

The Student Compendium, and the Communications and Social Media Plan drive an E-culture for the next generation of agriculture professionals

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Abstract. The Student Compendium is building the primary industry's workforce by connecting students to industry. It is aligned to the human capacity building pillars of the respective Blueprints for the South Australian sheep, beef, dairy, grains, and horticulture Industries that call everyone to action on state and national Industry Strategic Plans. The innovative Communications and Socials Media Plan highlights industry opportunities to high school, VET, and tertiary students through a presence in multiple media channels and physical outreach at student expos and events. The plan was developed and implemented by an Undergraduate Intern, where the Compendium Corner, a brand for postings on the Ag Institutes socials pages, has been developed. Hard copies have been essential to creating awareness in the early years. Long term it's important that an electronic culture is developed, initially around the PDF, while in the future it lends itself to the development of a national, searchable portal.

Keywords: primary industry's workforce, communications, socials plan, videos, multiple media channels, student compendium intern.

The Student Compendium

The 2023 Student Compendium (3rd Ed) is a collaboration between the South Australian Division of the Ag Institute of Australia (AIA-SA) and the Adelaide University Agricultural Students Association (AUASA). Its ongoing success, arising from the 2021 and 2022 editions (Hancock et al. 2022) is a strong indication of its value in connecting students to industry and industry to students. The Student Compendium provides students, teachers, lecturers, and industry with a "one-stop-shop" of internships and work experience, graduate and trainee programs, undergraduate scholarships, high school and vocational education training (VET), postgraduate studies and scholarships, early- to mid-career professional development, awards, competitions, travel, conferences, and professional associations and networks. It targets high school teachers and students, VET, and tertiary students.

The Student Compendium has offered value to five major funding partners. In 2023 an additional 30 sponsors engaged in ¼, ½, and one-page adverts and logos to support the collection, collation, compilation, production, and distribution of 500 hard copies. This is an increase from 400 copies in 2022, and 100 copies in 2021. Each year, an e-copy or PDF is lodged on the AIA, AUASA, and several industry websites.

All agricultural industries have a strong desire to gain the attention and attract the next generation of youth into life-long careers in agriculture to assist in and ensure the industry's growth and prosperity. The Student Compendium is a unique, innovative resource that assists in calling everyone to action on all the human capacity building pillars of SA's Primary Industry Blueprints and state and national Industry Strategic Plans.

The Student Compendium was originally based on the first author's networks and experience over many years of mentoring numerous high school and tertiary students, and national and international early career professionals (Hancock et al. 2022). In 2021, the Student Compendium contained over 100 opportunities for students, in 2022 over 150, and in 2023 over 230. It's heartening that market research and feedback from readers would indicate that capacity and saturation of new and diverse opportunities hasn't been reached at this stage.

The Student Compendium has a small working group consisting of two co-leads and engages undergraduate interns; two in 2021, three in 2022 (Hancock and Davis 2022), and six in 2023. The six comprised a Project Officer Intern, a Sponsorship Coordinator, three Compendium Interns to collect and collate opportunities, and a Communications and Social Media Intern (Figure 1 & Plate 1).

Figure 1. The 2023 Student Compendium working group and major funding partners

Source: 2023, personal file

Plate 1. The 2023 Student Compendium Working Group

Source: 2023, personal file

Student internships and communications and social media plan

During the annual continuous improvement process and discussions with stakeholders following the release of the 2nd edition, it was identified that it would be desirable to create and involve current students in an internship program to develop future editions. In addition, a Comms and Socials Plan should be developed to support the growth and impact of the Student Compendium. These additions were considered desirable to develop, implement, and drive the integration of an 'E-culture' that is valued by the students and industry alike. Moreover, the evolution of an E-communications focus lends itself to the development of a state or even national, searchable electronic portal in the future.

Student internships

In response to a call for student interns, undergraduates are invited to indicate their expression of interest through a cover letter that addresses five to six key criteria, and a one to two page student profile/CV. This process provides valuable experience and prepares them for future job applications. The Project Officer and previous interns get the experience of participating in the selection panel, developing and using an appropriate selection matrix, and writing up the candidate selection report. The interns are remunerated with a small and appropriate stipend that acknowledges the new skills, confidence, and networks they personally gain, while at the same time producing a great resource for their fellow students, and their two-member organisations; AIA-SA and AUASA. During their engagement, the interns also provide monthly reflections on the task and processes, submit a score on a one to five scale as to how they're rating the experience and are provided with the opportunity to discuss any feelings they may have on their activities.

In terms of timeline, the interns work on the Compendium from October through to February, initially gaining experience and a life-long skill in "cold-calling" and collecting and collating the opportunities provided by industry, while exploring interest in sponsorship. It's compiled or produced in January/February, and in late February, with the hard copy, drink holder, and Ag Institute student membership form in the hand, the Working Group attends 'O-Day' at the Waite

Campus and 'O-Night' at the Roseworthy Campus to provide eager 1st years with a copy of the Compendium. This process ensures a win-win outcome for both the students as they get their own personal copy and an introduction to a professional organisation which may become their tribe or peer group for life, and the Ag Institute gains the next generation of members who provide input and ideas, take on committee roles and keep the organisation relevant. In March, the Compendium is launched at an AIA-SA event, where the interns get to present themselves to industry representatives and share their experience and growth. Some interns have nominated for and been successfully selected for AIA-SA Division Committee members, and others have been invited to sit and contribute to working groups on careers and industry workforce planning.

Throughout the year, interns are invited to attend over 10 different exhibition stands, and present at high school and regional ag career expos, and state and national industry and professional association conferences. They also write media releases about their experiences. With the experience of the Compendium, several interns have won or received prestigious awards and scholarships, played key roles on major event committees, been selected for organising committees of national events, and submitted and been invited to present and write papers at professional conferences of the Australia Association of Animal Sciences, Primary Industries Education Foundation of Australia (Chambers et al, 2023) and the Australasia Pacific Extension Network.

The communications and social media plan

To support the 2023 edition of the Compendium, a Communications and Social Media Plan was developed. This Plan was co-developed by a working group and a student intern; Grace Moloney – Comms and Socials Intern. This internship was supported by funding partners including the SA Sheep Industry Fund and SA Cattle Industry Fund.

To assist with the development of the Plan, expressions of interest were sought from communications and media consultants and trainers to facilitate a one-day Communications and Social Media Plan workshop for the Working Group. The consultant would also provide mentoring and support to the Comms and Socials Intern to develop the Plan and commence implementation. A panel was convened to choose a suitable consultant, a selection matrix was developed, and a candidate selection report was written. The consultancy was awarded to Belinda Cay of Ag Communicators.

A one-day facilitated workshop was led by Belinda in February 2023 and was very effective (Plate 2). She engaged all the Compendium Working Group members through a facilitated learning process and empowered everyone with many new skills, processes, and workshopping tools. The group's collective vision, objectives for growth, key stakeholders, messages, tactics, deliverables, and risks were considered.

The completed Comms and Socials Plan includes our purpose (what), vision (future), mission (why), our aim, objectives, stakeholders (who), when, voice, tagline, key messages, primary audience, actions and responsibilities, social media strategy, newsletter, longer-term actions, what success looks like, and risks. The intern then added the detail and specifics which made it easy to constantly refer to when making decisions about social media content or implementing business advertisements, while ensuring all targets are being met.

As part of the implementation of the Plan, the intern actively collated content from major funding partners, sponsors, and contributors, and created weekly posts under the banner of 'Compendium Corner'. The Compendium Corner logo (Figure 2) was designed by another intern; Aleah Bakota.

Compendium Corner focuses on the keywords #studentcompendium, #careerpathways, #agriculture, and #agstudents (e.g. Figure 3). Compendium Corner can be found at:

- <https://www.facebook.com/AgInstituteAustralia>
- <https://twitter.com/AgInstituteAus>
- <https://www.instagram.com/aginstituteaustralia/>

As well as the socials, traditional forms of communication were utilised and include:

- AIA-SA monthly newsletter (SA members)
- AUASA website. (SA University students)
- AIA News and ALERT (national member / public domain)
- Rural and regional press (e.g. Stock Journal)
- ABC rural radio (e.g. Country Hour)
- Conference and career expo presentations and proceedings
- Journals.

Plate 2. Belinda (consultant, left) and Grace (intern, right) facilitated a workshop to develop the plan



Source: 2023, personal file

Figure 2. "Compendium Corner" logo for social tiles



Source: 2023, personal file

Figure 3. Example of a Compendium Corner posting - Elders



Source: 2023, personal file

The Student Compendium champion videos

To implement and further develop the appreciation and utilisation of an E-culture and attract more students and industry professionals to the Compendium at a cheaper and more efficient cost, a grant was received from the SA Cattle Industry Fund. The grant covered the production of four online videos that visually profiled student and industry champions of the Compendium. This has provided opportunities to further engage students and industry through the comms and socials avenues decided in the plan and added further value to the plan and experience of the Comms and Socials Intern.

As done previously, expressions of interest were sought from communications and online media consultants and video content producers who shared the value and passion for the Compendium. The outcome of this process was the award of the project to Miriam Yip, Environmental Sciences Media (ESM) to:

- Develop a plan to produce the online videos to support the Comms and Socials Plan.
- Identify and engage appropriate student and industry champions.
- Write the scripts, organise talent and suitable site locations.
- Shoot, edit (audio, music, text and fades) and produce the videos.
- Include the online videos in Comms and Socials Plan.
- Embed the online videos on appropriate websites.

Grace Moloney assisted in the delivery of a half day training session for the working group to learn about the technology and equipment, the need for scripting, and the scoping of the talent via the use of “video mind maps” (Plate 3). Detailed scripting required a Zoom meeting with the champions, followed by the writing of the script. Most videos took half to one day of shooting at the champion’s place of work or client operations. ESM kindly attended some AIA events, AUASA careers nights, and an awards night to get the champions interacting with students and colleagues. Then it was to the editing suite, designing the template, cut, splice and dice, weave the magic, and add the generic footage, the sound, and acknowledgments. ESM was very kind through this whole process to allow the intern to have a go at as little or as much as she desired, and provided some quality mentoring.

Plate 3. Miriam (ESM, left) and Grace (intern, right) workshop video champion mind maps



Compendium student champions included James Easter (University of Adelaide, Primary Producers SA Policy Intern and Elders Agronomy Graduate) and Emily Chambers (Compendium Project Officer Intern and AUASA president). Agribusiness champions included Richard Porter (AgXtra) and Lyndon May (Elders Rural Services).

The videos can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/@craigdavis2204/videos>. All activities, events, and developments have been reported in the public domain via the AIA's News and ALERT communications. The interns were encouraged and supported to provide the content, take the photos, and write the articles (<https://www.aginstitute.com.au/news-awards/news/>).

Figure 4. Compendium champion video, AgExtra posted on Ag Institutes socials



Plate 4. Miriam Yip (ESM, left) videoing Richard Porter, AgXtra



Monitoring and evaluation

The Compendium

Regular evaluation data gathered at the annual launch continues to rate the Compendium highly at 4.8 on a scale of zero to five for value in connecting students to industry, and 4.6 in value in connecting industry to students. Qualitative comments such as “a very professional and impressive publication - well done!”, “fantastic video!”, “great new and engaging cover design and perfect binding”, “impressive”, “holistic” and “if only the Compendium had been around when I was at Uni!” are all very common comments.

The AIA-SA and AIA have facilitated and supported interstate interest with a Compendium being launched in WA, a NSW edition in the final stages of production, and QLD/NT commencing a scoping of interest. This expansion means there is an interest in a national, searchable, E-portal resource in the future.

At the 2023 Student Compendium launch, participants provided valuable feedback to the working group, including evaluation of their involvement in the project, and identifying areas of continuous improvement for the future. Specifically, some suggestions around Comms and Socials and format, other than hard copy or PDF were:

- An application (app) for smartphones would be great.
- An interactive program/website to easily find what you're looking for.
- Digital online searchable, with another structure.
- Providing hard copies to schools, if not already.
- Email directly to students.

- Using TikTok (for the younger generation).
- Having a ChatGPT interface - a chatbot to summarise key opportunities based on keywords/prompts.
- Maybe provide USB copies or use QR codes.
- Just having hard copy and PDF is good.

These suggestions and ideas all support the vision for a state / national searchable online portal.

Communications and social media plan

Social media comes to the fore when looking to quantify the engagement, and in turn, the value of developing an E-culture to encourage the next generation to engage with the Compendium. This reduced the production and distribution costs of the hard copy of the Compendium, and ideally increases the outreach.

Following the implementation of the Comms and Socials Plan, there has been a notable increase in connections with the socials, and this strategy is supporting our aim to increase the E-culture around the Compendium (Table 1). Facebook has been the most effective social media platform, with Twitter and Instagram affording little activity or connection to the target audience.

Table 1. Monitoring of Ag Institute’s Facebook postings, “Compendium Corner”

	May	June	July	Aug
Discovery				
Post reach	3,510	3,815	2,369	1,258
Post engagement			147	278
New page likes	8	31	20	12
New page followers	18	48	31	23
Interactions				
Reactions			55	98
Comments			3	3
Shares			6	3
Photo views			15	23
Link clicks	78		15	42

The Comms and Socials Intern, Grace:

- was invited to present to over 250 students and industry professionals at the highly successful SA’s premier networking event for youth in agriculture, 2023 Growing the Future, at Adelaide Oval on 10th August (hosted by AUASA)
- will assist with and share her experiences at the induction of the 2024 Compendium interns
- will mentor/buddy the 2024 Communications and Socials Intern during a six-week handover period.

The Comms and Socials Intern received some fantastic professional development and new skills that will assist in being “employment ready” upon completion of her studies. On review, the intern rated the experience highly at 4.5 on a scale of zero to five. The new and valued skills included the accountability of applying for and gaining internships and scholarships, working in, and being part of a team of professionals, meeting procedures, evaluation and reflection, participation in the selection and contracting process, coordination of the service delivery by external consultants, cold-calling, attracting sponsorship by marketing a value proposition, developing and implementing the Comms and Socials Plan, event planning, presentation skills, how to build a quality network, strengthening and affording a point of difference in the CV, and producing a resource that is valued by student peers and industry alike.

Grace said in her presentation at AUASA’s Growing the Future in Adelaide:

I value the general life skills gained from the Internship such as the opportunity to learn and perform all forms of communication, the need to be articulate in a timely manner and task-orientated, work in a team of professionals, and above all, I have gained confidence in my skill and capability and taken my network to the next level.

Summary

The innovative Student Compendium and the Comms and Social Media Plan have been developed and implemented and are attracting the next generation of agricultural professionals. The Comms

and Socials Plan is assisting the long-term development of an E-culture via multiple media channels and physical outreach to high school, VET, and tertiary students at student expos and events and via websites.

In addition, traditional communications are utilised such as a monthly newsletter, AUASA website, AIA News and ALERT website, rural and regional press, ABC Rural Radio, conference and career expo presentations, conference proceedings, and journals.

The Plan was developed and implemented by an undergraduate intern, including the Compendium Corner, a brand for postings on the AIA's social media pages. Currently, hard copies have been essential to creating awareness, but long term it's important that an E-culture is developed, initially around the PDF, while in the future it lends itself to the development of a national, searchable portal.

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2023 Student Compendium consultants, Belinda Cay, AgCommunicators and Miriam Yip, Environmental Science Media.

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