

The Sandbox Education Program at UNSW Business School

The [Sandbox Education Program](#) (SEP) at the UNSW Business School is a platform that connects educators, industry and students to co-create career-focused learning experiences through solving real-life challenges.

The SEP is built on the award-winning Sandbox Education Model – an educational model that exposes higher education graduates to real-world experiences through embedding contemporary business challenges into courses as authentic assessments. Similar to how a software sandbox creates a segregated environment to safely experiment with new applications, the Sandbox Education Model transforms courses into “real-world sandboxes” – i.e., safe spaces where students can collaborate with their peers, educators, and industry practitioners to co-create solutions for real-life challenges, experience the world of work and learn from the experience. How the model works is based on its 3Cs principles:

Co-creation, Challenge-driven, and Co-ownership:



1. Establish meaningful challenges

In a Sandboxed course, educators work with industry practitioners to identify contemporary problem(s) relevant to both industry needs and course learning objectives. The problem(s) are then embedded in courses as authentic assessments. This co-creation process grounds the course content in the contemporary state of the industry, ensuring that students are informed of the most pressing issues in the professional work environment.



2. Engage in co-creative learning

Students are challenged to obtain the relevant knowledge and required skills through an authentic problem-driven learning process, and to work effectively with their peers, educators, and the industry partner to address the problem. Instead of passively consuming knowledge in didactic classrooms, students now actively create new knowledge through application and experimentation.



3. Enrich the career-focused experience

Students present their solutions to the industry partner and obtain interim and final feedback. This feedback allows students to understand the relevance of the problems and the feasibility of their solutions, and also provides interaction opportunities for students to establish meaningful connections with industry professionals.

To date, through the SEP, the Sandbox Education Model has been successfully adopted in five undergraduate and postgraduate courses across three disciplines, with the support of 14 industry partners. More than 1,000 students have completed one or more “Sandboxed” courses and cultivated transferable skills and career resilience that prepare them for a rewarding career.

In the following, we discuss some of the demonstrators and innovators of this model since its inception in 2018:

Demonstrators and Innovators

Deep, meaningful involvement of the industry

The Sandbox Education Model empowers the industry to assume a closely engaged role in higher education. The model incorporates industry involvement from the curriculum design stage, all the way to the assessment evaluation stage. This co-design approach allows industry partners to impart professional work practices, culture, and ethics through providing meaningful input, feedback and mentorship. By doing so, the model also creatively brings the real-life experience into the classroom, creating value for a larger number of students as compared to other conventional engagement models, such as an industry placement, which provides access to only a select few students.

Improvement in employment outcome: Direct link to employment

The Sandbox Education Model promotes students' employability. For example, in a 2019 Sandbox partnership with Ernst & Young (EY), six students were offered vacationer and graduate positions in EY's cyber security team upon completing the course because of their outstanding performance, which was described as “mind-blowing” and a “win-win situation” by one EY representative in a [UNSW BusinessThink interview](#). This successful outcome was also highlighted in an invited interview with NewsCorp. The interview was published in [The Daily Telegraph](#) illustrating how students “realised there were other aspects to IT” through a Sandbox engagement, and successfully secured a graduate role at the partner organisation (EY) months before graduation.

An Innovative Industry Partnership Model

Students

Expanding experience by working on real industry challenges with support from professionals



Educators

Fuelling the connection between the industry and higher education to cultivate graduates who are more work-ready

Industry

Contributing to the development of future-ready students through direct input into curriculum design and active involvement in challenge-driven education



Industry satisfaction

Having the trilateral co-creation process at its core, the Sandbox model delivers benefits to all three involved parties. For the industry partners, the model provides an opportunity to contribute to development of the future workforce and gain access to emerging talent. It also allows the industry to gather creative insights from students and examine their problems from a range of different perspectives:

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We look at this relationship as a symbiotic relationship wherein we get exposed to talents within the University... more industry partners need to start getting involved early stages when students are participating in higher education. We prefer that these collaborations with industry continue if possible, in order to prepare our students better.

Jay Hira, Senior Manager, Ernst & Young Risk & Advisory, shares his experience in [an interview](#) with UNSW Business School

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We loved partnering with UNSW and delivering a unique marketing challenge to the students of MARK5700. As Australia's leading digital marketing agency, we partner with ambitious businesses that all have unique challenges and strategies. Through the sandbox challenge, we were able to have the students work on real business challenges and to use their experience and study, to deliver real solutions. We were incredibly impressed with the work that was put into the challenges and look forward to partnering with UNSW again.

Cameron Bryant, Partner, Sparro, shares his experience as a SEP Industry Partner

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89.8%

of students agreed that the course met their professional needs



Over
1000

students have completed one or more Sandboxed courses



14

Industry partners, and 54 industry representatives



Award-winning program

Winner of a National award by the Australian Computer Society

Student satisfaction

Over the past 3 years, students have shared how their Sandbox experience has helped them develop confidence in pursuing their career ambitions or cultivating passion for new career paths. For example, Sunny Zhan, a student who completed a Sandboxed course in 2019, shared her experience:

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By the end I had learnt so much and I totally love [cybersecurity] now. EY offered me a job for next year before I had even graduated. I never would have dreamt that could happen.

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A student who completed a Sandboxed course in 2020 shared their experience in UNSW's institutional student satisfaction survey:

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THE ABSOLUTE BEST WAS – Industry collaboration, I learnt so much as part of that experience, and truly understood the real-world applications of the content that we were learning. Before this course, I had little interest in networking and it seemed like such an abstract topic, but after this course I'm seriously considering it as a career path.

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When students were asked in the institutional student satisfaction survey if the course met their professional needs, enthusiastic responses were received – for example, in the most recently completed Sandboxed course on Elements of Marketing in 2020, 89.8% of postgraduate students strongly agreed or agreed that the course met their professional needs.

Implemented with success, scale and student impact

The scalability of the model is demonstrated by its successful implementation across three different disciplines. Since 2018, the SEP has gathered support from 14 industry partners, with a total of 54 industry representatives contributing approximately 122 hours in the co-development of authentic assessments, co-facilitation of active learning sessions, mentoring, as well as the review of solutions and feedback. This strong support and commitment from industry partners demonstrates a mutual consensus on the impact of the Sandbox Education Model in nurturing future-ready graduates.

The success of the Sandbox Education Model has also been recognised through several awards, including a national award by the Australian Computer Society in 2019 - this highly competitive award was received after a panel of 36 industry luminaries worked through an intensive assessment process to select one national winner – ICT Educator of the Year – representing a disruptive innovation in higher education - and the 2019 UNSW Business School's John Prescott Award for Outstanding Teaching Innovation (\$10,000) in recognition of its place as a teaching innovation that fundamentally challenges orthodoxy.

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