

Understanding the risks in work-integrated learning

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an activity with inherent risks, different from those that occur with on-campus learning experiences. Risks associated with WIL may have serious financial, reputational and legal consequences for universities, WIL staff, students and host organizations. Using a mixed methods approach, this study examined how risk was defined and perceived by those involved in WIL, across eight New Zealand universities. Differences in understanding were examined and compared across disciplines and university roles. WIL staff perceived health and safety; conduct of students; student characteristics; conduct of the host organization (including exploitation and physical safety of students) as high risk. These factors were all linked to reputational risk for the university. WIL staff (both new and more experienced) need to have a clear understanding of the risks, so they can design risk management practices to help mitigate these risks for universities, students, host organizations, as well as themselves.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning; risk, student conduct; reputation; placements; health and safety

The purpose of work-integrated learning (WIL) is to enable students to have authentic experiences in relevant learning environments, with a focus on the integration of theory into practice contexts (Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). WIL normally occurs in host organizations external to the university as part of a student's course requirements. While the benefits of WIL for students, industry and the university are numerous and largely undisputed (see review in Coll & Zegwaard, 2011) WIL has been identified as an activity with inherent risks different from those that might occur with on-campus learning experiences (Cameron, 2017; Newhook, 2013).

How risk is defined depends on the context in which the word is being used. Risk can be simply defined as: "... the possibility or chance of loss, danger or injury" (Yourdictionary, n.d.). Risk in a business or enterprise context can be considered as anything that affects an organization's ability to meet their objectives or goals (APPA, 2018). Risk can be understood, from a social constructionist perspective, as a phenomenon interpreted and constructed by the individual and thus influenced by their experiences, understandings and relationships. Thereby, risks are dynamic, fluid and negotiated within contexts and history (Newhook, 2013). Perceived as either opportunities or threats, risks in the university WIL context can be conceptualized as issues that might affect, either positively or negatively, the achievement of WIL objectives (Cameron, 2017; Mattie 2007).

In New Zealand, changes to health and safety legislation altered the legal responsibilities for all public and private organizations (Health & Safety at Work Act 2015). In the context of WIL, this includes not only the host organization but also the university and individuals such as students. The host organization has a responsibility to take reasonably practicable steps to prevent harm to a student as it does with any other worker it engages. The university arguably, has an overlapping duty to the student, requiring it to "consult, co-operate with, and co-ordinate activities with" (Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, s. 34) the host organization to ensure effective health and safety management. This has

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led to increased attention on risk in WIL in New Zealand universities and other tertiary education institutions.

Maximizing the value of WIL, but minimizing risk is a challenge that is not unique to the New Zealand context. While research has been undertaken in Australian and Canadian universities (Cameron & Klopper, 2015; Cameron et al., 2019; Newhook, 2013, 2016), no previous empirical research on understanding risks associated with WIL in New Zealand universities has been located. Thereby, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the risks in placement-based WIL in New Zealand universities. Specifically, this article will examine how risk is defined and perceived by those involved in WIL and will explore the differences in understanding across disciplines and university roles.

BACKGROUND

The learning environment on campus is generally predictable and able to be closely monitored and controlled. In contrast, WIL programmes occur in a diverse range of workplaces and community settings and are structured in different ways depending on the curriculum model (Smith et al., 2019). Contractual arrangements between the parties involved with WIL are variable. WIL placements can be paid or unpaid, full time or part-time, and the length of the placement varies considerably. Generally, organizations are not paid for hosting a student. However, in the professions, such as teaching and health related areas, hosts frequently receive some financial reimbursement from the university and/or government. With such a wide variability within WIL, it is important to acknowledge the risks involved are also variable and may differ across disciplines, organizations and universities.

In the context of higher education, strategic risk may affect the ability of the institution to achieve its planned goals (Cassidy et al., 2001), and this risk may be intertwined with financial and operational risks that impact on ongoing management processes (APPA, 2018). Cameron (2017) defines risk by the probability of occurrence, consequences of event, and the event itself. More specifically, he identifies key areas of risk in WIL as: operations; health and safety; conduct; law and liability; finance; ethics; strategy and reputation. If manifested, risks in WIL can have serious financial, reputational or legal consequences for the university, WIL staff, and host organizations (Cameron et al., 2019).

Risk can be depicted on a continuum (Cassidy et al., 2001), where it can be positioned on one end as managing a hazard, through to the other end where risk can be viewed as an opportunity. WIL experiences undertaken as an integral part of a student's undergraduate education are included in strategy and policy for many universities in New Zealand and overseas (Dorland et al., 2020) and are positioned as an area of strategic risk that creates opportunities (Cameron, 2017). Yet, the important balance for universities to achieve is to be able to minimize the hazards while making the most of the opportunities.

While there may be risks for the university and the host organizations, the WIL student has both the greatest exposure to risk and may face the most serious potential consequences. Despite this, actual cases of injury or harm due to risk factors have been minimal (Graj et al., 2019; Newhook, 2016). While students gain the benefits from WIL, they are also the most vulnerable in the workplace, particularly in settings where it is a requirement for graduation or professional registration. There has been growing attention on interpreting the legal rights and responsibilities related to WIL activities, particularly those that are needed to protect students (Graj et al., 2019; Turcotte et al., 2016).

In New Zealand, the limited literature associated with risk and WIL has focused on specific aspects of risk, usually within one discipline. For example, Adamson (2006) considered the influence of an organisational environment on social work students' experiences of stress. Also situated in the social work context, Apaitia-Vague and colleagues (2011) explored the tensions between assessing a student's suitability and readiness for WIL and the role of the education institution in enabling students to develop both personally and professionally throughout the qualifying programme. In the nursing discipline, sustained attention has been given to student experiences of ethical issues and especially bullying during WIL experiences (Foster et al., 2004; Minton & Birks, 2019; Minton et al., 2018; Sinclair et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Williams et al. (1999) examined incidents of inappropriate sexual behaviour experienced by speech-language therapists and students. In contrast to these research examples, this paper offers a broader analysis of risk across multiple disciplines in New Zealand universities.

Responsibility for assessing and managing risk in WIL is largely a shared function; however, the boundaries can blur depending on factors such as the length of placement, whether a student is also an employee of the host organization and who is organizing the placement (Newhook, 2013). The importance of WIL staff in ensuring positive placement experiences for students has been canvassed (Coll & Eames, 2000) although, interestingly, their role in mitigating or managing risk has received minimal attention (Newhook, 2013, 2016).

The challenge for universities generally, and WIL staff specifically, is to enable student learning outcomes to be achieved successfully through WIL, while concurrently minimizing or managing the potential risks. The findings presented in this paper adds to the research endeavour on understanding risk in WIL.

METHODS

A mixed methods approach was used for this study. This approach enabled data triangulation through surveys and interviews, and methodological triangulation by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data (Johnson et al., 2007). As a wide range of WIL models are undertaken within universities in New Zealand, for the purpose of this study, the focus was on placement-based WIL undertaken for credit as part of a university degree.

Initially an online survey was undertaken with staff (faculty/ academic or professional/ administrative) involved in WIL in New Zealand universities. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with 13 staff directly involved with WIL and five university health and safety/risk managers. Further details of the participants and data collection processes are described in the following sections. Ethics approval was gained from each of the authors' university ethics committees (Reference numbers: 19/110 and 4000020718).

Participants

Participants were recruited through the researchers' professional networks and a snowball technique, where participants shared the invitation with their colleagues and networks. Surveys were completed by 64 WIL staff in 2019. The roles of the staff included: placement coordinators (professional and academic staff); WIL course leaders (academic staff); and academic supervisors. For some, they indicated that their role covered more than one of these areas. The majority of participants (59%) had been in their role for over five years, with 4.6% less than two years. Twenty-eight disciplines were represented with the most common being: business; health-related; sport and recreation; arts; science;

and social work. The university where the participants were employed was not disclosed in the survey to help ensure anonymity of the survey responses.

Interview participants were recruited through a similar process as for the surveys. Eighteen interviews were completed during 2019/ 2020 with staff from across all eight of the New Zealand universities. Participants included 13 WIL academic and professional staff as well as five staff involved in managing contracts or health, safety and risk within their respective universities. The disciplines and respective universities have not been identified here, to help ensure anonymity. However, ten different disciplines were represented in the sample.

Online Survey

The online survey included 5-point Likert scales, with descriptors dependent on the nature of the question. The risk categories provided to the participants were informed by Cameron's (2016) research with university lawyers in Australia. Open-ended questions were included to enable participants to provide their perceptions of risk in WIL. Focus areas relevant to this paper included: identifying current and emerging risks in WIL; understanding of different types of risk and the consequences for stakeholders. The scales were analyzed using descriptive techniques. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to generate chi-square tests of independence (Gratton & Jones, 2010), to examine associations between variables. A statistically significant relationship was taken as $p < 0.05$. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative responses from the open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the data was coded inductively and key themes identified. The codes were cross checked for consistency. Representative quotes were selected for reporting in the findings.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face, or through a video call, depending on the location of the participants. The interviews enabled participants to comment on perceived risks in WIL and also to share specific examples of risk, from their own experiences. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was the data analytic technique selected. Initially, deductive analysis was used, based on a coding framework developed from the interview guide and research objectives. This was followed by inductive analysis, to identify any new themes that were not in the initial coding framework. To enhance the rigour of the process, coding was completed by one researcher and then cross checked by the other researcher for consistency. Examples of extract narratives are presented within the findings.

FINDINGS

The survey and interview findings are combined and presented under the following areas: defining risk; common risks for WIL; understanding of risk; level of perceived risk; and consequences for WIL programs.

Defining Risk

In the context of WIL, interview participants defined risk in a general way as anything that caused physical or emotional harm. In a broader sense, risk was related to: "the potential for things to go wrong" (I5); "anything that would make a student or employer feel uncomfortable or unsafe... if you don't feel safe it's a risk" (I3); "negative unexpected happenings" (I17). In their attempts to define risk in WIL, most participants, but not all, considered risks for students, host organizations (or employers)

as well as the university. All participants were able to articulate specific examples of risk related to their own WIL contexts. These examples were commonly focused on physical risk to students, student conduct and learning, and the risk to the reputation of the university. Common examples of risk are described in the next section.

Common Risks Associated with Work-Integrated Learning

Common risks associated with WIL were identified by the interview participants. Participants were asked to talk about different risks within their own WIL programs. Risks are reported here as risks for students, host organizations / employers and the university.

For risks to students, one of the most common examples shared was physical harm and psychological safety, where there was a possibility of trauma, injury or in the worst case, death. This risk was commonly identified across the disciplines with physical safety especially highlighted in industries such as hospitality, agriculture, engineering, landscaping, science, and veterinary sciences. For example, "I guess there are the physical safety concerns of working in restaurants, kitchens, cafes, where there are slips, trips, hot food, hazards, things where they can physically hurt themselves " (I17).

Generally, the participants believed these common risks to students could be managed or mitigated, especially with comprehensive pre-placement preparation:

So, there is a physical risk, because a lot of the human tissues and blood samples that are dealt with have the potential to contain harmful micro-organisms with a physical risk, also dealing with hazardous chemicals. I think, so that's the example of something that's more easily managed, because the students are instructed to comply with the host laboratory protocols, health and safety. (I9)

The risk of student exploitation was also highlighted, with participants expressing a range of views on whether this was more likely to occur if students were unpaid. The demands placed on students by host organizations was likened to exploitation and a power imbalance between the student and host organization was recognized as a challenge:

I suppose exploitation is the main concern that we have. We want to make sure that they have a valuable internship experience which makes the whole thing worthwhile so, we need to make sure that happens but yeah, the main concern is to make sure that they are not put under any undue pressure. (I16)

Having established relationships with host organizations who understood the expectations and requirements of the WIL experience generally helped to counteract the potential for exploitation.

Risks for the host organization were often focused on the conduct or characteristics of students. This was a key concern in the disciplines where students were interacting with clients, patients or the public:

It could be a mismatch. In which case, that would put the organization's clients at risk, its reputation at risk and its good-will at risk and they may refuse to have students forever into the future, and not just ours. (I6)

Students not attending placement, misusing social media, acting unprofessionally or being incompetent in the required tasks were all common examples of poor student conduct or characteristics mentioned by the participants. The consequences of such behaviors could have significant impacts

“... for the companies that are usually involved and also potentially their safety record if the students aren't sort of, up to the task” (I8). Participants from science and technology-related disciplines also raised concerns about the risk of confidentiality of data and intellectual property: “...another risk that a lot of employers tick is that they train up the student, they invest in them but they leave, but they may take with them commercially sensitive information that then subsequently comes into their competitor's hands” (I13). Having clear expectations or contractual arrangements between the student and the host organization around ownership of intellectual property and confidentiality could mitigate these potential risks.

The most common risk for universities was perceived as reputational risk. This could be affected by students who did not have a quality WIL experience and who then raised these concerns with either fellow students or more widely, for example, in the media or on social media platforms. The university's reputation could also be impacted if the student acted inappropriately during their WIL course: “...reputational risk, that our students are also representing the University well through their behaviour and conduct and when things happen, that we need to manage” (I17).

The legal liability of the university could also be challenged if they had organized the placement and something went wrong during the WIL aspect. This was explained by a legal team staff member:

...even though we don't, we can't control what the company does ... no one's going to blame a company they are going to go, 'I got put in a situation where it wasn't ok and I was placed by this University,' so we are likely to be the fall boy for any adverse impacts on a person. And the same with the company. Potentially they will be pointing the finger at the University as the kind of caretaker of the scenario, so we are at risk. (I5)

Understanding of Risk

Survey participants indicated their understanding of different risk areas. Table 1 presents the means for each area of risk (using a scale of 1 being no understanding, 3, a moderate level of understanding and 5, a very high level of understanding).

The descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of staff perceived they had a high or very high level of understanding of the risks for WIL students, the risks for host organizations and the risks for the university. However, a high percentage of staff had little or no understanding of university policies for managing risk, strategies for managing risk or host organization policies for managing risks in WIL.

Associations between the risk areas listed in Table 1 and demographic variables were considered: length of time in the role; length of the placement; placement process; student payment; payment of the host organization. Pearson Chi-square analysis indicated a significant association for perceived understanding of the risks for WIL students with the length of time in the role ($p=0.023$). As you would expect, those that had been in their WIL roles for longer, had a higher perceived level of understanding of the risk for students. However, there was no association with length of time in the role for the other risk areas.

TABLE 1: Perceived understanding of risk associated with WIL.

Risk area	Mean (S.D)	% high or very high level of understanding	% little or no understanding
Risks for WIL students	3.89 (0.86)	69	6
Risks for host organizations	3.82 (0.80)	66	5
Risks for the university	3.83 (0.81)	72	8
Risk for university WIL staff	3.75 (1.02)	64	11
University policies for managing risks associated with WIL	3.06 (1.18)	37	37
Strategies for managing risks in WIL	3.32 (1.11)	46	28
Host organization policies for managing risks in WIL	3.00 (1.05)	31	34

There was a significant association for understanding risks for university WIL staff and the placement process ($p=0.001$), with a higher level of perceived understanding of risk by staff when the students were placed by the university (as opposed to finding their own placement). Also, a higher level of understanding of university policies for managing risk in WIL was significantly associated with the length of the placement ($p=0.047$). Staff involved with programs that had longer placement hours had greater understanding of the university policies. No significant associations were identified in any risk areas for student payment (paid versus unpaid) or for whether the host organization was paid by the university.

Level of Perceived Risk

Survey participants signaled, on a list provided, their perceptions of the *level* of perceived risk related to their WIL program. As indicated in Table 2, the perception of the level of risk was variable. The areas that were perceived by at least 25% of WIL staff to be high risk were: reputation of the university; breach of confidentiality; health and safety; conduct of student on placement; conduct of host organization; contracts or agreements; and intellectual property issues. These findings are largely consistent with the examples of high risk shared by the interview participants.

TABLE 2: Level of perceived risk - % of participants.

Type of risk	Low or no risk	Moderate risk	High or very high risk	Unsure
Health and safety	22	43	35	0
Intellectual property	48	22	26	4
Breach of confidentiality	24	30	46	0
Contracts or agreements	34	28	29	9
Student characteristics	26	43	26	4
Conduct of student on placement	22	50	28	0
Conduct of host organization	22	46	28	4
Sexual and other forms of workplace harassment	39	35	19	7
Conduct of university pre-placement	63	22	13	2
Conduct of university during placement	63	22	13	2
Discrimination, equity and accessibility	41	41	13	5
The educational quality of the WIL experience	43	38	17	2
Insurance coverage	39	26	17	18
Compliance with legislation or policy	43	24	22	11
Compliance with the Vulnerable Children's Act	66	13	8	13
Issues with wages and payment	72	6	6	16
Reputation of the university	32	32	36	0

The areas that at least 50% of survey participants considered low risk were: issues with wages and payment; compliance with the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014 (renamed the Children's Act 2014); and conduct of the university pre- or during placement. These findings are consistent with the interview data, where these areas of risk were not identified or emphasized in the examples they shared of risks for WIL.

The length of placement was significantly related to the perceived level of risk for the conduct of the university during placement ($p= 0.021$). The longer the placement, the higher level of perceived risk. The level of risk related to health and safety was significantly associated with whether the host

organization was paid by the university to have students ($p= 0.013$). The placement process (i.e. self-placed or placed by the university) was significantly related to the perceived level of risk related to the educational quality of the experience ($p= 0.038$) and insurance coverage ($p= 0.021$). This is likely to be related to the lack of familiarity with a new placement organization that has been selected by a student.

Interestingly, none of the interview participants specifically used the term 'health and safety' when describing examples of high-risk factors. Instead, the specific examples of high-risk factors largely concerned the risks to students. This included risks associated with student physical safety with some participants highlighting that students could potentially be injured during their placements, or even killed. While this had not actually occurred in the programs that participants were associated with, the participants were acutely aware of this significant risk:

If I was going to describe what was the most common risk it would be workplace risk from the equipment and chemicals and we do, every year, have some minor injuries from that. But always emphasis on the minor, but that's the most common risk. But the most significant consequence of a risk for us is a fatality. (I13)

While confidentiality was not emphasized as a key risk by the interview participants, they did focus on other aspects of student engagement, behaviour and success in WIL. The risk of poor student learning or failure in the WIL course was highlighted as a considerable risk with ongoing impacts on student confidence, learning and the ability to complete qualifications: "Lots of them do wait and see what the student can do, what their personality is like, before they allocate more challenging tasks" (I18). Poor student conduct or contribution to the host organization was also cited as a high risk that could affect both current and future students. Host organizations are also less likely to offer future placements if they have had a negative WIL experience.

The reputation of the university was considered by some participants to be the highest risk. This was at times linked to the "particular bad behaviour by student in the workplace that ends up in the media" (I13). Student success could also impact on the university's reputation, "...the University of course, it prides itself on, on people achieving well. So, there are ramifications and risks to its reputation if people are failed through a field placement" (I6).

Consequences for Work-Integrated Learning Programs

Participants identified their perceptions of the consequences of the risks for WIL. For the high-risk areas identified in Table 2, the perceived consequences of risk areas are summarized in Table 3 (Note: some risk factors do not add to 100% due to rounding of the data).

TABLE 3: Perceived consequences of risk - % participants.

Type of risk	No consequence	Minor consequences	Severe consequences	Unsure of consequences
Health and safety	8	42	39	11
Intellectual property issues	15	43	17	25
Breach of confidentiality	6	30	47	17
Contracts or agreements	9	43	23	25
Conduct of student on placement	4	34	57	6
Conduct of host organization	2	43	45	9
Reputation of the university	6	38	47	9

Not all participants were sure of the consequences of the risks related to contracts or agreements, intellectual property agreements, and breaches of confidentiality. Associations between the perceptions of the consequences of the risk areas and the demographic variables were analyzed. The length of time in the role was related to their perceptions of the consequences of risk for student characteristics ($p= 0.008$); sexual or other forms of harassment ($p= 0.025$), insurance ($p= 0.015$), compliance with legislation or policy ($p= 0.041$). This suggests, as expected, that those that had been in the roles longer were more aware of the consequences of these specific risk areas and the likely severity of the consequence, than those with less experience. The length of placement was significantly associated with the perceived consequences for breach of confidentiality ($p= 0.001$) and conduct of the host organization ($p= 0.008$). This suggests that consequences for these risk factors were likely to be greater with longer placements.

Interview participants expanded on some of the consequences of these risk factors when sharing examples from their own experiences. These consequences included students failing placements or being exploited or host organizations choosing to no longer take students on future placements. Host organizations might also lose intellectual property if a student takes their learning into new companies or must manage client concerns or complaints if students are not sufficiently competent to complete tasks appropriately. Unfortunately, students may also experience physical, emotional or psychological impacts from a difficult placement:

We just need to make sure that they come out of that the same way they went in. Obviously for them, because they are at such an influential time of their lives, something that could happen now, could very much carry on into the future. So, a lot of that, the mental health, how they develop into the future and what they want to, decisions around what they might do from a career perspective, if they've had a bad experience then that could affect them as well (17).

Universities may suffer criticism or negative publicity if a WIL experience is unsatisfactory for either the student or the host organization and this reinforces the need to ensure there is a greater awareness and understanding of risk in WIL.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Risk is a word that should be defined and interpreted within the context where it is used. In the context of WIL undertaken as part of a university education, WIL staff defined risk in a general way and focused mainly on the possibility of physical or emotional harm, particularly for students. When defining risk for WIL, the risks for all three stakeholders need to be considered, along with a broader acknowledgement that risk is not always negative and can also be related to creating and seizing opportunities (Cameron, 2017). Therefore, it is recommended that risk for WIL is defined as: any issues that might affect, either positively or negatively, the achievement of WIL objectives for students, host organizations and the university.

The most common risks for WIL were perceived by WIL staff (from across a range of disciplines) to be:

- health and safety including physical and psychological harm
- conduct of the host organization (e.g., exploitation; intellectual property)
- conduct and characteristics of students (e.g., behavior; competence; breaches of confidentiality)

The risks mentioned above all have the potential to impact the reputation and legal liability of the university, which were also identified as high risks for WIL.

Health and safety risks are classed as operational, as well as legal, risks (Cameron, 2017). There are clear government regulations (New Zealand Government, 2016) that guide the risk management processes for both universities and host organizations, to reduce physical harm. Recently, in New Zealand, attention has been given to organizational practices to reduce emotional or psychological harm, particularly related to harassment, bullying or discrimination (Minton & Birks, 2019). Increased media attention may have contributed to the interview participants in this study having a heightened awareness of psychological harm as a potential risk factor in WIL. Interestingly, and in contrast, the survey participants did not prioritize sexual and other forms of harassment as a high or very high risk. Recent research on bullying of student nurses in Australia and New Zealand have identified significant and shocking incidents that demand further attention, not only in that profession but also across the WIL space (Budden et al., 2017; Minton et al., 2018; Minton & Birks, 2019)

The conduct of the host organization and the conduct of the student are examples of legal risks that universities may be exposed to. Legal risks in WIL are described by Cameron, (2020) as “an event or circumstance that exposes the university to the possibility of liability or non-compliance with external or internal rules and regulations” (p.30). For example, where a WIL student has a disability or medical condition, the legal risk is whether this has been disclosed or not to the host organization for them to be able to manage any subsequent risks. Ensuring the competency of the student for the roles they are undertaking is also a legal risk for the university and the host organization. Appropriate behaviour and professional conduct of the student also creates both legal and operational risks for the host organization and the university. Legal and operational risks need to be managed appropriately to ensure that the objectives and benefits to stakeholders, including end-users such as patients or clients, can be achieved.

While the benefits of engaging in WIL are commonly included in university promotional material and strategy, this study has clearly highlighted the reputational risk that is involved. Reputational risk affects universities’ prestige, reputation, or brand (Cameron, 2018; Cassidy et al., 2001). Reputational risk arises as a result of a university’s inability to effectively manage any or all the other risk types, especially common risks such as health and safety, conduct, and student characteristics. The potential

for reputational damage 'when things go wrong' is high, such that, anecdotally, reputational risk has been used as an argument against the inclusion of mandatory requirements for WIL for all students.

Interestingly, the perception by WIL staff of the *level of risk* was variable across a range of different risk factors. In the survey, where participants were provided with a list of factors, the more common factors perceived as higher risk were: the reputation of the university; breach of confidentiality; health and safety; conduct of student on placement; conduct of host organization; contracts or agreements; and intellectual property issues. To some extent, this was similar in the interview responses wherein the higher risk factors included physical and emotional safety of the student, student conduct and characteristics and the reputation of the university. Poor or inappropriate student experiences was also emphasized as a significant risk although this contrasted with the survey data wherein the educational quality of student placements was not perceived to be a high risk. Overall, the high-risk factors identified in this New Zealand study align with those identified by university lawyers in an Australian WIL context (Cameron, 2017; Cameron et al., 2018).

While all WIL stakeholders may be in the situation where they expose one another (and themselves) to risk (Newhook, 2016), it is critical that WIL staff in universities have a clear understanding of risks when designing a WIL programme or implementing risk management practices within a programme. The findings of this study indicated the perceived level of understanding of different types of risks associated with WIL was variable among WIL staff, even those with considerable experience. WIL students can be considered the stakeholder most at risk during WIL given their position of vulnerability in the WIL environment (Graj et al., 2019; Newhook, 2016). So, it is perhaps somewhat reassuring that overall, the WIL staff in this study indicated a moderate to high understanding of the risks for students. WIL staff, with more experience, indicated a higher understanding of the risks for students, as could be expected with the likelihood that they have had more exposure to 'risky situations'. The implications of these findings stress the importance of ensuring that newer staff can be provided with the support and resources they need to increase their understanding. It is also important not to make assumptions that more experienced WIL staff fully understand the risks that are inherent in WIL.

The WIL staff in this study generally had a high perceived level of understanding of the risks to the university. However, many WIL staff indicated less understanding of university policies or strategies that could assist with managing risk. Interestingly, Newhook (2013), indicated in her Canadian study, that the majority of coordinators, "largely felt supported by the policies of their institution" (p.89), although she also mentions that some staff were unaware of policies, or sought more clarity on these policies, which is consistent with the findings in this study. The level of understanding of university policies for managing risk varied with the length of placement, with a higher understanding for those involved with longer placements. Without a strong understanding or awareness of university policies, this could potentially create both an operational and legal risk for the university. Cameron (2020) stresses that WIL staff need a base level of legal literacy, "the degree to which WIL staff are aware of the legal rights and obligations relating to the WIL program under university policy, in the WIL agreement and when designing the WIL program" (p.56). In addition, clear strategies and initiatives that encourage good communication and collaboration between university lawyers, risk managers and academic staff are critical in effectively managing the risks associated with WIL (Cameron, 2020; Cameron & Klopper, 2015).

While not often considered in risk management strategies, WIL staff are also exposed to risk through their roles. Interestingly, the WIL staff involved with placing students in host organizations indicated a higher level of understanding of risks for WIL staff (i.e., themselves) than those staff where students

found their own placement. This finding is likely to be linked to the responsibility WIL staff have when they are more closely involved with the placement process. Further awareness is needed to ensure all WIL staff understand and can mitigate risks to themselves, so that this does not create strategic or legal risks for the university.

Overall, WIL staff had a similar perceived level of understanding of the risks for host organizations as they did for risk to universities. However, a third of the survey participants had little or no understanding of host organization policies for managing risk in WIL. This is an area of concern as WIL staff have a duty of care to ensure the organizations where students are placed have appropriate policies and procedures in place, particularly for health and safety and other areas such as workplace harassment and discrimination. These findings raise an awareness of the need to implement strategies to ensure that even if WIL staff are unaware, students are provided with appropriate workplace induction to cover these areas. Further consideration as to what workplace policies should be requested by the university to ensure the safety of WIL students as well as educating students on health and safety expectations prior to placement is also recommended (Graj et al., 2019).

In this study, although not specifically reported here, the mitigation and management of different risks appeared to be somewhat ad hoc, individualized and discipline-specific rather than university-wide. The management of risk in WIL is the focus of a subsequent paper arising from this research.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Understanding risk in WIL is important for all universities in New Zealand and globally, and this research contributes to identifying the strategic, operational and legal risks associated with WIL. If WIL staff, (new or more experienced), do not clearly understand the risks, then it is challenging for them to design risk management practices or preparation material for students or hosts to help mitigate risks. Universities need to encourage regular communication and collaboration between university lawyers/ risk managers to help WIL staff develop their legal literacy. There is clearly a need to create a framework and guidelines to help WIL staff further develop their understanding and awareness in this important area.

Recruitment bias needs to be acknowledged as a limitation of this study. It is possible that those with less knowledge and understanding of risks in WIL, or those that were concerned about their own risk management practices may not have been willing to participate. This bias means the understanding of risks by WIL staff may in fact be even lower than reported. The small sample sizes in the survey and interviews also need to be acknowledged. Yet, the rich narratives were able to provide clear insights across different disciplines, universities and models of WIL. This limitation was unlikely to have influenced the identification of common risks in WIL or the recommendations made as an outcome of this study.

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