

## GoodWIL placements: How COVID–19 shifts the conversation about unpaid placements

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This paper discusses how the COVID–19 pandemic can shift the conversation of paid and unpaid placements from an economic to a pedagogical and goodwill perspective. During the pandemic lockdown many placements were cancelled or postponed. Some continued as agreed but with students working from home, while other placements became unpaid. We build on the pertinent literature that raises legal, ethical, economic and pedagogical implications of paid versus unpaid placement models and what motivates placement organizations to offer placements. Four interdisciplinary trans-Tasman case studies are discussed to better understand the complex situations for placement organizations and universities to sustain WIL placements during this pandemic. Conclusions include recommendations to be vigilant and ensure goodwill is not used to mask the exploitation of students, but rather, positively influence the motivation behind offering placements during these trying times and beyond.

Keywords: COVID-19, paid placement, unpaid placement, industry partnerships, work-integrated learning

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With this position paper, we discuss emerging industry and placement organization practices related to paid and unpaid student placements as a response to the world-wide pandemic of COVID–19. A position paper critically examines a contemporary issue, draws attention to recent trends, is grounded in current scholarly literature, and responds to emerging practices and recommendations (Dean et al., 2020). For the purpose of this paper, placements are a type of work-integrated learning (WIL) with the following distinctive features: student learning in a workplace with some form of supervision and assessment for learning, and the placement is for credit towards a tertiary degree. Due to the COVID–19 social distancing measures, along with public and economic lockdown, many placements were cancelled or postponed. Some paid placements continued as originally agreed but with the student working remotely from home, however, others became unpaid placements. In this paper, we explore the consequences of the pandemic for students and placement organizations as related to paid or unpaid WIL placements and offer considerations for future placement practices.

This study evolved from a trans-Tasman online coffee group hosted by the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) which met regularly during the Australasian COVID–19 lockdown to share experiences, observations and reflections of WIL challenges. The group of seven people from

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Australia and New Zealand included practitioners and academics in the following positions: student, workplace supervisor, academic supervisor, industry engagement coordinator, program coordinator and professional practice researcher. Through our discussion of the challenges of maintaining placements, issues relating to payment or non-payment of students on placement became clearer and we discovered further layers of complexity than have been portrayed in literature prior to the pandemic. We critically discuss these emerging placement issues to more deliberately influence discourse and future practices.

There are diverse models of paid and unpaid placements. For the purpose of this paper, a paid placement is one whereby the student receives some form of payment. This could be the equivalent of a wage or salary, a stipend or payment to cover accommodation and/or board (Todd & Lay, 2011). In an unpaid placement, students undertake work or a role for an organization and receive no financial remuneration. Work related expenses incurred during the placement may be covered by the placement organization or the student may receive additional small payments such as a petrol or travel allowance. For students on unpaid placements, there may be scholarships offered through the university or workplace. Organizations such as ACEN offer student scholarships as well. However, from the perspective of the workplace, students receiving scholarships are unpaid. Another placement model involves students paying to undertake work experience, these placements happen in two ways. Programs such as Dream Careers in the USA offer students work experiences, which also provide accommodation, in highly desirable companies for a fee (Todd & Lay, 2011). Alternatively, placement brokers charge students a fee to secure a placement (Hyde, 2019).

## LITERATURE

Legal, ethical and to some extent pedagogical, implications of unpaid placements are discussed in WIL literature (Burke & Carton, 2013; Cameron, 2013; Cohen & de Peuter, 2019; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Equity across different student demographics is a significant issue of debate and economic implications are reflected throughout the discussion.

### *Legal and Ethical Issues*

The first legal aspect covered in this paper is the topic of employment legislation. In many countries, legislation lacks clarity when applied to WIL placements, which are typically described as internships in the media. For example, in the United States, Fair Labor Standards offer criteria to determine the legality of unpaid work. However, Todd and Lay (2011) describe these criteria as vague. In the United Kingdom, internships have no legal status if under one year in duration (Smith et al., 2015) and in Australia, legal prosecution of workplaces offering unpaid internships has occurred (Wilson & Pender, 2016). In New Zealand as in other countries, the issue of unpaid student placements has come to media attention, including strong criticism in an award-winning documentary (Cohen & de Peuter, 2019; Hyde, 2019; Drake & Pine, 2020). In Canada, where the legislation refers to internships, a student on placement must be paid when enrolled in a course. All other cases are considered illegal if unpaid (Gowling WLG, 2014). This position is endorsed through the accreditation and definition of Co-operative Education (co-op) programs in Canada, which still required co-op placements to be paid during COVID-19 (Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada [CEWIL], 2020).

The New Zealand and Australian governments have resources (from Employment New Zealand and Fair Work Ombudsman respectively) that take different approaches to payment on placement. Employment New Zealand (2020) outlines the differences between an employee and a volunteer. In New Zealand, the focus is on the nature of the work being undertaken, whereas in Australia the focus

includes the arrangement between the placement organization and the educational institution (Fair Work Ombudsman, n.d.-c). The Australian emphasis on institution-based placements is not found in New Zealand legislation.

In New Zealand, a student on unpaid placement is regarded as a volunteer, and this status should be specified in writing. Advice about volunteer placements states clearly that the person undertaking the voluntary work must benefit from the experience of a placement of limited duration and hours of work. The placement organization should not ask the volunteer to undertake work “integral to the business” that can be completed by an employee, and should avoid “economic benefit from work undertaken by the volunteer” (Employment New Zealand, 2020, unpaid work experience section, para 5). The Labour Inspectorate in New Zealand takes the position that if a worker does not meet the requirements to be regarded as a volunteer, the minimum employment standards must apply and the Inspectorate can take enforcement action against the workplace if these standards are not met (Employment New Zealand, n.d.).

Australia has legislation which regulates unpaid placements, called the Fair Work Act 2009 (Fair Work Ombudsman, n.d.-a). Organisations can lawfully appoint students in an unpaid role if the placement satisfies the requirements for a vocational placement under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cameron, 2018). A vocational placement includes no entitlement to be paid for work undertaken, it is a requirement for the student’s qualification and is approved by the educational institution (Fair Work Ombudsman, n.d.-b). It is crucial for universities to ensure that their WIL programs are compliant with the Fair Work Act to protect students from exploitation. Both legal and reputational risks arise if a WIL Placement is not appropriately structured to meet the vocational placement exemption under the Fair Work Act (Cameron, 2018). Reputational risks expose an institution to potential damage to their prestige, standing or image. Given the negative media coverage about the legal issues and ethics of unpaid placements in many countries, exposure to reputational risk is high.

An additional legal issue can arise relating to intellectual property. For work undertaken by an employee, the intellectual property rests with the client or placement organization. With unpaid placements, it is less clear and can vary from country to country. However, in most jurisdictions in the absence of a specific agreement, by default, the intellectual property rests with the student. Educational institutions may have intellectual property policies that reinforce this stance (Cameron et. al., 2020). The value of this intellectual property may be significant and readily transferable in a field such as information technology (Clear et al., 2011). The intellectual property may be less significant if a placement student has been undertaking ongoing repetitive work. Lack of clarity is exacerbated if the student has used client or workplace resources to produce intellectual property. Use of such resources may prompt placement organisations to ask students to assign intellectual property to the organisation. Potential exploitation results if the student feels pressured to sign an agreement to this effect and does not fully understand the consequences of doing so (Cameron et al.,2020).

The ethical issues relate to equity of students working for no remuneration. This topic has caused controversy particularly with lower socio-economic students, as Burke and Carton (2013) express, “unpaid internships are a disproportionate burden for students in lower [socio-economic] classes” (p. 123). Economically disadvantaged students may have to undertake extra-curricular paid work to subsidise an unpaid WIL placement (Burke & Carton, 2012; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Smith et al. (2015) support this notion by discussing that unpaid placements are more favorable for people with privileged backgrounds who can afford to live for extended periods without paid work. Siebert and Wilson (2013) also discuss the exploitation of students, particularly those in the creative arts sector, and state, “the

drive to be creative makes people less sensitive to exploitation of unpaid work” (p, 4). There is a clear stance in the literature that unpaid placements are unfair and disadvantageous for some students.

### *Pedagogical Issues*

There were several pedagogical issues identified in literature that focus on WIL experiences in placement organizations. These issues include motivators for students and supervisors, industry norms, length of placements, and relationships between the parties involved. The weight of literature opines that placements should be paid (Burke & Carton, 2013; Cameron, 2013; Cohen & de Peuter, 2019; Grant-Smith & MacDonald, 2018; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Smith et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of payment during an extended placement or for work that is the equivalent of a regular employee, and their study found over half of the student participants on paid placements felt valued and committed to their placement.

Motivators for both students and supervisors are significant pedagogical issues. Concern is expressed that students may not be committed to the placement if they are unpaid. However, the lack of payment did not appear to undermine the meaningfulness of the placement nor impact the student’s motivation to undertake an unpaid placement (Smith et al., 2015). There was also motivation seen by the placement organization supervisors such as in Martin et al.’s (2019) study that revealed that in many placement situations altruism was a strong motivator for workplace supervisors, especially for those supervisors who had themselves previously been on placement as students. Martin et al. (2019), identified a ‘virtuous cycle’ whereby a positive workplace experience had motivated the alumni to offer work placement in order to contribute to the development of future professionals. Irrespective of payment, the alignment of the expectations of the student and the industry supervisor is important (Martin et al., 2019).

The strength of industry norms was evident in nursing and education. In these sectors the issue of payment for students in most countries is not applicable, where most undertake mandatory unpaid placements as a requirement for their degree. The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2019) explains that the workload of the workplace supervisors in these sectors requires copious amounts of unpaid personal time to help students attain the best from their placement. Altruism is a main contributor when it comes to supervisors’ commitment, especially during impactful times, such as COVID-19, the 2020 global pandemic.

There was a clear relationship between placement length and payment inherent in other studies. Hoskyn and Martin (2011), found that in five business academic institutions, payment appeared to be linked to length of placement. They identified that universities requiring students to be paid for their placement often required longer placements. However, where payment of students was optional, the placement length was shorter (180-315 hours). Workplace supervisors in a study by Martin et al. (2019), queried whether economic gain could be obtained from short-term placements at all.

When the supervisor and student create a supportive relationship, the result is a benefit that cannot be defined in economic terms. Resilience can be a key benefit for both parties. The resilience of students who are on placements has been closely linked to the resilience of the placement supervisor (Beutel et al., 2019).

## METHODOLOGY

An explorative qualitative approach was taken for this study to investigate payment for WIL placements from several perspectives in New Zealand and Australia. A collection of insights has been represented as case studies to illustrate the issues being explored. Case studies allow for complexity and diversity within disciplinary, placement or institutional contexts to be presented and examined (Creswell, 2014). This research was concerned with understanding WIL placements from lived experiences within the intersections of the COVID-19 and several WIL contexts. The collection of four case studies was analyzed for the similarities and differences within and between the cases. The case studies presented in this paper do not attempt to be a general representation, but merely offer plausible insights to the events at the time and allow the reader to draw their own conclusions (Lucas et al., 2018). The robustness of this research stems from the interdisciplinary data sources and the examination of the data from multiple perspectives.

This position paper was developed by a group of seven academics and practitioners at different stages of their careers, including a student, early-career, mid-career and senior academics from three higher education institutions across Australia and New Zealand. During the COVID-19 lockdown and the succeeding months the authors came together at the ACEN Coffee Chats to connect to other academic and professional staff navigating WIL activities during the pandemic. This cross-disciplinary, multi-institutional, online group met weekly using an online social media platform from March 2020, continuing through and beyond publication of this paper. This type of collaboration is supported by the work of Cameron et al. (2020) and Poole et al. (2018). Poole et al. investigated small significant networks as a methodology for like-minded academics with a specific interest to come together in an opportunity to grow and learn in their practice. This concept can be inclusive of academics located in institutions that are too geographically distant to meet face-to-face for a Small Significant Online Network Group (SSONG) (Eady et al., 2019; Green et al., 2020). As discussed in Brown (2010), these successful partnerships can also guide and potentially maximise scholarly output. In the circumstance of this SSONG, the authors used case studies that were situated in three universities, two in Australia and one in New Zealand. Cameron et al. (2020) noted that a collaborative focus on practice can enable WIL practitioners to transcend positive aspects of WIL and give a much-needed focus on negative or neglected issues.

## CASE STUDIES

Four discipline areas were considered for this study: engineering, sport, business and teacher education. For each discipline, we describe our ongoing experience with placement in that discipline, and the likely impact on placements of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australian state and territorial governments and the New Zealand central government introduced 'lockdown' measures in late March 2020 to contain COVID-19. Lockdown meant most residents, where possible, remained at home, while only essential workers such as medical, emergency and those in the food supply chain continued to go to their workplaces. Schools and universities were closed, and education was delivered online. Both countries imposed border restrictions. Physical distancing was implemented, which meant people in public spaces maintained at least one to two meters away from others.

Immediately after lockdown began, the Australian and New Zealand governments implemented monetary and fiscal measures to offer financial support to organizations and individuals impacted by the closures. These included wage subsidies, sector relief packages and specific financial support to

the most affected industries. For example, in New Zealand, the devastated not-for-profit sport industry was granted a NZ\$265 million-dollar relief package for the next four years (Wade, 2020). Nevertheless, both countries experienced a sharp rise in unemployment, a shrinkage of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Australian Government Treasury, 2020; New Zealand Government Treasury, 2020) and businesses began closing permanently. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted a 3 per cent contraction of the world economy, which compared to the 2009 Global Financial Crisis with a 0.1 per cent contraction (Australian Government, 2020).

### *Engineering*

In response to the COVID-19 lockdown, an American based award-winning technology company piloted their first virtual student placement with an Australian university. The company traditionally only offered local face-to-face placements but was prevented from doing so when the COVID-19 lockdown closed their facilities. An unpaid second-year Australian-based, software engineering student worked remotely with the company's technology team. The CEO provided the student with both one-on-one and team mentoring and performance feedback. The student was also able to work and socialise virtually with the broader overseas-based team. This example highlights the extraordinary level of mentorship during an international workplace experience that would not have occurred without the COVID-19 lockdown.

A professional requirement in Australia and New Zealand is that engineering students must complete a WIL placement to obtain their degree. Traditionally engineering placements are paid. In our experience, with payment students feel valued, consequently these placements receive greater student interest and attract a higher caliber of candidates. Unpaid placements tend to be given to disadvantaged students; for example, students without working visas or with limited English.

Unpaid placements commenced before COVID-19 lockdown were more likely to continue, while many paid placements were postponed or became unpaid due to financial constraints. In these cases, the lack of payment was not a mechanism to find 'free labor' rather a dedication to carry on with the education of a student that would otherwise have been suspended.

In the engineering sector, the economic effects of the pandemic are likely to be felt for some time. Existing projects are likely to be completed and new or early-stage projects are likely to be delayed, resulting in a shortage of WIL placements. It is uncertain if the number of WIL placements will recover in the foreseeable future.

### *Sport*

Two New Zealand-based sport management students experienced unexpected benefits from the closure of their WIL sport placement during the lockdown. In the first example, a 26-year-old male student was partway through his placement with a for-profit international business. His organization's New Zealand office closed permanently, his unpaid placement ended, and his workplace supervisor became unemployed. The student was passionate about his 'cutting-edge' WIL project, and he had a strong relationship with the workplace supervisor, so they continued working together on the entrepreneurial project during and after lockdown. The project was made visible through social media and the student was given the opportunity to continue his unpaid WIL placement with a competing organization. The resilient, proactive and innovative attitude of the student matched his new WIL organization's philosophy, and the student is likely to be offered a permanent paid job after graduating.

The second example is a 22-year-old female student who unsuccessfully tried to secure a placement with a high-profile women's sport prior to the pandemic. During lockdown, the student's lecturer encouraged her to attend international sport leadership meetings online. One such presenter was the international development manager for sport and after the online meeting the presenter introduced the student to several Australasian women sports managers resulting in the student securing a desirable but unpaid WIL placement.

The initial impact of COVID-19 lockdown on the sport and recreation industry in New Zealand was immense with most sports organizations, both grassroots and professional, being unable to operate due to social distancing rules. These two sports examples were typical of the industry's supportive attitude during the lockdown. This behaviour demonstrated the workplace supervisor's commitment to developing the next generation of sports practitioners and the support to help students complete their qualifications. Despite some positive outcomes, most sport and recreation WIL placements were postponed, or work was carried out remotely, however a few were terminated. Most students only four weeks into their year-long, two days per week sports placements retained their roles. Workplace supervisors seemed genuinely concerned that the students were able to complete their placement requirements and, in some cases, their degrees. The lockdown was particularly prolonged for organizations involved in events or hospitality as these were the last to reopen after lockdown.

The sport industry has traditionally been amateur and volunteer in nature and WIL placements have been unpaid. The New Zealand sport industry is becoming more professional and the trend is reflected in the slight increase in paid sports WIL placements. The longer-term significance of the COVID-19 pandemic on WIL sports placements is uncertain. While New Zealand society has been able to return to normal activity, the country remains closed to international travelers without New Zealand citizenship and this has inhibited many large-scale sporting events. Even though significant government financial support is available for organizations to maintain employees, some placement sports organizations have restructured, and paid jobs and WIL roles have disappeared. The chance of a paid WIL placement in not-for-profit sports organizations will be unlikely in the foreseeable future.

### *Business*

Marketing and accounting were two business specializations considered in this position paper. In both subjects the majority of students were able to continue their placements during the COVID-19 lockdown. Some workplaces regarded the lockdown period as leave for placement students who then recommenced work when restrictions for their industry were lifted, although most worked from home. Many processes in marketing and accounting are now undertaken electronically and these WIL placements continued normally, albeit remotely. With the end of the New Zealand tax year falling during lock-down, there was substantial work for accountants during this time. The discontinued placements tended to be in industries such as retail (except for supermarkets), and event management or tourism because these sectors remained closed during the lockdown. Some large corporate environments rely heavily on systems requiring personnel to be physically at work. Lockdown was implemented so quickly that these organizations had insufficient time to transfer placement students to working from home.

The resources required to work from home highlighted inequity amongst students. Students found working from home easier if they had good digital and computer equipment, up to date software, strong internet connections, the ability to set up a dedicated workspace and a household structure that minimized interruptions. Some students used technology provided by their workplace whereas others

had to use their own resources. In one case, a student using their own laptop without a camera was significantly disadvantaged during online meetings.

Working from home reduced some of the hidden costs of being on placement. There was no longer a need to adhere to the dress code for students which can be costly. Students spent less time and money travelling to the workplace. Travel time to the workplace often extends the working day allowing less time for university assessments and/or other paid employment.

On a positive note, few students were required to work long hours during lockdown. In general, the key message from the New Zealand government of kindness and consideration was evident in interaction within workplaces. In previous teaching periods, it was not uncommon to find a small number of paid marketing students burdened with heavy workplace demands, such as excessive work hours, in spite of agreements with the university that precludes such treatment. In our experience some businesses take an approach, that the student is being paid and therefore can work as required. In many cases, this is reflected in the normal culture and practices of the organization where all staff work long hours.

The value of similar work activities can differ depending on the organizational type. For example, an accounting student can prepare accounts for a firm which charges clients. In this situation, the student should clearly be paid. The same accounting work could be undertaken for a sports club, with the work supervised by an unpaid club volunteer. In this case payment is hard to justify. A large charity with significant fund-raising may employ paid staff for services such as accounting. In this case, an unpaid placement would not meet the voluntary guidelines of the New Zealand government. Similarly, in marketing, a small family-run business creating a placement for a friend to enable completion of a degree may initiate a strategic plan that would otherwise not be written. This is a different scenario to a large corporate organization hiring a student for its regular annual planning process.

#### *Primary Teacher Training (Education)*

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools and universities closed indefinitely, schoolteachers and higher education academics scrambled to transfer learning experiences that were normally face-to-face into online learning opportunities. In the teaching education sector in Australia, placement hours are required by the governing accreditation body of the profession, in order to graduate successfully. Primary school education students for example, are required to complete 80 days of WIL professional experience placements over four years of the degree (New South Wales Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2017).

The nature of placement changes over the course of the degree with increasing responsibility. The placements occurring early in the degree are primarily observational (that is the pre-service teacher (PST) observes an experienced teacher in the classroom). Later placements include increasing levels of responsibility for classroom teaching culminating with the PST taking a class without the supervisor present. However, the supervising teacher must remain at the school and be available to manage any emergency or health and safety issue such as evacuation or lockdown.

While education students on placement are not paid, a small payment is made to supervising teachers, provided from the state government through the higher education institution (NESA, 2017). This payment of placement supervisors is in recognition of the extra work required to supervise a PST. When PSTs are on placement, they are required to prepare resources for their classes and may not have



access to materials in their placement school. In addition, the location of their placement school may require them to travel to a different location and arrange temporary accommodation.

The most concerning impact of COVID-19 is that a bottleneck of PSTs is developing in the systematic placement routine. In coming months, a significant number of students will have to complete placements that had been missed during the COVID-19 lockdown. Higher education institutions will be required to creatively problem solve perhaps by adding “WIL experience only” subjects or adding extra professional experience days to existing placements in an effort to ensure all students can meet the requirements of their degree. Concurrently, schools and universities will be required to navigate COVID-19 restrictions and policies now faced by all schools.

## DISCUSSION

From observations about placement scenarios during and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we took a more critical look at the ongoing issue of paid and unpaid placements. From the reviewed literature we identified general principles that can be used to assess appropriateness of payment (or lack of it). However, the full context of a specific placement needs to be understood to determine whether or not a lack of payment is appropriate in any given circumstance. First, we look at a cross-case comparison, then we compare our experiences with existing literature and finally, consider post COVID-19 implications of our study. From this comparison we found little difference between paid and unpaid placements in terms of COVID-19 impact, with the nature of the industry being a more significant factor. Similarly, we found that exploitation can occur in paid as well as unpaid placements. We noted the significant hidden costs of being on placement that can place a strain on students. The key to a positive placement was mentoring on the part of the placement supervisor. A summary of characteristics of a goodwill placement arising from our comparative study can be found in Table 1.

Cross-case comparison showed little difference between paid and unpaid placements in terms of COVID-19 impact. The two factors influencing continuation of placement were the ability of the industry sector to operate, and the strength of the relationship between the placement organization with the student or academic institution. Discontinuation of placements occurred when it was physically impossible for work to be undertaken. Alternatives were found when either the workplace or the student could see alternative opportunities.

As our study was based on workplaces with which we had a strong relationship, no exploitative cases were identified. This may have also been a COVID-19 impact, as only the most hardened placement organization would exploit a student during such a situation. However, we observed from our pre-COVID-19 experience that exploitation can feature in paid as well as unpaid placements. Payment of a student does not necessarily result in a satisfactory WIL experience. If unsatisfactory, a placement may not be beneficial to a student. The motivation of the workplace supervisor is crucial in determining whether the placement is regarded as free or cheap labor or an opportunity to contribute to the development of a future professional (Goldsmith & Trede, 2019).

TABLE 1: Key characteristics of goodwill placements in our study.

Characteristic	Description of characteristic and impact
Motivation of workplace supervisor	Altruism and a desire to see the next generation develop that leads to mentoring.
Relationship between placement organisation and academic institution	Goodwill was more evident when this relationship was strong.
Consideration of the student perspective	In particular, consideration of how the placement benefits the student and how a student will manage the hidden costs of being on placement.
Adherence to legal situation in the country of the placement	General principles that can be used to assess appropriateness of payment (or lack of it).
For an unpaid placement – genuine reason for lack of payment (rather than a desire for free labor)	For example, in volunteer industries or situations where placements have been created purely as an educational experience.

Our experiences reflected many aspects of WIL literature. We observed that paid placements can attract a higher caliber of student. The strain of unpaid placements on students was evident, even when students could justifiably be regarded as volunteers. However, our observation placed more emphasis, than is found in WIL literature, on the hidden costs for students (dress, travel, etc.) of being on placement. WIL models need greater emphasis to be given to these costs especially if a student has to give up paid work to undertake a placement. During the COVID-19 lockdown, there were hidden costs related to students working from home such as the cost of internet connection and virtual communication.

Altruism and a desire to see the next generation develop is likely to accompany a satisfactory mentoring experience (Martin et al, 2019). However, in scenarios where students are treated as free or cheap labor, this altruistic tendency is most likely absent. If lack of payment is occurring for genuine reasons, mentoring of the student is often strong, for example, in volunteer industries such as sport or situations where placements have been created purely as an educational experience.

The projected economic fallout from COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to disadvantage future WIL opportunities by reducing the number of placements and the likelihood of payment. Many not-for-profit organizations have limited resources and may be unable to offer paid WIL placements, for example, community sport. In sectors where full time paid jobs are limited and the number of potential candidates is high, supply and demand will reduce rates of pay. These impacts could increase financial barriers for those students from lower socio-economic groups.

In this discussion we considered the payment of placements in a number of scenarios beyond the legal and ethical perspective that dominates much of the literature. We attempted to discuss the issue from the perspective of both the student and the workplace. A limitation of our approach includes our close proximity to all of the cases which came from our own experiences. All WIL placements discussed in

this paper relate to strong university/industry partnerships built on respect and connection. Future research projects could investigate a wider range of scenarios as well as placements that could be regarded as exploitative. Better understanding in all of these contexts could result in improved practice and positive experiences for all.

## CONCLUSIONS

Distressing economic situations open up possibilities for new ways of working. It is probable that payment for placements may be less common in the future. However, the pandemic should not be used to excuse the non-payment of students. The COVID-19 pandemic will result in a review of many practices and we advocate that the altruism, initiative and supportive environment recently seen should continue in future WIL environments.

We consider that goodwill and partnership are essential qualities of any placement; paid or unpaid. A spirit of altruism can demonstrate a desire to contribute to the development of future professionals. In any placement, there is a duty of care towards the student and a need to actively consider how the experience benefits the student. There is an ongoing need for respect for working conditions and in particular hours of work. Whether or not lack of payment is legally acceptable, without mentorship a student is less likely to attribute value to the placement. This outcome can be hard for both a student and academic institution to assess prior to approving a placement.

It may seem impossible for all placements to be paid; some industries are simply not able to sustain such practice. Regardless of legality and propriety, in a perfect world, all placements would be paid. Both existing literature and our experience demonstrate the difficulties for students who need to cover the cost of living while studying. Opportunities that occurred as a result of COVID-19 disruption could well provide inspiration for re-thinking placements in the future. It is worth acknowledging this has not yet been discussed in depth in current literature.

In the post COVID-19 world, the payment of placements may be less common due to the economic environment. Our paper discusses a wide range of considerations to ensure that goodwill is not used to mask the exploitation of students, but rather, positively influence the motivation behind offering placements in a post COVID-19 era.

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