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Craig Cameron, Anne Hewitt

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Designing financial support for students in Australian work-integrated learning programs

CRAIG CAMERON¹

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

ANNE HEWITT

The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

Work-integrated learning (WIL) can be expensive for tertiary students. There are potential accommodation, equipment, and travel expenses, as well as opportunity costs associated with lost income when completing unpaid WIL placements. Non-remunerative financial support such as bursaries, scholarships, stipends, and honorariums (collectively 'WIL studentships') can defray student expenses and facilitate access to WIL for students of diverse backgrounds, alleviating equity concerns. Careful consideration is required, however, when designing WIL studentships to maximize the opportunities and minimize the hazards for stakeholders. This article arises from the first known systematic study examining WIL studentship design across Australian institutions, which included a qualitative web-based study of 59 WIL studentships. The article presents a typology of WIL studentships developed from that study. In addition, two case studies are presented as to facilitate examination of key features of WIL studentships, identify risks, and provide a basis for recommending effective practice in WIL studentship design.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, financial support, scholarship, bursary, risk, risk management

This article presents part of a research project, funded by the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), exploring the design, risks, and risk management of WIL studentships in Australia. The authors define 'studentship' as any formal arrangement involving non-remunerative financial support to a tertiary student, being support that is not a salary or wage in exchange for a student's work. Tertiary institutions use various terms to describe programs which provide non-remunerative financial support including stipend, bursary, honorarium, grant, and scholarship. The nature of that support may include cash or in-kind assistance (provision of accommodation or travel etc.). A studentship is not: a loan advanced to a student that requires repayment; the payment of a wage or salary; or a discretionary payment such as a gratuity or reimbursement for travel expenses, which is not a term of any formal contractual arrangement. A studentship also differs from the concept of 'paid WIL' in which the student is an employee and the financial support, including wages and other minimum employment conditions such as paid leave and holiday pay, is both a contractual obligation and remuneration for student labor.

The term studentship is not without history in the context of tertiary education. It is used in North America within health-related disciplines to describe a short-term placement, often undertaken during a break in teaching, during which a student completes a research output (Cleland et al., 2010) and/or gains clinical experience (Fairchild et al., 2012; Zorzi et al., 2005). Students may be paid. Studentships in the UK typically involve financial support for students to complete research higher degree programs (UCL, 2021). In Australia and New Zealand it usually relates to a paid short-term research project (e.g., Employment New Zealand, 2020) and it is unclear if the term refers to the payment, the work experience, or both. The authors selected studentship as the unifying term adopted in this project

¹ Corresponding author: Craig Cameron, craig.cameron@mq.edu.au

because the research central to experiences covered by the term in other contexts is not usually part of tertiary study and is not a prominent arrangement covered in the literature apropos scholarships and bursaries. In addition it reflects the student-centered nature of the support.

Studentships are often offered to students completing work-integrated learning (WIL). For the purposes of this article, WIL is defined as a tertiary curriculum design that:

- combines formal learning with student time spent in a virtual or real workplace;
- involves three parties: a student, the university, and an entity hosting the student ('host organization'), which may be the university (e.g., dental clinics and placements within legal and media departments); and
- is either part of an individual subject within a program of study or is a requirement of that program of study.

Studentships linked to WIL will be referred to as 'WIL studentships'. WIL studentships improve students' capacity to complete WIL, and can be an important tool to ensure equitable access, countering the obstacles to participation faced by some students (Hewitt et al., 2021; Universities Australia, 2019). However, if poorly designed, WIL studentships may expose stakeholders (individual and corporate donors, students, hosts, universities, government, professional/industry associations) to hazards.

The purpose of this article is to report on that part of our research which explored the design characteristics of WIL studentships in Australia, identified opportunities and hazards (collectively 'risks') impacting WIL studentship design, and described best practices for WIL studentships (or 'risk management'). The concept of risk being employed is derived from the theory of Enterprise Risk Management, in which any issue, event or circumstance can be understood as a risk, whether positive (an opportunity) or negative (a hazard), to meeting stakeholder objectives (Cameron, 2017b; Cameron & Orrell, 2021).

The next section reviews the literature on design and risks of WIL studentships, followed by a brief description of the qualitative research which informed this article. The results of the research are presented as a WIL studentship typology, and two case studies which consider various features of WIL studentships and attendant risks. A set of recommendations for best practice in WIL studentships is then proposed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature considering the design and risks associated with WIL studentships. This is a subset of a broader literature, considering studentships across higher education in general (tertiary studentships) which is outside the scope of this article. The literature is presented through analysis of the purpose, financial support offered, and conditions of WIL studentships, and attendant risks.

Work-Integrated Learning Studentships

WIL studentships may have the *purpose* of attracting high-achieving students (Neil-Smith, 2001), or promoting wider access to WIL experiences by reducing the (sometimes prohibitive) cost of participation (Hillman, 2011). Government-funded WIL studentships are often designed to increase WIL placement opportunities across universities, without necessarily targeting an academic discipline(s) (Smith et al., 2015).

There are 4 dimensions of *financial support* for WIL studentships canvassed in the literature: amount, payment method, type, and source. The financial support offered by the WIL studentship may be intended to replicate a salary payment (Ward et al., 2004), be paid as a lump sum (Moore et al., 2015; Souder et al., 2012), or via weekly (Cleland et al., 2010; Lock, 2008) or monthly (Jacobs et al., 2019; Riedeger et al., 2020) instalments, that are paid over the duration of the WIL experience or the program of study (Neil-Smith, 2001). Payments may be made directly from the donor into the student's bank account (Jacobs et al., 2019), or indirectly via the university (Cameron, 2017a). The location of the WIL placement may affect the type of support offered. For example, students may receive subsidized transportation for travel to a remote host location (Ward et al., 2004), reimbursement for transport costs (Smith et al., 2008) and/or accommodation if the WIL placement is distant from where they usually live (Beattie & Riley, 2015; Cuthbertson et al., 2004). In addition, medical insurance may be offered for international WIL placements (Ward et al., 2004) or flights to and from an overseas placement location (Riedeger et al., 2020). There are a variety of funding sources for WIL studentships, including the university (Roberts, 2017; Souder et al., 2012), government (Smith et al., 2015), host organizations (Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997; Riedeger et al., 2020), independent donors who do not host students (Deruosi & Sherwood, 1997), not-for-profit organizations (Riedeger et al., 2020), and professional and industry associations (Lock, 2008; Moore et al., 2015). The New Colombo Plan (NCP) is often cited as an example of an Australian government-funded WIL studentship (e.g., Byrne, 2016; Tran et al., 2021). NCP scholars can complete study in conjunction with an internship in the Indo-Pacific region. NCP support may include tuition fees, language training, various allowances (living, health, study, and travel) and insurance (DFAT, 2021, p. 18-20.). NCP scholars' internship can be paid or unpaid, part-time or full-time, and scholars are 'encouraged to seek academic credit for their internship, but this is not mandatory' (DFAT, 2021, p. 13).

Students may be subject to *conditions* when applying for, receiving, and continuing WIL studentships. For instance, students may need to achieve a minimum level of academic performance to be eligible for or to continue receiving a merit-based WIL studentship (Neil-Smith, 2001), or complete the WIL placement in a rural or remote location (Lock, 2008; Moore et al., 2015). Students' financial circumstances or background may comprise eligibility criteria for WIL studentships. For example, the financial support may be based on the income of the recipient and their number of dependents, or targeted at a particular demographic group (e.g., mature-age students) (Cuthbertson et al., 2004).

Risks

WIL studentships present opportunities for the student, the stakeholder providing the financial support (donor), and the university. WIL studentships can reduce the financial obstacles of WIL for students (Roberts, 2017; Smith et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2021), and support a greater diversity of students to participate in WIL (Hewitt et al., 2018). With some of the financial pressure of WIL relieved, students may be more motivated and committed to their placement (Jacobs et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2015). From a university perspective, being able to offer WIL studentships can not only enhance the institution's brand or reputation and facilitate attracting high-performing students (Neil-Smith, 2001) but also present an opportunity to develop relationships with host organizations (Byrne, 2016). From a donor perspective, funding studentships can encourage students to apply for WIL experiences (and subsequent employment) in high-needs areas associated with the donor, such as rural and remote regions (Lock, 2008), can provide access to student talent for future employment, and can cast the donor as a good corporate citizen in supporting education and the industry (Neil-Smith, 2001).

A significant hazard associated with studentships is that the support they offer may not be sufficient to cover the additional costs incurred by students completing WIL. Those costs are varied, but could include expenses such as travel, accommodation, equipment costs, uniforms, payments for childcare and medical expenses (Jacobs et al., 2019; Lock, 2008), the costs of sacrificing paid work to undertake WIL, and incidental costs such as the expenses of attending social events associated with the WIL experience. Fixing the quantum of financial support may contribute to a WIL studentship providing inadequate financial support, and inequitable outcomes. For example, a WIL studentship may make no adjustments for cost-of-living expenses across domestic regions (Callender, 2010) or host countries (Reidiger et al., 2020), leaving student participants better or worse off according to the location of their placement. A related hazard is the timing of the provision of financial support, for example, payments in instalments which are not adequate to pay for one-off items or large bills (Mbah et al., 2018). Although anecdotal, university lawyers have also raised concerns that hosts may deliberately manipulate WIL studentships which amount to less than the lawful wage applicable to a student's work to circumvent employer obligations (Cameron 2018). Such subterfuge is unlawful and does not prevent a court or tribunal finding an employment relationship does in fact exist, with consequent liability for student/employee's violated entitlements (i.e., wages) attaching to the host/employer.

To conclude, the literature review reveals two significant research gaps regarding WIL studentships. First, there is limited description about the design characteristics of Australian WIL studentships spanning multiple disciplines and universities. The Australian literature often consists of a case study exploring a singular WIL studentship, rather than a collective analysis of WIL studentships. Second, the international and Australian literature exploring risk in the context of WIL studentships is generally limited to the positive and negative impacts of provision of financial support. The qualitative web-based study reported in the sections which follow seeks to fill these gaps, and explores the features, and the risks, of WIL studentships in Australia.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is one component of a multi-method study (Ethics Approval H-2020-217) with two qualitative strands: a study of WIL studentships based on a systematic method of collecting WIL studentship data from websites ('web-based study'), which is the subject of this article; and interviews with university representatives and students involved with WIL studentships, which is outside the scope of this article and is reported separately (Cameron & Hewitt, 2022).

Data Collection

WIL studentships available to Australian tertiary students were identified using a modified form of the web search method adopted by McDonald (2020), who identified internship intermediary firms using a Google key word search, and then placed a limit on the Google page results evaluated (20) upon achieving data saturation, that is a "redundancy of new firms to add to the sample" (p. 37). Like McDonald (2020), our data collection method involved generating potential search terms that may identify WIL studentships, conducting a Google key word search of those terms, and then evaluating a specified page number of results. After the conduct of a pilot study, three changes were made to the proposed methodology: the addition of extra search terms associated with WIL and studentships to respond to the diverse terminology describing these opportunities; limiting the jurisdictional scope to WIL studentships offered by Australian institutions and organizations; and reducing the planned number of Google 'pages' to be analyzed from 20 to 15. Jurisdiction and pages were limited because of

time and budget constraints. A further limitation of the data collection was that WIL studentships only advertised on internal university systems were not accessible and therefore not captured in the results.

The main study was conducted between mid-February and mid-March 2021, and employed the following Google key word search term combinations: Australian internship scholarship; Australian placement bursary; Australian work-integrated learning paid; Australian work experience stipend; Australian internship bursary; and Australian placement stipend. Two criteria were added to the main study. First, studentships were only considered if the opportunity was still active or appeared to be on temporary pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic – that is, if it was offered in 2019 or more recently. Second, to be included the studentship needed to provide accessible information regarding both WIL requirements and the financial benefits, without requiring creation of a profile or commencing an application. Each Google link considered was also searched for any external pages that contained WIL studentships. The web-based study produced 257 web page results, recorded in Microsoft Excel.

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed to determine whether they met the criteria for a WIL studentship (as considered above) and an asterisk placed against those results identified as WIL studentships. Studentships were included in the study if WIL was an essential term of the studentship or a non-essential term. Therefore, the study included as WIL studentships those where: WIL was not mandatory but was preferred by the donor; WIL was one of a variety of forms of study which the studentship would support; or it was advertised that students may be eligible to obtain academic credit for work experience supported by the studentship. Studentships which did not explicitly reference WIL in the searchable web pages were excluded. After analysis, 59 WIL studentships were identified. An S-Number was assigned to each of the 59 WIL studentship (S1 to S59) to protect anonymity.

The 59 WIL studentships were then coded using eclectic coding techniques (Saldana, 2013), and a code map with associated descriptors was created. Sixteen features relating to the design of the studentship (13) and the WIL experience (3) were derived from the code map. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet of the features of each WIL studentship was maintained, and then distilled into a case typology ('WIL studentship typology') and six categories related to WIL studentships—Strategy, Eligibility, Selection, Payment, Conditions and Work-Integrated Learning. A full description of the findings under these six categories is covered in the final report of the multi-method study (Cameron & Hewitt, 2022).

RESEARCH RESULTS

This article reproduces the WIL studentship typology from the report to provide context for two case studies. The case studies are amalgams of multiple WIL studentships analyzed in the web-based study and do not represent any singular WIL studentship nor are linked to any genuine stakeholders. The case studies are presented as a vehicle to explore key findings regarding the design characteristics and risks of WIL studentships arising from our research, and as a basis for recommending improvements to WIL studentship design.

The WIL studentship typology is set out at Table 1 below. Some WIL studentships fell into multiple categories, therefore the payment amount, payment use, payment source and academic discipline statistics in the table sum to more than the number of WIL studentships. For example, in some WIL studentships a scale of payments (e.g., AUD\$500-2000) is available depending on student circumstances, or the payment amount is determined by a selection committee from within a stipulated range. In instances such as these a WIL studentship could be categorized within multiple typology

payment categories. Other WIL studentships were recorded in multiple categories for other reasons. For example, one studentship stipulated the payment was to be used for travel, living expenses, and subject fees, three WIL studentships had joint donors (university/host or university/industry association), and seven studentships were associated with two (n=6) or 3 (n=1) academic disciplines.

CASE STUDIES

The two case studies are considered below (Box 1 and Box 2) with reference to the WIL studentship typology.

Case Study 1: Host Work-Integrated Learning Studentship

BOX 1: Host work-integrated learning studentship.

The WIL studentship is designed to attract outstanding secondary education students to a science career. Students complete, as part of a three-year specialist degree, two compulsory WIL subjects for academic credit (200 hours placement each) in Years 2 and 3. Collectively, the two WIL subjects represent the full time equivalent of one teaching period (or 1/6th of the degree). The scholarship is worth \$20,000, provided by the host organization, administered by the university, and paid to the student in bi-annual instalments of \$5,000 over Years 2 and 3. The student must complete both WIL placements with the host.

To be eligible, the applicant must be enrolling full time with the university, is a domestic secondary education student, and achieves a minimum secondary education score of 90, or equivalent grade. Selection is based on an interview during which students demonstrate their academic and extra-curricular achievements, and a 1,000-word statement demonstrating their interest and commitment to science. Student recipients must maintain a 65% overall grade during their degree to remain eligible, failing which, the university administrator can terminate the studentship.

Strategy

The targeted approach to WIL studentships involves a clearly defined target demographic or purpose above and beyond non-remunerative support to students generally (Table 1). The relevant 'target' of the Host WIL Studentship was recruitment of high achieving students and promotion of science careers (Academic Merit and Strategic Promotion, Table 1). Academic performance-based studentships, such as the Host WIL studentship, may be considered a stakeholder strategy to attract and retain high-achieving students to the university and the host (as potential future employer). Host organization or university funding accounted for seven of the nine WIL studentships targeted at academic achievement.

TABLE 1: Work-integrated learning studentship typology.

| Targeted (n=59) | | | Payment: \$ (n=67) | | | Payment: Use (n=60) | | | Payment: Source (n=62) | | | Academic Discipline (n=66) | | |
|--------------------------|----|----|-----------------------|----|----|----------------------------|----|----|---------------------------|----|----|----------------------------|----|----|
| Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % |
| No | 20 | 34 | ≤ \$1,000 | 18 | 27 | Not Specified | 38 | 63 | University | 18 | 29 | Any | 16 | 24 |
| Domestic Location | 10 | 17 | ≤ \$4,000 | 20 | 30 | Travel + Living | 15 | 25 | Host Organization | 17 | 27 | Health | 12 | 18 |
| Academic Merit | 9 | 15 | ≤ \$10,000 | 12 | 18 | Student Fees | 7 | 12 | Individual Donor | 10 | 16 | Business | 12 | 18 |
| Disadvantaged Students | 8 | 14 | ≤ \$20,000 | 8 | 12 | | | | Government | 6 | 9 | STEM | 9 | 14 |
| Strategic Promotion | 6 | 10 | ≤ \$20,000 | 7 | 10 | | | | Third party WIL provider | 4 | 7 | Arts | 7 | 11 |
| International Location | 3 | 5 | Not Available | 2 | 3 | | | | Industry Association | 4 | 7 | Education | 6 | 9 |
| Indigenous Students | 3 | 5 | | | | | | | Corporate Donor | 3 | 5 | Law | 4 | 6 |
| Student enrolment (n=59) | | | Student degree (n=59) | | | Student nationality (n=59) | | | WIL essential term (n=59) | | | Selection criteria (n=59) | | |
| Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % | Description | N | % |
| Both | 44 | 75 | Both | 31 | 53 | Domestic only | 30 | 51 | Essential | 38 | 64 | Yes | 40 | 68 |
| Full Time only | 15 | 25 | Undergraduate only | 22 | 37 | Both | 29 | 49 | Not Essential | 21 | 36 | Not Specified | 15 | 25 |
| Part Time only | 0 | 0 | Postgraduate only | 6 | 10 | International only | 0 | 0 | | | | Nil - Automatic | 4 | 7 |

Eligibility

The Host WIL Studentship is open to secondary education students enrolling in an undergraduate science degree. This is not a criticism of the Host WIL Studentship, as the limitation on student degree is aligned with the attraction and retention strategies underpinning the arrangement. The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) group was a prominent discipline-specific WIL studentship identified in the study (14%), along with Health (18%), Business (18%), and the Arts (11%). One surprising result was Education (six of 59 WIL studentships), which requires students to engage in extensive mandatory WIL, with potentially significant time and cost implications, but had relatively few discipline-specific WIL studentships available. Education students also faced competition in four of the six WIL studentships because students from other disciplines were also eligible to apply.

The Host WIL Studentship has academic merit, based on secondary education results, as part of the eligibility and selection criteria. Eligibility in the WIL studentships studied included both secondary school results (five cases) or university results, such as a Grade Point Average (GPA) or Weighted Average Mark (WAM) (six cases). While academic merit may be a stakeholder strategy to attract high-achieving students, limiting academic merit to secondary school results may deny stakeholders access to a significant pool of student talent. For example, students may underachieve in their secondary education but excel in a university environment. Considering extending eligibility to tertiary results at the end of their first year (GPA, WAM) could cast a wider net for talent provided it is consistent with stakeholders' strategic objectives in relation to WIL studentships.

Selection

The Host WIL Studentship, consistent with most WIL Studentships reported in the study (68%, Table 1), stipulates an application and selection process (e.g., student statement and interview). The decision-maker then awards the WIL studentship based on the extent to which specific criteria, such as financial need or professional skills, are satisfied in that process. In the Host WIL Studentship the explicit selection criteria include academic merit, extra-curricular activities, and student interest in the affiliated discipline area (science). However, contrary to the selection process used by most WIL studentships in the study, some WIL studentships were awarded to any student who met the eligibility criteria (four cases) – that is, selection was automatic once eligibility was satisfied.

Surprisingly, 15 of the 55 WIL studentships involving selection did not specify the relevant selection criteria prior to the student starting the application process; that is, the criteria were not published on the web page (Table 1). An opaque selection process raises questions of fairness and could potentially deter students from applying, as they do not understand the criteria against which their application is being assessed and therefore cannot tailor their application to the criteria.

Payment

The Host WIL Studentship payment quantum of \$20,000 is consistent with the study findings. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between the payment source and payment amount for WIL studentships. Of the 16 WIL studentships, 14 funded by hosts involved a payment of more than \$4,000. The level of financial support provided by hosts suggests that their motives are not purely altruistic – instead it is likely the WIL component of the studentship arrangement is an opportunity for the host to gain early access to and assessment of student talent for future employment.

TABLE 2: Payment amount according to payment source.

| Amount (n=63) | Uni | Host | Individual Donor | Govt | 3rd party WIL | Industry Association | Corporate Donor |
|------------------|-----|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| ≤ \$4,000 | 14 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| >\$4,000 | 5 | 14 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

One important finding about payment source was the significant proportion of WIL studentships funded by individual donors (16% of WIL studentships), being non-corporate entities such as persons, trusts or endowments named after a person or family, which do not host the students. These WIL studentships provide important financial support for WIL participants that is not linked to the host of the WIL activity, as this category of donors do not host the students. This may minimize the risk of contravening labor laws in Australia, provided that the student is completing WIL (not work experience) and the host is not paying the student (Cameron & Hewitt, 2022).

Conditions

Some WIL studentships impose conditions on students. Nine WIL studentships (and the Host WIL Studentship) had academic performance as a condition of continuing financial support under the studentship scheme. The benchmark for academic performance had a range from 'satisfactory performance' (S30, S59), to a pass average (4.0 GPA – S41, S42, S49) up to a maximum credit average (60–70% – S31, S37, S40). Despite these relatively low benchmarks, there is a risk that students in their first year of university study, who may not be able to accurately predict their academic performance at tertiary level, experience additional stress in meeting even minimum levels of academic performance which impacts their well-being.

The study identified three additional conditions in WIL studentships: promotion, reflection, and conduct. Students may be required to promote the WIL studentship by: attending studentship events such as presentation ceremonies (five cases); sharing their experiences through social media channels, video, interviews, or presentations (six cases); having their photograph taken for publicity (S2, S3, S38); and permitting the donor to publish written materials produced by the student in relation to their experiences (S37, S38). Students may be required to reflect on their experiences by way of video, or a report about the placement specifically or the studentship in general (nine WIL studentships). Student misconduct was an express ground for termination in 15 WIL studentships, with an emphasis on the provision of false and misleading information by students during the application process (eight cases). Student misconduct exposes the donor, host and university to legal, reputational, financial, and strategic hazards. As with the Host WIL Studentship, WIL studentships can specifically include terms that a breach of conditions may lead to cessation of payments (12 cases), and/or a demand for refund of studentship monies paid.

Work-Integrated Learning

WIL is an essential term of the Host WIL Studentship, that is the student must complete WIL as part of the studentship arrangement. In the study, WIL was an essential term in 38 studentships (64%), and was a non-essential term (the student could complete WIL) in 21 studentships (36%) (non-essential WIL studentships). There are risks for students, universities and hosts participating in a non-essential WIL studentship. WIL experiences are quality assured for students in terms of student orientation, supervision, learning objectives and outcomes, and assessment (TEQSA, 2018; Hewitt, 2021). Furthermore, work experience that is not part of a tertiary study program or subject (and therefore not

WIL), or payments to students engaged in WIL which are legally considered remunerative, may create an unintended employment relationship between an Australian host and the student by virtue of the operation of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) (Cameron & Hewitt, 2022). In this circumstance, the host is legally obliged to pay the student the minimum prescribed wage and other statutory benefits (e.g., leave and superannuation) (Cameron, 2018; Hewitt et al., 2018;). If the WIL studentship donor is also the host and benefits from productive work the student performs on placement, this risk is magnified. The Host WIL Studentship minimizes the potential negative outcome of this risk because the payment amount (\$20,000) is likely to exceed the prescribed wage for 400 hours (\$50 per hour) if the payment was deemed remunerative by a tribunal. Therefore, the host, even if found to be an employer, would not owe additional wages to the student.

Case Study 2: Equity Work-Integrated Learning Studentship

BOX 2: Equity work-integrated learning studentship.

A university offers a WIL studentship worth \$700 to any full-time domestic* university student completing WIL who can demonstrate either *financial disadvantage* by producing the following items: Proof of Personal/Partner/Parental Income (social security records, pay slips, bank statements), and anticipated costs associated with the WIL placement (clothing, travel); or *educational disadvantage*: students with a medical condition/disability impacting participation in WIL, students relocating to the university from rural/remote regions, students with refugee status, and students with caring responsibilities.

Students are assessed based on financial need and academic merit. The bursary is paid in one lump sum by way of electronic funds transfer within two business days of acceptance. The bursary can be awarded before, during or after the WIL placement. However, students who have previously been in receipt of any equity-based WIL studentship awarded by the university cannot apply.

* Domestic student: An Australian citizen, New Zealand citizen, Australian permanent resident, Australian humanitarian visa holder

Strategy

The top three targets of WIL studentship arrangements (Table 1) were WIL placements in a regional or rural area of Australia (Domestic Location, 17%), high academic achievers (15%), and disadvantaged students (14%), being students of financial or educational disadvantage as defined in the Equity WIL Studentship. A significant strategy of university WIL studentship donors was to provide financial support for disadvantaged students to access WIL opportunities (5/8 WIL studentships). This responds to evidence that students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, rural/regional areas, Indigenous and international students (Universities Australia, 2019) are not participating in WIL equally.

Eligibility

The study identified four primary criteria related to student eligibility for WIL studentships: academic discipline of the student; student enrolment load; student degree; and student nationality. The availability of the Equity WIL Studentship to both undergraduate and postgraduate students of any academic discipline (53% and 24% of cases respectively in the study, Table 1), promotes access to WIL. Conversely, part-time students and international students are not eligible to apply for the Equity WIL studentship. This is problematic, as these student cohorts may already face barriers to accessing WIL (Universities Australia, 2019). In terms of student nationality, approximately half of all studentships

identified in the research were open to both domestic and international students, the remaining half were restricted to domestic students only. There were no WIL studentship schemes accessible only by international students. Part-time students are also frequently excluded from eligibility, and 25% of part-time students were explicitly excluded from the WIL studentship in the study (15 cases). Part-time enrolment is, for some students, a mechanism to counter other forms of educational disadvantage, such as disability or caring responsibilities, and is the only pathway to tertiary study in their circumstances. Therefore, it is problematic in equity terms that part-time students are so frequently excluded from WIL studentships.

The Equity WIL Studentship provides that recipients are not eligible for a further equity-based WIL studentship awarded by the university. Our research revealed that WIL studentships may set eligibility criteria that prevents students from receiving: the same WIL studentship more than once in any academic year, or during the student's degree (S22, S49, S57); concurrent WIL studentships provided by the same donor or administered by the same university (S4, S5, S39, S40, S43); concurrent WIL studentships relating to the same student activity (S7, S38, S47) or having the same purpose (S53); or multiple WIL studentships administered by the university or provided by the donor in the same year (S23, S24, S28). Such restrictions negatively impact student equity and access to WIL. Some disciplines, such as Education and Health, require students to complete multiple and lengthy WIL placements. Receipt of one WIL studentship is unlikely to alleviate a student's need for support to complete subsequent placements. Troublingly, some WIL studentship schemes in the study which offered relatively limited support (\leq \$1,000, Table 1), and were based on financial need, included this restriction. Universities can manage this risk by removing the restriction and:

- prioritize applicants based on the number and duration of WIL activity(ies);
- allow repeated access to a WIL studentship in different academic years (S57); or
- give preference to students who have not previously received funding (S53).

Positively, applications for the Equity WIL studentship can be made before, during or after the WIL activity. This minimizes disadvantage for students who experience financial or economic disadvantage, or learn about the WIL studentship, after commencing WIL. This flexibility also minimizes the risk of the student withdrawing from or failing the WIL subject.

Selection

Disadvantage in the Equity WIL Studentship, like academic merit in the Host WIL Studentship, may be an eligibility criterion, selection criterion or both. Financial need may be demonstrated by the documents produced for eligibility, but may also be assessed based on the student producing evidence of the additional costs associated with their WIL studentship, that is, quotes and bills (S26, S49). To increase flexibility 'additional costs' (appropriately defined) can be covered. They could, for example, include income lost by the student through sacrificing paid work to participate in WIL.

Most WIL studentships in the study, like the Equity WIL Studentship, used more than one selection criterion. However, academic merit and financial need as the selection criteria seven cases in the study) create potential conflict. Some students are not high-achieving because they experience financial disadvantage – for example, the student who is obligated to financially support themselves/family members at the expense of academic achievement. The combination of financial need and academic merit may, in practice, exclude students who could demonstrate academic merit if provided the financial support of a WIL studentship. Potentially, students may be less inclined to apply for a WIL

studentship based on what are arguably contradictory criteria. The lack of access to WIL by students from equity groups is a risk for these WIL studentships.

Payment and Conditions

The Equity WIL Studentship payment is fixed at \$700. Conversely, five WIL studentship schemes in the study – all of which were government- or university-funded and targeted at disadvantaged students or placement location – had a scale of payments up to a maximum cap (e.g., \$250, \$400, \$600, \$1000) based on duration and location of the WIL activity, distance to the WIL activity, financial need and circumstances of the student, or a combination of these factors. While the use of criteria and discretion in awarding different payment amounts may impose administrative costs on the administrator (typically a university), scaling payments promotes equity in student access to WIL opportunities by aligning funding with the additional costs attached to a WIL experience in each student situation.

The Equity WIL studentship does not mandate or specify the intended use of financial support by the students (also the case in 63% of studentships in the study), and payment is promptly made to students without any conditions imposed after receipt. These are positive aspects of the WIL studentship, particularly for students who may be in urgent financial need. Donors/administrators of WIL studentships may choose not to mandate the use of the funds for various reasons including: the operational costs (or risk) of administration; the quantum of funding (usually \leq \$1,000 in the study); or the fact that recipients are anticipated to have capacity to manage their finances. It seems the time commitment required to monitor studentship spending, particularly when the studentship involves small lump payments, may be excessive to any perceived benefit. In fact, only one of the 15 studentships in the study for which travel, living and accommodation expenses was an intended use of financial support published a procedure to audit or approve the spending (S25).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the study presents a novel snapshot of WIL studentships in Australia. This advances our understanding by revealing how WIL studentships are being designed, as set out in the typology presented in Table 1. This allows us to engage in an informed analysis of the risks related to WIL studentships in Australian practice. These risks, identified from an analysis of the literature, have been contextualized through the matrix of two WIL studentship case studies, which are amalgams of common WIL studentship forms identified in the study. The six categories used to examine the case studies (Strategy, Eligibility, Selection, Payment, Conditions and WIL) provided a framework for scrutinizing the case studies, and to expand our understanding of WIL studentships generally. The *strategy* underpinning WIL studentships extends beyond the traditional means-tested bursary and achievement-based scholarships addressed in the literature (Hillman, 2011), to include strategic promotion of an occupation, industry, or geographical location. Student *eligibility* for WIL studentships is not limited to academic achievement, financial circumstances and geographical location as identified in the literature (Cuthbertson, 2004; Lock, 2008; Neil-Smith, 2001). Eligibility criteria may also involve student enrolment load, student degree and student nationality, as well as restrictions on accessing multiple WIL studentships, which all present barriers to students. Student application processes and selection criteria were also described and analyzed through the two case studies, and risks associated with contradictory selection criteria were identified. The study has systematically assessed *payment* quantum and source. Whilst studentship payment sources and the types of financial support reported in the study, such as reimbursement or payment for living and travel expenses, are consistent with the literature (e.g., Beattie & Riley, 2015; Riedeger et al., 2020; Ward et al. 2004), the study did reveal that

WIL studentships typically do not mandate the use of payments. The study further advanced the literature by describing the *conditions* attached to receiving and maintaining WIL studentships, which may include academic achievement (Neil-Smith, 2001), maintaining proper conduct, promoting the WIL studentship, and student reflection on their WIL experience. Finally the study reported that work-integrated learning is not an essential term of all WIL studentships, exposing stakeholders to risk, particularly a host organization donor that may be an unintended employer of the student, and liable to meet minimum employment conditions under labor laws (Cameron, 2018; Hewitt et al., 2018).

In the process of analyzing the case studies, the authors identified risks attached to WIL studentship design. The five recommendations in the next section are directed at university stakeholders and conceptualized as best practices in WIL studentship design, intended to minimize the hazards and maximize the opportunities of WIL studentships. This constitutes a process of risk management.

Recommendations

Make completing WIL an essential term of the WIL studentship

In Australia, adopting a rule prohibiting any studentship associated with work experience (outside the definition of WIL) minimizes legal risks associated with an unintended employment relationship. It also ensures quality assurance of student learning as tertiary activities, including WIL, are regulated by a government authority, which in Australia is the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2017).

Create a diversity of WIL studentships to maximize student access to WIL opportunities

There are significant gaps in existing WIL studentships. For example, there were limited studentships specifically targeted towards part-time and international students. Universities can facilitate equitable participation in WIL in a variety of ways, including by offering a diverse range of WIL studentships. WIL studentships can be open to any student, or more targeted. Where targeted, considering cohorts with additional needs ie students suffering financial disadvantage, international students, Indigenous students, part-time students, students with a disability, or those undertaking WIL in remote or international locations, can minimize obstacles to participation.

Create a clear strategy for the WIL studentship and align the strategy with selection processes

A strategy is the 'why' stakeholders provide benefits to WIL participants. Some WIL studentships considered in the study did not appear to have an explicit strategy, or the strategy was inconsistent with eligibility criteria. For example, criteria which limit students to single WIL studentships have implications for students completing multiple or lengthy WIL placements and may be inconsistent with an equity strategy. This limitation could be reconsidered for studentships based on financial need.

Incorporate flexibility in WIL studentships

Flexibility as to the quantum and timing of payments in WIL studentships, eligibility criteria and conditions maximizes the number of students who can utilize WIL studentships, and the benefit they receive. For example, WIL studentships can pay on a scale depending on factors such as: specific costs the student may face (i.e., childcare expenses); additional costs associated with completing WIL (i.e., lost income, purchase of materials/equipment); and the duration and location of the WIL placement. Further, the WIL studentship may be open for applications before, during or after a WIL placement, and to students in a variety of discipline areas.

Document terms of the WIL studentship

Many WIL studentships include a range of terms, stipulating the required behaviors of different stakeholders. To promote transparency, all terms including eligibility and selection, should be documented in writing and disclosed to the student prior to application. Universities can develop standard form WIL studentship agreements which can be easily modified to facilitate the efficient creation of such documentation. Common terms, drawn from the study, include: conditions the student must satisfy, grounds for termination of the agreement, provision for cessation of payment/refund after termination, and restrictions on/preferences for use of payments.

CONCLUSION

The research reported in this article is part of the first known systematic study of WIL studentships in Australia. Nevertheless, a significant limitation of the web-based method was that it captured data about available WIL studentships at only one point in time. Consequently, WIL studentships published after the search are not part of the 59 WIL studentships reported. Future research could replicate the web-based methodology in other jurisdictions, and subject to time and resources, collect data at various points during a calendar year, which would further enhance the depth of our understanding of the phenomena. Despite this limitation, stakeholders such as universities and donors can utilize the findings about the design of WIL studentships, as well as the recommendations, to evaluate existing schemes and to inform development of new WIL studentships. More broadly, the authors' wish is that the research generates greater interest among universities to incorporate WIL studentships as a student equity strategy, namely providing financial support for students of diverse backgrounds to access WIL opportunities.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL, in 2018 the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum. Defining elements of this educational approach requires that students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related task, and must involve three stakeholders; the student, the university, and the workplace". Examples of practice include off-campus, workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (Co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, etc. WIL is related to, but not the same as, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is ongoing financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ; www.wilnz.nz), and the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and received periodic sponsorship from the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE).

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Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

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