The Future of WIL: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

In response to the 2021 NAFEA Conference, *The Future of WIL: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*, this editorial paper explores many of the conference presentations and topics related to the inclusion and participation of diverse cohorts in WIL activities. These topics include partnership and relationship management and the importance of including diverse key stakeholder voices in the co-design process. There is also a fundamental need to understand the key challenges for historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups, and the impacts on employability and career development learning outcomes. Within this paper, the *WIL in Practice* Editorial Board members call on education providers to step up to the challenge to provide the necessary staffing and resourcing to support equity initiatives in order to foster social change.

Keywords: work-integrated learning, WIL, equity, inclusion, diversity, equitable access.

Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) has become a focus for most higher and vocational education providers as a response to the needs of industry and government policies to better equip graduates for the future world of work. Likewise, issues related to equity, inclusion and access to WIL (and to education more generally), along with increasing concerns about risk management, health and well-being have become a focus for education providers. The power of WIL has been repeatedly acknowledged in scholarship as a transformative pedagogy, although there are risks of exclusion to equal opportunities as well as barriers and access issues for students from historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups (Harvey et al., 2017). The future of WIL needs to consider strategies, innovations and practices to enable and to grow diversity, equity and inclusion in addition to considerations of risk management, and health

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and well-being. Issues of equity and access have increasingly been highlighted as an area of much needed attention and research to understand how education providers can respond to the growing needs of a diverse student population. Education providers have a significant role in influencing social change, and have a social responsibility to ensure activities, such as WIL, are resourced appropriately so as not to inadvertently create barriers to accessing equal opportunities and perpetuating social injustices.

Separated by a pandemic but brought together virtually and on campuses (in Brisbane and Adelaide), the 2021 NAFEA Conference explored fundamental issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in relation to WIL practices and administration. The conference theme, *The Future of WIL: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*, focussed on employability, inclusion and access to WIL, ways we can educate ourselves as WIL practitioners and industry partners and how to innovate WIL experiences to foster a more inclusive approach. We acknowledge that equitable access to education continues to be a challenge for education providers.

In this editorial, we will explore issues that impact and affect the inclusion and participation of diverse cohorts in WIL activities. These issues include:

- Partnership and relationship management between universities and industry partners to support students from historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups,
- The importance of including diverse key stakeholder voices in the co-design process,
- Understanding key challenges for historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups,
- Understanding impacts on employability and career development learning outcomes for historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups,
- The role of universities in fostering social change,
- Staffing and resourcing to support equity initiatives.

Partnership and Relationship Management

Work-integrated learning relies on industry partners willing to develop and provide learning opportunities for students. These relationships should be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders but should be student-centric in approach and outcomes. Strategies to support the relationships and collaborations between industry, education providers and students were a significant theme at the 2021 conference, particularly in the context of equity and inclusion. During the conference, we heard about interventional and supportive strategies that reflected the complexity of requirements necessary to allow students from an equity background or historically under-represented group to access a WIL experience during their studies. In most cases, minimal adjustments are required to maximise student participation in WIL.

We know that WIL will be embraced by industry and partners if our students are prepared through their formal learning and extra-curricular activities (Jackson et al., 2019; Paull et al., 2019). Trust, reciprocity, clear expectations, and recognition can all help to build and sustain relationships (Fleming et al., 2018). Within their conference presentation, Dollinger

and Prezioso noted that there is a limited understanding of the formalities associated with supporting these segues of students into industry and their chosen professional contexts (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). The formalities that embrace processes to protect all parties and ensure that legal, privacy and issues of intellectual property should always be asserted at the outset. Theoretically, technology can simplify industry and university processes and interactions by minimising and automating paperwork and reporting. For example, one placement management system can collect information for students and supervisors to prepare them for the specific workplace contexts. However, education providers need to ensure that these systems and processes do not inadvertently exclude or place burdens on students. A student who identifies as gay, for instance, should not need to 'out' themselves to the university to avoid being placed in a religious-affiliated school.

Working with industry partners who can understand the role of placements, the provision of suitable projects and appropriate settings to support and grow emerging professionals is critical. Industry partners who can understand the needs of diverse learners, who can embrace inclusion and diversity and have a student-centric approach to WIL are critical to ensuring student safety and equal opportunities to WIL. WIL practitioners and researchers continually advocate for the required resources to build relationships necessary to provide quality placements and to facilitate the adjustments required to maximise student participation. These resources can be tailored to build and maintain the relationships between industry, education providers and students that are required to support placements for diverse student groups. This kind of scaffolding allows learners on placement to thrive when they can translate the theory, skills and knowledge from their studies into practice. It is also important that students feel a sense of belonging as part of their experience, whether online, on-campus or within the workplace.

Inclusion of diverse key stakeholder in the co-design process

Co-design with, and collaboration amongst, all WIL stakeholders has increasingly become a focus for education providers. Higher education and government policies, influenced by professional and accreditation bodies, have aimed to be more inclusive in the co-design of curricula. This has focussed curriculum design on the needs and outcomes for students. In 2019, a Universities Australia report heightened concerns about equity, student involvement in WIL and the need for more inclusive practices (O'Shea et al., 2021; Universities Australia, 2019). The report highlighted loss of income and lack of social networks as challenges for equity students (Universities Australia, 2019). At the centre of co-design are students and their relevant communities. Genuine and inclusive engagement amongst stakeholders is paramount to drive this approach. Stakeholders need to avoid tokenistic gestures and focus on systemic approaches to inclusion (Bell et al., 2021)

Important questions raised by Dollinger and Prezioso (2021) at the 2021 NAFEA Conference included examining issues of participation and inclusion, WIL design, assessment and scalability. Questions about who participates (or who does not participate) in WIL and the characteristics of students that are favoured by industry partners are important to understanding

biases in WIL (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). Similarly, questions around curriculum design biases need to be understood to prevent additional burden being placed on students from an equity background (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). WIL practitioners need to consider who they are designing WIL for, whether this is inclusive and meets the needs of a diverse cohort. These design principles need to be applied across the WIL lifecycle.

In their presentation, Dollinger and Prezioso suggested several options for WIL practitioners to engage students in the co-design of WIL. It was suggested that higher level student engagement comes from a 'students as partners' model that is driven by an ethos rather than isolated or single acts of engagement (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). The engagement is ongoing, reciprocal and responsibilities are shared amongst staff and students (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). Other options may include students in pilots or as "consultants", but, this needs to be approached in a purposeful and systematic manner (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). Other strategies to encourage co-design include co-labs with students and university staff to generate ideas and solutions with a focus on diverse student cohorts (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021). Dollinger and Prezioso (2021) cautioned against student representation models of student engagement in co-design due to power imbalances that limit student input. Also, student representatives cannot represent an entire cohort of students, which can lead to superficial feedback (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021).

From a student perspective, Dollinger and Prezioso (2021) suggested that there is an open discussion about the diverse needs of students and not to assume that all students face the same challenges. Dollinger and Prezioso (2021) highlighted that it is important to provide clarity on WIL activities and outline expectations. Where possible, Dollinger and Prezioso (2021) suggested negotiating activities and learning outcomes to align them with the goals of students or providing online WIL options. Most importantly, students need to be aware that WIL is inclusive and that there is flexibility (Dollinger & Prezioso, 2021).

Some of the challenges for education providers come about in courses where accreditation or inherent requirements of a profession or industry stifle the ability for education providers to innovate. Universities are generally quick to claim their achievements as 'innovative' - a term that seems to have lost some of its meaning in recent times - but in the equity space, progress has been slow. These external limitations placed on education providers, however, does not mean that flexibility of WIL activities (or innovation) within accredited programs cannot be achieved. Andrew (2021) highlighted that the student nursing cohort has diversified and is no longer predominantly young female school-leavers but rather mature-aged students with complex and busy lives. More broadly, there has been a trend, at least during the COVID-19 pandemic, of students reducing their study load; and with continuing economic pressures, it is likely part-time study mode will become even more common. WIL programs, for example, need to consider the effects of offering only full-time placement opportunities in this context. Students who are unable to commit to full-time placement, along with their other commitments, may cease or interrupt their studies. An indirect consequence could lead to particular groups of students being inadvertently excluded, perpetuating existing inequities in

access to education. However, there is opportunity for students and education providers to work together and co-design WIL to achieve value and inclusive practice (Dollinger & Lodge, 2020).

Key challenges for historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups

While more students from equity backgrounds have been entering into higher education over the past decade, the retention of these students remains a challenge (Harvey et. al, 2017; Koshy, 2019). Attrition rates continue to be high despite targeted programs and resources to address identified issues (O'Shea, 2022). For low socio-economic students, for instance, employment outcomes continue to be lower than those of students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Harvey et. al, 2017; Li & Carroll, 2019). Richardson et al. (2016) suggested that unemployment rates increase further for students who identify with multiple equity groups which compounds their disadvantage. It is important that any strategies that aim to increase access and participation to education (and WIL) do not have a 'one size fits all' approach. Strategies need to be nuanced to account for individual and intersectional needs.

We know that there is inequity in the availability and experience of placements nationally and internationally for First Nations peoples (Itano-Boase et al., 2021).[2] Local perspectives, needs-based approaches to addressing barriers and amplification of the student voice and other strategies ensure inclusion and strengthen the experience of Indigenous students (Itano-Boase et al., 2021). In Australia, inclusion and participation of First Nations people in WIL activities is key to improving employment outcomes and 'closing the gap'. WIL programs that address these challenges and incorporate innovative models to support diverse student groups, such as flexibility of duration, increased use of technology and virtual opportunities, will benefit all students (Kay et al., 2019). Of course, some of these strategies are not applicable to all degrees or professions and limitations exist.

More focussed research is required to understand the barriers and enablers for different equity groups, acknowledging that identities can be intersectional. Eckstein's (2021) research has highlighted that university staff do not understand the fundamental issues related to students with a disability and their career aspirations and career challenges. Students with a disability are accustomed to being reminded of their disabilities and being denied their abilities (Eckstein, 2021). While some students feel safe to share personal information with the university, this security does not always extend to industry partners or supervisors (Eckstein, 2021). Many students with a disability are reluctant to disclose information to industry supervisors, despite disclosure processes being intended to be positive and supportive of student needs (Eckstein, 2021). The fear of undesired consequences is often so strong that disclosure is not possible (Eckstein, 2021). Universities need to provide an environment where students feel safe to share personal information. Eckstein (2021) suggested several ways that a

[2] In the special issue of the International Journal of Work Integrated Learning (IJWIL) 2022, No 2 - Indigenous perspectives and partnerships: Enhancing work-integrated learning, this theme was explored.

safer environment can be encouraged and promoted through contextualising and 'normalising'[3] disability. Diversity is important in how curricula information is presented (Eckstein, 2021). Case studies and other educational information cannot focus only on mainstream generalisations and stereotypes (Eckstein, 2021).

Research on international student access and participation in WIL is much more extensive. Some of the barriers for international student participation in WIL are related to a lack of cultural capital (e.g., language and cultural barriers), lack of financial capital (e.g., the need to work during semester) or a lack of social capital (e.g., lack of social and family networks, an emphasis on academic performance at the expense of extra-curricular activities) (Andrew, 2021a). Racism also continues to plague Australian society and workplaces, with a significant portion of workers reporting racism as common in the workplace (Aidone, 2022; Mansouri, 2022). When incidents of racism, or any kind of discrimination, occurs during a WIL experience, it is often difficult for education providers to confront industry partners directly about the issues. Education providers tend to feel that they are in a powerless position and at the mercy of the industry partner. But without some courage and calling out the discrimination, the *status quo* will continue unchecked.

It is clear from the data from the National Student Safety Survey that students who identify with diverse sexualities and genders (DSG) are more likely to experience discrimination, harassment and abuse in Australia and within university contexts (Heywood et. al, 2021). These students experience much higher levels of sexual harassment and sexual abuse when compared to heterosexual or cisgender students (Heywood et. al, 2021). Yet, as Van Leent et. al. (2022) highlight in this issue, there is a severe lack of research on the experiences, enablers and barriers of students who identify with DSG. Without research of this kind, it is difficult for education providers to provide the appropriate and nuanced support that address the disadvantages of different equity groups. A sense of belonging is important to students who identify with DSG and providing visual signals that a workplace is inclusive can have a significant impact on students (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019). However, students who identify as GSD are not one of the government-recognised equity groups targeted to increase access and participation to education; and therefore, particular strategies and support for these students have often been neglected.

While students who are 'first in family' are also not a government recognised equity group, many of these students come from one or more disadvantaged or under-represented groups (O'Shea, 2021). In the research conducted by O'Shea (2021), it has been found that many students who are 'first in family' do not feel a sense of belonging at university, and in many ways feel like imposters. These students do not perceive that this is a failing of the system or lack of support from education providers, but rather they feel personally "responsible for not taking advantage of opportunities post-graduation" (O'Shea, 2021). O'Shea highlighted that

[3] We recognise that there are debates in academia on the use of this term (Krzyżanowski, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). We use the term in a positive sense to mean that equity groups are no longer considered 'other' and social justice principles become part of mainstream thinking unconsciously.

while universities have "supported and scaffolded" students as they transition into university more is needed to support the "transition out" phase (O'Shea, 2021).

It is important to recognise that students from different equity groups will have different experiences. To address issues of access and participation for many student cohorts who have been systemically excluded from WIL opportunities, recommendations have often included online WIL as a solution, and as a means to provide more flexibility to students (Bell et al., 2021; O'Shea, 2021). The financial hardship of workplace WIL opportunities is widely acknowledged, and this can be reduced by offering online opportunities. Travel costs and the ability to continue paid work and other personal commitments are made easier with online WIL activities (Bell et al., 2021). Although, students find it more difficult to develop interpersonal connections with others in online WIL environments (Bell et al., 2021). Digital access barriers are also a consideration when offering online opportunities. Like co-design principles within the curriculum, online WIL needs to include inclusive co-design that is systemic rather than tokenistic (Bell et al., 2021).

Bell et al. (2021) acknowledge that online WIL is not always possible as a substitute for workplace activities, either due to accreditation requirements or the inherent requirements of the profession or task. Online WIL cannot be the only option to address barriers to access and participation in WIL. There is a concern that students from an equity background may be disadvantaged by not having access to equal opportunities. By providing online WIL, it may provide some access to WIL, but the fact remains that these students are being excluded from other opportunities that their mainstream colleagues are participating in.

Employability and career development learning for students from historically disadvantaged or under-represented groups

It is widely recognised that WIL forms an integral part of student pathways to employment and contribution to the development of their professional selves (Jackson, 2013). This makes embedding equity and inclusion in employability strategies even more critical for students from equity backgrounds or historically under-represented groups. Embedding employability strategies, such as career development learning and WIL, have become a focus in recent times (Harvey et. al, 2017); however, as Harvey (2021) highlighted, there continues to be disparities in graduate outcomes for particular equity groups, such as people with a disability and students from refugee backgrounds. Some of the causes of employment disparities include a "paucity of informal networks, unconscious (and conscious) workplace biases, lack of time and money, belief by students that academic achievement is more important than extra-curricular activities" (Harvey, 2021). Harvey (2021) questioned how universities could acknowledge student employment activities, and the importance of work, in addition to recognising work-integrated learning. Harvey (2021) recommended diversifying the understanding and recognition of extra-curricular activities and cultural capital. Institutional employability strategies, including WIL, need to be embedded within the curriculum through a variety of initiatives that apply a student-equity lens (Harvey, 2021). A holistic approach that connects employability strategies with retention and completion strategies is needed (Harvey,

2021). Importantly, students should receive information from an early stage in their studies on a range of extra-curricular activities that are available (Harvey, 2021). This information needs to be specifically promoted to equity groups (Harvey, 2021). Even more important is the articulation of the employability benefits of participation to students (Harvey, 2021). One of the most important recommendations from Harvey's research, but perhaps the most difficult to address, is resolving issues of discrimination, unconscious bias, and other barriers for equity groups within the workplace (Harvey, 2021). This is an area that requires future research and intervention by education providers to create social change.

Employability strategies need to be embedded in the educational journey of students from an early age. Research has identified the need for quality career education, including access to workplace learning to achieve equity (Napthine et. al., 2019). The study by Austin and Groves (2021) has highlighted some of the barriers for secondary school students from regional, rural and remote communities and who come from low socio-economic status backgrounds, such as limited educational and employment opportunities (Cuervo et. al., 2019; Napthine et al., 2019). Similar to the tertiary sector, the organisation of workplace learning is a time-consuming task that is under-resourced in many areas (Austin & Groves, 2021). This has led to some regional, rural, and remote communities limiting workplace learning experiences to students who are interested and can find their own experiences (Austin & Groves, 2021). Therefore, this has resulted in many secondary students in regional, rural, and remote areas missing out on their opportunities (Austin & Groves, 2021). In effect, the under-resourcing inadvertently contributes to excluding certain groups and reinforces social inequities.

Another identified barrier by Austin and Groves (2021) is the suitability of learning environments and availability of industries within regional, rural, and remote communities. Their study has suggested ways in which universities can support workplace learning opportunities for regional, rural, and remote secondary students through virtual work experience or widening participation programs to leverage industry linkages (Austin & Groves, 2021). Austin and Grove (2021) have called for more collaboration between WIL practitioners in higher education and school career advisers to expose students earlier to workplace learning.

Coffey and Bennett (2021) support the recognising of career practitioners in secondary education as "core business of schools". It is also recommended that career education is provided by a qualified practitioner (Coffey & Bennett, 2021). This does not necessarily mean a person who specialises as a career advisor, but the person should at the least have the appropriate training (Coffey & Bennett, 2021). Career education, like WIL or workplace learning in secondary education, needs to be introduced early in the curriculum and reinforced throughout (Coffey & Bennett, 2021). Coffey and Bennett (2021) have recommended that pre-service education includes career development information to provide all pre-service teachers with knowledge and training to embed a career education focus and move away from career education as an "add-on" (Coffey & Bennett, 2021). Exposing students from an early age to career development 'normalises' the activity and makes career education "core business".

The role of universities in fostering social change

Despite efforts of education providers and government bodies, the necessary social change has not occurred to make a significant difference to access and participation rates in higher education. While some have argued that universities have historically played a role in shaping social change discourse, most institutions are increasingly more removed from influencing social change. As Hill (2021) stated in his 2021 NAFEA Conference presentation, "[u]niversities are becoming increasingly outpaced by accelerating social change". Social media is exposing young people to concepts of social change at an earlier age prior to undertaking tertiary studies (Hill, 2021). In general terms, the next generation of university students have grown up in a world permeated with technology and who value diversity, mental health, relevance in learning and immediate feedback (Hill, 2021). Within this context, universities need to ensure that curricula, and systems more generally, can respond to these expectations (Hill, 2021). Hill (2021) challenged the education sector on whether it was "positioned … to be responsive to this social change?", and specifically, "what does this [social change] mean for work in the WIL space?". Historically, universities have excluded some diverse learners, such as women and First Nations peoples. Hill (2021) highlighted the case of the University of Sydney, Australia's first university, which excluded women from studying at the University for the first three decades. By contrast, it was a century before an Indigenous person would be admitted to the University. It was not until 2009 that the first Indigenous senior executive position was created within an Australian university.

Universities have a role in contributing to social change and being at the forefront of that change. Universities also have a role to systematically remove barriers to education for equity-based groups. Some may argue that education should specially target equity-based groups as a strategy to break the cycle of disadvantage and exclusion. Unfortunately, as Hill (2021) noted, universities, and Australian culture in general, are reluctant to call out racism or queerphobia. Universities often play it safe with industry partners and do not want to impact relationships. On the other hand, in some industries, it is the industry partner that is causing universities to shift their attitudes towards diversity, equity and inclusion (Hill, 2021). The number of students undertaking work-integrated learning has increased so significantly that resources have not kept pace. The lack of resourcing has impacted the service and delivery of education for students. Equity-based programs are often the first to be scrapped in times where there is a perception of economic difficulty. However, if universities are to be leaders in this space, there needs to be a financial commitment, in addition to a philosophical commitment, to embedding diversity, equity and inclusion principles in daily operations and practices (Hill, 2021). It must be core to university business rather than an optional extra. It is also important for education providers to consider intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic statuses in relation to development of policy and practices in WIL (Hill, 2021).

Staffing and resourcing implications

Historically, WIL activities have tended to be under-resourced and under-staffed. This has resulted in many policies and practices in WIL being limited to particular models of WIL

(e.g., full-time placements completed in block periods in nursing). Supply and demand issues, too, have played a role in inadvertently placing criteria on WIL activities to limit the opportunities to certain groups of students (e.g., high achieving students). For practices, processes, and systems to be scalable and efficient, they tend to be uniform. But to support equity initiatives it takes staff time and resourcing. A recent study claims that it is four to six times more expensive to support students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Devlin et al., 2022). Under-resourcing WIL limits the ability for education providers (and industry partners) to provide bespoke programs for students to address individual requirements and needs, and in effect, perpetuates social injustices and limits access to opportunities.

Increasingly, the demographics of university cohorts are becoming more diverse and education providers need to keep up with the needs of their cohorts. For many disciplines, there has been a change from predominantly school-leavers to more non-school leavers, especially in undergraduate nursing degrees (Andrew, 2021). However, mature-aged non-school leavers are more likely to attrit from their course (Andrew, 2021). Andrew's (2021) research has found that women who have partners (or partners and children) have limited access to placements. Andrew has also found that family pressures impact "progression, achievement, attrition, family stress, relationship conflict and student mental health and wellbeing" (Andrew, 2021). Often these students are needing to juggle multiple commitments both at university and within the home, such as paid work, childcare, housework, study and placement (Andrew, 2021). These students also felt that they needed to compromise or sacrifice their studies and careers to meet antiquated cultural expectations of women as the carer and housekeeper (Andrew, 2021). Education providers need to provide flexibility within their programs to enable diverse student cohorts the ability to access and participate in WIL. Of course, inherent (or genuine and reasonable) requirements of the learning task need to be fulfilled. But full-time WIL opportunities are rarely an inherent requirement, nor is part-time WIL an impossibility or an unreasonable adjustment. Flexibility in processes, though, often means appropriate resources need to be provided by the employer (e.g., education provider) to achieve the desired outcomes.

In a separate study, Andrew (2021a) identified in the Master of Public Health courses offered across 27 universities in Australia that only 12 curricula included a WIL component, and eight of these were limited by an academic or merit criteria (Andrew, 2021a). These kinds of exclusionary practices often stem from the lack of supply of WIL opportunities or a lack of resourcing to increase supply. The (unintended) consequence is that certain students are excluded and others, who may have been in a more privileged position previously with respect to access to education opportunities, continue to be advantaged by the systems that are put in place to address issues of supply and demand. Therefore, it is important to "make the implicit explicit", to "create networking opportunities" within the curriculum and to "create financially accessible WIL opportunities" by establishing flexible opportunities (Andrew, 2021a). Diversity in the offering of opportunities is key to addressing the various challenges and barriers for students. Of course, this diversity comes with a financial and resourcing cost that needs to be factored into budgets by universities.

As university cohorts diversify, universities need to respond and take into consideration the needs of various groups. Without this conscious attempt to address any systemic biases, universities will fall into the trap of maintaining and even reinforcing the *status quo* or inadvertently excluding access to education. Likewise, if a capitalist mindset is applied to the resourcing of university activities, including WIL, further systemic biases are likely to be perpetuated. Some of the issues experienced by mature-aged female nursing students are echoed by other cohorts, particularly around the financial impacts of placement, often due to the distance between home and the placement site or the lack of notice regarding placement commitments. The lack of notice means that students find it difficult to reorganise their family and work lives to meet university commitments. In an under-resourced environment and an imbalance between supply and demand, tailored programs for students become increasingly difficult for academic and professional staff, and students are required to "suck it up" (Andrew, 2021). This can lead to students considering withdrawal or impacting academic performance, mental health issues and relationships (Andrew, 2021).

While some WIL practitioners may take the view that students are responsible for managing their external commitments, universities have a role in ensuring that access to education is not exclusionary and that the student body represents the broader community. Regardless, these issues will impact student participation, either through attrition or delayed course progressions, and which will ultimately need to be addressed by the education provider. This means that curricula cannot be developed without taking into consideration broader social, cultural and economic factors influencing aspirations of higher education. It also means making some small adjustments to accommodate the needs of students. This can include providing early and timely communication to allow for students to plan for WIL activities or by providing opportunities for students to articulate their circumstances so adjustments can be considered.

Future considerations

Education providers will need to continue to focus their attention on issues of equity and inclusion and continue resourcing initiatives to enable equitable participation in WIL. This requires education providers to be flexible in their approaches and practices, where that flexibility does not infringe upon genuine inherent requirements of the task, course or profession. It is important that course content and materials reflect the diversity of the broader community to demystify and 'normalise' diversity and inclusion, such as case studies that include diversity but also address stereotypes. Arbitrary criteria, such as academic- or merit-based criterion, should be questioned and interrogated. While these criteria may be considered benign in their intent, the unintended consequences are the exclusion of particular groups of students and the creation of inequities.

The disruption that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic in all our communities has demonstrated the ability of industry and higher education providers to work together to partner to deliver WIL experiences for students. However, this has come at the expense of human resources within education institutions, where staff have been required to go above and beyond, in a time where university resourcing and funding have been brutally slashed. The

pandemic has also had an impact on students, and the community in general, that has led to burnout, additional financial pressures and disruptions or limitations on WIL activities. To say that there is a need for further research to understand the barriers and enablers of students from historically disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds is an understatement. WIL stakeholders need to continue to strengthen their understanding and question their practices and systems to ensure that they are enabling rather than hindering inclusion and access to WIL.

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Work Integrated Learning in Practice

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