

# The Australian Collaborative Education Network student scholarship for work-integrated learning 2010 - 2014

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The increasing emphasis on embedding work-integrated learning (WIL) in the higher education curriculum has impacted on teaching and learning approaches. While the benefits of incorporating experiential learning in the student experience are recognized by all stakeholders, additional costs incurred by students have not been identified. At the same time the Australian Federal Government's review of base funding has recommended a detailed assessment of the costs of providing student placements across all disciplines - in particular health and education. Data collected from over a thousand Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) student scholarship applicants indicate travel, accommodation, food, clothing, equipment and loss of income are of major concern especially for students on mandatory, lengthy placements involving relocation. We present a range of data from the five-years of the scholarship to inform discussion of costs from the student perspective which highlighted major concerns. The implications for ACEN are described and recommendations made to improve practice. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2015, 16(4), 241-254*)

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, practice-based learning, access and equity, Australia

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Most Australian universities have operational and strategic targets associated with embedding WIL in the curriculum according to the Skills Australia Report (DEEWR, 2010). Embedding authentic learning experiences in higher education curriculum to enhance the employability of graduates and ease the transition from study to work has become increasingly important. Curriculum design is expected to support the transition from student to professional and nurture intellectual, social and cultural capital (Knight & Yorke, 2004; Peach & Matthews, 2011). A blend of theory and practice in curriculum is integral to a holistic approach which broadens the educational experience and helps graduates develop the attributes, personal qualities, and self-efficacy necessary for a competitive, global employment market (Orrell, 2011). The 'Statement of Intent, Work Integrated Learning, Strengthening University and Business Partnerships' (Universities Australia, 2014) highlights the importance currently placed on students' work readiness and the impetus for all Australian Universities to create opportunities to make them so. Work readiness developed through WIL opportunities requires students to have the financial means to engage in this part of their course.

Across the world, employers and industry bodies are exerting increasing pressure on universities to produce work ready graduates who have had exposure to, and experience of, the workplace throughout their degree (Clements & Cord, 2013; Nixon, Smith, Stafford, & Camm, 2006). The ultimate outcome is to produce graduates who demonstrate proficiency in the skills and attributes employers deem to be essential for creative, innovative, and resilient employees. The approach of explicitly addressing industry defined attributes is being adopted by a growing number of professions. Industry accreditation is perceived as a mechanism for elevating the status of a profession and informs education standards and academic quality (Ewan, 2009). A work based experience of a specified timeframe frequently

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forms part of the criteria for a program of study to achieve industry accreditation. Despite mandatory work based WIL activities being resource intensive for both the institution and the student, they are an essential component of many degree programs to ensure students gain employment upon completion.

For the purposes of this paper WIL refers to a placement within curriculum where students apply theory to practice in authentic professional workplace setting under the supervision of professionals. An increasing emphasis on embedding WIL in the curriculum has impacted on teaching and learning approaches in Australian higher education institutions *Base Funding Report* (Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2011). Yet whilst the benefits and costs of these approaches have been identified (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Patrick et al., 2009) insufficient attention has been paid to the financial and personal burden for students studying subjects with a work-integrated learning component.

There are a range of variables that impact on the effectiveness of WIL in the curriculum and the cost implications for institutions, students, and industry partners. The federal government's review of base funding to universities (DEEWR, 2011) acknowledges that WIL has spread widely through the disciplines at a time when increasing access and participation of disadvantaged students in higher education is a priority. Yet, many students need to be in paid work to have sufficient income to live; some struggle to live within Government support payments; and others may have multiple disadvantage, for example, rural, Indigenous, disability, and/or have carer responsibilities. For many low income students, total expenditure is often greater than income and engagement in WIL adds increased pressure to weekly costs of living such as rent, groceries and transport. Many students rely on help from their families and use credit cards or savings in order to meet these costs (QUT Equity Services Training and Development Program, 2011). In the design of any WIL program or event consideration must therefore be given to the financial consequences for students.

This paper contributes to understanding these issues through an analysis of applications received for the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) Student Scholarships from 2010 to 2014. This analysis is intended to provide an evidence-base to identify and understand the financial difficulties some students encounter when undertaking WIL activities. It is hoped that this analysis will inform the development of strategies to help address the issues identified. The paper provides an overview of the scholarship process, characteristics of the applicants, and a discussion of the costs and benefits identified by applicants. The paper concludes with implications of the findings for the scholarship scheme and recommendations for ACEN's role and the universities role in ensuring that these issues are given greater consideration across the sector.

#### THE ACEN STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

First introduced in 2010, the purpose of the ACEN's annual scholarships are to provide financial support for students who are required to complete a WIL activity in the workplace. Only students from universities that are financial members of ACEN are eligible to apply. Initially three scholarships of \$1,000 each were offered. With an annual increase, by 2013, ACEN allocated funding for five scholarships of \$1,500 each. The scholarships are advertised through the ACEN website and promoted by ACEN representatives at member institutions.

In 2010, the first year scholarships were offered, 70 applications were received. In 2011, 828 applications were received for three scholarships. Following the introduction in 2012 of specific criteria intended to reduce the resource intensive administration of processing large numbers of applications, one hundred and twenty three eligible applications were submitted for the five scholarships at \$1,500 each. In 2013, 340 applications were received for five \$1,500 scholarships. A total of 315 applications were received in 2014 with recipients receiving \$1,500 each.

The analysis of the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 applications was based on a mixed method approach to maximize the findings through the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data sets (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011). Analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken to assess the impact of multiple aspects associated with financial hardship experienced whilst engaged in WIL. Qualitative data, including direct quotes from applicants, have been used to capture key themes present in the data. These quotes are presented verbatim with identifying features removed in accordance with ethics approval from Curtin University (HR33/2012).

Limitations of the analysis include difficulties in extracting data from the qualitative responses of the applicants. The open-ended questions used in the 2011 application created confusion for some applicants. In some cases applicants misunderstood the question, resulting in missing data. For other variables such as the location of the WIL activity, the question was vague. In 2011, we asked about the location of the WIL placement and that data strongly influenced the decision to change the criteria in 2012 and 2014, thereby, confining applicants to a more specified placement.

As a consequence, and in order to target the scholarships to those students who incurred the greatest expense, in 2012, 2013, and 2014 scholarship eligibility was limited to those students undertaking work placements in rural and remote locations requiring students to relocate from their existing place of residence. Rural and remote locations were determined on the basis of the RA2- RA5 on the 'National map from Department of Health and Aging' (Australian Government Department of Health and Aging, 2012)

Another limitation of this analysis is that it cannot be directly compared with the 2010 data due to changes in the questions and the method of analysis. Where possible, broad trends in comparative data from 2011 - 2014 have been identified and are presented below. The next sections presents samples of data related to the characteristics of the applicants including their university and degree, WIL location, sources of income, and financial impact.

## RESULTS

### *University and Degree*

While applications received between 2010 and 2014 were from universities throughout Australia, not all universities were represented. Several universities had a significantly higher number of applicants in comparison to others. In 2010, Flinders University, Griffith University and RMIT University had the highest number of applications compared to 2011 when the highest proportion of applications were received from Griffith University (22%), Charles Sturt University (17%) and Southern Cross University (10%). Raw numbers for 2011 are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Number of applicants applying for the ACEN Scholarship in 2011 by university

University	Number of applications
Griffith University	182
Charles Sturt University	139
Southern Cross University	88
Flinders University	77
University of Newcastle	51
Monash University	47
Curtin University of Technology	36
Queensland University of Technology	33
University of Ballarat	22
University of Canberra	20
University of the Sunshine Coast	18
University of New South Wales	15
Deakin University	12
University of Technology Sydney	11

Note: Universities with less than 10 applications in 2011 were: University of Sydney, University of Tasmania, Australian Catholic University, University of Melbourne, Victoria University, RMIT University, University of Western Australia, Macquarie University, Adelaide University, La Trobe University, Wollongong University, Queensland University of Technology, Charles Darwin University.

For the purposes of analysis in 2011, course names were consolidated (e.g., Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Education were considered to be the same) and majors were excluded. Scholarship applicants were studying in 91 different academic programs. Seventy-nine applicants were undertaking master programs and five applicants were completing doctoral programs. Sixty-seven students were undertaking double degrees. Five applicants indicated they were studying by distance education. The majority of applicants were studying a Bachelor of Nursing (23%) or a Bachelor of Education (20%). The bulk of applicants were female and this is reflected in a high proportion of the applicants studying nursing and education.

By 2013 applications came from students undertaking WIL in rural and remote placements associated with 23 universities as shown in Table 2. It is likely that the emphasis on particular disciplines is the result of more industrious promotion of the scholarship. The emphasis of health disciplines is possibly a result of large cohorts, professional accreditation requirements, an emphasis on WIL placements in degree programs; and an increased awareness of the demands WIL places on students.

#### *Location of WIL placement*

In 2011, 366 applicants stated the location of their placement, or that they would be undertaking their placement in a rural, regional or metropolitan setting. Of those applicants who did not state where their placement was located, many had not had their placement allocated at the time they applied for the scholarship. The following definitions were used:

- Rural – population less than 10,000
- Regional - population 10,000 – 200,000
- Metropolitan - population greater than 200,000 or capital city.
- Overseas – non-Australian Countries.

TABLE 2: Number of 2013 applicants applying for the ACEN Scholarship by university and discipline.

<b>University</b>	<b>(x=n)</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>(x=n)</b>
Charles Sturt University	62	Nursing	16
Edith Cowan	4		
Flinders University	37	Nursing	6
Curtin University	9	Nutrition and Dietetics	2
Griffith University	32	Nursing	7
James Cook	19	Nursing	4
Queensland University of Technology	50	Paramedic Science	6
RMIT	8	Medicine	3
Charles Darwin University	2		
Southern Cross University	8	Nursing	3
University of Notre Dame	6	Nursing	2
University of Queensland	5	Medicine	2
University of Canberra	3		
University of Newcastle	2		
University of South Australia	22	Nursing	4
University of Sydney	4		
Murdoch University	2		

Note: Universities with single applications were: Australian Catholic University, Deakin University, Monash University, University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong and the University of Melbourne. Health related disciplines dominated in 2014 with 36.5% of the applications submitted by students studying a professional degree in a health area.

In 2011 the Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Occupational Therapy and Bachelor of Physiotherapy recorded the highest number of applicants undertaking rural and regional placements. Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Bachelor of Veterinary Biology had relatively high numbers undertaking rural placements. Bachelor of Social Work had the highest proportion of applicants undertaking metropolitan placements while the Bachelor of Business had the highest proportion of applicants undertaking overseas placements.

In 2013, 31% of applicants travelled between 100-500 kilometers to the placement site. Seventeen percent said they travelled 1,000-2,000km and 14% over 2,000km. These figures support the claim of difficulties in keeping part-time employment, travel costs and likely double rent.

#### *Sources of Income*

In 2011 most applicants had multiple sources of income with 61% in 2011 receiving Youth Allowance or other Centrelink benefits and many supplementing this income with casual or part time work. In 2011 nearly 10% of applicants had received a scholarship of some sort for their studies (not including the Youth Allowance "scholarship" that all youth allowance students receive). Applicants in 2012 and 2013 were not asked about sources of income, as we felt there was no value in that information given that it could not be and ought not be confirmed during application analysis.

*Financial Impact of WIL*

Figure 1 shows in the 2011 scholarship round, loss of income was reported as the primary concern for most applicants, with a large number indicating that they would have to give up paid work in order to complete their WIL activity.

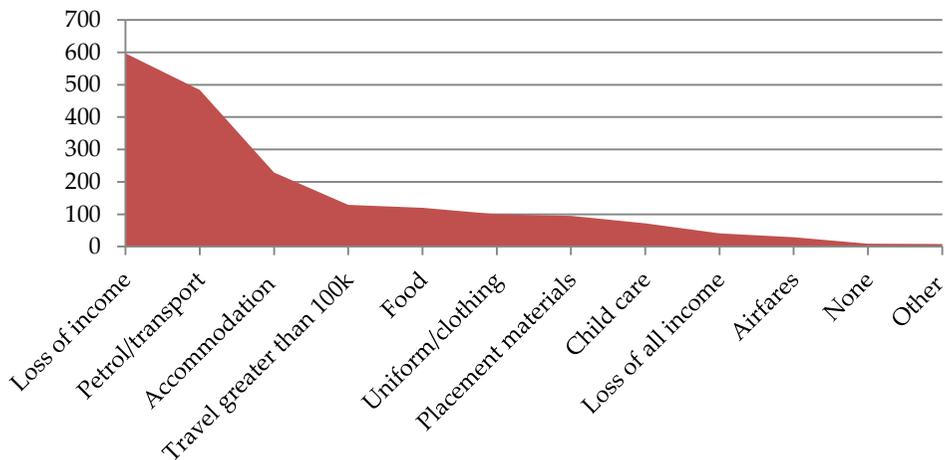


FIGURE 1: Financial impacts of WIL according to the applicants for the 2011 Scholarship (multiple responses allowed)

A small number of applicants also indicated they would receive reduced Centrelink benefits as they are not considered full time students whilst undertaking WIL. Five percent of applicants reported that their WIL would cause them to lose all sources of income for the duration of their placement. (FTB: Family Tax Benefit).

In 2011, 59% of applicants also indicated that travel to and from their placements would be a significant cost either due to the cost of fuel or public transport. This was particularly the case where applicants were planning to drive to rural or regional placements. Nearly 28% of applicants were concerned that they would have to pay for accommodation when on placement, while maintaining their existing place of residence.

While on placement, 14.5% indicated that they would spend more on food. Some applicants spoke of this in terms of buying food when relocating for placement, while others felt they would need to buy lunch at work when on placement. Some applicants were simply unsure how they would meet the cost of this necessity on such a tight budget with the additional costs of WIL. Twelve percent of applicants mentioned they would need to purchase uniforms, professional clothing, or protective clothing for their placements, and 11% stated they would need to purchase a range of materials for their placements, including texts, tools, police checks, or have vaccinations (e.g., Hepatitis B for clinical placements).

A further 9% of applicants indicated that child care costs would be incurred as a direct result of their WIL placement and 3.5% of applicants indicated they would need to cover the cost of airfares for their placements. This included students travelling interstate, or to regional areas as well as students planning overseas placements.

A considerable number of 2011 applicants were undertaking placements in rural or regional settings. Many of these applicants spoke of wanting to gain a range of experiences in diverse settings. Others stated that gaining experience across an array of metropolitan, regional, and rural settings was a requirement of their academic program. A reverberating theme was the concern over the need to relocate for the duration of the placement, the costs associated with relocation, and loss of income. This was particularly prevalent in education degrees. As one scholarship student said:

We have been told we may not even get placed in our town of residence, so if this was to occur I would be out of pocket a lot, due to rent and bills having to be paid back home, childcare and babysitting for my son during the weekdays and also travel expenses and any expenses while I am wherever they choose to send me. (Applicant 389)

The cost of petrol, public transport and other travel was also of concern to most applicants. They were concerned at the cost of driving long distances to rural and regional placements, as well as the cost of driving every day to local placements.

Other applicants were concerned about the cost of public transport, or felt they would need to utilize taxis regularly due to a lack of public transport and their inability to drive. Several applicants who were required to undertake shift work for their placement mentioned using taxis to get home late at night as they felt unsafe on public transport.

Out-of-pocket expenses I will incur when on placement involve transport costs. I will need to purchase bus tickets and on my late shifts I will need to pay for a taxi to drive me home, for safety reasons (as opposed to taking a bus). (Applicant 187)

The cost of food was of concern to a large number of applicants. Many felt they would have increased costs as they would need to purchase lunch while on placement. Others were concerned about the cost of food in rural and regional locations. Many applicants were concerned with how they would meet this basic necessity with reduced income and the increased cost of WIL.

The costs of uniforms or appropriate clothing and placement materials were also mentioned. Placement materials varied from teaching resources for Bachelor of Education students, to stethoscopes and medical equipment for nursing and medical students. Vaccinations, police checks, and text books specific for placement were also classified as placement materials for the purpose of analysis.

These costs were quite high for some students. With Bachelor of Education students for example, placement materials tended to be listed by those who had been on placement before and had a better idea of what would be required of them and the need to provide teaching resources. One said, "I will have to purchase teaching resources, stationary, art/craft supplies and the incidentals that are associated with teaching. Previous experiences predict that I will be spending anywhere from \$50 to \$100 a week on resources and/or material". (Applicant 649).

Child care costs were of concern to both sole parents and partnered parents in 2011. Twenty-two per cent of applicants were parents, and almost half were concerned about costs of child care. As well as the financial impact of child care, parents spoke of the difficulty in negotiating their day around the opening hours of child care centers. Several partnered applicants spoke of loss of income due to their partner taking time to pick up children from childcare or taking leave from work to assume child care duties. Parents also spoke of the

difficulty in balancing paid work, study, family responsibilities, and the added complexity of undertaking a WIL placement. For example:

During the 5 week placement I will have my 1 year old son in day care 3 days a week which will cost us approximately \$120 per week, and my husband will look after our son 2 days a week, which will diminish our weekly income by approximately \$300 per week. (Applicant 71)

Figure 2 shows, the self-reported living status of the 2012 applicants, of which 51% were single and self-supporting. In addition, in 2012 56% of the 123 applicants said they would need to pay rent at the location of the WIL placement while continuing payment for their existing place of residence. Eighty-two percent said they would lose income whereas 10% said they would earn income while on placement. In 2012, 58% of applicants cited rent, 60% food and 81% transport as out-of-pocket expenses incurred during WIL.

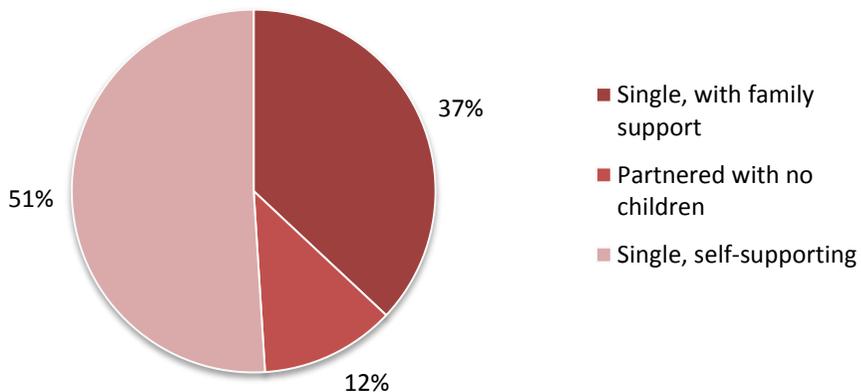


FIGURE 2: The 2012 ACEN Scholarship applicants self-reported living status

Again, the self-supporting student was the largest category in self-reported living status of the applicants for the 2013 scholarship: 40% said they were single, living away, financially independent. Confirming the trend from previous iterations of the ACEN Scholarship, 57% of 2013 applicants indicated that they will need to pay double rent and only 16% will earn some income while they are on placement. In 2014 35% of the 315 applicants reported the need to pay double rent with only 8% of the total applicants earning an income while on placement.

*Benefits of WIL Placements*

The majority of scholarship applicants stated WIL was an extremely valuable part of their education. There was no indication from applicants that WIL was too much to bear, albeit some found it extremely difficult. Most applicants were grateful for a rare learning experience linked to career aspirations. For example one applicant wrote:

Opportunities exist in [name of country] for product development, as it is a country that has only recently been open to foreign markets. I have a specific career goal of working for an organization that practices the principles of fair trade; creating real opportunities for otherwise disadvantaged people. (Applicant 125)

And another said:

One month working in [name of organization] will expose me to cutting edge interventions used to treat the most serious and complicated of ... conditions... This placement will also allow me to give something back as a medical student to the hospital system in which I have trained, as I will be working as a Doctor in ... in particular, volunteering whatever skills I have that may be needed in a somewhat resource-poor setting. (Applicant 652)

The examples given above highlight the extraordinary opportunities students are exposed to during their tertiary education to delve deeply into their disciplinary practices in a variety of settings (Patrick et al., 2009). Nonetheless the larger number of applications showed beyond any doubt that even WIL activities undertaken locally add significantly to already stretched, day-to-day expenses. These exacerbated financial difficulties can impact on course completion; deter students from some fields of study; and create a sense of despair and anxiety in students with increasing indebtedness (QUT Equity Services Training and Development Program, 2011).

#### *Structure of WIL Placements*

The structure of WIL placements appears to have significant impact on the ability of students to cope financially. Block placements of 4 to 6 weeks full time work significantly reduce the amount of time available for part time or casual work.

My placement is six weeks of full time unpaid work as a result I was forced to cut down my paid working hours from 15hrs-20hrs/week to 4 hours a week. In addition to that petrol, food, rent and other work related expenses placed more pressure on my budget. (Applicant 30)

Some students reported being advised by their academic advisors not to undertake other forms of paid work during their placements, so as not to adversely affect their performance whilst on a WIL placement.

Unpaid placements that take place over the summer break are also problematic as many students use this time to work full time in order to supplement reduced income during semester. Undertaking an unpaid WIL placement at this time has the potential to reduce earning capacity and financial stability during the year.

A concern for many students was the number of placements they were required to undertake over the course of their degree where they incur a financial loss with each placement. The applicants who were required to undertake multiple placements over the entire degree program reported an inability to recover from each financial loss before the next placement occurs.

Without completing every placement successfully we are unable to demonstrate that we will be able to work constructively, independently and precisely within a healthcare environment. The added strain that financial worries will add while I'm on placement adds an extra unnecessary stress while trying to complete such an important assessment. (Applicant 366)

Several students also reported that they would face reduced Centrelink benefits or lose benefits entirely as they would no longer be considered full time students whilst undertaking WIL. These students were extremely concerned about their financial stability as they felt they would lose all sources of income including paid work as well as benefits.

Of the 2012 applications, 1% reported the placement would last one week, 3% said two weeks, 6% said they would be three week placements, 13% four weeks, 17% five weeks and 60% other lengths of time. Ninety-two percent of them said they would be engaged in the placement for more than four days of each of those weeks.

In contrast 25% of the 2013 applicants reported that the WIL activities continued for eight to ten weeks with 36% saying their WIL was for in excess of ten weeks. The 2014 figures are presented in Table 3 that in contrast shows the six to eight week placement was the most common length of WIL which may reflect different strategies or the different cohort – the high percentage of health students who applied for the Scholarship this year.

TABLE 3: The time engaged in WIL as reported by 2014 applicants

Length of placement	n	(%)
3 weeks	10	3%
4 weeks	55	17%
5 weeks	64	20%
6 to 8 week	69	22%
8 to 10 weeks	57	18%
more than 10 weeks	60	19%
Total:	315	100%

## DISCUSSION

Even though most Australian universities have operational and strategic targets associated with embedding WIL in the curriculum according to the *Skills Australia Annual Report* (DEEWR, 2010) the costs of attending work-integrated learning events range greatly and, in the case of non-mandatory WIL options, must be weighed by individuals against the perceived educational value. The age and circumstances of learners varies considerably and there will be an expectation that they will conform to the social norms of the community they enter (Campbell, 2009). This can be stressful and difficult for students with diverse learning needs. Campbell attests that learners want to fit in with the environment and its people, they do not want to be sidelined. Arguably, how they are treated during WIL impacts on their sense of value for their efforts.

Evidence suggests a WIL experience has a positive influence on retention, in particular in under-represented student groups (McEwen & Trede, 2014). This is important to the widening participation agenda (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012). Moreover, the blend of theory and practice considered integral to a holistic curriculum, to a broader educational experience and the development of graduates attributes, personal qualities, and self-efficacy necessary for a competitive, global employment market (Orrell, 2011) has both financial and personal costs for students, particularly when the WIL activity is compulsory such as in the health disciplines.

The lengths as well as the structure of the actual placement are key considerations. The WIL experience is highly valued when the structure permits learners to have greater independence in their role as the placement proceeds and as they understand more about the

workplace community (Fleming & Eames, 2005). Greater independence is desirable towards the end of the curriculum to assist transition and this underpins the notion of the Statement of Intent (Universities Australia, 2014). As an aside, in China, internships are now regarded by learners and host organizations to be the preferred pathway to entry-level professional positions (Rose, 2013).

The location of the WIL placement varies as does the length with a fair percentage of applicants for the scholarship reporting a placement of more than 10 weeks which, arguably, increases the costs in most cases. The data show that while universities mentioned in the applications are providing a good mix of metropolitan, regional, and rural placements across disciplines, participation in placements that require travel creates additional financial strain. Accommodation, fuel, transport, and the costs of uniforms, clothing and placement materials are identified as key expenditures for most students. Child care costs are also significant for those students who are parents, whether they are partnered or sole parents. Whilst this hardship can be complex; relative; and difficult to define and measure, an integrated, collaborative, and sustainable solution is required for change. The core challenge is to ensure university is affordable and accessible to all those who aspire to further education (QUT Equity Services Training and Development Program, 2011). Clearly, this is an important area for ongoing monitoring across the higher education sector and for future research. This is particularly important given the recently signed *Statement of Intent* (Universities Australia, 2014) which outlines the plan to improve, the scale, breadth and value of WIL to improve the work-readiness of graduates. Universities Australia, Business Council of Australia, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group and ACEN are signatories to the *Statement of Intent*.

Models of some WIL placements cause additional costs for students. There is scope for higher education institutions in partnership with industry to be more flexible with the way placements are managed. Timeframes for WIL placements could be adjusted to accommodate students experiencing financial difficulty. For example in instead of a nursing placement being five-days per week over several weeks, how many universities offer an option for students to take a nursing placement one day a week over a year? A number of universities have on campus facilities such as health clinics where, under appropriate supervision, students undertake placement by providing health services to the local community. These types of arrangements also facilitates interdisciplinary clinical education and practice. This might be a viable model for other disciplines so that, while they learn, students provide service to the local community as well as the university community.

An innovative, industrious and agile workforce is integral to economic and social well-being of a nation. 'Human capital' is perceived as the most valuable asset for a sustainable and productive economy. The expectation is that higher education institutions will produce work-ready graduates equipped with the skills to contribute effectively to the Australian economy in a globally competitive environment (van Rooijen, 2011). WIL, as an integrated curriculum component of the student experience, is increasingly recognized as a strategy for enhancing students' skill acquisition and building employability capabilities (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2014; Yorke, 2011). Mutually beneficial partnerships between higher education institutions and industry underpins successful WIL, thereby facilitating authentic and engaging learning experiences where students practice professional responsibilities alongside practitioners in the workplace.

In this paper we did not seek to solve an educational issue, rather to highlight the consequences of an educational strategy and suggest how the adverse impact of the cost to students might be otherwise managed. With unequivocal evidence that WIL makes a unique contribution to the employment readiness of students (Smith et al., 2014) it is incumbent on universities to incorporate experiential learning in the curriculum where WIL is scaffolded across the degree to optimize the proficiency of students in a work-based setting.

## CONCLUSION

The ACEN Student Scholarship is attracting increasing attention from across the sector with the majority of applicants studying nursing and other health disciplines. Traditionally, the curricula for these disciplines have a mandatory WIL component that is based in the workplace. Given the federal government's focus on widening participation and social inclusion, coupled with rapid change and an increased emphasis on WIL in the curriculum, a systematic and informed approach is needed to improve opportunities for successful engagement by *all* students.

While the number of applicants varies according to the criteria for the scholarship, overall the numbers of applicants have increased. The universities and disciplines represented in the applications are indicative of a broader awareness of the scholarship and/or a greater need for the funds provided by the scholarship.

The analysis of ACEN's WIL Scholarship applications between 2010 and 2014 shows that students value the opportunity to participate in WIL programs and they appreciate the subsequent learning and experience. However, there is no doubt that WIL placements create financial hardship for many students. Loss of income as a result of a reduction in paid work, loss of government benefits in some instances; and increased living expenses in order to undertake the placement causes additional stress for students. Clearly, this is an important area for ongoing monitoring across the higher education sector and for future research. This is particularly important given the recently signed *Statement of Intent* (Universities Australia, 2014). The very notion that in some instances students are advised not to undertake other forms of paid work during their placements, so as not to adversely affect their performance whilst on a WIL placement highlights a lack of consideration of student's circumstances. Why can't the students be offered a choice of a range of different models so they may maintain their standard of living and adhere to their other personal responsibilities? The concept is in tension with the notion of the student as a consumer of education and of the equity agenda.

This paper is intended to raise awareness of the issues so that ACEN, in collaboration with university colleagues, university equity services, and student associations can advocate on behalf of students. Lobbying federal government and industry to explore ways for securing increased funding and developing strategies to reduce costs associated with this important aspect of the university curriculum is recommended as a way forward.

Accordingly, based on this evidence, the following recommendations for universities have emerged from the study:

- be more flexible and mindful when designing WIL activities to ensure students are not overburdened with excessive costs.
- consider offering more than one model of WIL for the same learning objectives to accommodate students' diverse needs, circumstances and affordances.
- negotiate partnerships with government and industry to enhance WIL outcomes.

University academics need to be more flexible and the professional accreditation bodies and industry must align their expectations and practices to allow for greater flexibility. The Statement of Intent provides this impetus.

'The Office of Learning and Teaching Project Report: Assessing the impact of WIL on student work-readiness' (Smith et al., 2014) provides a sound evidence-base that WIL does have a positive impact on students' work-readiness. Due to the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of WIL, a complex research design was warranted. A suite of five progressive studies was undertaken, each informed by the previous study (Ferns, Smith & Russell, 2014). This research highlighted the need for WIL to be embedded across the curriculum to enable developmental acquisition of skills. The quality of the WIL activity is pivotal to the magnitude of the impact and the benefits for students.

Finally, to further explore the student engagement in WIL, the authors and others are currently undertaking an ACEN endorsed initiative – an Office of Learning and Teaching Grant for a project entitled: 'Building institutional capacity to enhance access, participation and progression in work-integrated learning (WIL)' (Peach et al., 2014). The outcomes of this project will contribute to the discourse student engagement and success in experiential learning events in the professional placement setting. The products of the study will be available through a series of publications and presentations and on a designated website as the project progresses.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sophie Edwards for her statistical analysis of the 2011 ACEN Work Integrated Learning Scholarship Applications.

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## About the Journal

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education publishes peer-reviewed original research, topical issues, and best practice articles from throughout the world dealing with Cooperative Education (Co-op) and Work-Integrated Learning/Education (WIL).

In this Journal, Co-op/WIL is defined as an educational approach that uses relevant work-based projects that form an integrated and assessed part of an academic program of study (e.g., work placements, internships, practicum). These programs should have clear linkages with, or add to, the knowledge and skill base of the academic program. These programs can be described by a variety of names, such as cooperative and work-integrated education, work-based learning, workplace learning, professional training, industry-based learning, engaged industry learning, career and technical education, internships, experiential education, experiential learning, vocational education and training, fieldwork education, and service learning.

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

## Submitting Manuscripts

Before submitting a manuscript, please ensure that the 'instructions for authors' has been followed ([www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors](http://www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors)). All manuscripts are to be submitted for blind review directly to the Editor-in-Chief ([editor@apjce.org](mailto:editor@apjce.org)) by way of email attachment. All submissions of manuscripts must be in Microsoft Word format, with manuscript word counts between 3,000 and 5,000 words (excluding references).

All manuscripts, if deemed relevant to the Journal's audience, will be double-blind reviewed by two or more reviewers. Manuscripts submitted to the Journal with authors names included will have the authors' names removed by the Editor-in-Chief before being reviewed to ensure anonymity.

Typically, authors receive the reviewers' comments about 1.5 months after the submission of the manuscript. The Journal uses a constructive process for review and preparation of the manuscript, and encourages its reviewers to give supportive and extensive feedback on the requirements for improving the manuscript as well as guidance on how to make the amendments.

If the manuscript is deemed acceptable for publication, and reviewers' comments have been satisfactorily addressed, the manuscript is prepared for publication by the Copy Editor. The Copy Editor may correspond with the authors to check details, if required. Final publication is by discretion of the Editor-in-Chief. Final published form of the manuscript is via the Journal website ([www.apjce.org](http://www.apjce.org)), authors will be notified and sent a PDF copy of the final manuscript. There is no charge for publishing in APJCE and the Journal allows free open access for its readers.

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Types of manuscripts the Journal accepts are primarily of two forms; *research reports* describing research into aspects of Cooperative Education and Work Integrated Learning/Education, and *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and give critical explorative discussion around a topical issue.

The Journal does also accept *best practice* papers but only if it present a unique or innovative practice of a Co-op/WIL program that is likely to be of interest to the broader Co-op/WIL community. The Journal also accepts a limited number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

*Research reports* should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry, a 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 for practitioners, and a conclusion preferably incorporating suggestions for further research.

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



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Publisher: New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education