., 2019). Participant responses to the potential benefits or concerns with the intervention underwent an intertextual analysis. The objective was to investigate for traces (or lack thereof) of ‘quality’ standards within the intervention itself. A deductive approach was used to determine if there were risks of the intervention that required addressing (see Table 3 below). The themes (see Table 1 & 2) were recorded according to a two-part code system: [M] to represent faithful phrasing matches between the themes and the WIL standards. [I] denotes an implicit phrasing match. Table 3 includes (column 1) whether the theme was recorded by the research participants as a perceived benefit (+) and/or concern (-). The relationship between the value and quality, as well as the perceived benefits and/or concerns, were all seen as significant in addressing the future considerations, impacts and potential risks. This analysis does not claim empirical validation of quality but instead offers an analytic lens for examining perceived alignment and potential risks.

Table 3

Intertextual analysis for indicators of quality

Thematic responses	Quality Standards -	WIL	Relationship between ‘value’ and ‘quality’ - potential risk(s)
Student engagement	[I] – standards 1.7	1.1-	If engagement drops across any part of the intervention, then quality will be compromised.
Both (+) & (-) mentions	[I] – standards 2.2	2.2	

Thematic responses	Quality Standards -	WIL	Relationship between 'value' and 'quality' - potential risk(s)
Career Understanding/ Development (+) only.	[M] – standards 2.3		Career development learning is a high value (with no reported concerns from participants) and as such, must remain as the central purpose and intention of the curriculum.
Employability Skills; Development Both (+) & (-) mentions	[M] – standards 2.3 [I] – standards 1.1 - 1.7 [I] – standards 2.3 and 2.6		Employability skill development must be designed in context, with systems for effective monitoring and measuring of learning gains appropriate for the discipline/course addressed.
Job/Industry Ready Skills & job/industry-readiness and recruitment Both (+) & (-) mentions	[I] – standards 2.3 and 2.5, 4.0		Readiness and 'recruitment' pathways are a high value outcome of WIL. Assurance of fit-for-purpose industry readiness and "recruitment" pathways, via co-created authenticity curricula with partners is essential.
Self-awareness, self-assessment and reflection Both (+) & (-) mentions	[I] – standards 1.7, 2.3, and 2.6		Employability reflection (via assessment) is useful not just for personalising student development but must be incorporated into meta-systems for measuring learning gains (evidence) and (impact).
Real-World Connection/Preparedness (+) only	[I] – standards 2.5		Real-world connections for improved graduate outcomes are high value (with no reported concerns from participants) and as such, must remain as the central focus with the authentic assessment design.
Curriculum Integration Both (+) & (-) mentions	[I] – standards 2.1, 2.5, and 2.6 (+); 2.1 and 2.7 (-)		The benefits of embedded whole-of-qualification curriculum design to WIL assessments may involve some repetitiveness - scaffolding and providing context-centric purpose are essential.
Employer insights	[I] – standards 2.2 and 4.6		The co-design approach is a high value (with no reported concerns from participants) and as such, involving industry/community insights

Thematic responses	Quality Standards -	WIL	Relationship between 'value' and 'quality' - potential risk(s)
(+) only			relating to student readiness (before recruitment) must be maintained.
Inclusive & Equitable (+) only	[M] – standards 2.4 [I] – standards 1.4 and 2.2		The accessibility and inclusion inherent in the design is a high value (with no reported concerns from participants) – maintain the students as co-designers of learning must be maintained.
Employability Confidence Both (+) & (-) mentions	[I] – standards 1.1-1.7 and 2.7		Employability confidence is not referred to explicitly in the standards (however, it is an indicator of quality curriculum and an outcome of a positive student experience).
Resourcing (-) only	[M] – standards 3.6 [I] – standards 2.7		Resourcing is a high value (as reported in the concerns from participants) and as such while academic stress relating to workload/time constraints are not directly addressed explicitly in the standards they are implied in implementation challenges (see 3.6 and 2.7) and associated risks need consideration to ensure continuous improvement.

The deductive method, used to gain an indication of the utility, value and concerns of the intervention, in relation to the agreed set of quality standards for WIL, contributed to our meaning-making process (Pearson et al., 2025). As anticipated, given that the intervention was a curriculum-led model, most matches were evidenced in the Curriculum Domain (Standards 2.1–2.7) (refer to Figure 2). There were matches found across the 'Student Experience', and less common matches in the 'Stakeholder' and 'Institutional' domains.

This case study methodology with the inclusion of inductive and deductive methods functions effectively as an examination of early-stage curriculum innovation, underpinned by a transparent sharing of context-specific findings. Rather than claiming objectivity detached from context, the findings are intended to represent a situated interpretation, a commentary that may inform the trial and testing of similar models beyond our context.

Discussion

Partner responses, reinforced by the intertextual analysis, indicate that

Ready123GO currently demonstrates that the design and delivery provide a mechanism promising scalable and sustainable curriculum-led approaches to the support of employability learning across a course of study. Findings support the embedding of confidence check-ins within authentic, discipline-specific assessment that allows students to re-calibrate self-perceptions, against demonstrated performance benchmarked to industry standards during the WIL experience.

Nested in the industry responses were caveats to success—that students may overestimate their skills and capabilities in the self-report elements of the intervention. They emphasised the importance of the distinction between employability confidence and employability competence. Arising from the data is the meritorious capability of the intervention to report on student perceptions of learning gains for the student and for educators. The measuring of this leading data whilst requiring careful interrogation is novel. The nascent approach is integral to the Faculty's WIL strategy: learning gains are positioned as an increasingly important consideration of our WIL impact evaluation reporting (Young et al., 2023, 2024). A model that can enable the reporting of student employability learning gains (+/-), ahead of the graduate outcome data (Jackson, 2015) has great potential from a curriculum and student experience perspective. The caveat is that data experts and appropriate technologies for data gathering and analysis, need enterprise-wide resourcing if they are to be leveraged (Young et al., 2024).

The enablers and barriers of a curriculum-led approach to employability development speak to the need for employability learning to be guided, and that work/job readiness goes beyond being a formal curriculum matter. For greatest student success, translation to current employer requirements is necessary in the endeavour to reduce skill calibration risks. The notion of sense checking, and even formal curriculum opportunities for skill recalibration, emerges as a critical facet of this style of employability learning. Confidence indicators are best expressed and most meaningful when carefully positioned alongside structured curriculum opportunities for reflection, feedback, and authentic assessment, allowing learners to refine their judgements about their own employability capabilities (Young et al., 2025).

The most described risk by all partners was coded as resourcing. While identified in this data as a significant risk, the finding is not particular to Ready123GO; the resourcing of WIL is well-known challenge (Dean et al., 2023; Oliver, 2015; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Sachs et al., 2017). Consistent with existing scholarship (Dollinger & Brown, 2019; Jackson, 2013), the findings from this study reiterate that the relationship between resourcing and the need for scalability remains a ubiquitous challenge for WIL implementation (Dollinger & Brown, 2019; Jackson, 2013). However, partners noted that because Ready123GO is designed as a light-touch enhancement of existing WIL units—rather than a comprehensive curriculum redesign initiative—that leverages existing assessments the intervention promises to provide a practical mechanism for extending employability learning across entire courses and thus minimising additional curriculum burden.

The findings advocate for interventions that do not rely upon standalone employability instruments. This supports the design of Ready123GO as a pedagogical architecture that integrates employability learning, employability skill confidence data, reflection on that learning via authentic assessment, with longitudinal monitoring of employability learning gain trends (+/-), in a fashion that fosters student engagement and genuine progression toward confidence and readiness over time. Potential gains can be triangulated with typical unit (subject) and assessment data to provide insights into demonstrations of achieved learning outcomes.

While the relationship between WIL and employability is well established (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Young et al., 2023, 2024), comparatively few studies have examined Faculty-wide approaches for evaluating employability development across a programme of study. The reiteration of the importance of employability data for all stakeholders, as confirmed by academic and industry participants, supported findings from other related evaluation studies (Young et al., 2023, 2024). This study confirms that the technical design of the assessment frame, which facilitates an embedded and engaging learner-experience that includes personalised student learning data, facilitates a less resource-intensive mode for reporting on the employability learning gains that occur during a student's course. A particular strength of the intervention is the integration of employability development and employability monitoring within the same curriculum structure. Rather than treating evaluation as a separate activity, employability reflections are embedded within core WIL assessments, creating opportunities to simultaneously support student learning and generate evidence of perceived development.

Ready123GO is underpinned by the assumption that employability development is a longitudinal learning process. The design of Ready123GO supports this through multiple units where students are encouraged to build awareness of, and reflect upon, their confidence in skills not yet 'tested' via formal employment opportunities. It provides theory to practice learning, of and beyond the discipline, wherein students apply understandings of themselves as employable 'citizen scholars' (Miller et al., 2020). This approach has strong scholarly foundations to the cannon of similar curricula and pedagogies that enliven work-ready capabilities in personally meaningful ways (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019).

The intervention deliberately focusses on aspects of employability development that educators can influence most directly: curriculum design, assessment design, and meaningful learning outcomes. A persistent challenge within employability research concerns identifying where, how, and to what extent employability development occurs during a student's course of study. Ready123GO provides a scalable course-wide solution to developing (and tracking) not just a pedagogical and assessment-driven rationale for uplifted employability learning but also a student experience rationale for genuine progression toward meaningful outcomes.

A pragmatic advantage of the intervention is its reliance on existing WIL

curricula. Building on previously established WIL structures (Garett et al., 2016; Young et al., 2022a), Ready123GO required relatively modest curriculum modifications rather than wholesale redesign. The light-touch approach to existing WIL units meant that only minor curriculum and assessment enhancements were necessary, generating a level of 'ease' toward the inclusion of the ECC. The intervention also had a further pragmatic advantage—it defined (and reduced) the number of instances in which the employability curricula needed to be formally assessed. The baseline touchpoints provide a manageable means for performing a pulse-check on the quality of the course approach to employability supported by timely check-ins on and for student's employability learning journey. In short, the evidence to date indicates that the intervention provides a scalable and sustainable curriculum-led approach to both developing and monitoring student employability learning.

Further Research and Limitations

While case study methodologies with an emphasis on 'insider researcher' commentaries are noted for their limitations particularly around biases (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018), in this instance, the chosen methodology was deemed appropriate for providing a context-rich exploration of the intervention. The case study approach worked best as a means for gaining insights about the curriculum design. When supplemented by the inclusion of researcher reflections—arising from the parallel horizon scanning of the literature—the case study was improved as a scholarly artefact.

The insider research method, which included rigorous peer feedback loops and debriefing meetings, served to address and lessen personal biases. Given that the researchers were directly committed to and responsible for embedded and scaffolded employability learning, the inclusion of reflexive practice throughout the coding and analysis process was critical to the examination of emerging interpretations, as consistent with an insider researcher approach (Fleming, 2018).

While the study participation is small, and we could not determine whether non-respondents to the academic survey might have differed systematically from respondents, observation of diverse perspectives from the data captures a balanced view of concerns and benefits represented in the emergent themes. Further to this, while the focus group was also relatively small, the high engagement from those with direct expertise in employability and graduate work readiness, representing the discipline areas of the intervention being investigated, offered key insights.

Outside the scope of this study are three key data sets that are currently being investigated in ongoing studies: student confidence data, learning outcome (success) lead data and student perceptions of value about the intervention. While consideration of these factors was integral to the design of the intervention, the metrics will be used to evaluate Ready123GO (post completion of the intervention across all student cohorts). Further to this, while we acknowledge that the absence of student voices represents a study

limitation, ethics approval for student data collection has not yet been sought.

Future changes resulting from the cross-examination of the stakeholder data will continue to generate new ideas and knowledge for the Faculty (and the sector) to interrogate. Our next steps are to explore the student confidence data sets, for the purpose of including lead data into the investigation of graduate outcome data. Future research will include consideration of course-wide employability confidence trends across cohorts. Investigations will include if this light-touch course-wide approach to employability learning is engaging for students; do student reflections and assessments indicate that meaningful and personalised readiness for graduate success is enabled; are there further assessments opportunities to enliven our students as employable 'citizen scholars' (Miller et al., 2020); if there are specific outliers of employability skill learning gains (+/-) within disciplines; and if the intervention maintains adherence to updated quality standards for internal reporting processes against the refreshed Quality WIL Standards Framework (WIL Australia, 2026).

Conclusion

The findings suggest that Ready123GO offers a promising and scalable approach to embedding and monitoring employability development across a course of study. The intervention accommodates a discipline-specific understanding of employability while enabling employability-focussed activities to be integrated within existing WIL units through relatively minor assessment modifications. The combination of the ECC and structured reflection tasks provides a mechanism for capturing students' perceptions of employability development while supporting longitudinal monitoring of employability learning across a programme of study. It also delivers practical pedagogical architecture for beginning the longitudinal reporting on employability learning gains. Combined, these elements have provided our Faculty with a scalable and sustainable means for course-specific employability enhancement.

This case study provides a contextually situated account of the design and implementation of Ready123GO. While the intervention adeptly responds to our Faculty's strategic need for scalable and sustainable approaches to contain existing multiplicity-WIL offerings, the findings suggest that the underlying design principles may have relevance beyond the immediate context. The study suggests that repurposing existing WIL assessments and strategically sequencing WIL learning experiences across a course may provide a practical means of supporting and monitoring employability development. Rather than introducing entirely new curriculum structures, Ready123GO builds on existing WIL practices through a light-touch approach that seeks to make employability learning more visible to both students and educators. In this sense, the intervention conceptualises employability development as an ongoing and evolving process, supported through reflection, authentic assessment, and repeated opportunities for students to review their emerging capabilities. Such an approach positions curriculum

as a dynamic system capable of responding to changing educational, professional, and societal contexts.

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Appendix A

Industry Focus Group Questions

Question 1: What do you think is the key benefit of R123GO for:

- Students undertaking R123GO
- Industry/community partners (including potential employers?)

Question 2: What do you think is the key benefit of the ECC (in R123GO) for:

- Students completing the questionnaire over the duration of their course?
- Industry/community partners in which we serve (including potential employers)

Question 3: Can you suggest any aspects of R123GO that could be improved to enable the intervention to impact on its primary aim of heightening student awareness of their employability across their course-wide learning journey?

(Your response could consider educational approach, ECC, technology, the research project, collaborations with SEBE staff, assessment, data, other).

Appendix B

Ready123GO Staff Academic Survey

Question 1 - What type of Deakin University staff member are you?

- Unit chair of a R123GO unit
- Professional staff member
- Academic teaching into and/or supporting any part of the unit/unit team (but not the unit chair)
- Leadership position (e.g. Course Director, Associate Head of School, Campus Coordinator, ADTL etc.)
- Other — please specify below (open text box)

Question 2 - Please indicate the School that you belong to within SEBE.

- School of Life and Environment Science
- School of Information Technology
- School of Engineering
- School of Architecture and Built Environment
- SEBE (Faculty) or University division.

Question 3 - What is your gender?

- Female; Male; Non-binary; Prefer not to say; Other: please specify below (open text box).

Question 4 - What do you think is the key benefit of R123GO for:

- a. Students undertaking R123GO (open text box)
- b. The course team members (and unit chairs) involved in R123GO (open text box)
- c. Higher education (HE) providers (including Deakin University) (open text box)
- d. Industry/community (including potential employers) (open text box).

Question 5 - What do you think is the key benefit of the ECC (in R123GO) for:

- a. Students completing assessments in R123GO (open text box)
- b. The unit chair involved in one of the nominated units for R123GO (open text box)
- c. HE providers (including Deakin) (open text box)
- d. Industry/community (including potential employers) (open text box).

Question 6 - Do you have any concerns with:

- a. Students undertaking R123GO (open text box)
- b. The course-team members involved in R123GO (open text box)
- c. HE providers (including Deakin) (open text box)
- d. R123GO as an intervention that aims to enhance student employability awareness learning from a work-readiness perspective (open text box).

Question 7 - Do you have any concerns with the ECC for:

- a. Students completing assessments in R123GO (open text box)
- b. The unit chair involved in one of the nominated units for R123GO (open text box)
- c. HE providers (including Deakin) (open text box)
- d. The ECC as an instrument used in the curriculum intervention designed to improve the employability-readiness of students (open text box).

Question 8 - Are there any changes that you would like to suggest — to improve the statements in the ECC?

Note: open text boxes (no more than 25 words)



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