

# Developing graduate career readiness in Australia: Shifting from extra-curricular internships to work-integrated learning

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There is broad acknowledgement that higher education should produce career-ready graduates and the role of practical experience - such as part-time employment, unregulated extra-curricular internships and work-integrated learning (WIL) – in achieving this. WIL is critical for developing the non-technical skills, disciplinary expertise and career self-management competencies required to prepare graduates for the world-of-work. Although Australia appears committed to growing WIL, many employers engage in extra-curricular internships while there is a lack of industry partners available to meet student demand for WIL. Extra-curricular internships may, therefore, be considered the ‘black market’ to WIL and could be constraining the achievement of targeted growth in Australia’s National Strategy for WIL. This paper highlights that extra-curricular internships may not be governed by the good practice principles critical to a quality work-based learning experience. It explores possible reasons for stakeholder preference for unregulated, extra-curricular internships and presents strategies to shift their engagement to WIL.

Keywords: Career-readiness, work-readiness, internship, vocational placement, Australia

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Work-readiness is the ability to function effectively upon entering the workforce and across a range of contemporary working environments. In recent decades, work-readiness has become almost synonymous with the development of certain skills and attributes. The concept has now broadened to capture the different capabilities and attributes required by graduates to successfully navigate a labor market characterized by rapid technological change and ‘precarious’ employment practices (Campbell & Price, 2016), termed here as career-readiness. Career-readiness now typically forms a strategic focus for higher education (HE) providers with considerable effort given to embedding opportunities and initiatives into curricular and co-curricular offerings. It is the responsibility of industry to assist in fostering career-readiness in students, so they are confident of their capabilities, can pursue suitable opportunities and are capable of transferring skills and knowledge across different work contexts as an entry-level professional.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) embraces the shared responsibility among employers, HE providers and students for developing career-ready graduates who can succeed in and contribute to the contemporary working environment. Through collaborative partnership, WIL integrates formal learning with the practical application of acquired skills and knowledge in an industry-infused environment. It comprises the more traditional forms of ‘placement WIL’ - work placements, internships, and practicums - and ‘non-placement WIL’, such as client-based virtual or on-campus projects, simulations and industry mentoring. WIL is recognized as a key driver for developing career-readiness in the National Strategy for WIL (Universities Australia et al., 2015) and National Strategy for International Education 2025 (Department of Education and Training, 2016). It can be both paid and unpaid but, primarily, should be a formal component of a student’s degree program. The advancement of WIL in Australia, however, is inhibited by a lack of employer engagement in WIL processes in certain

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disciplines (Department of Industry, 2014). It is likely this is aggravated by the significant and growing 'black market' of unregulated, extra-curricular internships which, unlike WIL, do not form part of a student's degree program and are not monitored by HE providers. In Australia, if these internships are unpaid and the student is not volunteering for a community cause or operating in a primarily observational role, they are unlikely to comply with the Fair Work Act 2009's criteria of a 'vocational placement' and may breach Australian labor laws (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2011). As HE providers have no coordination role, these extra-curricular internships may also not be governed by the good practice principles critical to a quality work-based learning experience. WIL, meanwhile, offers exposure to industry through an authentic learning experience, in return for academic credit, and incorporates the governing principles of preparation, reflection and feedback. Students who are unable to be physically based in a workplace, such as those with caring and paid work commitments, are not excluded and can participate in innovative learning opportunities with industry partners focused on mentoring, consultancy and/or projects.

While there has been global critical discussion of the value of extra-curricular internships (Perlin, 2011; Scheuer & Mills, 2015), this paper explicitly considers their worth and regulatory arrangements in the Australian context. The paper discusses the superiority of WIL as an inclusive platform for developing and assessing career-readiness and explores a shift from extra-curricular internships as potentially contributing to the sustainability and growth of WIL. Finally, it discusses avenues for change to encourage HE providers, employers and students to work collaboratively to promote career-readiness through the legal and more inclusive vehicle of WIL.

## DEVELOPING CAREER-READINESS THROUGH WIL

### *The Notion of Career-Readiness*

While graduate work-readiness may have been a strategic focus for HE for some time, producing graduates with the required cognitive, affective and social capabilities to function effectively in the workforce has become increasingly explicit in recent years. The drive to develop graduates which meet the needs and expectations of industry has prompted a wealth of national initiatives, including the Bradley Review (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008), skills frameworks (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) and curricular reform on mapping, developing, assessing and embedding student employability in the HE sector (Oliver, 2013). Previously, work-readiness focused on identifying critical employability skills in new graduates, including team-work communication, self-management and meta-cognitive skills (Confederation of British Industry, 2011). More recent literature broadens the concept to encompass a range of interacting and dynamic elements such as disciplinary expertise; non-technical skill capabilities; career self-management and pre-professional identity (Jackson, 2016), as well as self-perceptions of one's own professional preparedness (Berntson & Marklund, 2007).

The changing nature of graduate work-readiness aligns with the evolving destination of graduate-level employment which is characterized by part-time and casual contracts; increased job mobility, virtual working and automation (Committee for Economic Development of Australia [CEDA], 2015; McGann, White & Moss, 2016). Graduates in Australia are experiencing rising unemployment and underemployment due to the growing numbers of students (Karmel & Carroll, 2016), and deskilling of what were traditionally graduate-level jobs (CEDA, 2015). It is increasingly important to equip our graduates so they have strong perceptions of their own employability and confidence in progressing their careers (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), nurturing employability security (Kanter, 1993) and an adeptness at working in a range of employment contexts and conditions. They must be equipped with

the skills to effectively manage their own careers, meaning being able to formulate informed career goals, understand labor market opportunities, identify suitable opportunities through effective job search techniques, and recognize appropriate developmental pathways (Bridgstock, 2009).

### *The Value of Work-Integrated Learning*

WIL may be paid or unpaid and - as a formal component of a degree program - may be completed as an elective or core academic unit or a specified number of hours of relevant experience to meet course/accreditation requirements. WIL has evolved organically in Australia and comes in many forms, causing confusion among employers (Department of Industry, 2014). It ranges from short (for example, 100 hour) experiences to year-long programs and encompasses volunteering and service learning programs which meet a tangible need in the local community. As it is integral to a student's formal learning program, the HE provider is responsible for mediating the relationship between the student and employer as WIL is excluded from Australian labor law regulations. Whether labor law and tertiary providers should co-regulate WIL programs, similar to the US, is the subject of debate (see, for example, Cameron, 2013) yet beyond the scope of this paper.

Employers are critical to fostering graduate career-readiness, particularly given the workplace may be a superior environment for developing required professional competencies (Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2009) and a better appreciation of one's career goals and aspirations. Employers have a vested interest in ensuring new graduates can operate effectively in contemporary working environments with heightened skills in digital literacy, creativity and entrepreneurialism (see Oliver, Freeman, Young, & Oliver, 2015) and career self-management (Bridgstock, 2009). HE providers and organisations should be engaging collaboratively to expose students to an array of professional communities which foster the varying elements of career-readiness and help prepare students to operate as a successful entry-level professional (Jackson, 2016). Although there are varying forms of collaboration, WIL is an important avenue for developing employment-oriented capacities and assessing stakeholder perspectives on an individual's preparedness for employment. As extra-curricular internships are not coordinated by HE providers, it is unlikely there will be the same level of control regarding assurance of learning. Further, these unregulated internships lack the critical 'integrative' element of WIL where students connect and evaluate their work-based experience with disciplinary knowledge acquired during their degree program through reflective activities (Billett, 2011a). In these circumstances, extra-curricular internship arrangements may not yield the potential benefits of WIL.

The benefits of WIL include skill acquisition (McHugh, 2016), professional networking (Bourner & Millican, 2011) and increased self-confidence through practice and feedback (Billett, 2011b). WIL exposes students to the realities of their intended profession (Jackson, 2016) and can facilitate a more seamless transfer of skills and knowledge from the university to workplace (see Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragolini, 2004). It can sharpen their career self-management skills through gaining a clearer understanding of where current and future opportunities lie and develop a stronger sense of self-awareness (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2014; Usher, 2012), allowing new graduates to better articulate their strengths and where they can contribute to organizations. Often a precursor to graduate programs or graduate-level roles, WIL provides a tool for 'try before you buy' (McHugh, 2016), particularly useful for smaller companies with limited recruitment budgets (Bacon, 2011). WIL also provides a unique opportunity to triangulate the perspectives of the HE coordinator, workplace supervisor and student on an individual's ability to apply their learning, function effectively in the workplace and perform to the standard expected by employers at their stage of study. Assessments can be administered both

prior to and post-experience, to capture the full impact of WIL on elements of individual career-readiness. There are, however, documented difficulties with moderating and comparing supervisor assessments (McNamara, 2013) and evidence exists of students inflating their own capabilities and achievements, known as the Dunning-Kruger effect (see Smith et al., 2014), prior to their WIL experience. Importantly, the benefits and outcomes of WIL are dependent on HE providers implementing structured, high quality programs. There is a growing body of literature informing WIL practitioners of good practice principles in curricular design, delivery and assessment (see, for example, Billett, 2011b; Smith, 2012) with further support provided by the national peak body for WIL, the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN). The forthcoming *Guidance Notes on WIL* (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2016) will further clarify expected standards on the delivery of WIL in the tertiary sector.

WIL also augments much-needed collaboration between HE providers and employers (Tepper & Holt, 2015), particularly as Australia ranks weakly on business-university collaboration relative to other countries (Australian Government Department of Industry, 2014, p. 7). Dialogue between these stakeholders, particularly on key student learning outcomes and the design of WIL, is critical for bridging gaps in graduate capabilities and may lead to further ventures in research, knowledge exchange and commercialization. In alignment with both social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) and human capital theory (Becker, 1993), the development of skills and connection with professional networks during the WIL experience should improve employment outcomes. While evidence emerges of the positive association between relevant work experience and employment prospects (Nunley, Pugh, Romero, & Seals., 2016; Silva et al., 2016), some studies do not support the relationship (Interns Australia, 2015) warranting further investigation (Frenette, 2013; Wilton, 2011).

#### STAKEHOLDER MOTIVATION TO ENGAGE IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR INTERNSHIPS

Unregulated, extra-curricular internships, often of an unpaid nature, appear to be on the rise in Australia (Stewart & Owens, 2013). They have prompted global concern (Perlin, 2011) and media attention (Brennan, 2015) on whether they offer a quality learning experience (DeVelder, 2009) or simply free labor (see International Labour Organization, 2012). Although growing (Interns Australia, 2015), the number of extra-curricular internships is difficult to gauge as reporting by host businesses is scarce with data tending to concentrate on community-based work (Stewart & Owens, 2013). In a recent survey conducted by Interns Australia (2015), of approximately 450 students who had completed at least one internship, only 40% of these were part of their formal education. Only 13% of the 60% completed as an extra-curricular activity were paid, highlighting a significant proportion of cases which may not be adhering to *Fair Work Act* regulations. A recent study by the Department of Employment (2016) found that of the 3800 working age Australians, they surveyed approximately one third had undertaken unpaid work experience in the last five years, half of which was not connected to formal study.

##### *Student Engagement*

Student motivation to engage in extra-curricular internships is most likely a response to industry expectations of relevant work experience and an attempt to differentiate themselves in a competitive labor market (Cameron, 2013; Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2016). Evidence of student willingness to undertake significant periods of unpaid work through extra-curricular internships continues to emerge (Department of Employment, 2016; Seibert & Wilson, 2013) and may indicate a 'competitive hunger to achieve one's goals – all qualities which are often deemed to be vital in the workplace' (Stewart &

Owens, 2013, p. 43). Many students believe extra-curricular internships lead to employment (Tepper & Holt, 2015); the founder of an Australian management consultancy firm accordingly stated 'internships are fast becoming a necessary step to securing a full-time job offer' (Loudon, 2015, p. 104). Students could be supplementing the (perhaps limited) WIL opportunities available in their degree program or could have actively chosen to pursue an extra-curricular internship in order to focus on completing more discipline-based academic units.

Stewart and Owens (2013) found that many HE providers still actively promote extra-curricular internships to their student body and attributed this to both student demand and "the enthusiastic support of many educators for the concept of WIL" (p. 70). There appeared, therefore, to be some confusion among academics on the differences between extra-curricular internship arrangements and in-curricular WIL programs. Other HE providers, in contrast, categorically avoided extra-curricular internships unless it constituted volunteering arrangements for a not-for-profit organization. The increasing importance assigned to graduate employment outcomes may also foster an understandable desire among HE providers to permeate their students throughout industry to raise individual prospects and institutional profile. This may result in extra-curricular internships being promoted through CareerHub – a portal designed to advertise paid or volunteering vacancies – with little consideration or regulation of whether the advertised opportunities offer a quality learning experience and/or adhere to the criteria of vocational placements. For some extra-curricular internships, HE providers may be asked by students to 'sign off' on arrangements in order to access institutional liability and indemnity insurances as these are not provided by the host organization. Signing off may simply require confirmation that the opportunity is relevant to the student's degree program studies with a seeming lack of consideration as to whether the experience offers valuable learning, is not exploitive in nature and adheres to appropriate risk management processes.

#### *Employer Engagement*

The rationale for organizations engaging with extra-curricular internships is perhaps less clear. Why opt to bypass WIL programs designed by local HE providers which assure a quality learning experience designed to enhance graduate career-readiness in lieu of extra-curricular internships which may not comply with governing labor laws? Given students who are in unpaid extra-curricular internships could be classed as an employee who needs to be fairly remunerated, as per Fair Work regulations, organizations are potentially exposing themselves to legal action, such as the highly publicized case of Crocmedia (Innis, 2014). The advertising of unpaid, unregulated extra-curricular internships appears to now be under the social media spotlight (see, for example, Powell, 2016) which, at the very least, may hold negative connotations for organization profiles. Stewart and Owens (2013) argue participation may be due to poor interpretation of labor law regulations, perhaps coupled with a lack of understanding of the availability of WIL (Jackson et al., 2016). On a less positive note, it may reflect a desire to capitalize on free labor, particularly during lean economic periods and in the context of soft labor markets with numbers of students seeking to differentiate themselves from other potential graduate recruits.

Extra-curricular internships may be chosen by employers because they have been unsuccessful in engaging in WIL with local HE providers. Research confirms some employers have been unable to locate suitably skilled students through WIL programs (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2014) and have experienced difficulties in connecting with appropriate HE contacts. Others have been deemed unsuitable industry partners by those coordinating HE WIL programs, perhaps due to company size, location or other logistical matters (see Jackson, Rowbottom, Ferns, & McLaren, 2016).

Evidence also suggests that employers are reluctant to engage in WIL due to a lack of capacity for the required supervisory and mentoring arrangements (Department of Industry, 2014), as well as perceptions of high levels of administration associated with WIL processes (Jackson et al., 2016). Indeed, the extra-curricular internship may provide an option which appears less cumbersome given the administrative, induction and preparation, rigorous informal and formal feedback and supervisory processes inherent to a quality WIL experience (see, for example, Billett, 2011b; Smith, 2012). The importance of this supervisory support and mentoring on developmental value is empirically supported by McHugh (2016), however, as is the role of feedback in enhancing deep learning (McNamara, 2013). The often undefined duration and structure of extra-curricular internships may also make it difficult for students to set goals and negotiate realistic achievements and milestones with their workplace supervisors. Directed and specified learning outcomes, and a clear understanding of role structure, are fundamental to student work-based learning (Beenen & Rousseau, 2010).

As Stewart and Owens (2013) note, encouraging 'good internships – that is, those where skills are enhanced and which lead to employment – must be the central concern' (p. 40). Billett (2011a) then differentiates a 'good' - yet extra-curricular - internship - from WIL by stating "having only workplace experiences is insufficient for effective student learning; they need to be augmented by teacherly interventions (i.e., pedagogic practices)" (p. 2). He highlights the value of integrative learning where learners explicitly reflect on and reconcile their learning in the classroom and professional settings, a rich process which helps students develop a better understanding of the nuances of professional practice and how it can differ from theory. Certainly, developing a better understanding of employer motivation for choosing extra-curricular internships over and above WIL through empirical analysis, and how this can be rectified, poses a valuable area for future research.

#### THE IMPACT OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR INTERNSHIPS ON WIL

The success and growth of WIL is reliant on the commitment of employers. In Australia, there is an imbalance in the number of students wishing to participate in placement WIL and the number of opportunities made available by industry (Department of Industry, 2014). This often means the limited number of work-based experiences are distributed to 'preferred' groups, including those with a stronger academic record (Ramirez, Main, Fletcher, & Ohland, 2014), domestic students (Gribble, 2014) and, anecdotally, students who are able to source their own WIL opportunities. In addition to the previously discussed concerns for administrative and supervisor arrangements, many employers do not engage in WIL due to poor buy-in from management (Jackson et al., 2016) which suggests a cultural shift at the higher levels is necessary to achieve growth in WIL. The development of career-ready graduates is certainly a shared responsibility for both HE providers and industry. In other countries, notably North America through the widely supported cooperative education system and the United Kingdom with its established sandwich degree programs, employers appear to inherently understand that the workplace is indeed a rich learning environment which is essential for student development. Unfortunately, Australia seems to lack the necessary employer support for establishing work-based learning arrangements across all disciplines to develop and prepare graduates for professional life. In regard to the impact on students, those participating in extra-curricular internships will need to balance their arrangements with their studies, in addition to any employment commitments and caring responsibilities. These significant time commitments may impact on the academic achievement (Curiale, 2010) and well-being (Scheuer & Mills, 2015) of participating students and may simply preclude certain groups from accessing work experience. Some students who pursue extra-curricular internships may need to pay significant sums to third-party brokers to source an opportunity, particularly those who may find it more difficult to secure their own such as international students

(Perlin, 2011). This group is vulnerable to extra-curricular internships (Stewart & Owens, 2013) as they are notoriously keen to gain relevant work experience in Australia (International Education Association of Australia [IEAA], 2012) yet find it more difficult to secure WIL opportunities due to employer concerns with communication skills, cultural integration and visa restrictions (IEAA, 2012).

#### MOVING FORWARD: SHIFTING EXTRA-CURRICULAR INTERNSHIPS TO WIL

Indeed, it is acknowledged that not all extra-curricular internships are 'bad' and detract from WIL. Some may offer a rich work-based learning experience, potentially in combination with addressing an important community need. Here, students could be providing a much-needed contribution to, for example, the running of community events or implementation of service learning programs which rely heavily on volunteer support. There may be instances where it would be inappropriate to try to translate such experiences into a WIL program, possibly due to the length or nature of the volunteering opportunity. It is likely, however, that there are many cases where channeling extra-curricular internships through WIL programs would afford an added layer of protection against the exploitation of students and a higher probability of a quality learning experience (Cameron, 2013). It would result in greater consistency in work experience and better connection between industry and HE providers through collaborative partnerships. The following strategies act as pathways to shifting extra-curricular internships into WIL arrangements, thus improving how we develop and gauge individual career-readiness.

##### *Clarifying Legalities*

Despite efforts by the Fair Work Ombudsman (2011; 2014) to clarify the precise meaning of the vocational placement, there is a documented inconsistency among HE providers in their interpretation and application of the Fair Work Act (Stewart & Owens, 2013). A richer picture could no doubt be gained from a national review of WIL offerings, combined with the outcomes of the ongoing and nationally-funded study of the regulatory challenges of post-secondary work experience (Owens, Stewart, Hewitt, & Howe, 2015). Stewart and Owens, in their review of the management of extra-curricular internships in a range of developed countries, noted the active role taken by the UK government in monitoring their incidence and impact, particularly those involving students of low socio-economic status. A more proactive stance by the Australian government in this regard may prove helpful.

More is also required of the Australian government to clarify the legalities surrounding extra-curricular internships and, in particular, how non-adherence relates to and impacts on WIL. This could be achieved through key bodies and associations such as Universities Australia, the Business Council of Australia, Australia Innovation Group, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and ACEN, all of which were involved in the development of the national WIL strategy. Moving beyond the development of case studies and brief sheets, introducing web-based forums to encourage interns to comment on their own experiences may assist the Fair Work Ombudsman, as certain social media sites did in the UK (Stewart & Owens, 2013), to identify problematic practices and highlighting areas requiring intervention and education. It also appears that developing understanding of the intricacies of vocational placements and how extra-curricular internships differ from WIL is important not only for employers but also students and HE academics.

##### *Educating Employers and Students*

For employers, the early talent identification benefits of WIL may not be as powerful in a soft graduate labor market. Australia has, however, made a commitment to WIL with the national strategies for WIL and international education both acknowledging the need for growth. This could be more easily achieved by employers shifting their engagement with extra-curricular internships to WIL. This would better assure certainty of compliance with local labor law, enhance student learning, increase collaboration with HE providers, potential input to curricula design, and an enhanced profile as an employer of choice. There is considerable scope for third party organizations - such as local Chambers of Commerce and Industry, professional associations and industry bodies - to promote and broker WIL to their membership and beyond (Jackson et al., 2016). Targeting industries with a higher incidence of extra-curricular internship arrangements – such as legal services, arts, media and communication (Interns Australia, 2015; Stewart & Owens, 2013) – could be particularly useful.

Students must also be educated on the pitfalls of extra-curricular internships and the advantages of WIL, assuming offerings in their own institutions adhere to good practice. Students must understand they share responsibility for their own career-readiness and need to think carefully about the activities they engage in for their personal and professional development. Educating students on the importance of clearly defined learning outcomes, quality mentoring and supervision arrangements, adequate insurance arrangements and the range of WIL options available to meet their own needs is critical. This may be more effectively conveyed by HE providers in conjunction with high profile industry partners who are involved in WIL, in combination with students who have undertaken WIL and can report back on the benefits of their experience.

#### *Government Interventions*

Following the example of the UK's *Graduate Talent Pool* website, a national portal which advertises work experience opportunities, may help to streamline employer demand for trialing students and/or the completion of certain projects through legal channels – either as paid employment or through WIL. Quality assurance processes would need to monitor the advertised opportunities to ensure adherence to labor law regulations. This is cognizant with Australia's Public Sector Internship Program where projects are advertised at a state level and are completed through a curricular-based WIL program. Opportunities are, however, only for government agencies and drawing on a broader cross-section of Australian businesses may help shift industry engagement to WIL.

Setting up a taskforce to develop a code of practice around extra-curricular internships, such as the UK's *Common Best Practice Code for High-Quality Internships* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills [DBIS], 2013), may also be helpful. The purpose would be to clarify the differences between extra-curricular internships and WIL offerings, encouraging employers to engage with the latter. Further, a 'name and shame' policy – similar to that implemented in the UK by the DBIS (2011) - of those breaching labor law regulation by operating extra-curricular internships which do not meet the criteria of vocational placements, could prevent others from engaging with the practice. While such formal interventions may assist, government funding may be better directed at increasing much needed resourcing for HE providers to embed a diverse range of quality WIL programs across all disciplines. Financial incentives for employers which host WIL students - similar to schemes implemented for apprentices - and awards, telephone advisory services and recognitions for 'champions' in WIL may also be beneficial.

#### *Delivering Flexible and Inclusive Work-Integrated Learning Programs*



Extra-curricular internships cannot reasonably be shifted to WIL if curricular offerings are not appropriately designed and/or adequately resourced to meet both industry and student needs. Potential host employers may have particular requirements regarding the number of available students and the skills, traits and characteristics of students presented for consideration. Those designing WIL offerings must ensure they align with a range of different business cycles and cater for different organization types, including the smaller, home-based organizations which are often keen to participate in WIL yet may not meet program requirements (Jackson et al., 2016). Adequate support must be given to industry partners to ensure they are equipped to deliver appropriate mentoring/supervision, feedback and performance management processes. This could be achieved through the development of useful resources and third party interventions (Jackson et al., 2016), in addition to formal training of workplace supervisors by HE providers.

For students, opportunities must be meaningful and produce quality learning outcomes and should ideally span a range of purposes (such as discipline-based exposure and service learning), structures and durations to fit with diverse student needs. Course designers must ensure there is adequate space for WIL activities, particularly given some students may wish to undertake multiple episodes of WIL (Interns Australia, 2015). Some may seek a global WIL experience which requires additional resourcing due to the labor-intensive nature of administrative requirements and establishing quality partnerships (Clark, Rowe, Cantori, Bilgin, & Mukuria, 2015). Available opportunities must be effectively promoted as some evidence suggests students are simply unaware of WIL offerings in their area and are not always prepared for the workload and processes associated with the experience (Jackson et al., 2016).

The application of eligibility criteria, such as average course grades and stage of study, appears to be widespread and requires careful consideration if WIL is to be inclusive (Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto, & Carter, 2014). Providing opportunities to support all students wishing to gain relevant work experience is critical to HE provision and significant attention has been paid to making WIL programs more inclusive through diversified offerings which cater to a heterogeneous student body (Felton & Harrison, 2017; Mackaway et al., 2014). Steps, for example, should be taken to make WIL more accessible to international students (Department of Education and Training, 2016), including overcoming management bias towards hosting domestic WIL students and better preparing international students for their WIL experience (International Education Association of Australia, 2012). Students of lower socio-economic status may find it more difficult to participate in placement WIL due to the associated costs of travel, clothing, childcare (Moore, Ferns, & Peach, 2015) and having to forego paid work (Curiale, 2010). Designing and facilitating virtual and campus-based opportunities can help those traditionally excluded from placement WIL due to socio-economic, background and geographical factors. It is also important to cater for students who desire a more entrepreneurial and/or virtual experience than that offered by traditional placement-WIL. This preference may grow amid rising trends in internet-enabled businesses in the 'sharing economy' (see Oliver et al., 2015). Oliver's contemporary definition of WIL, "a range of tasks that are authentic (the task resembles those required in professional life) or proximal (the setting resembles professional contexts)" (p. 62), captures its inclusive nature and potential to provide a quality learning experience for individuals with diverse backgrounds and needs.

#### *Recognize the Potential of Co-Curricular Work-Integrated Learning*

In-curricular WIL opportunities may be limited in certain degree programs because of its resource-intensive nature or a lack of available space in already full course programs, perhaps due to accreditation requirements. For students who have exhausted their available WIL opportunities,

additional options are needed. In response, and perhaps in an effort to avert students from extra-curricular internship arrangements, some HE providers are catering to student needs and filling curricular gaps through 'co-curricular' WIL programs (Ferns et al., 2014). These are often coordinated by a centralized unit, such as careers provision or teaching and learning centers, with the vetting of learning opportunities and risk management processes similar to those followed for in-curricular WIL. Completion may be recognized through a certificate or an additional entry on an academic transcript yet the experience does not constitute a formal component of the student's degree studies.

While the potential advantages of co-curricular WIL exist in terms of providing opportunities for developing aspects of career-readiness in students, learning is not linked back to the curricula or formally assessed (McRae & Johnston, 2016). Further, as it is additional to student's studies, participation may be difficult for some who have other significant time commitments, such as caring and paid work. This means - similar to unregulated, extra-curricular internships - that certain student groups are disadvantaged in accessing valuable authentic learning experiences. Other concerns are whether co-curricular arrangements, if designed as 'placement WIL', are compliant with labor law regulations and also whether they might cause a decline in student take-up of in-curricular WIL as students are now able to complete the esteemed discipline-based academic units while still gaining relevant work experience organized by their university. These are interesting points for consideration and debate, yet are beyond the scope of this paper and offer a valuable area for further research.

## CONCLUSION

WIL is well-established as a valuable platform for developing career-ready graduates. Given a lack of employer engagement in WIL in certain disciplines in Australia, however, WIL offerings may be limited to only certain student groups, denying access to the many seeking relevant work experience. Continued growth in extra-curricular internships raises the question of why employers are engaging in these unregulated arrangements and not participating in WIL programs which are developed and coordinated by local HE providers. Potential reasons vary yet the outcome remains that continued employer support for extra-curricular internships is likely to, albeit inadvertently, impede the growth targeted in the National Strategy for WIL (Universities Australia et al., 2015). Unregulated, extra-curricular internships are unlikely to offer the same quality work-based learning experience as WIL which is underpinned by the principles of preparation, feedback and supervision. Further, extra-curricular internships may not be compliant with the Fair Work Act's definition of a vocational placement and could contravene governing labor law in Australia. Shifting employer engagement from extra-curricular internships to quality WIL programs, which are flexible and inclusive to stakeholder needs, could be an important step in developing career-readiness across student groups and heightened prosperity for all.

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## About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favoured the broader term of WIL. In response to these changes, the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning in 2018.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "*an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum*". Examples of such practice includes work placements, work-terms, internships, practicum, cooperative education (Co-op), fieldwork, work-related projects/competitions, service learning, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, applied projects, simulations (including virtual WIL), etc. WIL shares similar aims and underpinning theories of learning as the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training, however, each of these fields are seen as separate fields.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

## Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

*Research publications* should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data. And a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

*Topical discussion* articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

*Best practice and program description* papers. On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or is situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.



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