

# Research Roundup: Advances in Work Integrated Learning

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## Introduction

This research round-up is designed to assist professionals and academics who are supporting students on WIL placements. This brief round-up of the key issues and implications for practice we hope will inform, inspire, and support those working in WIL seeking new ideas, based on the findings of contemporary research. We have selected four papers that we think will be of interest to a diverse range of readers. All papers are fully accessible via the links provided. This research roundup's structure is a short synopsis for each of the papers, key implications for practice and our derived recommendations for WIL practitioners.

- 1. Quew-Jones, R. J. (2023). Degree apprenticeships in the UK higher education institutions—are they viable? Integrative literature review. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 13(6), 1250-1268.**

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/HESWBL-02-2023-0026/full/pdf>

The paper investigates the challenges and viability of providing apprenticeships for higher education providers at degree and postgraduate levels in the United Kingdom (UK). A degree apprenticeship is a program that combines university study with practical work experience, allowing participants to earn a degree while working in their chosen field. Apprenticeships are widely used in the trade and vocational education sector and provide a learning pathway that combines paid on-the-job training and formal study. In the UK, apprenticeships in higher education were launched in 2015 to widen participation, offering authentic vocational courses and to encourage providers to work more closely with employers (Quew-Jones, 2023). Degree apprenticeships are also the subject of discussion in Australia with the Australian Universities Accord Report heralding “pathways which support ‘earning while learning’ models in key industry sectors, such as advanced apprenticeships” (Australian Government, 2024).

According to Cullinane and Doherty (2020) in the context of the United Kingdom (UK), an apprenticeship is a job, in an occupation, that requires substantial and sustained training, lasting a minimum of 12 months and includes off-the-job training. Following completion of an apprenticeship, demonstrated by the achievement of standards or competencies, individuals will enter an occupation. Apprenticeship standards are defined by employers and professional or industry bodies and develop transferable skills, to progress careers. In the UK, the program

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designed for apprenticeships in higher education was founded on a principle of benefiting the learners (apprentices), employers and wider society, and is paid for in part by all three (i.e., learners, employers, governments/business) (Cullinan and Doherty, 2020). The paper used an integrative literature review to answer these research questions:

- RQ1. What does the existing research literature tell us about Higher Education Institute (HEI) apprenticeships impact, effectiveness, and viability?
- RQ2. What strategies could enhance apprenticeship sustainability in HEIs?
- RQ3. What are the review implications for further research and practice for HEIs apprenticeships? (Quew-Jones, 2023).

While the paper focusses on the UK there are learnings for Australia and other countries. One of the key issues identified relates to governance. The paper proposes ensuring that governance related to the provision of apprenticeships are integrated at the strategic, academic department and teaching team levels. From the study, a new framework called the "apprenticeship knowledge-based checklist model," is introduced and offers an evidence-informed, structured method to evaluate the viability and effectiveness of apprenticeship programs (Quew-Jones, 2023). A feature and strength of the paper was its interdisciplinary critique of potential apprenticeship practices for higher education enabling a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with apprenticeships in this sector (Quew-Jones, 2023).

### ***Implications for practice in Australia***

Many of the findings relating to an apprenticeship model of learning in higher education have practice implications for those who support and help learners realise the opportunities of work integrated learning placements. This includes the time-intensive nature of building collaborative partnerships, adequate funding, supporting learners with 'off-the-job learning', employer mentors and support for mentors including the need for checklists and other tools (Quew-Jones, 2023). Finally, the authors argue that apprenticeships provide a lever for widening participation, something the Australian Universities Accord has identified as a proposition for Higher Education Providers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024).

### ***Recommendation***

A program that combines university study with practical work experience, allowing participants to earn a degree while working in their chosen field

Degree apprenticeships in higher education (learning programs combining university study with work experience) encourage an employment relationship as part of course design and has been highlighted as an initiative for Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024). We recommend reading this paper for practical insights and to read further on the impact and

challenges of degree apprenticeships in higher education in the UK. With the University Accord (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024) and potential reforms, the paper is useful in understanding the implications for Australia, should we move in this direction.

2. **Borren, J., Sutherland, D., & Maidment, J. (2023). A speed-networking model for facilitating interprofessional education and work-integrated learning.** *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 24(2), 157-167.  
[https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL\\_24\\_2\\_157\\_167.pdf](https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL_24_2_157_167.pdf)

This article explores the evaluation of a workshop designed to foster inter-professional work-integrated learning (WIL) within a tertiary educational environment. The workshop used a speed networking methodology and targeted students from disciplines, including speech therapy, nursing, and social work. The workshop aimed to develop the skills required for effective interprofessional teamwork in the health disciplines (Borren et al., 2023). Interprofessional working is important and the literature describing the value of interprofessional working and education in health is vast (Brandt, 2018; Fraher et al., 2019; Reeves et al., 2017). Poor interprofessional collaboration has been identified as impacting negatively on the delivery of health services and patient care (Brandt, 2018; Fraher et al., 2019; Reeves et al., 2017). Professional networking according to Porter et al. (2023, p.2) involves interpersonal “interactions that build and maintain professional relationships and include the exchange of work and career-benefiting resources”. As such, professional networking is crucial in healthcare for facilitating collaboration, knowledge exchange, and access to resources, ultimately improving patient care and advancing practice (Schot et al., 2020).

The research presented here used a thematic analysis to review the evaluation of the participant’s experience of speed-networking. Key themes revealed that participants gained a deeper appreciation for the diverse professional identities and the workshop successfully challenged preconceived stereotypes about different disciplines, promoting a more nuanced understanding of their complementary roles in healthcare (Borren et al., 2023).

The findings of this paper emphasise the importance of experiential learning opportunities like speed-networking to prepare students for collaborative practice in real-world settings. Engaging in activities that simulate interprofessional teamwork, enhance student readiness and efficacy in professional environments. This highlighted the significance of incorporating innovative approaches to interprofessional education into academic curricula (Borren et al., 2023).

In summary, the article underscores the implications of facilitating interprofessional WIL initiatives like speed-networking. This type of activity can promote understanding, collaboration, and the breaking down of disciplinary stereotypes, contributing to the development of students and better prepare them for their future careers in healthcare and beyond (Borren et al., 2023).

### ***Implications for Practice***

The article provides an overview of the practical considerations involved in the facilitation of speed-networking. These considerations encompassed various logistical aspects, such as structuring the event, managing participant interactions, and ensuring inclusivity across disciplines. Using a speed-networking approach allowed the authentic engagement of students from multiple disciplines and is aligned with WIL principles and relevant pedagogy.

### ***Recommendation***

Give speed networking a go. Interprofessional learning is beneficial in all disciplines, particularly health. Incorporating the knowledge and expertise of multiple professions within the learning environment can begin the process of student's understanding of their role and that of other team members in the healthcare environment. The structure of networking opportunities can be informed by the findings of this paper.

3. **Hay, K., & Fleming, J. (2024). An inclusive workplace framework: Principles and practices for work-integrated learning host organizations, *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 25(1), 83-94.**  
[https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL\\_25\\_1\\_83\\_94.pdf](https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL_25_1_83_94.pdf)

Students undertaking work integrated learning (WIL) are exposed to a range of variables in placement contexts that differ from their normal learning environments. It is the responsibility of the higher education institution (HEI) to work with the host organisation to provide a safe experience and positive learning experience (Hay & Fleming, 2023). Additionally, students have diverse experiences and backgrounds that need to be considered and understood to ensure the placement experience is successful (Jackson et al, 2023).

Hay and Fleming (2024) propose an Inclusive WIL Workplace Framework to support the effective delivery of work integrated learning (WIL) experiences by host organisations. The student experience in WIL needs to be safe and supported which requires awareness and training by the student and host organisation (Campbell et al., 2019). Drawing on the authors' previous research examining risk in work integrated learning situations the paper also recognises the existing research that addresses equity and access to WIL and extends this further to the implementation of the framework.

The structure of the framework is presented in three stages, presented in tables and is practical and pragmatic and includes:

1. Principles for an inclusive work integrated learning host organisation,
2. Practices for an inclusive work integrated learning host organisation,

3. Characteristics of inclusive work integrated learning supervisors and co-workers (Hay and Fleming, 2024).

The four 'Principles of Inclusivity' include: self-determination, belonging, wellbeing and care and respect as a holistic frame for the student experience (Hay & Fleming, 2024). These principles are extended to practice examples, which presents WIL practitioners and host organisations an opportunity to explore how these are reflected in individual organisation settings (Hay & Fleming, 2024). The final table overviews the identified characteristics of inclusive work integrated learning and provides a range of qualitative characteristics of how the student might experience an inclusive relationship with WIL supervisors and co-workers within the host organisation's culture (Hay & Fleming, 2024).

***Implications for practice in Australia***

In the current environment for organisations in Australia, there is heightened focus on safe and inclusive workplaces, for example *Respect at Work Amendment Act (2021)* and psychosocial safety model work health and safety (WHS) laws and regulations on psychosocial hazards (Safe Work Australia, 2022). Although the paper references specific requirements in New Zealand these are transferable in principle to students participating in Australian workplace contexts.

The Framework presented in this paper is relevant and addresses the required standards of student safety. Further, the Framework extends to application in the broader definition of inclusivity and diversity attributes and the factors that exist within organisational culture to create a positive learning environment. These include indigeneity and other cultures, gender identity and disability.

Partner organisations report a range of challenges from engaging with students in an authentic manner including difficulty or reluctance in assessing students and giving authentic feedback (Peach et al., 2014). The framework is an opportunity for higher education to work with host organisations to support better understanding of the range of considerations and adjustments that can be made to enhance student placement experience beyond the compliance requirements of safe workplaces and to provide learners on WIL with more effective feedback.

Hay and Fleming (2024) also suggest there is an opportunity to encourage student involvement in the process of assessing and developing plans for an inclusive placement environment as part of their placement preparation.

***Recommendation***

Successful placements require positive relationships between the higher education institution, the host organisation and the student; however in the implementation, students are in a

lesser position to influence the work environment. The framework proposed by this paper is a useful resource for WIL practitioners to work with host organisations offering student placements to create more successful WIL experiences.

4. **Salm, V., Chopra, S Golab, L. (2023) Student success in cooperative education: A comparison of remote and in-person workplace performance evaluations, *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 24(2), 169-207. [https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL\\_24\\_2\\_169\\_207.pdf](https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL_24_2_169_207.pdf)**

Salm et al. (2023) have undertaken an extensive research study to examine the elements that contribute to student success in cooperative (co-op) education from 45,000 educator performance evaluations in a large university undergraduate co-op program. Cooperative Education, or Co-op is the name for the work integrated learning (WIL) delivery model delivered in Canada.

Worldwide, COVID related attendance restrictions resulted in an increase in the offering of remote delivery co-op education by necessity. The availability of a data set comprising of identifiable pre-COVID and post-COVID evaluations presented an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of remote delivery compared to in-person delivery.

The questions formulated to understand these differences were as follows:

1. Which skills, abilities, and attributes make co-op students successful?
2. How do the most valued skills differ for remote and in-person positions?
3. Where should students improve to be most successful in remote and in-person positions? (Salm et al, 2023).

Anonymised student data and employer evaluations for 22,134 in-person and 23,417 remote work placements were included in the analysis (Salm et al., 2023). A dataset that included an overall student performance rating using a 7-point scale, categorised as unsatisfactory, marginal, satisfactory, good, very good, excellent, and outstanding. Text data was also collected as optional comments written by the supervisor to explain their choice of evaluation rating for the given student. The data analysis extracted key words from within sentences using Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) and rationalised similar words before applying a logistic regression classifier. Attributes of success were defined and aligned to recommendations from employers (Salm et al., 2023).

The authors recognised that two potential impacts or limitations on the research is the other variables that could give rise to differing results pre-COVID in-person placements and post-COVID remote placements plus some variations in question format between the two time periods (Salm et al., 2023). The findings from this paper did not distinguish conclusively between remote

and in-person experiences, with many of the attributes of an outstanding experience common in both modes for example asking questions, communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving, working independently, work ethic and professional development (Salm et al., 2023). To understand the text indicators, the authors referenced the text in its original form to determine the positive or negative nature of the recommendations. The points of difference were subtle between the modes of delivery, with in-person recommendations related to presentation and communication skills compared to remote recommendations were innovation, curiosity and asking questions.

### ***Implications for practice in Australia***

Gaining insights into factors that contribute to successful placement experiences is an ongoing process. Understanding differences in experience between remote and in-person placements helps in the design of placement experiences and performance evaluations for programs in Australia and is relevant to future strategies for WIL delivery.

The large data sets analysed demonstrate the complexity of extracting meaning from qualitative information embedded in supervisor feedback and recommendations. Although the nature of the responses presents a challenge to distil specific outcomes, it does shed light on the supervisor experience and common themes.

In summary, this study compared remote and in-person evaluations of undergraduate co-op students and found key factors contributing to student success. Outstanding students in both settings were praised for their leadership, innovation, and design skills, contrary to prior beliefs that team leadership was less important (Salm et al., 2023). Independence was a significant predictor of success for remote students, while flexibility was highlighted for in-person students. Additionally, cultural awareness was noted for remote students, while generating fresh ideas and research skills were emphasised for in-person students. Recommendations for remote students included improving work ethic and technological skills, while in-person students were advised to focus on communication skills (Salm et al., 2023). Understanding these skills can benefit students, employers, and educational institutions, facilitating better preparation for workplace success (Salm et al., 2023).

### ***Recommendation***

In addition to the key findings in the paper directed to students undertaking co-op or WIL, the analysis included in the appendices gives an insight to WIL practitioners and placement host organisations of the attributes that are indicative of outstanding WIL experiences. In particular, the parties to WIL can reference these attributes to focus on developing skills that underpin performance measures in evaluations.

## Summary

This research round-up highlights key findings from four contemporary studies covering a broad range of topics of interest to professionals and academics involved in work-integrated learning (WIL). Quew-Jones (2023) examines the viability of degree apprenticeships, emphasising the need for integrated governance and structured evaluation to ensure success, with implications for similar initiatives in Australia. Borren, Sutherland, and Maidment (2023) evaluate a speed-networking workshop for interprofessional education, finding it effective in fostering collaboration and breaking down stereotypes among healthcare students. Hay and Fleming (2024) propose an Inclusive WIL Workplace Framework to ensure safe and supportive placements. Salm et al (2023) compare remote and in-person WIL, identifying key skills and attributes for student success in both settings. The insights from these papers aim to inform and inspire WIL practitioners, offering practical recommendations and innovative approaches to consider when designing learning experiences that can enhance student readiness, professional development and learning.

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# Work Integrated Learning

in Practice

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