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Working together to achieve better work integrated learning outcomes: Improving productivity through better employer involvement

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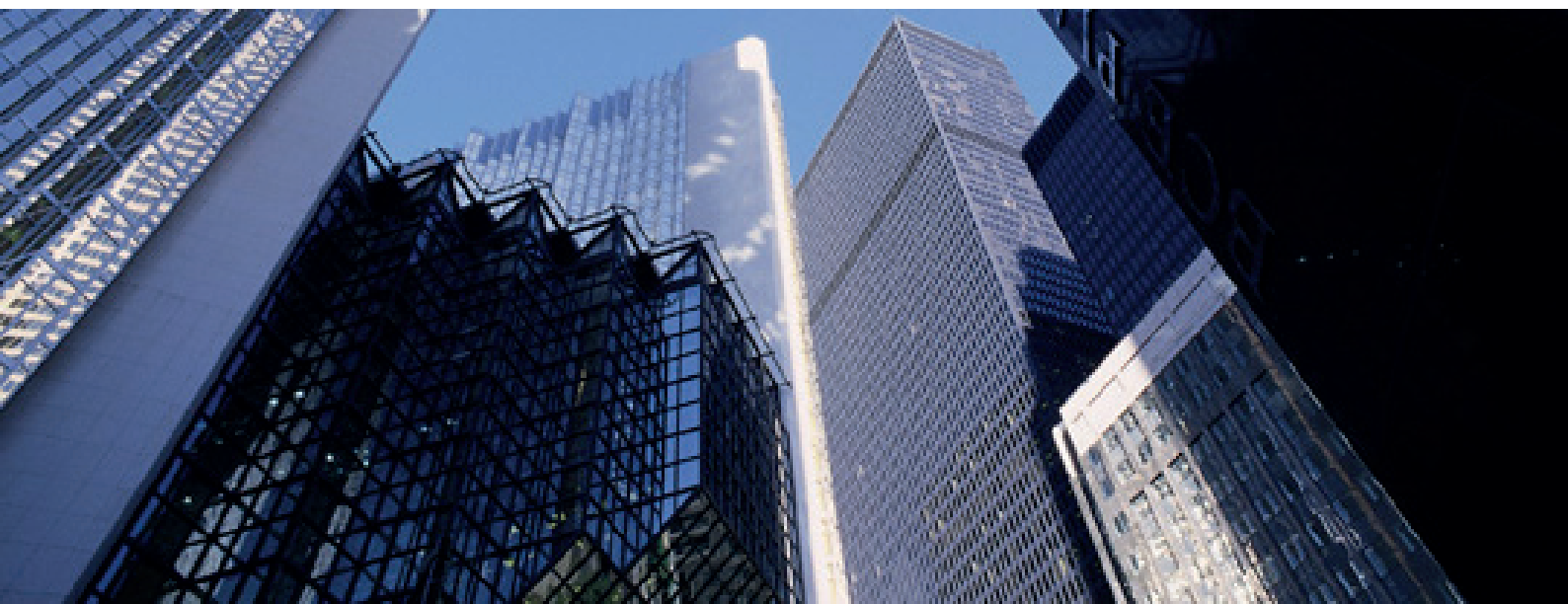
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WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE BETTER WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING OUTCOMES: IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH BETTER EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

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Executive Summary

The overarching aim of this twelve-month project, funded by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was to develop industry understanding of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and assess the support needed by employers to better engage in WIL. Data gathered in a survey of Western Australian employers and industry focus groups prompted the establishment of a WIL Advisory Service (WAS). The service was founded by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia (CCIWA) to broker relationships between employers and universities, and provide support to improve WIL outcomes. In this study, student and employer users of WAS were asked to evaluate the support provided, to measure its success, and to assist in identifying strategies to improve WIL for all stakeholders.

Key findings from the project were:

Employer Understanding of WIL

- The majority of respondents had very little or no understanding of WIL offerings at the various Business Schools in WA; and
- Employers most commonly accessed information on WIL via academics that coordinate WIL programs or through pre-established contact(s) within the university.

Employer Participation in WIL

- The main motivation for employers' participation in work placements was to produce skilled graduates who would go on to form a suitable talent pool for future recruitment needs;
- Employers generally believed that work placements for students are useful for their industry sectors;
- Human Resource Management (HRM), Marketing/Public Relations, and Finance/Accounting were the most popular disciplines for work placements;
- Intermediate managers were predominantly responsible for mentoring and supervising placement students. Few employers chose not to assign a supervisor to a placement student and most adhered to good-practice principles in work placement design; and
- Of the companies hosting business students 39% used more than one university, 40% used only one, and 21% were unsure.

Challenges and Barriers to WIL

- Main areas of concern were identifying suitable projects and work for students to undertake, allocating suitable students to the work, and the quality of student performance and/or outcomes.

- The main barriers to hosting students on placement were capacity to mentor/supervise, identifying suitable projects, and not being approached by universities.

- In general, host employers did not find the paperwork associated with Occupational Safety and Health, risk, confidentiality and Intellectual Property for work placements too onerous.

- Results indicate that managing OSH and risk during work placements was one of the least challenging aspects for employers.

Improving the WIL Experience

Support Required for the WIL Advisory Service

- Promotional materials and social media strategies, industry events and case studies to raise awareness of WIL opportunities and how to become involved;

- Case studies of completed projects in a range of different organisation types to encourage a focus on tangible placement outcomes that identify suitable student projects/programs of work;

- Alignment of employer expectations through enhanced understanding of students' availability according to academic calendars and the broad capabilities of final-year Business students;

- Developing resources and strategies to educate employers on how to identify students with the required skill sets to complete work placements by matching them with appropriate domestic and international students;

- Educating employers on mentoring, feedback and performance management processes via telephone advice, host inductions and supervision fact sheets; and

- Guidelines and fact sheets to engage management and staff in WIL, and to promote the benefits of road-testing potential graduate recruits, completing stalled or unfinished projects and developing graduate work-readiness.

University Strategies to Improve Work Placements

- Educate university staff on the existence and benefits of WIL to provide a more cohesive approach to partnering with industry;

- Allow more flexibility in the timing of placements to cater to industry needs;

- Raise student awareness of WIL through promotional events, social media and content marketing; and through academics, careers services and student groups;

- Establish a centralised WIL position to facilitate employer engagement;

- Ensure awareness of industry expectations of technical and non-technical skills in different discipline areas through the use of consultative committees, implementation of co-curricular design and collaboration on teaching and learning methodologies; and

- Better manage student expectations of the scope and breadth of work to be carried out on work placements, including the level of administration and menial tasks involved.

Good-Practice Principles to Improve Work Placements

- Provide students with an induction and tour of the company to assist with settling in. Introduce them to clients and other stakeholders, and encourage them to join relevant social or networking activities and work meetings;

- Provide regular, formal and informal feedback, and extend beyond the standard evaluation reports required for academic purposes. Prescribed milestones should be established and reviewed prior to the next performance meeting;

- Enhance student learning by rotating across departments, taking minutes of meetings to ensure correct interpretation, and completing presentations and reports on tangible outcomes; and

- Assess students through a dialogue between employers and students. For example, workplace supervisors should provide an evaluation of the student's performance which the student should be encouraged to reflect on through a written commentary or other means. This can provide employers with valuable insights into students' culture, expectations of placement arrangements, quality of supervision and job design, and may assist with arrangements for their graduate positions.

Success of the WIL Advisory Service

Employer evaluation

- Participating employers believed there was a reasonable level of assistance provided by the Advisory Service on the various aspects of the work placement process.

- Strategies for improving the Advisory Service focused on enhancing the support provided to hosts during the placement and offering them a greater choice of better prepared students for placement opportunities.

- The significant majority of employers were satisfied with their student's performance and achieved outcomes and were keen to host additional students in the future.
- The mentoring and supervision of placement students tended to be the responsibility of more junior employees and a range of useful support measures were identified to assist them.
- Several employers noted the need for industry, universities and students to better connect through collaborative projects and networking events.

Student evaluation

- Average ratings suggest participating students found the Advisory Service provided a reasonable level of assistance on the various aspects of the work placement process.
- The significant majority of students were satisfied with their performance and achieved outcomes during the work placement. They noted a range of ways in which they felt they contributed to their host organisation.
- The vast majority of students felt the organisation added value to their skill repertoire and assisted them in preparing for the transition to graduate employment.
- The networking opportunities arising during the placement were acknowledged by many although these varied significantly across different placements.
- Although the majority felt mentoring and supervision processes were adequate, several suggestions were made on how to improve on these.

Areas for Future Development

This project highlighted a number of issues which impact on the extent to which individuals and organisations effectively engage in WIL. Further exploration is recommended for managing placements in smaller organisations and regional areas; managing employer perceptions of international students; an imbalance in the supply and demand for placements; and a lack of available support and training for placement supervisors and mentors. A number of innovative approaches to WIL were identified during the project. These ranged from ideas to implementation, such as post-placement monitoring; university-based client projects; shared mentoring for small businesses; virtual WIL; and links to postgraduate research. In addition, a range of resources to assist with enhancing WIL outcomes was also identified.

Introduction

Australia boasts a highly trained and educated population that provides employers with the skills required in their workplaces. In the past, a degree was widely accepted as a suitable requirement for entry into the workforce, but it is clear that employers today are also demanding applicants who are work-ready, have appropriate workplace skills and relevant experience (Edwards et al., 2015). Employing a qualified worker with experience and commendable work attributes minimises the loss of productivity that comes with taking on new staff.

In response to both industry and employer needs, universities across Australia have introduced the opportunity for students to undertake Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) as part of their undergraduate studies across a broad range of disciplines. WIL is defined as "an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum" (Patrick et al., 2009, p. iv). WIL broadly comprises "placement WIL" such as work placements, internships and practicums where students gain experience in a work setting, and "non-placement WIL" such as industry-based projects and simulations where students connect with industry in an authentic learning experience in a campus setting. Both forms of WIL are aimed at developing "professional practice capabilities" in students (Pilgrim, 2012, p. 1).

WIL contributes to the development of knowledgeable and skilled graduates who are prepared to participate in a highly productive labour force. Its purpose is "to develop a coherent approach to build workforce capability, skills and individual prospects" (Universities Australia, 2015, p. 1), and it is increasingly acknowledged as a beneficial tool for both industry partners and students. WIL enables students to apply the disciplinary knowledge acquired during their studies, and to make the connection between various aspects of theory and practice in the workplace (AWPA, 2013). It also provides students with insights into the realities of their chosen career (Accenture, 2013) and gives them a chance to develop their understanding of ethical behaviour and professional conduct (Woodley & Beattie, 2011). WIL is widely regarded as a valuable platform for non-technical skills development (AWPA, 2013) and career development learning (Smith et al., 2009), both critical in highly competitive graduate labour markets.

For industry, WIL provides access to fresh and innovative talent and facilitates a "try before you buy" approach to recruiting new graduates (see Bates, 2005; Wilson, 2012) which is proving popular among employers (see for example GCA, 2014). Between 2013 and 2014, a third of UK WIL hosts recruited approximately one fifth of their placement or internship students (AGR, 2014). WIL also

presents an opportunity to establish links with local universities and contribute to curricula and assessment methodologies. Furthermore, it allows existing staff to gain valuable experience in supervising and mentoring students (AWPA, 2013) and provides a resource to accomplish low-priority short-term projects.

For universities, WIL not only provides opportunities to collaborate with industry on research projects, it also enhances students' learning experiences and employment prospects. The additional work experience offered by WIL often gives students a competitive advantage over other graduates when competing for positions in the workforce. Evidence suggests students obtain more discipline-related employment immediately after graduation (AWPA, 2014; Sattler & Peters, 2012; Weisz & Chapman, 2005) and command a salary premium (AWPA, 2014). It is estimated that of today's Gen Ys (people in their mid-late 20's), one in three holds a tertiary qualification (McGrindle, 2014). Based on current trends the ratio will be as high as one in two for today's school-aged students (Gen Z). Increasingly, graduates will need opportunities to differentiate themselves from their peers as university degrees become the norm. This is critical given full-time graduate employment immediately following graduation has reached a record low in Australia (GCA, 2013; 2014) and there is significant underemployment among graduates (Carroll & Tani, 2013). These trends are also apparent in the US (Accenture, 2014; Malcolm, 2014). Recent reports from the UK suggest improvement in the UK graduate labour market (High Fliers, 2014) although underemployment is still problematic as 30% of graduates are employed in jobs for which their degrees are not required (UKCES, 2015).

Higher education providers are increasingly expected to develop undergraduate employability through initiatives such as WIL in order to increase students' prospects of employment upon graduation (see Balta et al., 2012). As more students choose to study undergraduate degrees, a larger number of employers will be needed to meet the demand for WIL placements. However, a number of issues have been identified through consultation with universities and industry representatives which need to be addressed to improve WIL outcomes and sustainability. They focus on the ability of universities to effectively engage with employers to set up placements and achieve effective results for both themselves and their students. The main issues include:

1. Employers need to understand that WIL is challenging. While it is becoming more commonplace, it is not a mainstream option for business or employers' workforce planning processes.
2. The capacity of employers to take on WIL students varies and therefore requires streamlined, flexible and adaptable programs, particularly for students in Business disciplines. Administrative

barriers deter employers from engaging in WIL activities. While it is widely acknowledged that employers are instrumental in the success of WIL, there appears to be limited support available for establishing and conducting placements.

Funded by the Australian Government's Productivity, Education and Training Fund through the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, this project was aimed at finding effective approaches to increase employers' understanding of WIL and exploring the support needed to improve their engagement. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia (CCIWA), in partnership with four member universities based in Western Australia – Curtin University, Edith Cowan University (ECU), Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia (UWA) – undertook research to explore the barriers to WIL from an employer's perspective, and establish a WIL Advisory Service within CCIWA to broker relationships between employers and the universities and provide support to improve WIL outcomes.

Key Research Objectives

1. Develop employers' understanding of WIL and the different WIL opportunities available through WA university Business Schools;
2. Develop an understanding of the challenges for WIL employers who are currently engaged, and an understanding of the barriers for employers who do not participate in WIL;
3. Determine the Advisory Service support required by employers to improve placement outcomes; and
4. Measure the success of the Advisory Service support on WIL outcomes for students, universities and employers.

Supplementary Research Objectives

1. Identify the reasons why employers engage in WIL;
2. Assess the frequency with which employers participate in WIL and their propensity for using multiple universities; and
3. Identify ways to improve the placement experience and outcomes for students.

Background

Employer Understanding of WIL

Many stakeholders lament the lack of shared understanding of the meaning and purpose of WIL (Martin & Leberman, 2005; Patrick et al., 2009). An array of terminology has been applied to WIL, such as work-based learning, experiential learning, professional learning, cooperative education, service learning and community-based learning. Differences among the various types of WIL practices, in particular practicums, placements and internships, cause further confusion (Patrick et al., 2009), and although WIL is a commonly-used umbrella term in Australia (Patrick et al., 2009) many employers are still not familiar with its meaning (Department of Industry, 2014). The importance of agreeing to a common language and interpretation of WIL also features in Australia's National Strategy for WIL (Universities Australia, 2015).

Research on WIL offerings in Australia indicates a high level of variability among the programs on offer, with little or no commonality between policies and practices amongst universities. It appears that "each university is adapting its WIL experiences to suit its own needs and strengths, particular to its student cohorts, and possibly the specific needs and interests of local industry and employers" (AWPA, 2014, p. 12). Streamlining WIL to standardise offerings may be realistic in some aspects, such as centralising insurance, risk management and legal services, but more difficult in relation to developing programs which are similar in pedagogy, design and structure while still aligned with the needs and expectations of a specific sector (AWPA, 2014).

From a pedagogical perspective, disparate offerings makes good sense and ensures quality provision, yet it may confuse and disengage employers, particularly those who engage in WIL across a range of different disciplines. Employers are vital to the success of WIL and therefore need to understand its broader benefits. Developing the work-readiness of undergraduate students assures labour productivity in the workforce in the long term. Smith et al. (2006) identified three areas of disconnect between academic WIL coordinators' and host employers' expectations of the nature and purpose of WIL, and proposed that a shared vision of WIL not be assumed by stakeholders. Disparity may arise around the level of commitment of host employers to WIL activities and their understanding of what it involves; the capacity of assigned mentors and supervisors to undertake their roles effectively; and differences in perceptions of what constitutes a quality placement and how this can be achieved.

Participation in WIL

Reeve and Gallacher (2005) argued that, in the UK at least, there was little evidence of WIL as a major component of the higher education sector. In fact, there was a decline in the proportion of students completing placements as part of their degrees, from 9.55% of the entire full-time cohort in 2002/3 to 7.2% in 2009/10 (HESA, 2009). In Australia however, significant numbers of employers are engaging in WIL (Graduate Careers Australia, 2014) and an estimated 19% of Australian university students now undertake WIL (ACER, 2009). Evidence suggests the significant majority of employers engaged in WIL plan to continue for at least the next two years (Department of Industry, 2014). The recently developed WIL Statement of Intent (Universities Australia et al., 2014) and National WIL Strategy (Universities Australia et al., 2015) add impetus for the growth of student, university and employer participation in WIL in Australia. Indeed, advancing quality WIL offerings is now entrenched in institutional strategic directives across the country (Patrick et al., 2009).

Smith et al.'s (2009) review of studies exploring the participation of Australian industry in WIL offerings indicated an endemic lack of WIL opportunities across sectors, aggravated in certain geographic regions. This is supported by other studies (Patrick et al., 2009; Peach et al., 2012) and unfortunately reflects the significant difficulties associated with recruiting the required number of employers for WIL activities (Kant, 2007; see Reeve & Gallacher, 2005), particularly problematic when WIL placements are being sought at the same time by all local universities (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013) and in the same parts of a particular sector (HWA, 2011). The nature of partnerships in WIL is inherently problematic, as according to JM Consulting (2003) "targeting employers as the market for this type of course has proved high-cost, with long lead times and significant amounts of abortive effort required" (p. 85).

Despite a general oversupply of students for WIL there are certain barriers to participation that raise concerns of equity. Many universities determine the criteria to ensure capable students are provided with work placement opportunities, and although this is aimed at providing employers with skilled and motivated students, it creates a barrier for lower-grade students (see AWPA, 2013). Those with part-time work obligations may also be disadvantaged, particularly when it comes to unpaid WIL placements (Pilgrim, 2012), as well as those with carer responsibilities who have to incur childcare costs to undertake a WIL placement. In addition, mature-age students may choose to complete their degree program as quickly as possible (NCWE, 2002) rather than pursuing WIL opportunities. Other barriers include geographical location, where regional students struggle to secure suitable placements; and misalignment of students' expectations and available placements (see Balta et al.,

2012). As more students seek placements, it is likely that those who are disadvantaged will be less likely to secure suitable opportunities (Patrick et al., 2009). Some believe that saturation is inevitable given the shortage of employers in certain areas and the resource constraints for managing quality placements.

International students are particularly disadvantaged as employers prefer to host domestic students who offer post-graduation employment opportunities without concerns for visa regulations (IEAA, 2012). This bias among Australian employers supports previous studies (see Gribble, 2014) and is of significant concern since relevant work experience is highly valued by international students (IEAA, 2012) and pivotal to their choice of study destination (IEAA, 2012). Given that international education generates $15 billion a year (ABS, 2014) facilitating engagement among international students and employers is critical, as evidenced by its inclusion in the National Strategy on WIL (Universities Australia et al., 2015) and the recently released Draft National Strategy on International Education (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

Barriers and Challenges of WIL

Resourcing Issues and Limited Support

Implementing quality WIL programs involves significant costs. Host organisations incur costs associated with monitoring quality, liaising with university partners, and time for mentoring and supervising (see AWPA, 2013). The estimated cost of a three-month work placement is $8,100 plus Goods and Services Tax (AWPA, 2013), which may be a barrier for some, particularly smaller organisations. In addition to costs to students for travel and appropriate clothing, there is also a cost associated with reducing part-time work and increased childcare needs during the WIL period (see Bates, 2005). Given the need to carefully monitor students across many sites and the increased paperwork associated with risk management, the coordination of WIL programs in the tertiary sector is resource intensive (Patrick et al., 2009). A study by DEEWR (2011) highlighted the additional costs associated with WIL programs, over and above those for traditional academic units. It is nevertheless difficult to quantify the precise cost of WIL due to the overlap of administrative support and teaching, and variations in the time taken to organise placements across the student body (Clark et al., 2014). The lack of funding for WIL is problematic (AWPA, 2013) and a barrier for all parties involved. As noted by Patrick et al. (2009), poorly resourced WIL placements can be counterproductive.

Employers have identified gaps in the support available to them, especially connecting with WIL co-ordinators and departments within universities, and the lack of clarity around the processes for internships/placements within the framework of the Fair Work Act. It is difficult for universities to provide ongoing support in these areas, given that they are frequently under-resourced and predominantly focused on supporting the students. Assistance with identifying suitable tasks or projects is critical for a quality and worthwhile placement and would be welcomed by employers (Smith et al., 2009). There is also evidence of a lack of support for students in the workplace, including inappropriate work spaces and equipment (Department of Industry, 2014; HWA, 2011). Another significant barrier to WIL is identifying suitable supervisors who have the time to guide and mentor students (Department of Industry, 2014). Educating potential supervisors about the importance of good practice when taking on placement students and equipping them with appropriate techniques (Patrick et al., 2009) are priorities for enhancing WIL processes and outcomes.

Establishing Partnerships

Mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and local employers are critical for WIL success, and Australia has a long way to go with an international ranking of 29 out of 30 (OECD, 2013) for industry-university collaboration on innovation. Since every university delivers WIL in its own unique way and there is little or no conformity, employers find it difficult and confusing to navigate their way through universities to secure an appropriate student. Strong, positive partnerships between universities and industry are critical for achieving national excellence and prosperity. Not only will partnerships facilitate WIL opportunities, they will also inform quality learning programs, world-class research, a skilled workforce and a culture of pursuing excellence (Wilson, 2012). Partnerships may stall for a number of reasons, often due to a misalignment of the culture and business model of the two entities (Wilson, 2012). Establishing collaborative partnerships with local universities is particularly problematic for small and medium businesses (Mendelsohn et al., 2011) and evidence suggests employers tend to favour collaborating with one university after establishing a partnership. In a study of 3369 Canadian employers, 61% of those participating in WIL worked exclusively with a single university. In WA, where five universities offer WIL placements, it is difficult for each to attract and build relationships with sufficient employers to meet the demands of their students for work placement programs.

Compliance with Fair Work Act

The central focus of WIL is the students' learning experiences rather than the tangible outcomes for which host organisations would normally pay. This is particularly true of small and medium enterprises who may be interested in WIL opportunities for the creativity and new thinking it offers but lack the infrastructure and resources to provide a quality placement for students (AWPA, 2013; Department of Industry, 2014). Compliance with employment legislation and unpaid internships has been the subject of much media debate (see for example, Innis, 2015), with internships that are not a formal component of a student's learning program coming under particular scrutiny.

Aligning Stakeholder Expectations

Students, universities and employers engage with WIL for different reasons. This can create tensions (Patrick et al., 2009) and lead to disengagement from WIL activities. A better understanding of the motivations of other stakeholders and shaping WIL processes to benefit all parties is critical for organising WIL (Pilgrim, 2012) and its long-term growth. Dalrymple et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of developing a triadic approach to WIL, whereby students, academic coordinators, and workplace supervisors work in close collaboration to maximise the experience.

Lack of Awareness of WIL

Evidence suggests a possible lack of awareness of WIL opportunities among both students (AWPA, 2014) and employers (Patrick et al., 2009). A general lack of resourcing means processes, activities and promotion relating to WIL are often underfunded (Edwards et al., 2015) and this may contribute to the lack of understanding among students of what opportunities are on offer. Employers tend to rely on universities making contact with them about WIL, and many simply do not know who to contact in relation to WIL opportunities (Department of Industry, 2014).

Availability of Suitable Students

Many employers have reported that students were insufficiently skilled to take on work designated as WIL activities (Department of Industry, 2014; Slatter & Peters, 2012). Common reasons for employers disengaging from WIL included a lack of suitable work for students, the economic downturn, insufficient numbers of suitably skilled students, and a lack of time for the recruitment, coordination, supervision and administration of placement students (Sattler & Peters, 2012). Commonly cited barriers to initially engaging with WIL are of a similar nature (Department of Industry, 2014; Sattler & Peters, 2012) across different developed economies.

The West Australian Context

There are four publicly-funded universities in Western Australia; each is a member of CCIWA and incorporates a School/Faculty of Business/Management. The only privately-funded university in WA is not a member of CCIWA and did not participate in the project. Of the four publicly-funded universities, two have centralised policies and processes relating to WIL and a central WIL team/coordinator who manages the strategic vision. Another has a central WIL working party responsible for developing policy and processes without the operational/implementation focus facilitated by a dedicated coordinator/team. Each university uses different models for managing WIL but there appears to be growing attention to streamlining WIL processes and increasing participation in elective offerings in various disciplines.

Among the four Business Schools/Faculties work placement delivery and student take-up varied significantly. Other than a core program in one university for students specialising in Public Relations, work placements were predominantly elective and spanned both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs. One university placed less than ten students each year, whereas others placed in excess of 150 in business-related disciplines. The length of time on placement was typically around 100 to 150 hours, although there were internship models in two universities which required 500 to 600 hours in the workplace, mostly unpaid. Some universities allowed students to complete their placement hours in different states, and in two cases, overseas. The majority of placement and internship programs allowed or required the students to organise their own placements with the support of WIL coordinators within the Faculty/School and career services.

This project has taken place in a context of transition and uncertainty in the WA economy. The economic transition that is occurring at a national level – from investment led growth to production led growth – has been felt most predominantly in the resource dependent states, particularly WA. In terms of component and industry, business investment and the mining sector each make up around 30 per cent of the WA economy, and this compares to around 16 per cent and 8 per cent respectively in the national economy. Large falls in commodity prices, in particular iron ore, have caused uncertainty in the WA economy and is evident in surveys on business expectations and consumer confidence conducted by CCIWA.

Recently, confidence indicators have fallen to record low levels. This is reflective of the uncertainty surrounding the transition in the WA economy by households and the business community, who both rely heavily on the mining industry. While consumers still remain pessimistic about the future

of the WA economy, results from September could be an early sign that consumers are beginning to see opportunities from a transitioning WA economy. Some 18 per cent of consumers now believe the WA economy will improve over the next 12 months. In alignment, close to 30,000 net jobs were created in the WA economy over the past year, particularly in the areas of health care and construction. Anecdotally, members of the project working party noted greater difficulty in sourcing placements – particularly in Accounting and Human Resource Management – due to downsizing, restructuring and less supervisory capacity as organisations operate on leaner models. In contrast, there has been a greater call for marketing students due to organisations who traditionally relied on word-of-mouth or informal means now having to employ strategies in increasingly competitive markets.

Methodology

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools were used to gather data, which allows for generalisation of the findings and provides a rich picture of stakeholder experiences in WIL. There were three main components of the research project: employer survey; industry focus groups and an evaluation by students and employers who used WAS. The focus of this project was on placement WIL where students undertake a period of work experience in a professional setting which forms a part of their degree program.

Employer Survey

A survey of employers in Western Australia was used to gather data from those who had engaged business students in work placements to set a baseline and obtain feedback on the reasons why employers had not engaged in placements. Respondents were invited to complete the online survey in late 2014. Certain members of CCIWA, both regional and metro-based businesses, were emailed information about the survey and a link for electronic completion. Approximately 4100 were contacted by email. To complement this sample, organisations that were known to participate in WIL were contacted directly via email by academic WIL coordinators. This ensured there were sufficient responses to the questions dedicated to issues and challenges experienced by those participating in WIL.

Table 1 summarises the background work characteristics of those participating in the survey. A significant majority were from private-sector organisations and half were from small businesses. The sample included representation from a wide range of sectors, with 20% from Finance and Insurance,

15% from Health and Community Services, and around 11 to 15% from areas of Mining, Personal Services and Education. The primary location of the participating businesses was predominantly the Perth metro area, and responses were derived from a broad spectrum of job positions. A prerequisite for participating in the study was for the employer to have hosted or to potentially host Business/Commerce university students on a work placement as opposed to students from the Vocational Education (VET) sector or from a different discipline. Deliberately targeting organisations which participated in WIL was necessary to generate data that addressed the research objectives, despite not representing a cross-section of local employers.

Table 1 Profile of Survey Respondents (*N*=118)

Variable	Sub-grouping	Frequency	Valid %
Organisation type	Public sector	26	22
	Private sector	78	66
	Not-for-profit	14	12
Organisation size	1 - 49 (small)	59	50
	50 - 149 (medium)	11	9
	150 + (large)	48	41
Sector	Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants	1	0.5
	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	3	3
	Communications	8	7
	Construction	1	0.5
	Cultural and Recreational Services	1	0.5
	Education	14	12
	Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	3	3
	Finance and Insurance	24	20
	Health and Community Services	18	15
	Manufacturing	5	4
	Mining	13	11
	Personal Services and Other Services	14	12
	Property and Business Services	6	5
	Retail Trade	2	2
	Transport and Storage	2	2
	Wholesale Trade	2	2
	Local government	1	0.5
Location	Metropolitan centre (i.e. Perth)	108	91
	Regional city (i.e. Bunbury)	8	7
	Rural town (i.e. Waroona)	2	2
Position in business	Owner	26	22
	Director	14	12
	Line Manager	27	23
	HRM, Manager/Officer	37	31
	Field-based role	14	12

Employer Focus Groups

Survey respondents were asked to provide their email address if they were interested in participating in a focus group session. Two groups were subsequently formed, each comprising the research project working group (CCIWA WAS Coordinator and an academic representative from the four WA universities) and some of twelve employers located in Perth. Employers who participated in the focus group were all based in the Perth metro and hailed from a range of different organisational contexts, including the private, public and not-for-profit sectors as well as small and large organisations. The two focus group sessions explored strategies for managing the barriers and challenges of WIL; developing stakeholder awareness of WIL; and ways to improve the WIL experience for all stakeholders, particularly mentoring and supervision processes.

Evaluation of WIL Advisory Service

The 41 students and 20 employers who participated in placements organised and coordinated by WAS were asked to complete an evaluation of the service. A total of 25 students and 18 employers completed the evaluation, providing a response rate of 61% and 90% respectively.

Understanding WIL

Employers were asked to rate the extent to which they understood the different WIL activities offered by the four publicly-funded Business Schools in Western Australia. Table 2 summarises the ratings for each university and indicates that the majority of respondents had very little or no understanding of what was on offer.

Table 2 Employers' Understanding of the Different WIL Activities Offered by WA Business Schools

University	Level of Understanding	Count	%
ECU	None	39	33.0
	Very little	26	22.0
	Some	23	19.5
	Good	18	15.3
	Detailed	12	10.2
Curtin	None	41	34.7
	Very little	35	29.7
	Some	21	17.8
	Good	19	16.1
	Detailed	2	1.7
UWA	None	45	38.1
	Very little	40	33.9
	Some	25	21.2
	Good	6	5.1

	Detailed	2	1.7
	None	49	41.6
	Very little	35	29.7
Murdoch	Some	22	18.6
	Good	11	9.3
	Detailed	1	0.8

The figures suggest there is significant room for improvement when it comes to informing industry of the WIL activities available and how they might become involved. Survey respondents were provided with a range of sources for obtaining information on WIL activities offered by local Business Schools.

Table 3 presents the different sources accessed for gathering information by number and percentage of respondents. Respondents were allowed to select a number of different sources if appropriate. Clearly the most popular way of disseminating information about WIL is via academics responsible for coordinating WIL programs or through established contact(s) within the university. Third-party bodies and associations also appear to play a role in communicating information about WIL locally. Table 3 highlights currently underutilised avenues for disseminating WIL opportunities to the local business community. In particular, alumni and university websites emerged as avenues where universities may wish to concentrate their efforts.

Table 3 Obtaining Information on WIL Activities Offered by WA Business Schools

Source	Frequency	%
Academic(s)	50	42
Third party (CCIWA, Public Sector Commission, Professional Association)	29	25
University website	20	17
Word of mouth	28	24
Pre-existing relationship with university	43	36
Alumni	8	7
Family / friends	22	19
None	8	7

Participating in WIL

Reasons for Engaging in WIL

This section reviews how and why local businesses are engaging in work placement programs offered by WA Business Schools. Table 4 summarises the survey respondents' main reasons for participating in work placements, which appear to be motivated by a long-term view of the benefits of WIL. Many respondents cited the supply of skilled graduates and the creation of a suitable talent pool as their main reasons for participating.

Table 4 Main Reasons for Participating in Work Placements

Reason	Frequency	%
To assist with producing skilled graduates within the profession	41	34.7
To access talent more easily to meet future recruitment needs	29	24.6
To complete projects that would otherwise be incomplete or delayed	18	15.3
To introduce new ideas and fresh perspectives into the workplace	13	11.0
Corporate responsibility and profile	10	8.5
Not sure	7	5.9

When asked to consider the usefulness of work placements to their industry sector, participants assigned the ratings summarised in Figure 1. The rating "not useful at all" was assigned a value of one, and "extremely useful" a value of 5. The mean rating was 3.70 with a standard deviation of .812, which indicates that on average, employers believed that work placements are useful.
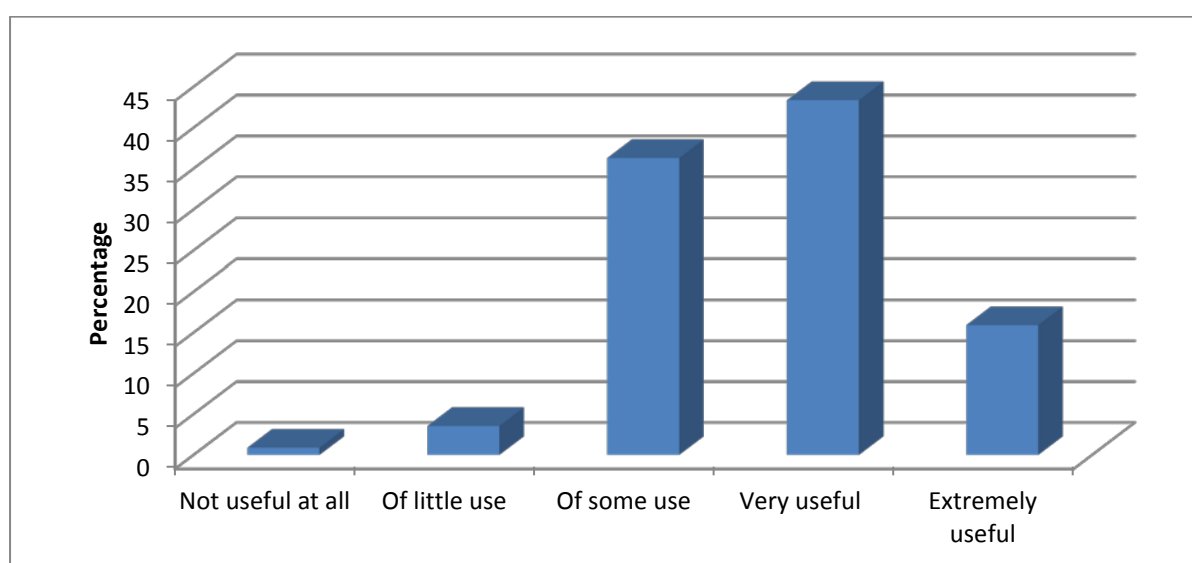
Figure 1 Usefulness of Work Placements for Industry Sector

Nature of Participation in WIL

Of the respondents 44% had previously hosted a business student on placement, 44% had not previously hosted a student, and 13% were unsure. Of the 50 employers who had hosted students on placement, 65% stated they had a student once a year, 16% twice a year, and 18% three times or more a year. In terms of the actual number of business students hosted, 78% had one to three students per year.

Table 5 summarises the different types of students hosted on placements in the field of Business. Human Resource Management (HRM), Marketing/Public Relations and Finance/Accounting appear to be the most popular sectors for Business placements. It is not known whether the proportionately higher numbers in these disciplines are driven by trends in student enrolments or by industry requesting these types of students to meet their business needs.

Table 5 Type of Business Students on Work Placements

Source	%
HRM/Industrial Relations	21
Finance/Accounting	33
Marketing/Public Relations	22
Events Management	8
Economic/Policy	4
Logistics/Supply Chain	3
Legal	3
Management	5
Tourism/Hospitality/Recreation	1

Sixty five per cent of employers stated students were required to attend a company induction while on placement, 33% of employers did not, and 2% were unsure. Of those hosting business students, 39% used more than one university, 40% used only one and 21% was unsure. Employers who were not currently hosting from multiple universities were invited to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the extent to which eight different reasons acted as barriers to collaborating with more than one institution. A rating of one indicated "not a barrier at all" and a rating of five indicated "a significant barrier". Although only 17 valid responses were recorded for this question, Figure 2 presents the reasons and their respective average ratings, which were fairly low across five reasons. "Lack of capacity to seek or consider alternative WIL opportunities with more than one Business School" scored the highest.

Employers were given the option of stating an alternative reason – one cited difficulty in contacting some universities.
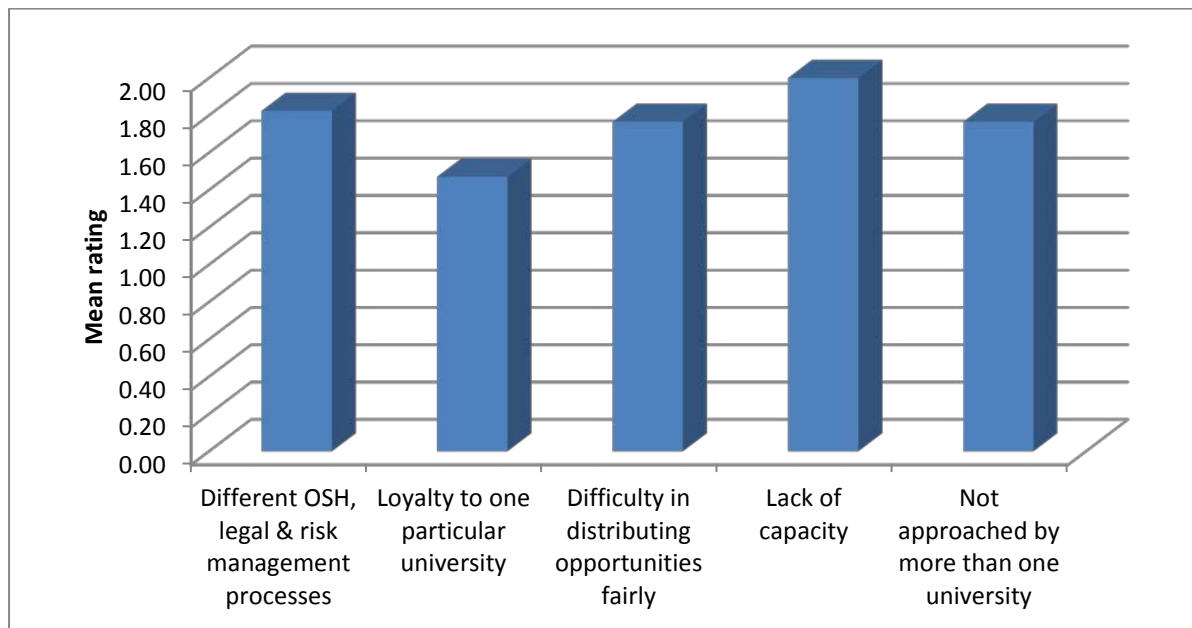
Figure 2 Average Ratings for Barriers to Hosting Students from Multiple Institutions

Barriers and Challenges for Employers Participating in WIL

Employers who hosted business students were asked to consider the degree of challenge posed by the various aspects of the work placement process. Table 6 summarises the ratings for eight different areas while Figure 3 shows the average ratings.
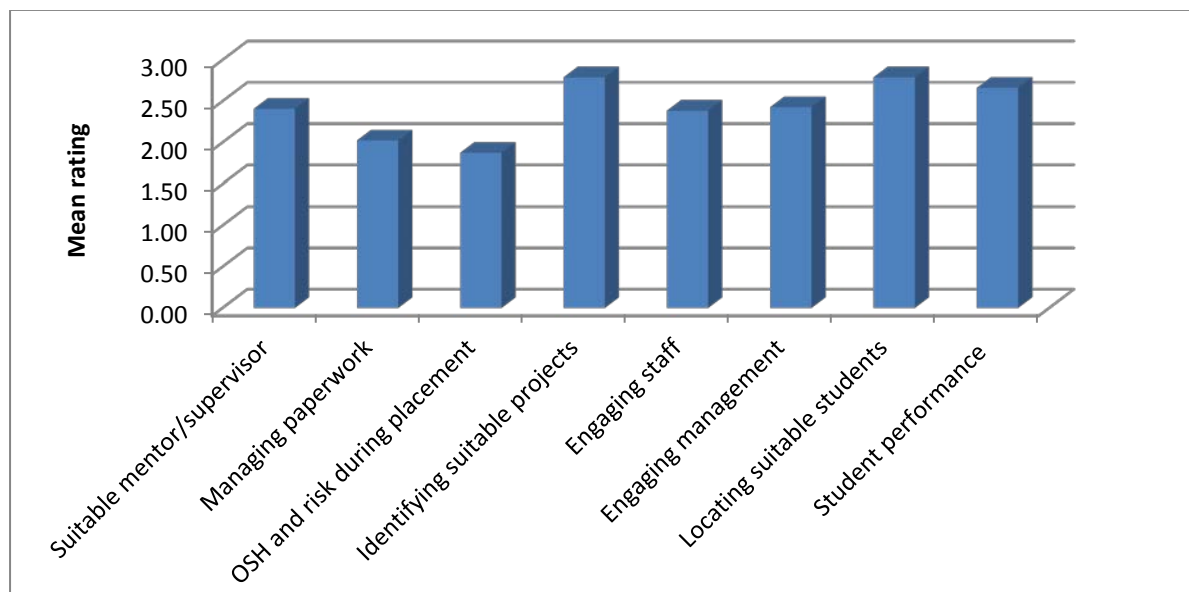
Figure 3 Average Rating for Challenges Posed by Work Placements

Table 6 Degree of Challenge Posed by Different Aspects of Work Placements

Challenge	Rating	Frequency	%
Assigning a suitable mentor/supervisor	Not very challenging at all	6	12.8
	Not very challenging	24	51.0
	Challenging	10	21.3
	Very challenging	6	12.8
	Extremely challenging	1	2.1
Managing the OSH, risk, confidentiality and IP paperwork	Not very challenging at all	11	23.4
	Not very challenging	27	57.4
	Challenging	6	12.8
	Very challenging	3	6.4
	Extremely challenging	0	0
Managing OSH and risk during placement	Not very challenging at all	12	25.5
	Not very challenging	30	63.9
	Challenging	4	8.5
	Very challenging	1	2.1
	Extremely challenging	0	0
Identifying suitable projects	Not very challenging at all	2	4.3
	Not very challenging	16	34.0
	Challenging	20	42.6
	Very challenging	8	17.0
	Extremely challenging	1	2.1
Engaging staff	Not very challenging at all	5	10.6
	Not very challenging	25	53.1
	Challenging	13	27.7
	Very challenging	2	4.3
	Extremely challenging	2	4.3
Engaging management	Not very challenging at all	7	14.9
	Not very challenging	22	46.8
	Challenging	11	23.4
	Very challenging	5	10.6
	Extremely challenging	2	4.3
Locating suitable students	Not very challenging at all	5	10.6
	Not very challenging	13	27.7
	Challenging	19	40.4
	Very challenging	7	14.9
	Extremely challenging	3	6.4
Quality of student performance / work produced	Not very challenging at all	4	8.5
	Not very challenging	20	42.6
	Challenging	15	31.9
	Very challenging	4	8.5
	Extremely challenging	4	8.5

Identifying Suitable Projects

One area of concern was identifying suitable projects or work for students. Over 60% of respondents cited this as being challenging, very challenging or extremely challenging and this issue also emerged as one of the highest mean scores across the different areas of concern. Locating a suitable workspace for students was mentioned as a challenge by a small number of employers in the survey.

Locating Suitable Students

An above average mean rating was recorded for problems locating suitable students to complete assigned projects/programs of work. Over 60% of respondents identified this as a challenging aspect of WIL. Areas of particular importance noted by employers in the focus group sessions were high levels of confidence, English language competence, and adequate levels of experience in the students' intended area of work (academic major).

Student Performance

Around half the survey respondents considered student performance and/or quality of work to be a challenging aspect of work placements. Performance and quality of outputs were also cited as issues by several employers during the focus group sessions. Areas of particular weakness were oral presentations, grammar and spelling, attention to detail and report writing. In the latter case there was a tendency among students to produce "academic" pieces of work rather than reports which identified the issues and incorporated practical recommendations on how to improve current practices. This led to a discussion about the causes of the weaknesses, with the following flagged as possible issues:

- Lack of collaboration between industry and academics;
- Academia not listening and responding to industry needs;
- Academics often not connected to industry and not seeking their advice on curriculum;
- Decline in university contact hours; and
- Less rigorous units and courses than in previous years.

Mentoring and Supervision

Although less problematic than certain other areas, identifying suitable mentors and supervisors, and engaging staff and management with work placements was considered challenging by more than one third of respondents. Table 7 outlines the different types of employees responsible for mentoring and supervising students while on placement. It is interesting to note that very few

employers assigned the responsibility of mentoring and supervision to those who had graduated within the previous three years, despite the likelihood of students being able to identify with such an employee. The responsibility for both mentoring and supervision appeared to predominantly fall on the shoulders of intermediate management, although both junior and senior management also had some involvement. The pattern of mentoring and supervision across the different employee types were fairly similar, although senior management played a greater role in supervising than mentoring. This may be due to time constraints, forcing more junior members of staff to take on the mentoring responsibilities. Very few employers did not assign a particular supervisor to a student, which aligns with best-practice principles in the design and structure of work-placement programs.

Table 7 Mentoring and Supervising Arrangements for Students on Work Placements

	Mentor		Supervisor	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Recent graduate (less than 3 years)	3	6.3	2	4.2
Junior management	10	20.8	7	14.6
Intermediate management	23	47.9	21	43.7
Senior management	8	16.7	15	31.2
No particular supervisor is assigned	4	8.3	3	6.3

Paperwork and Administration

Results indicate that managing risk and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) during work placements, as well as the paperwork associated with OSH, risk, confidentiality and Intellectual Property were the least challenging aspects for employers. In addition, survey participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the degree of challenge posed by the paperwork associated with work placements. A rating of 1 indicated "minimal" and a rating of 5 was "onerous". Table 8 presents the mean rating and standard deviation for different paperwork requirements associated with work placements. The findings indicate that in general, host employers do not find the paperwork associated with work placements too arduous.

However, one employer who actively hosted business students commented on how onerous and frustrating the paperwork associated with placements can be. He suggested it could be a deterrent for some supervisors/managers, particularly where no administrative assistance was available within the organisation.

Table 8 Degree of Challenge Posed by Paperwork Related to Work Placements

Type of Paperwork	Min	Max	M	SD
Insurance	1	5	1.71	.99
MOU/Confidentiality/Intellectual Property	1	5	2.00	1.05
Occupational Health and Safety (OSH)	1	5	1.81	.91
Formal agreements	1	5	1.90	1.06
Legal contracts	1	4	1.75	.89

Managing Expectations

Focus group discussions highlighted the various challenges posed by work placements for different business types. Placements were deemed more problematic for consulting firms, whose revenue relies heavily on an hourly billing model. In small firms, where every hour of manpower is vital to the business, providing mentoring and supervising can be difficult. Firms specialising in the provision of highly technical services can also find work placements difficult, as students have not acquired the expertise to undertake technical work (particularly if this is being completed directly for a client). Students may also be dissatisfied with only administrative work associated with technical projects. There was debate amongst the group about student expectations, and some agreement that students are keen to do administrative work only, as this provides them with some relevant work exposure as well as developing their non-technical skills. Discussions highlighted the importance of exploring and clarifying student and employer expectations and ensuring they are appropriately aligned in order to guarantee a positive learning experience.

Other Barriers/Challenges

Students' ability to effectively manage work-life balance was noted by a number of employers during the focus group sessions. Managing client confidentiality was also considered problematic, particularly for Accounting work placements. In addition, the timing of placements was noted as a problem by some. One employer felt the typical one-hundred hour placement was too short, while others expressed a preference for a block format comprised of more working days over a shorter timeframe. Although they understood this created issues for combining with other academic units and for those with carer and work responsibilities, this format was preferred as it helped to maintain flow and continuity and assisted students to settle in and manage the routine of work.

Barriers to Engaging in WIL

Employers who had not previously hosted business students were asked to rate the extent to which a number of reasons posed barriers to engaging with work placements. A rating of 1 indicated "not a barrier at all" and 5 indicated a "significant barrier". Table 9 summarises the results for the 72 employer respondents. Concerns about their capacity to mentor/supervise, identifying suitable projects and not being approached by universities scored the highest mean ratings. Almost half the respondents rated the volume of risk and OSH paperwork at three or above, suggesting it may negatively impact on their decision to host students. This indicates that employers who were involved in the placement process did not find the paperwork cumbersome, while many of those who had not yet hosted students perceived this as arduous. Forty-four per cent rated concerns with student performance as a barrier (rating of three and above). Relatively low ratings were assigned to the organisation being unsuitable, previous negative experiences, and being registered but not provided with a student.

Table 9 Barriers to Engaging with Work Placements

Barrier	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Capacity to mentor/supervise	1	5	2.67	1.289
Volume of risk and OSH paperwork	1	5	2.47	1.210
Identifying suitable projects	1	5	2.74	1.151
Willingness of staff	1	5	2.14	1.011
Willingness of management	1	5	2.14	1.154
Not approached by universities	1	5	2.89	1.359
Registered but not provided with a student	1	5	1.89	1.145
Concerns with student performance	1	5	2.39	1.133
Managing OSH / risk during placement	1	5	2.33	1.289
Advised we are unsuitable	1	5	1.82	1.214
Advised we are too small	1	5	2.18	1.485
Previous negative experiences	1	5	1.64	1.079

Employers were invited to discuss any other barriers which deterred them from engaging in work placements. Concerns were expressed about confidentiality, computer literacy, distance from the universities, organisations undergoing significant change and therefore not able to provide an appropriate learning environment, and finally, difficulty obtaining information about courses involving WIL and the types of students available.

Improving the WIL Experience

Focus group sessions were used to identify strategies to enhance WIL and work placements in particular. The value of WIL for stakeholders was acknowledged, with those actively engaged in WIL expressing a desire to increase the number of students on placement, and to collaborate more with universities about other forms of WIL such as client-based projects. These participants felt WIL offered students insight into the realities of work and professional life, provided invaluable networking opportunities, and was an important avenue for introducing students to the diverse nature of contemporary working practices, such as virtual offices and mobile working. Focus group discussions, liaison with employers through WAS, and working party meetings identified a number of ways in which WIL could be improved.

Table 10 WIL Advisory Service Strategies to Enhance Outcomes

Identified Employer Barriers to WIL	Advisory Service Strategies

Lack of awareness of WIL and how to become involved	▪ Create promotional material and case studies highlighting the benefits to employers, rather than just the university and students. An effective tool is a "simple" or "dummies" guide to WIL for employers.
	▪ Promote WIL through segmented marketing. This may include networks and word of mouth with particular attention to:
	   ▪ Social media: LinkedIn and Facebook are emphasised although managing social media can be time consuming.
	   ▪ Events: These can be external and held in conjunction with professional or local business associations, or internal events in organisations. They should clarify the nature and benefits of WIL and whom to contact to get involved.

Difficulty identifying suitable projects	▪ Create case studies to provide employers with examples of WIL opportunities undertaken in other organisations. ▪ Develop a repertoire of samples of work and completed projects to provide examples of suitable content for work placements. ▪ Present students individually with a résumé and summary of skills and attributes so projects can be matched. ▪ Create a 'project proposal' template for employers and universities which outlines the students' required skills and work to be completed (objectives, strategies, timeline and outcomes). This will assist in structuring employer requirements and help universities identify the right student. ▪ Encourage employers to focus on intended tangible outcomes to better facilitate the scoping of objectives and strategies for potential projects and placements.
Time allocated is not long enough or inconvenient	▪ Advisory service to manage employer expectations according to academic calendars and their preference for WIL as a structured

Identified Employer Barriers to WIL	Advisory Service Strategies
	- program during semester periods. - Advisory service to manage employer expectations of the time spent in the workplace. Some reported a lack of continuity with one-day-a-week placements rather than a block format. Others stated that 100 hours is not enough time to complete sizeable projects.
Difficulty locating suitable students	- Liaise with universities in the capacity of a third party "matching agency". - Use of project proposal template to better define project requirements and expectations of student skill sets. - Educate employers on the availability of international students for WIL and employment for a minimum of 18 months post-graduation. The benefits of "try before you buy" are therefore upheld for both international and domestic students.
Navigating the university system	- Advisory Service to develop central points of contact for liaising with each of the four publicly-funded universities. - Creation of a mud map and/or directory of WIL offerings with timing and contacts within each local university that can be circulated via the CCIWA web area for WIL.
Quality of students and their work	- Manage employer expectations of the broad capabilities of Business students so they can make informed decisions about whether to host, what projects are suitable and who is best. This can be achieved through videos, case studies, testimonials and third party assistance (such as the Advisory Service and Professional Associations). - Manage employer and student expectations of the skills required and intended project outcomes through a project proposal template. - Manage expectations of performance and encourage employers to adopt similar processes for placement students as they would for existing staff.
Concerns with capacity to mentor and supervise	- Induct host employers on mentoring and supervising requirements. - Create supervision guides and fact sheets to share good practice in performance management and feedback processes.
Improve mentoring and supervising processes	- Mentoring should be inspirational and include constructive feedback. Poor mentoring techniques can be brand-damaging to hosts and cause frustration and anxiety for students. - Manage employer expectations of students' skill levels and provide quality mentoring to meet the primary placement objective of enhanced student learning. - Educate hosts on the benefits of developing junior and middle management in mentoring roles to relieve time-poor senior management. - Educate hosts on the benefits of using new graduates as buddies

Identified Employer Barriers to WIL	Advisory Service Strategies
	for peer mentoring purposes, for the benefit of placement students, and the professional development of graduate employees. ▪ Educate hosts on the benefits of rotating students across different areas so they are exposed to different forms of supervision and leadership. Although it is noted that this can be resource-intensive and there is less focus on tangible outcomes for the organisation, it allows organisations to pilot graduate programs which typically focus on job rotation. ▪ Highlight the importance of mentoring and supervision for enhancing resumes and improving future job and promotion opportunities as it demonstrates an ability to lead others. It should form part of professional development and a standard component of the role of appropriate personnel. ▪ Inform hosts of appropriate mentoring and feedback processes and practices to enhance student performance. This includes good practice in informal and formal performance reviews to identify and remediate issues and concerns at an early stage. Implementing a standard two-week review after a placement commences to assist in revising and managing expectations. It will identify problems early on so that students can withdraw without academic penalty if the employer wishes to opt out. ▪ Guidelines, case studies and fact sheets to assist future host employers on the above points.
Engaging staff and management	▪ Create guidelines and fact sheets on the engagement of management and staff. ▪ Highlight the possibility of placements as a means of road-testing graduate programs. ▪ Emphasise the availability of support available to assist staff who are managing and coordinating placements. ▪ Highlight placements as a way of getting delayed or stalled projects completed. ▪ Reiterate that it is nearly always possible to adapt current processes and systems to accommodate a successful placement. ▪ Refer to placements as a means of becoming an employer of choice.

Strategies for university stakeholders were also identified:

Table 11 Strategies for University Stakeholders to Enhance WIL Outcomes

Identified Employer Barriers to WIL	University Strategies
Lack of awareness of WIL, its benefits and how to become involved.	• Some schools and academic advisers promote WIL more than others. Educating university staff about WIL and the benefits to stakeholders will be beneficial. • Educating university alumni would assist in strengthening awareness of WIL among local employers.
Time allocated is not long enough or inconvenient	• More flexible scheduling of placements for hosting students outside of semester, and not strictly in line with semester (keeping in mind census dates and assessment requirements) and in blocks of more than one day a week will be helpful. • Consider lengthier placements beyond the standard 100-hour format.
Difficulty locating suitable students	• Raising student awareness of WIL to drive demand for integrated WIL in business courses and provide more choice for employers. Students may not fully understand the potential implications of WIL for their future employment prospects and may lack motivation to complete dedicated WIL units, which often have a heavier workload and pose difficulties with carer and other work responsibilities. • Raising student awareness through promotional material and case studies, promoting WIL via social media and events as well as networks such as university guilds and careers centres.
Navigating the university system	• Establishing a central point of contact for WIL within universities is recommended. If managed at a Faculty/School level, academics and professional staff will be aware of whom to direct potential host employers to.
Quality of students and their work	• Ensuring universities are aware of industry expectations of the technical and non-technical capabilities of students in their field. This can be achieved through consultative committees and collaboration on the design of curriculum and teaching and learning methodologies. • Academic coordinators should manage student expectations of the type of work undertaken, skills required and level of administration and menial duties involved.

Several good practice principles to enhance the work placement experience were also identified:

Table 12 Good Practice Principles to Enhance the Work Placement Experience

Areas for Improvement	Stakeholder Strategies
Settling in and networking	▪ Company induction ▪ Tour of the building ▪ Joining in any activities (social/work) that are going on at the time ▪ Attending any networking or professional development events ▪ Participating in work meetings ▪ Introductions to clients and other stakeholders
Provision of feedback for placement students	▪ Extend beyond the standard evaluation/report template provided by the coordinating university. ▪ Standard evaluation reports for academic coordinators should be discussed with and explained to the student. ▪ Combine formal (such as performance management review meetings) and informal (daily debrief with the student's immediate supervisor) processes. ▪ Allow for regular informal feedback as integral to the placement and conducted at the discretion of the immediate supervisor. ▪ Establish project-focused rather than time-focused milestones and performance indicators when placements start and review regularly. ▪ Performance review meetings should measure what has been achieved against prescribed milestones, identify areas for improvement and areas of strength, and set out a list of tasks to be completed prior to the next meeting.
Enhancing student learning	▪ Rotate the work program/project across different departments to broaden their understanding of their discipline. ▪ Sit in different departments for short periods to see differences in operations and environment. ▪ Participate in work meetings and encourage students to take mock minutes to practice recording and interpreting proceedings. ▪ Complete a presentation and/or report of their completed work for a range of internal stakeholders. ▪ Ask students to construct emails/documents and then copy them in on checked and amended versions so they can identify grammatical and formatting errors.
Career development	▪ Conduct "career chats" on pathways and what the role entails with relevant personnel in their intended field.
Assessment	▪ Encourage students to provide a reflective commentary on their evaluation report. ▪ The final evaluation is a good opportunity for hosts to gain feedback from students on their culture, placement arrangements, supervisory and mentoring arrangements, and will assist with job design and arrangements for their graduate positions. ▪ Activity logs/portfolios are an important tool for students to summarise and reflect on their experiences and activities in order to improve their own learning. This should be incorporated into assessment practices as a minimum standard for WIL units.

Implementing the WIL Advisory Service

The findings from the survey and focus groups shaped the support services, promotional activity and processes of WAS. The service was provided to employers, universities and students between January and October 2015, covering the two academic semesters typically offered in WA Business Schools. The WAS format comprised four phases:

Table 13 Format of the WIL Advisory Service

Phase	Key Functions
Defining the project/placement activity	- Initial, broad discussion of how WIL works. - Project stages and student deliverables developed through face-to-face or telephone meeting with employer. - Required non-technical skills and attributes identified for role. - Appropriate supervision requirements established, with assurance that these can be put in place. - Provision of a safe workplace and the need for a workplace induction. - Employer expectations managed around time management, student output and supervision.
Setting up the placement	- Initial development of project proposal outlining the defined project or placement activity on offer for students. - Employer signs acknowledgement form to accept the proposal and their obligations associated with the placement.
Liaise with universities	- Project proposal circulated to relevant university contacts with a request for a shortlist of suitable candidates. - Potential student résumés submitted to WAS Coordinator by universities who collates (capped at 10) and sends to the employer for review. - Employer advises WAS Coordinator of preferred candidate/s who in turn advises the relevant universities. - The employer and student negotiate the start date, working days and expected outcomes of the placement. The student is responsible for informing the WAS Coordinator of any arrangements made. - Student signs acknowledgement form to accept the proposal and obligations associated with the placement. - Project confirmation is sent to employer, student and university. - Reminder is sent to employer and student one week prior to placement
During placement	- Reminder sent to employer and student one day prior to placement on making the most of the first day and to contact the Advisory Service if any issues arise. - Employer contacted by telephone at least twice during the placement to assess progress and with a reminder to contact the Advisory Service if there are any issues. - Photograph and social media opportunity are secured. - Student contacted by email twice during the placement with advice on how to make the most of the opportunity. - Feedback request form sent to employer and student on completion of placement. - Gauge employer interest in participating in future WIL placements or

Phase	Key Functions
	mentoring arrangements.
	▪ Stay in contact with employer and student through social media and/or networks.
	▪ Reminder sent to employer and student one week prior to completion of placement with assessment and feedback requirements and advice on staying in contact post-placement.

Marketing the Advisory Service

A range of approaches to communicate WIL to employers were trialled across a variety of media platforms. Promotional content was developed in the form of a flyer, an introductory letter, electronic direct mail, presentation, newsletter, website and case studies. Content and segmented marketing were undertaken via direct mail, electronic direct mail, electronic magazines and newsletters. Targeted sectors included agribusiness, international trade, financial services, tourism, medical and manufacturing industries; rural and regional businesses; micro businesses and small to medium enterprises. WIL was promoted to CCIWA followers on social media through LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. These platforms were also utilised to make contact with employers through the CCIWA network of staff, committees, members, and links with industry groups and professional associations. A webpage dedicated to WIL was developed within the CCIWA website.

An industry practitioner "sun downer" event, dedicated to promoting WIL was hosted by CCIWA. The WAS Coordinator attended relevant events sponsored by individual employers, industry bodies and professional associations. WIL was also promoted at university events including Student Career Fairs, Orientation Days and Research Week activities. Some events provided an opportunity for the WAS Coordinator to present directly to stakeholders on the nature and benefits of WIL. Such presentations were delivered at CCIWA events for Human Resource Management and Occupational, Safety and Health practitioners; the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) research symposium on WIL; CCIWA Education and Training committee meetings, and Innovation Centre of WA incubator meetings. In addition, the WAS Coordinator attended the National WIL Stakeholder workshop, aimed at identifying and prioritising actions to implement the recently released National Strategy on WIL. In addition to other activities such as presentations and events, data were collected on the number of employers reached through these activities to determine the most effective methods of raising awareness of WIL. In relation to effective promotional and marketing strategies for engaging employers in WIL, the data indicated the following:

- LinkedIn networks and newsletters were very useful for promoting WIL;

- Direct mail to targeted segments of the market generated a positive response rate compared to other methods;

- CCIWAs network of staff and their individual contacts raised awareness of WIL and created linkages with employers to engage in WIL;

- Contact with industry groups, business and professional associations and local Chambers of Commerce was helpful for communicating information about WIL to a broader audience; and

- Strengthening relationships with local government economic development advisers, state government Public Sector Commission, and AusIndustry's national advisers (Industry Skills Fund Advisers and Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Fund Advisers) is considered an effective long-term strategy for raising awareness of WIL.

Success of the WIL Advisory Service

Areas of Support

The types of assistance sought by employers throughout the operation of WAS can be classified into awareness, pre-placement, during placement and post-placement. These are defined as follows:

Table 14 Types of Support Sought by Employers

Support	Detail
Awareness	- What are the different WIL formats available? - How does WIL work? - What are WIL placement requirements? - What are the time commitments? - How does WIL fit within employee relations guidelines? - What are some examples of projects the student can do?
Pre-placement	- What is a relevant project? - Can it be more than one specific project? - What if the project is completed in less than 100 hours? - What if the project takes more than 100 hours? - Are there templates available to guide me through the set-up of work placements? - What are our obligations in terms of supervision and support? - Do we meet the requirements to supervise? - Who should be the supervisor? - Who covers insurance for travelling home to work? - Is there flexibility with shorter term or time sensitive projects? - Is there flexibility to run placements outside of semester?

Support	Detail
During placement	▪ How do we provide feedback to the student? ▪ How often do we provide feedback to the student? ▪ What happens if the student doesn't fit with the role/company? ▪ What happens if the student isn't ready to be in the workplace? ▪ Are there templates to use for a daily work plan? ▪ Can the student attend networking events, including those after hours?
Post-placement	▪ What options are there to continue the placement if the project is not completed within the 100 hours? ▪ What are the pay rates for taking the student on as a casual employee after the placement finishes?

Use of the Service

Use of the Advisory Service by local employers during its ten-month period of operation is shown in Figure 4.

Define the projects

UNIQUE ENQUIRIES **149**

Timing **45**

No suitable supervisor **5**

Timing - project no longer available **3**

Setting up the placement

PLACEMENTS CREATED* **118**

2016 Potential **15**

Timing inconvenient **15**

Continue current arrangement **2**

Liasing with the university

Employer did not respond **19**

Management declined to participate **7**

Limited supervision/expertise **7**

Suitable student not identified **2**

Concerned about student quality **1**

During placement

PLACEMENT COMPLETED **46**

First semester 2015 **4**

Second semester 2015 **42**

PLACEMENT NOT COMPLETED **4**

Student withdrew during placement **2**

Student decided not to proceed **1**

Student withdrawn - supervision **1**

*some enquiries led to multiple placements for a single host employer

Figure 4 Use of the WIL Advisory Service

Figure 4 shows, in blue, the activity at each stage of the WIL Advisory Service. The red bars highlight reasons for 'fall out' at the different stages. As the figure shows, typical reasons for WIL enquiries not generating a placement proposal were:

- Timing of academic semester cycle being inconvenient for employers due to changes in management and organisational structure;
- Potential host did not have suitably qualified and/or experienced staff to supervise a work placement student; and
- The project no longer being available for a work placement student to complete.

At the placement proposal stage, some placements did not materialise due to:
- Project being rolled over to the following year;
- The timing of the academic semester being inconvenient; and
- Host employers preferring to continue with current arrangements and coordinate work placements directly with their usual university.

A number of placements were closed after circulation of the proposal to universities due to:
- Host employer not responding within the timing required for the academic semester cyle;
- Management declining to participate;
- Lack of availability of suitable staff for mentoring and supervising;
- A suitable student not being identified among the applicants; and
- The placement not being finalised due to concerns for student quality.

A small number of placements were not completed. Two students withdrew during the placement, one decided not to proceed, and in another case, the employer did not meet the supervision requirements to host a student.

Employer Evaluation of the Advisory Service

When asked how they learned about the WIL Advisory Service, the greatest proportion (27%) of the 18 responding employers had been informed by direct mail from CCIWA and 22% by both word of mouth or through their own employment at CCIWA (which also operated as a host employer for certain students). The remainder learned of the service via their HRM departments, through an event or via a newsletter. Employers were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating 'not at all' and 5 indicating 'high level', the extent to which the Advisory Service assisted on different aspects of the work placement process. Table 15 summarises the mean ratings for each aspect.

Table 15 Assistance provided to employers by WIL Advisory Service

Aspect of work placement process	Min	Max	M	SD
Clarifying the meaning and value of WIL	3	5	4.22	.55
Clarifying what WIL opportunities are on offer in local universities	3	5	4.28	.67
Identifying suitable projects	3	5	4.50	.71
Arranging and finalising the student for the placement	2	5	4.28	.83
Preparing the host for the placement	2	5	3.89	.68
Providing adequate support to hosts during the placement	2	5	3.67	.77
Providing adequate support for the student during the placement	3	5	4.22	.73
Connecting local employers with local universities and helping them understand whom to approach for WIL in the future	3	5	4.22	.55

The results are positive and indicate the Advisory Service provided reasonable assistance to employers in all aspects of the work placement process. Areas for improvement, with lower means and a small number of employers providing a 'limited' rating, are preparing the hosts for placement and providing them with adequate support during the placement process.

Improving the WIL Advisory Service

When asked for suggestions on how the Advisory Service could be improved, one employer felt the finalisation of arrangements should be passed from the service to the WIL Coordinator at the university where the student is based. Others felt there should be a greater range of students engaging with WIL programs and they should be available throughout the year, not just at the start of the academic semester. Some commented on shifting the administration part of the service to online. A small proportion of employers felt there should be more contact from the WAS Coordinator prior to and during the placement and more availability to answer employer questions during the placement. Several commented on the need for students to be more prepared for the placement and to have a better understanding of what is expected in the professional working environment. Some noted they would have liked more support on how to evaluate and report back on their student's performance with specific guidelines on expected performance criteria and outcomes. These comments were combined with a broad acknowledgement that the program was in its early stages and largely successful with small areas for future refinement.

Student Performance

In relation to student performance, approximately 80% of participant employers were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the outcomes achieved by their student during the work placement. Similarly, 81% felt their student's performance met or exceeded the expectations communicated to them by the WIL Advisory Service. When asked of the ways in which students contributed to their organisation during their placement, one employer felt the focus on undertaking project work hindered student learning and placed significant pressure on the host. They believed work produced from the project was often not of great use, with inadequate presentation, writing style and levels of accuracy, and students found the work difficult to complete without continual assistance. They felt that the completion of a series of menial / administrative tasks would provide them with a broader exposure to how an office works and was more aligned with the type of work they would be completing as a newly employed graduate. Several employers felt students had completed a range of tasks which added value to their organisation. Some felt students contributed energy and enthusiasm and a small number stated new ideas which had not previously been thought of. Almost 90% of employers felt their organisation had added reasonable or significant value to their student's repertoire of skills and had, to a reasonable or high level, helped prepare their student for future transition to graduate employment.

Mentoring and Supervision

In regard to mentoring and supervisory arrangements, employers responded that 69% of the assigned supervisors/mentors to work placement students were recent graduates (less than 3 years). The proportion of staff involved in mentoring/supervision appeared to decline with seniority with 63% of junior management being involved, 50% of intermediate management and 44% of senior management. When asked if they believed the mentoring and supervision given to their students were adequate, 80% of host employers felt it was adequate or more than adequate. When asked what additional support would assist mentors/supervisors in appropriately managing their work placement students, one felt tools to track attendance, planning task allocation and outcome tracking would be beneficial. . Interestingly, 88% of respondents indicated they would be interested in mentoring other workplace students, based in their or other organisations, through a mentoring program operated by CCIWA.

Student Preparation

Some employers noted the importance of better preparing students on the differences between university, where work is often isolated to one particular problem or concept, and the workplace where problems are multivariate and time constrained with significant time pressures on finding resolutions and completing tasks. Some felt that organising an industry partner to speak to students on expectations and requirements prior to placements may assist with their preparation and, ultimately, improve their performance and supervisory needs. One employer felt a guide on 'how to mentor and supervise students' would be particularly helpful for younger/less experienced employees involved in working with WIL students. Others felt clear guidelines on the expectations of workplace supervisors and establishing reporting systems and templates with feedback for all parties would assist. One employer felt that a site visit from the WAS Coordinator would enable them to gauge support and provide assistance, beyond administration, where needed. Another believed a checklist of expected behaviour and outcomes which is consulted prior to, during and at the end of the placement would assist greatly with supervision and mentoring processes

Placement Issues

Employers were asked to comment on any particular issues which arose from hosting a work placement student in their business. One felt students over-sold their capabilities in resumes; another felt there was often a lack of commitment among students with their study and paid work commitments 'taking over' during the placement. One felt there was little in the way of checking the placement offered a genuine learning opportunity for the student once it was underway. Overall, employers were positive about how the Advisory Service helped informed them of what WIL entailed and the offerings available with several noting they simply were not aware of the opportunities beforehand. Some did, however, feel they would have preferred more direct contact with the WIL university coordinator during the placement process.

Improving Relationships with Universities

Employer participants were asked how they thought relationships with local universities could be improved in relation to sourcing suitable students for WIL purposes. Some suggested networking functions and events while others felt industry needed to better connect with potential WIL students, through organised talks and visits, to engage their interest in WIL and articulate their expectations of placement students. Some commented on the need for potential projects to be better advertised directly to the student bodies to generate interest and to attract suitable

candidates. Interestingly, every employer respondent indicated that they would be keen to take on additional work placement students after their experience.

Student Evaluation of the Advisory Service

As with the employers, students were asked to rate - on a scale of 1 to 5 - the extent to which the Advisory Service assisted on different aspects of the work placement process. Table 16 summarises the mean ratings for each aspect for the 25 student respondents.

Table 16 Assistance provided to students by WIL Advisory Service

Aspect of work placement process	Min	Max	M	SD
Arranging and finalising the student for the placement	2	5	3.84	1.12
Preparing the student for the placement	1	5	3.32	1.16
Preparing the host for the placement	2	5	3.42	1.07
Supporting the student during the placement	2	5	3.53	1.07

The results were less positive than for employer respondents with relatively lower mean ratings and less than half of the students rating the assistance provided as reasonable or high level for all four areas other than 'arranging and finalising the student for the placement' which reported 63%. These figures are not unexpected given that the universities, rather than the WIL Advisory Service, took responsibility for preparing and supporting the student during the placement process.

Student Performance

Just over 70% of participating students felt they had met their host employer expectations outlined in the project proposal, indicating an alignment in student and employer perceptions. Notably, 84% were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the outcomes they achieved during their placement. In terms of the contribution they made to the host organisation during the placement, several felt they brought new ideas to the table and many believed they produced useful content or undertook tasks which were of benefit and which would not have been otherwise completed due to time constraints.

Enjoyment of Placement

Aspects which students enjoyed most about their placements were:

- creating something tangible and completing worthwhile tasks in an autonomous way;

- gaining exposure to the corporate environment;

- being given the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in an authentic setting;

- networking with new people and collaborating with a diverse range of people; and

- enhancing verbal communication skills.

Elements which students least enjoyed were:

- trying to balance the placement with their other commitments, an area of difficulty noted also by host employers;

- not having a clear vision or instructions on what they were doing;

- not having enough work to complete;

- commencing the placement when they lacked confidence and there were too high expectations of their skill repertoire;

- too little interaction with other employees and interns; and

- a lack of feedback on their performance and how to improve.

Value from the Placement

Students cited attending meetings with other professionals and working to tight deadlines as areas which enhanced their learning. Around three quarters of the students felt their organisation had added reasonable or significant value to their repertoire of skills and had helped, to a reasonable or high level, prepare them for their transition to graduate employment. Although this proportion is high, relatively fewer students felt their placement added value in these ways than the participating employers. The extent to which the work placement provided students with networking opportunities appeared to vary quite significantly with some stating this was limited only to peers and immediate colleagues and others being given extensive exposure to both internal and external stakeholders whom they felt would enhance their employment prospects.

Mentoring and Supervision

When asked to rate the extent to which their mentoring and supervision was adequate during their placement, although 66% felt this was adequate or more than adequate, one quarter felt it was inadequate or highly inadequate. The perceived quality of mentoring and supervision is therefore

not as high among participating students as employers. When asked to identify additional support to assist mentors/supervisors, students noted:

- better communication between industry and university on the associated academic unit's assessment requirements, length of work placement and start and finish dates;
- providing their mentor/supervisor with specific guidelines/information on expected outcomes from a placement student; and
- having a second supervisor as backup during periods of absence or heavy workload.

Some students felt they needed a clearer hierarchy of support within their host organisation although many commented that additional support measures were not necessary. Students were also asked to comment on ways they found the workplace culture welcoming while on placement. Casual Fridays, being on-boarded with other employees, being included in team activities, participating in a tour of the company and being given the opportunity for both informal and formal discussions on project work and intended career were all considered important.

Improving Placements

In addition to points previously raised, students were asked to identify support resources/processes to make placements function better in the future. Many commented on the benefits of connecting with other students undertaking placements, through face-to-face sessions or social media groups, to discuss how to manage arising issues and problems. Some commented on the need for the workplace to provide the equipment – such as a laptop – required to complete assigned tasks and two mentioned the value of assigning a stipend, or similar, to students on placement.

Areas for Future Review

Emergent Issues in WIL

A number of issues emerged during the project which impacted the degree of engagement of certain employers and students. These are summarised below, followed by recommended areas for future investigation.

Managing Placements in Smaller Organisations

It is often more difficult for smaller businesses to engage in WIL due to their limited capacity to provide adequate supervision and mentoring arrangements. In order to work within the confines of the Fair Work Act, students must be supervised by an expert in their discipline area in order to

ensure a quality learning experience with appropriate levels of feedback and guidance. This may prove difficult for smaller firms who are inclined to outsource support services such as human resource management and marketing. Furthermore, firms with a technical focus, such as accounting practices and technical consultants, rely on client billing hours, so their capacity to provide adequate supervision can be problematic, especially if students are not yet able to liaise directly with clients. One solution may be for placement students in such settings to undertake background research and process/policy reviews and evaluations in combination with administrative work, to enhance their non-technical skills and give them exposure to the realities of working within their chosen profession.

Managing Placements in Regional Areas

The Advisory Service predominantly supported employers from the Perth metro area, with support for others limited to advice by telephone. Furthermore, WA Business Schools predominantly offered WIL opportunities to metro firms, with the exception of one who conducted WIL programs from its Bunbury campus. Broadening CCIWA support to regional areas through the Regional Chamber network would be desirable, as state-wide enquiries were received about hosting students on work placements. Industry associations in regional areas are potential champions for WIL, and supplemented by extended WIL offerings beyond the Perth metro area to include regional cities and even rural towns will assist in enhancing awareness of the program. Future initiatives to address regional demand for WIL need to account for the potentially high travel, accommodation and living costs for students hosted in remote areas.

Managing Employer Perceptions of International Students

There was no evidence of a preference for domestic students on the part of employers throughout the project. A number of students were frequently offered to host employers and no particular trend was detected to suggest a preference for domestic students, although the majority of hosts emphasised the need for strong communication skills, which may impact on the suitability of international students. However, the WAS Coordinator was not personally involved in the employer selection process, and there were occasions when only international students were presented to hosts, so monitoring any bias would have been difficult. Given the numbers of international students choosing to study in Australia and their importance to the local economy, monitoring and examining this more carefully in future studies is highly recommended.

Managing an Imbalance in the Supply and Demand for Placements

In line with previous research (Department of Industry, 2014) the advisory service found that students seeking placements far outnumbered the opportunities on offer. This was particularly the case in Accounting. In contrast, the demand for students in the areas of Digital Marketing and Information Systems appeared to exceed supply. In addition to ongoing awareness-raising around the need for local employers to participate in WIL to ensure future work-ready graduates, placing students in teams may assist with managing this issue.

Lack of Available Support and Training for WIL Mentors and Supervisors

It soon became evident that those responsible for organising placements and those who supervised and mentored students on work placements required additional support in mentoring and supervising processes. This extended to all who were best placed to mentor and supervise, and included training in good-practice principles and case studies of approaches and techniques that work well. Current CCIWA resources and training courses are geared to employers of apprentices and trainees, with the overarching aim of achieving completion, rather than WIL/graduate employers. The development of specific training modules for work placement coordinators, supervisors and mentors would therefore be beneficial. The need for resources and information to support industry engagement in WIL has been identified as an outcome in several recent major reports (PhillipsKPA, 2014; Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; Smith et al, 2014). Industry has expressed a need for guidance in several key areas, including: supervising students and providing feedback to enhance skill development; the role of industry in designing and administering industry-focussed assessment; maintaining and engaging students in WIL activities; developing and maintaining partnerships with educational institutions and familiarity with different types of WIL and the associated benefits.

The Need for Innovative Approaches to WIL

Post-Placement Mentoring

Some businesses offered to mentor their assigned students post-placement in order to continue skill development within a professional context. Ongoing advice and support from industry-based mentors provides a theoretical and practice-based blend of learning experiences for students which ultimately enhances their employability. Furthermore, the industry connection will ensure students

maintain valuable industry networks as they proceed through their degree studies and transition into employment.

University-Based Client Projects

Employers deemed not to have sufficient expertise to supervise students, particularly common in firms who request a Marketing student but do not have a dedicated marketing manager, have the option of undertaking a viable campus-based industry project. Here the business briefs students on the project requirements and intended outcomes, and students work on the project, possibly in a group format, as part of an academic unit with the support of an academic mentor/lecturer who is able to advise and provide feedback. Students are then required to present the tangible project outcomes to the industry client, typically through a written report and oral presentation.

Shared Mentoring for Small Businesses

The option of "sharing" mentors may allow micro and small businesses to participate in WIL placements collectively to provide students with appropriate supervision. For example, one business may have access to a HRM professional for mentoring purposes, while another can provide support in marketing. Another possibility is the use of local professional or industry associations to offer a mentoring service in particular disciplines.

Virtual and Online WIL Opportunities

In virtual and online WIL, students participate in an authentic workplace project using online communication technologies without being physically based in a workplace. Such projects are typically team-based, and students engage with workplace peers and supervisors using a range of communication tools, including Skype, blogs, online chat and email. Students undertake to complete the project's intended outcomes and receive feedback from their workplace supervisor/mentor. Online WIL presents an opportunity for those in regional areas, as well as those running smaller businesses, to engage in WIL practices through virtual projects and placements.

Links to Postgraduate Research

WIL has the capacity to act as a bridge between industry and postgraduate research through sponsorship of PhD and Master students. This is an area of huge potential for future development, and will give industry access to innovative solutions through capable students who dedicate significant amounts of time to issues that are highly relevant to certain sectors and industries.

Development of Additional Resources

A number of useful resources were identified in the organisation and delivery of WIL. These were beyond the scope of the current project but are listed below as areas for future examination:

- Project management template incorporating timeline tables, GANTT charts, milestones and Key Performance Indicators to assist students (and supervisors/mentors) to effectively manage assigned projects;
- Placement plan template incorporating week-by-week planning, daily activities and feedback processes;
- A comprehensive guide to WIL for employers (pre-placement, first day, during placement, post-placement);
- Development of a suite of promotional content which introduces students to WIL and can be circulated via Career Services, student guilds, bodies and associations, Enactus, WIL Coordinators and academics; and
- A comprehensive guide to WIL for students (pre-placement, first day, during placement, post-placement).

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Appendix One
Employer survey instrument

1. What best describes your organisation type?
- Public sector
- Private sector
- Not-for-profit

2. How many staff does your organisation employ?
- 1-49 (small)
- 50-149 (medium)
- 150+ (large)

3. What industry sector does your organisation operate in?
- Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- Communications
- Construction
- Cultural and Recreational Services
- Education
- Electricity, Gas and Water Supply
- Finance and Insurance
- Health and Community Services
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Personal Services and Other Services
- Property and Business Services
- Retail Trade
- Transport and Storage
- Wholesale Trade

4. What is the primary location of your business?
- Metropolitan centre (i.e. Perth)
- Regional city (i.e. Bunbury)
- Rural town (i.e. Waroona)

5. Which of the following best describes your position within the organisation?
- Owner
- Director
- Line Manager
- HRM, Manager/Officer
- Other (please state…)

6. Please rate your understanding of the different WIL activities (placements, case studies, client-based projects) currently offered by the Business schools in any of the following WA universities. Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'No understanding at all' and 5 being 'detailed understanding'.
- University of Western Australia
- Murdoch University

- Curtin University
- Edith Cowan University

7. Please indicate how you have obtained any information on the different WIL activities undertaken in Business schools in the WA universities. Please select those that apply from the options below.
- Communication with academic(s) coordinating the WIL activities
- Information from a third party (professional association / Chamber of Commerce etc)
- University website
- Word of mouth
- Through pre-existing relationship with university
- University alumni
- Family/friends/personal contacts
- Other (please state…)

8. Which of the following would be the main reason for your organisation participating in work placements?
- To access talent more easily to meet future recruitment needs
- Corporate responsibility and profile
- To assist with producing skilled graduates within the profession
- To introduce new ideas and fresh perspectives into the workplace
- To complete projects which would otherwise not be completed or would be delayed
- To be involved in university curricula and assessment
- Other (please state …)

9. Please rate how useful you believe work placements are for your industry sector? Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating 'not useful at all' and 5 'extremely useful'.

10. Has your organisation hosted a university Business/Commerce student on a work placement before?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Filter 'no' or 'not sure' to Question 22.

11. How many times per year do you host university Business/Commerce students on work placement? Please select one option from the drop down box.
- Once per year
- Twice per year
- More than twice per year

12. How many Business/Commerce students does your organisation host on work placements each year? Please select one option from the drop down box.
- 1-3 per year
- 4-6 per year
- 7-9 per year
- 10 or more per year

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13. In which areas of your organisation have you hosted Business/Commerce students in?
- HRM/Industrial Relations
- Accounting, Finance & related
- Marketing/PR
- Events management
- Economics/Policy
- Logistics/Supply Chain
- Legal
- Management
- Tourism, Hospital & Recreation
- Other (please state …)

14. What is the main motivation for hosting university Business/Commerce students on placement in your organisation?
- To access talent more easily to meet future recruitment needs
- Corporate responsibility and profile
- To assist with producing skilled graduates within the profession
- To introduce new ideas and fresh perspectives into the workplace
- To complete projects which would otherwise not be completed or would be delayed
- To be involved in university curricula and assessment
- Other (please state …)

15. From which of the following universities have you hosted Business/Commerce students?
- University of Western Australia
- Murdoch University
- Curtin University
- Edith Cowan University

16. How would you rate the legal/risk management paperwork requirements arising from having Business/Commerce students on work placement in your organisation? Please use the slider to indicate the degree of challenge posed by the paperwork on a five-point scale. A rating of 1 would indicate 'minimal' and a rating of 5 would be 'onerous'.
- Insurance
- MOU/Confidentiality/Intellectual Property
- Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)
- Formal agreements
- Legal contracts

17. Are Business/Commerce students on work placement typically required to attend a company induction?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

18. Typically, who do you assign to supervising your Business/Commerce students on work placement?
- Recent graduate (less than 3 years)
- Junior management
- Intermediate management
- Senior management

- No particular supervisor is assigned

19. Typically, who do you assign to mentoring your Business/Commerce students on work placement?
- Recent graduate (less than 3 years)
- Junior management
- Intermediate management
- Senior management
- No particular mentor is assigned

20. Please rate the extent to which you find the following aspects of work placements challenging. Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5. A rating of 1 indicates 'extremely challenging' and a rating of 5 indicates 'not challenging at all'.
- Assigning a suitable mentor and/or supervisor to the student(s) to achieve the intended placement outcomes
- Managing the OSH, risk management, intellectual property and/or confidentiality paperwork
- Managing OSH and risk while students are on placement
- Identifying suitable projects or work for students to complete
- Engaging staff with the student work placement process
- Engaging management with the student work placement process
- Locating suitable students to complete the designated work
- Quality of student performance and/or work produced
- Other (please state …)

21. Do you host Business undergraduates from more than one university?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Filter those answering 'no' to question 23.

22. Please rate the extent to which each of the following stop you from hosting Business/Commerce students from more than one WA University. Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating 'not a barrier at all' and 5 indicating 'a significant barrier'.
- Different OSH, legal and/or risk management requirements and processes
- Loyalty to one particular university
- Difficulty with distributing limited work placement opportunities fairly among more than one university
- Lack of capacity to seek or consider alternative WIL opportunities with more than one Business School
- Not approached by other universities for work placements
- Other (please state…)

Filter in …

23. Please rate the extent to which each of the following act as a barrier to your organisation hosting Business/Commerce students on work placements? Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating 'not a barrier at all' and 5 indicating 'a significant barrier'.
- Capacity to mentor and supervise
- Concerns with the volume of risk management and other associated paperwork

- Unable to identify suitable projects or work for students to complete
- Lack of willingness among staff
- Lack of willingness among management team
- Not approached by universities to host a student and would not know who to contact
- Have registered interest with a university but have not been provided with a student
- Concerns with the quality of student performance/output
- Managing OSH and risk while students are on placement
- Our organisation has been advised we are not suited to hosted students (for example, too small)
- Our organisation believes it is too small
- Previous negative experiences with hosting students
- Others (please state …)

Appendix Two
Employer focus group questions

1. Can you suggest some effective ways which WA Business schools can disseminate information on WIL activities to local employers?

2. How can we overcome the barriers to building stronger partnerships between businesses and universities to increase the number of host organisations and provide real world learning experiences for students?

3. Why do you think WIL placements occur more frequently in the areas of HRM, Marketing/Public Relations and Finance/Accounting than other Business disciplines?

4. What strategies can we adopt to improve work placement processes and their associated problems?

Employers were advised of survey findings which indicated identifying suitable projects, locating suitable students, student performance, suitability of mentors/supervisors and engaging staff/management were particularly problematic.

5. In what ways can a recent graduate employed in your organisation enhance the experience for students on placement?

6. In what ways do WIL students contribute to your organisation and how could this be enhanced?

7. What support/resources/processes would make WIL work better in your organisation?

8. How / when do you provide feedback to students on their performance in their workplace?

9. How do you support students during work placements to enhance their development?

10. Describe your involvement in the assessment process of Business students on work placements?

Appendix Three
Employer evaluation of WIL Advisory Service

Role of Advisory Service

1. How did you hear about the WIL Advisory Service?
   - Direct mail
   - Magazine, newsletter or advertisement
   - Event
   - Social media
   - Word of mouth
   - Other

2. To what extent did the WIL Advisory Service assist with :
   - Clarifying the meaning and value of WIL
   - Clarifying what WIL opportunities are on offer in the local universities
   - Identifying suitable projects
   - Arranging and finalising the student for the placement.
   - Preparing the host for the work placement
   - Providing adequate support to hosts during the work placement
   - Providing adequate support for the student during their work placement
   - Connecting local employers with local universities and helping them understand whom to approach for WIL in the future

Rating next to each stating: Not at all; limited; neutral, reasonable, high level

3. What suggestions do you have for ways to improve the WIL Advisory Service in the future?

Student performance and skills

4. How satisfied were you with the outcomes achieved by your student during their work placement?
   - Extremely dissatisfied; dissatisfied; neutral; satisfied; extremely satisfied.

5. To what extent did your student's performance meet the expectations communicated to you by the WIL advisory service?
   - Not met at all; partially met; neutral; met expectations; exceeded expectations

6. In what ways did the student contribute to your organisation during their work placement?

7. In your opinion, to what extent did your organisation add value to your student's repertoire of skills?
   - No value at all; limited value; neutral; reasonable value; significant value

8. To what extent do you think the work placement helped prepare your student for their future transition to graduate employment?
   - Not at all; to a limited extent; neutral; reasonable extent; high level of preparation

Supervising students on placement

9. Which of the following did you use as mentors / supervisors for your work placement student?
    *   Recent graduate (less than 3 years)
    *   Junior management
    *   Intermediate management
    *   Senior management

10. To what extent do you believe the mentoring and supervision given to your work placement student was adequate?
    *   Highly inadequate; inadequate; neutral; adequate; more than adequate

11. In your opinion, what additional support would assist mentors/supervisors in appropriately managing their work placement students?

12. Would you be interested in mentoring other workplace students, based in your or other organisations, through a mentoring program operated by CCI?
    *   Yes
    *   No

Improving placements in the future

13. Please outline any issues arising from hosting a work placement student in your business.

14. What support / resources / processes would make placements work better in your organisation?

15. In what ways do you feel more informed about the concept of WIL, particularly in relation to local university offerings?

16. How do you think relationships with local universities could be improved in relation to sourcing suitable students for WIL purposes?

17. Would you take on a WIL placement in the future? If no, why not?

Appendix Four
Student evaluation of WIL Advisory Service

Placement performance

1. How satisfied were you with the outcomes you achieved during your work placement?
   - Extremely dissatisfied; dissatisfied; neutral; satisfied; extremely satisfied.

2. To what extent do you think you met the host employer expectations outlined in your project proposal?
   - Not met at all; partially met; neutral; met expectations; exceeded expectations

3. In what ways do you feel you contributed to your host organisation during your work placement?

Placement experience

4. What aspects of your placement did you enjoy the most?

5. What aspects of your work placement did you enjoy the least?

6. Which aspects of your work placement benefited your learning the most?

7. To what extent did your organisation add value to your repertoire of skills?
   - No value at all; limited value; neutral; reasonable value; significant value

8. To what extent do you think the work placement helped prepare your for your future transition to graduate employment?
   - Not at all; to a limited extent; neutral; reasonable extent; high level of preparation

9. In what ways, if any, has the work placement increased your networking opportunities?

Supervision on placement

10. Which of the following were used as mentors / supervisors for your work placement?
    - Recent graduate (less than 3 years)
    - Junior management
    - Intermediate management
    - Senior management

11. To what extent to you believe the mentoring and supervision given during your work placement was adequate?
    - Highly inadequate; inadequate; neutral; adequate; more than adequate

12. What additional support do you think would have assisted your mentors/supervisors in appropriately managing students during work placements?

13. In what ways, if any, did you find the workplace culture welcoming while you were on placement?

Improving work placements

14. What support / resources / processes do you think would make student work placements function better in the future?

15. What tips and suggestions do you have for students considering completing a work placement in the future?

16. To what extent did the WIL Advisory Service assist with the following:
    - Arranging and finalising your placement details
    - Preparing you for your work placement
    - Preparing your host for the work placement
    - Supporting you during the work placement

Rating next to each stating: Not at all; limited; neutral, reasonable, high level