

Viticulture

in Australia and New Zealand

Ideal growing conditions and an international approach to wine production make Australia and New Zealand popular with viticulture students. Bethan Norris reports.

The reputation of the wine industries in Australia and New Zealand is attracting increasing numbers of international students keen to study in the heart of this thriving industry.

“Wine exports are estimated to yield AUS\$4.5 billion (US\$2.5 billion) [by 2025], with Australia capturing eight per cent of the world export market,” says Kristina Sinclair, from Curtin University of Technology (CUT) in Perth. “Therefore, [our] course [in science viticulture and oenology] offers great career opportunities for anyone who has an interest in vineyard management, wine making or wine marketing.”

The growth of the wine industry in Australia and New Zealand has led to an increase in the number and variety of courses in this field, many of which are available in key wine producing areas. In Australia, the South East Institute of Tafe offers viticulture diploma and certificate courses from its Naracoorte campus, which is situated within a 100 kilometre radius of a number of vineyards. The courses cover the four main industry sectors – which are wine grape growing, cellar door sales, cellar operations and laboratory processes – and graduates, according to Marie McKeough from the Tafe, are able to obtain “management positions in various wine regions throughout Australia”.

The Bachelor of Viticulture and Winemaking degree offered at the Hawkesbury campus of the University of Western Sydney (UWS) has only recently been promoted internationally but, according to Tony Reeder at the university, the response has so far been positive. “Interest from Europe and North America is increasing,” he says.

While there are many viticulture courses to choose from at many different levels, most have a very practical base, as Sinclair points out. “[The CUT] course is practically-oriented and students study vine physiology, vineyard management, irrigation technology, wine chemistry and microbiology, wine production, and science and wine evaluation,” she says. “Students must [also] complete a 24-week work placement in the industry prior to graduation.”

As student visa conditions in Australia specify that international students can only work up to 20 hours a week during term time, those undertaking a work placement need to apply for an occupational training visa. “The school will assist the student in arranging for the appropriate visa,” says Karen Gan from CUT.



Selection of institutions providing viticulture programmes in Australia and New Zealand

	Location	Use agents	No. of students	% of students
Australia				
Curtin University of Technology	Perth, WA	✓	45	0
Onkaparinga and South East Institutes of Tafe	Naracoorte, SA		50	2
University of Western Sydney	Penrith, NSW	✓	40	8
New Zealand				
Eastern Institute of Technology	Hawke's Bay	✓	100	4
Otago Polytechnic	Dunedin	✓	26	4

Students on the degree course offered at UWS are heavily involved in operating the university vineyard and winery, and also given the chance to undertake an industry placement in the nearby Hunter Valley wine region. “The practical focus of the course has already gained acceptance in the grape industry in Australia and overseas,” says Reeder. “This is evidenced by the acceptance of students graduated from UWS in the grape industries of Australia, New Zealand, France and the USA.”

The opportunity for local and international employment on graduation is an important consideration for all students, and Peter Wilkins, from the Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, believes that graduates of their courses have skills that are easily transferable overseas. “Our courses are developed with the industry locally and also reflect the fact that wine is an international employment option,” he says.

Graduates of viticulture courses in Australia and New Zealand may find themselves in the enviable position of being able to pick and choose their future career progression. “Australian-trained winemakers are in demand around the world,” claims Sinclair.

Common terms

Viticulture – is the study of grapevine cultivation. Studies in this field focus on the factors controlling grapevine performance and the technology of grape production for wine making. Courses also include both practical and management aspects of grape production.

Viniculture – is another term used in the field for winemaking, as opposed to the study of grapevine harvesting and cultivation.

Oenology – is the study of wine and an oenology education provides graduates with knowledge of the scientific principles controlling wine making and an understanding of the technology of grape production for wine making and business management. Students cover topics such as chemistry, plant physiology, microbiology and management subjects.

Cellar door sales – is the customer service and winery-promotion sector of the wine production industry. Students learn how to deal with customers and tourists and manage the front-of-house section of the winery, including organising product tasting and the responsible service of alcohol.

Cellar operations – is concerned with the processing and storage of different wines.