Keeping students safe: Understanding the risks for students undertaking work-integrated learning

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Universities in New Zealand are increasingly focused on an employability and global citizenship agenda, leading to a proliferation of work-integrated learning (WIL) courses across diverse curriculum areas. WIL exposes students to authentic learning opportunities in a workplace. It is however an activity with inherent risks which may have significant consequences for students, universities and host organizations. This study drew on qualitative interpretive methodology to examine risks related to WIL at eight universities from the perspective of eighteen academic and professional staff. The findings indicate that significant risks for students undertaking WIL relate to the readiness and suitability of the student, the learning environment and student safety. A framework that outlines the responsibilities and conduct of students during WIL is presented. While it is acknowledged that all stakeholders are important in the WIL enterprise, it is the student experience that should be prioritized.

Keywords: work-integrated learning, risk, student conduct, reputation, safety

An employability and global citizenship agenda has increasingly shaped the core business of teaching in New Zealand and Australian universities over the past decade (Abbott, 2006; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). A desire for students to be future and work-ready has brought attention to teaching and learning approaches that enable students to move beyond knowledge accumulation to developing interpersonal and professional capabilities that, along with disciplinary knowledge, can be applied in real-world contexts (Jackson et al., 2020). Work-integrated learning (WIL) has a long-established tradition internationally and across many disciplines, especially those with a professional or vocational focus (Aprile & Knight, 2020). It is, therefore, unsurprising in the current economic and political climate that it has been upheld as somewhat of a panacea to the call for work-ready and future-ready graduates.

The provision of meaningful and authentic learning experiences, usually off-campus and in workplace settings, is the cornerstone of WIL (Smith et al., 2019). For the purposes of this article, WIL refers to workplace-based placements. As part of course work, the WIL experience allows students to integrate theoretical or classroom learning with relevant practice experiences (Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). The benefits of WIL are numerous not only for the student but also for the university and host organization who each gain from the collaborative partnership. Excellent students enhance the standing of the university and aid the work and the reputation of the host organization (Cameron et al., 2020). Situated off-campus and involving several stakeholders WIL is, however, an activity with inherent risks (Cameron, 2017; Effeney, 2020; Newhook, 2013; 2016).

Analyses of risk are often concerned with the identification, measurement, evaluation, mitigation or management of possible hazards. From a social constructionist perspective, culture and ideology shape discernment of actual and perceived risks (Tierney, 1999). This therefore influences how risks are framed and by whom. Subsequently, risks are fluid and negotiated within different contexts and timeframes and by different stakeholders (Newhook, 2013). While definitions of risk may vary, it can

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be broadly defined as "any issues that might affect, either positively or negatively, the achievement of WIL objectives for students, host organizations and the university" (Fleming & Hay, 2021, p.177). This definition, which emerged from participant commentary about risk in this study as well as consideration of previous research (Cameron, 2016; Cameron et al., 2020), highlights that risk can relate to both opportunities and challenges in the WIL context.

Minimizing risks to students undertaking WIL is critical for universities globally. To maintain their reputation and fulfil their duty of care to students, universities should develop systems and processes that enable student success, both on and off campus (Newhook, 2013). The legal duty of care to WIL students, while often seen as a key responsibility of academic staff (Wenham et al., 2020), is shared with host organizations who are also obligated to provide a safe working environment (Cameron, 2018; Newhook, 2013). Addressing possible negative risks can therefore be seen as a collaborative endeavor among all WIL stakeholders.

Interestingly, aside from the authors' own work, minimal empirical research on understanding risks in WIL in New Zealand higher education providers has been located. The existing literature has focused on specific risks or concerns primarily in single disciplines (see for example, Adamson, 2006; Apaitia-Vague et al., 2011; Minton & Birks, 2019). This research therefore sought to address a gap in the literature on understanding risks relevant to WIL students across a range of disciplines in the New Zealand university context.

BACKGROUND

WIL relies on an effective quadripartite relationship between the key stakeholders; students, the university, the host organization, and the host supervisor (Hay, 2020; Neden et al., 2018). Each party contributes to the success of the WIL experience. Research in WIL has frequently focused on the benefits of WIL for each stakeholder. Benefits for students include the development of skills and employability capabilities (Freudenberg et al., 2010; Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017), and enhanced professional identity and professionalism (Trede, 2012). However, as Rowe (2015) highlights, there are negative aspects (or risks) associated with WIL which may impact stakeholders.

Legal, operational, reputational, strategic, and financial risks have been identified as relevant to WIL in higher education providers (Cameron, 2016; 2017; 2018; Cameron et al., 2020). A cross-institutional and interdisciplinary study in Australia suggested that several principles, including balance, collaboration, relationship management and resources, can guide how risk is managed (Cameron et al., 2020). These principles emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement and relationships in WIL processes and ensuring that opportunities are maximized, and possible hazards minimized. Newhook (2016), from a Canadian perspective, suggested that while students are potentially the most at risk in WIL, the actual risk in terms of the probability of the event occurring, is minimal. Personal safety, harassment, age or limited life experience, and mental health were all identified risk factors that need active management to ensure positive WIL experiences for the student. Similarly, Australian studies have identified student disability and medical conditions as significant risks in WIL (Cameron et al., 2018; Cameron et al., 2020). In previous work by Newhook (2013), the author identified that university coordinators felt varying levels of responsibility for managing the risks to WIL students. Liability for the consequences of potential risks was generally seen as a shared responsibility between the university, student and host organization with some participants suggesting that the host organization should take primary responsibility for risk assessment and management (Newhook, 2013). Having

clear guidelines that delineates the responsibilities of each partner in the WIL relationship was recommended (Newhook, 2013).

Students may be perceived as most at risk in WIL due to their vulnerability during the WIL experience (Graj et al., 2019; Newhook, 2016). Student conduct during a placement can, for example, create risks for the student such as failing the course or jeopardizing future career opportunities (Graj et al., 2019). Host organizations are also at risk in the WIL relationship and may have concerns about their reputation, client satisfaction, confidentiality of data and the security of intellectual property (Fleming & Hay, 2021). From a university perspective, WIL may be seen to support the goals and intent of the university while concurrently presenting "distinct and unavoidable legal risks" (Cameron, 2016, p.259). Systems and processes are employed to manage or mitigate these risks to the university (Cameron, 2018). Examples may include agreements with host organizations, safety checking of students, and student and host organization evaluations (Cameron et al., 2020; Newhook, 2016).

As universities respond to their duty of care to students, increased understanding of risks associated with WIL experiences is required as well as consideration of how these may be appropriately mitigated and managed. This paper seeks to address this agenda.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach, using semi-structured interviews to generate data from university staff engaged in WIL. The qualitative data provided detailed contextualized narratives (Leitz & Zayas, 2010) that have been drawn upon in this article.

Ethics approval was granted by each of the authors' university ethics committees (Reference numbers: 19/110 and 4000020718). Ethical principles pertinent to the research included informed consent and confidentiality. The outcomes of the research are focused on improving current systems and processes related to risk in WIL in New Zealand universities and so maximizing benefit for participants was also relevant.

Participants

The interview participants were recruited initially through the researchers' professional networks and consequently by adopting a snowball technique wherein participants were invited to ask other contacts if they might wish to participate (Naderifar et al., 2017). The researchers' recruited participants from all eight New Zealand universities and gained representation from a range of disciplines as well as from legal and health and safety staff.

During 2019 and 2020, 18 staff were interviewed. Participants included five staff whose work responsibilities related to health and safety, risks or contracts and 13 WIL academic and professional staff. Ten different disciplines were represented however these are not identified to support confidentiality. Individual universities are not identified for the same reason.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face to face, or by video call, depending on the location of the researcher and the participant. Participants were asked about their understanding and perceptions of risks related to WIL. The narratives were interpreted using a social constructionist lens, and the significance of the subjective experiences of the participants within each context was recognized as important. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. A coding

framework was developed from the interview schedule and the research aims and used for initial coding and sorting of the data. Thematic analysis was then applied to elicit key themes and thematic tables were produced and agreed to by both researchers (Braun & Clark, 2006). Rigor and consistency were enabled by one researcher completing initial coding which was then cross-checked by the other researcher. The findings reported in this paper focus on identified themes specifically relating to student exposure to risks. Alpha-numeric identifiers are used to ensure anonymity of the participants.

FINDINGS

From a university staff perspective, the risks for the student engaged in WIL can be broadly separated into three categories: the readiness and suitability of the student, the learning environment, and safety. These risks may manifest before, during or even after a WIL experience.

Readiness and Suitability of the Student

Elements related to student characteristics were identified as risks in the WIL experience. Many disciplines employ screening processes to ensure students are suitable for WIL. This may include police checks, referee checks, safety screening for working with children and vulnerable adults and skills testing. One participant (who provides advice on WIL contracts) suggested that the approach taken in their university mitigated many risks associated with student characteristics:

> … they are hand-picked to be responsible and intelligent and the people who are thought to get most from it. So, there is some negligible reputational risk but yeah, if you pick carefully, the risk to the University is fairly low. (I16)

Other participants emphasized that personality clashes (I9) can sometimes create risks for student's achievement of WIL objectives especially if communication between the student and the supervisor becomes strained or breaks down. Further, interpersonal capabilities may contribute to students being seen to be marginal or unable to successfully complete the WIL experience:

> They can get a marginal grade … or a fail grade for their rotation and that is probably more common on attitude and interpersonal skills rather than on a lack of knowledge. So, we do identify the students who have problems and if they fail a rotation, they have to repeat it. (I11)

An additional issue was raised about characteristics students need to enable them to find suitable WIL placements:

> … international students sometimes find it particularly tough to find placements and lack the confidence and skills … there's a lot of mental stress and anguish I think in finding their own placements and so, you know, I try and give them a lot of care and attention in terms of helping them identify organizations because they don't have the networks necessarily and also, the confidence. (I18)

The provision of adequate support and having appropriate models for screening students and organizing placements is therefore important to reduce risks.

Student conduct was commonly identified as a risk in WIL. Limited experience in a real-world environment, rather than the classroom context, amplified potential risks if students were unsure as to expectations around professional conduct and behavior (I8). One participant presented a clear example of inappropriate conduct:

> … other issues we have had, mainly been with students who've never been in the workplace and they don't really know how to behave in general, and so for example, we had a student who was treating the people in the lab who are his superiors as his equal, you know and making inappropriate jokes and things like that, so again, easily dealt with but, there was kind of a lot of flak, you know, because there's no toleration for that type of thing in the medical laboratory, you know it's a high stakes environment. (I9)

Other participants provided examples of inappropriate student behavior with a patient (I12), misuse of social media (I17), students not turning up to work on time or being hungover (I13). One WIL coordinator had several examples of student misconduct:

> We have had examples of work stuff being stolen, we've [had] examples of people being slack with where they keep their equipment and losing it or subsequently being stolen by someone else… bad behavior on the road and students involved in an accident. (I13)

The consequences of poor student conduct during the WIL experience could be significant for the student, including failing the WIL course which may then affect subsequent employment (I2). The impact on host organizations and the university may also be significant with clients or patients being negatively impacted. One aspect of student conduct that received considerable attention related to students not abiding by organizational policy "…they might cross a boundary with regards to patient confidentiality. And that's very serious, so the host laboratory will then kick them out and … they will fail the paper basically" (I9).

Confidentiality and intellectual property breaches were highlighted as significant risks especially if a student takes important data with them to another company or uses it for their own means, and not for the benefit of the host organization (I4, I5, I13). Another example related to student conduct was of students boarding with a farmer for their WIL experience and being a poor guest by, for example, using high amounts of wi-fi or not treating their room with respect.

Opinion was divided as to whether a paid or unpaid placement aggravated the possibility of student misconduct during WIL. One participant suggested that students may not be as engaged in a paid placement they had found themselves (I2) while another indicated that an unpaid placement could lead to less commitment from the student: "Disappointingly, the students see an unpaid role, that when the pressure comes on, they don't have to be as committed. So, the student may choose to, simply at short notice or no notice, not attend their placement"(I17).

The pressure referred to was other university course work, therefore prioritizing WIL and limiting other course work could lessen this risk. In contrast, another participant suggested that paid placements had their own risks because if students did not perform well this could jeopardize ongoing employment (I2). Sufficient preparation of the student and clear expectations were regarded as primary mitigating factors for risk related to student conduct.

A small number of participants raised health as a possible risk factor for WIL students: "… probably the most common example is a student with a disability. So that's a risk. For example, we have one or two students going through with Asperger's, another one with a hearing disability" (I9). Physical or mental health conditions may affect a student's readiness for WIL (I18) and if a student has specific needs, for example a disability, then they may require additional support from the host organization and the university (I18).

One participant stressed the importance of the university familiarizing themselves with student needs so any necessary support to ensure the student has every possibility of success during WIL can be implemented (I9). Further, a health and safety manager proposed that requirements relating to student health and wellbeing may be embedded in different ways across disciplines. For example, construction WIL may have different risks to WIL in business settings. Similarly, another participant raised the importance of knowing students' health conditions such as asthma and allergies if they were going to be working with animals (I11). Ensuring adequate pre-placement screening of both the student and host organizations were approaches recommended to mitigate these risks so that students did not have experiences that compounded existing health conditions (I7).

The Learning Environment

To ensure student success during WIL, students should have exposure to relevant learning opportunities within a safe and supportive environment. As noted by one placement coordinator a significant risk

> … to the students will be that it doesn't actually offer the range of learning experiences that they need in order to evidence their learning. And that it's not a place that is psychologically as well as physically safe for them to do that learning, and that they don't have the people around them to coach, mentor and grow their ideas. (I6)

A risk manager also noted a risk associated with expectations of the student and the host organization as to what the WIL experience is to entail. For example, regularly making cups of tea is not usually deemed to be a meaningful learning experience for a student on placement (I10). The quality of the learning is vital for student preparation for their future career as well as for success in the university course. One participant discussed at length their concerns about the quality of the learning experience and whether good experiences can be accessed due to concerns raised by the host organization staff. For example, farmers may be concerned that students might do secret filming or report practices they consider to be unsafe (I11). In addition, she commented, "… with the changes in health and safety legislation, potentially more farmers are reluctant to have people come on to their farm who aren't particularly skilled and the risks that that lays them open to" (I11).

Accessing effective supervision was emphasized as essential for a meaningful WIL experience although this was not always offered in a consistent manner (I2). Changes to staffing, including management, during a placement may also impact the student's ability to access appropriate tasks. For instance, a new supervisor may not understand the requirements of the university or their role in supporting and educating the student (I6). Further, paid placements could also threaten the provision of meaningful activities:

> I think the main risk is that it's sometimes, again, the learning is not valued, that it is seen that they have got an employment agreement with the student and that they don't need to meet the criteria of actually mentoring a student for their learning. It's possibly a little bit of conflict around what is seen as being more important: the placement agreement or the employment agreement. (I17)

Similarly:

> The risks of paid placements are higher in my experience … challenges in separating the student out as a student and they'll continue to use the student in their day-to-day employed role. And

> the colleagues … within the workplace can't make that mind shift either. It's often difficult for the organization to be able to provide a separate project or piece of work that isn't business as usual. (I6)

Illustrating the tension between the value of paid and unpaid placements, another participant suggested that while meaningful activities may be less likely to be offered to the student if they were in an unpaid placement, an employer may also have too high expectations of the student's capabilities if they were paying them to complete the placement (I4).

There are also financial risks to the student that stem from being placed in unsuitable learning environments. Failing a course and then needing to repeat it has significant financial as well as emotional ramifications for students. Further, students who do not experience WIL that extends their learning and professional development may be further disadvantaged post-qualification when they are applying for work. Students may, justifiably, be frustrated if they pay expensive course fees and the WIL experience is limited in scope for them to achieve the course learning outcomes (I4). One participant relayed a scenario wherein a student organized their own placement:

> …the risk is obviously them doing this work-integrated learning, and actually not getting the credit for it because they didn't check with the university about the suitability of the placement beforehand. So, there's the risk of them actually not getting their degree in time as well, because they haven't checked that they've got everything. (I8)

Interestingly, this risk of exposure to relevant and meaningful learning opportunities was often associated with students finding their own placements (also known as 'self-sourced' placements). In this situation students may make "poor choices" and "be seen to be vulnerable" (I17) to the host organization. Consequently, this may lead to the student "doing far too many hours and that is a real risk for the student to be worked too hard without a focus on the project" (I17). Similarly, another participant questioned whether students could negotiate and access appropriate learning environments for themselves especially if they have specific needs such as a disability (I15). A further example from a risk manager referred to a student organizing their own placement in their uncle's business, an organization that had not previously been used or vetted by the university (I10). In fact, the student may be unable to find a suitable placement and therefore not be able to pass their course (I13).

Addressing risk associated with the suitability of the host organization was largely focused on the importance of the university maintaining positive relationships (I12). This enabled universities to implement safety checks prior to the placement and assisted with any challenging conversations that may need to occur during the placement. Appropriate insurance was mentioned by one participant and is commonly held by the universities, " … professional indemnity and general liability cover … does cover our students, but it has exceptions, it doesn't cover them for stupidity, it doesn't cover them if they sign a contract that gives away their liability." (I10).

The extent to which students and host organizations understand their roles and responsibilities in the WIL space will contribute to the minimizing of risk (I18). Having university staff as conduits between the student and the host organization also enables conversations to be occurring around the appropriateness of the organization and the tasks students will be expected to undertake. A hands-off approach by the university to organizing WIL experiences may increase potential risk and therefore workloading of university staff to organize as well as monitor and assess WIL is preferential.

Exploitation of students, especially in respect of having significant demands placed on them in the WIL experience, was highlighted by several participants. Contrasting perspectives regarding exploitation in paid and unpaid placements were evident. Students in a paid placement "might feel obliged to do more than what the WIL paper or the agreed project and placement is asking for" (I15). A staff member who organizes WIL indicated there is "legal ambiguity with paid placements as part of a course. Paid internships are not well defined in employment law" (I4). A further dilemma was apparent for motivated students on paid placements:

> … because they are engaged and meeting with the industry mentor weekly, they come across as being very enthusiastic which is a good thing, however, they also tend to always go to the top of the list to be called upon if extra work is required. (I17)

Exploitation was also considered a relevant risk in unpaid placements where students might be seen to be taken advantage of if asked to do tasks that an employee would usually undertake, but without any payment attached (I13). A further dilemma was apparent with unpaid placements where:

> … perhaps [there is] more opportunity to negotiate a role which allows them to meet their learning outcomes that they set for themselves in the learning agreement as opposed to a paid placement where they might have a limited role. (I18)

However, this participant was also concerned with the potential for exploitation in paid placements and recommended careful negotiation with host organizations around the tasks and responsibilities for the student prior to the placement commencing.

Participants recognized the power imbalance between students and the host organization. Students may feel unable to put boundaries around the number of hours they completed beyond the course requirements. Additionally, students may be reticent to admit if a task is beyond their capability (I13). Being viewed as 'free labour' (I17) was a concern related to exploitation. As one participant noted, "the main risk is trying to ensure that, we hold up the Human Rights Act of equal work for equal pay …"(I17). Exploitation had also been evident when a student had not been given the agreed payment at the completion of the placement despite successfully finishing the course requirements. Strong relationships with the host organizations was a practice that mitigated the risk of exploitation.

Safety

The potential for physical harm was identified as a significant risk in several disciplines, especially in hospitality and across the sciences, and was a key feature of how many participants defined or explained risk. Physical harm examples included exposure to toxic chemicals, animal diseases, being bitten by a dog or stood on by a cow, as well as travelling to and from the workplace. The consequences of physical harm could be considerable:

> Death in a workplace … definitely not likely, but it is [a] quite possible outcome … the most common risk would be workplace risk from the equipment and chemicals. We do, every year, have some minor injuries from that … But the most significant consequence of a risk for us is definitely a fatality. (I13)

Safety cannot always be guaranteed and even observing hazards can leave a student in a vulnerable position:

> … [the student was] raising concerns about the safety on site for one of their jobs and they were actually concerned about it but they didn't know what to do about it, cause they felt that if they spoke up, they would jeopardize their placement. (I8)

Despite being a risk, physical harm was considered relatively straightforward to manage if appropriate procedures were in place and students was made aware of possible hazards (I9). Having knowledge of the work of the host organization and ensuring they are reputable and responsible can also assist with mitigating risks:

> Safety is obviously important but we don't just send them out to any builder that we have found in the phone book, they go out to responsible organizations and bodies who we have contractual arrangements anyway on other projects, who we know are trustworthy. (I16)

This position was endorsed by another participant (I15) who encouraged the involvement of the university in setting up the placement and checking the suitability of the organization to ensure safety expectations are met.

The risk of emotional harm including being bullied or harassed during WIL experiences was also a notable risk across several disciplines. The power imbalance between the student and the staff in the host organization and the importance of an emotionally safe environment for student learning were highlighted (I6). Harassment was, at times, discussed in relation to students who were part of a cultural or gender minority including "belittling, especially female students or students who are not Pākeha [European New Zealander]" (I11). There was a sense of inevitability that unacceptable or illegal behavior could occur in some host organizations:

> … we appreciate that there are some organizations that aren't gender, transgender friendly, they aren't accessible, disabled friendly … so there is a risk to students so that's why we need to ensure that we have approved these partner organizations. (115)

Strategies to manage or mitigate these particular risks are essential so universities can ensure student wellbeing and safety is maintained.

The impact of the WIL environment on the emotional wellbeing of the student was discussed by several participants and varied depending on discipline, as illustrated in these examples:

> There are the social and interpersonal risks … whether you take the Gordon Ramsey approach of a shouty chef sort of bad rap that our industry may have, through to even just subtly being pressured into doing things that they don't want to. (I17)

> … emotional safety from people in the workplace … 75-80% of our students are female. Some of them are international and from different cultures and yes, some of them may be more of a target for sexual harassment and just feeling uncomfortable or feeling belittled, made fun of because they don't have a lot of animal experience. (I11)

Being exposed to an emotionally unsafe environment was highlighted by this health and safety manager:

> … it could be a mental health risk where they are placed into a situation where there is bullying or high stress environments or they are exposed to something traumatic … for nursing students heading out to a hospital, we know that there are a range of hazards in hospitals so they're going

> to be exposed to while they're there. Everything from psycho-social hazards like bullying, through to violence from patients, through to the risk of biological exposure from treating people. (I14)

The mental health of students, and the importance of safeguarding this during WIL experiences, were raised by several participants but exemplified in this comment:

> … the mental health, how they [the student] develop into the future and what they want to [do], decisions around what they might do from a career perspective, if they've had a bad experience then that could definitely affect them as well. (I7)

Students may also experience triggers during their WIL experience whereby a situation negatively reminds them of a memory or emotions from previous life experiences. This can create trauma or negative emotional responses for the student and affect their ability to have an optimal learning experience (I6). Having a robust pre-placement system whereby students are matched to appropriate host organizations following relevant disclosure processes with academic staff may assist with mitigating this particular risk. Assessing the suitability of the host organization may also limit the likelihood of emotional harm to students or exposure to illegal activity such as discrimination.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The WIL enterprise has inherent risks for all stakeholders although, arguably, the people most at risk are the students (Graj et al., 2019; Newhook, 2016). Keeping WIL students safe in the learning environment should therefore be a priority for universities and host organizations.

Student readiness and suitability for WIL was identified as a risk with participants providing multiple examples of student misconduct during WIL. Screening of students and providing support in finding suitable placements differed across disciplines but having university involvement in these processes may assist with minimizing risk (Cameron et al., 2020; Newhook, 2016). While the characteristics of students may adversely affect the success of the WIL experience, Rowe (2015) notes: "… there has been little research on the characteristics of students prior to the co-op work term (personality, attitudes, ability, etc.) and how these characteristics interact with experience" (p.102). Interpersonal capabilities such as humility, flexibility and adaptability have been highlighted as desirable attributes in WIL students (Hay & Brown, 2015) and graduate attributes associated with employability have been canvassed (Freudenberg et al., 2010), however further research would strengthen understanding of this particular risk factor. The results and previous research indicate that understanding of students' health conditions may support student success in WIL and reduce risks to the student, the reputation of the university and the host organization (Apaitia-Vague et al., 2011; Cameron et al., 2018; Newhook, 2016). Given the participant narratives, examination of the effectiveness of current screening processes, and their utility for WIL rather than for program entry, is worthy of further consideration.

Guidelines positioning the responsibilities of the student, developed from the findings from this study and relevant literature, has utility in minimizing risk across disciplines (see Table 1). Focusing on three responsibility areas, these guidelines clarify expectations of student conduct during WIL and can be integrated in student and host organization pre-placement preparation, training, and handbooks. Note, while these guidelines focus on the student, future publications from this research will consider university and host responsibilities.

TABLE 1: Student responsibilities and conduct for work-integrated learning.

Responsibility to self	Responsibility to the university	Responsibility to the host organization
• Demonstrate honesty and integrity • Take reasonable care for your own health and safety in the WIL environment • Be self-motivated and actively contribute to your own personal and professional learning • Do not engage in any discriminatory or bullying behavior • Utilize appropriate stress- and time-management skills • Observe professional or disciplinary codes of conduct and ethics • Respect the cultural needs and values of others	• Behave in a manner that upholds the reputation of the university • Demonstrate honesty and integrity when submitting assignments • Communicate appropriately and in a timely manner with the university • Meet university expectations and obligations • Observe university codes of conduct and ethics	• Treat colleagues, clients and others during the WIL experience with respect • Demonstrate ethical behavior, including confidentiality and privacy • Be courteous towards others and respect property • Engage positively with the host organization and wider community • Meet workplace expectations and obligations • Maintain accurate written work • Appropriately and safely use technology • Comply with legal obligations • Adhere to workplace policies and procedures

A consistent finding in this study was that a safe and supportive learning environment will lessen potential risks to students. A learning environment that provides students with relevant tasks that are appropriately supervised and then integrated with their previous learning was highlighted as vital for successful WIL (Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Neden et al., 2018). Methods of assessing the suitability of the host organization are important, and this area requires further investigation, especially to protect against exploitation, bullying, discrimination or other unfair treatment from the host organization (Apaitia-Vague et al., 2011; Cameron et al., 2018; Cameron et al., 2020; Minton & Birks, 2019). While universities can reasonably be expected to lead any initiatives with host organizations to minimize risk (Newhook, 2016), recent changes to health and safety legislation in New Zealand also requires organizations to be responsible for the personal safety of WIL students. Further, sufficient time is needed to create and sustain the relationships between the host organizations and the university and thus workloading capacity is required (Cameron et al., 2020). As the results in this study indicate, there is potential for both physical and emotional harm during WIL which may impact students' short- and long-term learning and development. Exploitation may also occur during either paid or unpaid placements (Cameron, 2018) and the findings suggest disparity across disciplines around placement models. Similarly, Rowe (2015) emphasizes that "the relative benefits of paid versus unpaid [WIL] are unknown" (p.103). The legality of paid placements requires further attention alongside consideration of how students in either type of placement can be protected from inappropriate expectations from the host organization (Cameron, 2018). As highlighted in previous New Zealand and Australian studies, deliberate pre-placement preparation of both the student and the host supervisor, as well as ongoing monitoring during the placement are important and may limit these identified risks (Cameron et al.,

2020; Hay, 2020). Clarifying the responsibilities of the host organization and universities, a focus of our future work, may also mitigate many of the risks highlighted in this study.

Political and organizational agendas drive risk analyses and the development of risk management systems in the university context. Legal and reputation risk to the university is presently steering the risk agenda (Cameron, 2016; Cameron, 2018; Cameron et al., 2020). This is perhaps understandable given the neo-liberal managerialist environment which has led to increased competition for enrolments and global recognition, as well as limited available funding for servicing the university machinery (Abbott, 2006; Came & Tudor, 2020; Neden et al., 2018). In New Zealand, as in other countries, students can, however, sometimes get lost in this milieu as universities emphasize research over teaching and reduce capacity and resources of staff directly engaged in student learning (Curtis & Matthewman, 2005).

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Students are, we argue, the most important stakeholder in WIL and their safety should be prioritized as the potential risks and consequences to them are greatest. There are key responsibilities, as outlined above, that students should adhere to in order to minimize risks for themselves, thereby helping to keep themselves safe. The learning environment should also be one that enables success and limits exploitation, physical or emotional harm. Universities and host organizations should both ensure risks to students are minimized. As the central figure in the WIL experience it follows that student voices should be prioritized in future risk management research. Whilst the views of university staff, as heard in this article, are important and valid, student perspectives will add further value to the WIL enterprise.

A limitation of this research lies in the recruitment of participants. Only university staff engaged in WIL were invited to participate thus preventing student or host organization perspectives to be heard. Staff that were concerned about their own understanding of risk, or risk management practices, may not have volunteered for the study. Further, not all disciplines who engage in WIL participated, limiting wider understanding of the unique risk factors inherent in different programs. The sample size for interviews was small which means that generalization is not possible. The data collection also occurred prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore additional risks may emerge in WIL experiences as a result of this event. However, while these limitations should be acknowledged, the rich data elicited from the interviews offers insights into many of the risk factors pertinent to WIL students in New Zealand universities.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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