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Host organizations' perceptions to providing safe and inclusive work-integrated learning programs for students with disability

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Inclusive work-integrated learning (WIL) requires collaboration between universities, host organizations and students, particularly, when designing and delivering WIL for students with disabilities. Host organizations, however, are not often included in the collaborations. This study explored host organization knowledge, capacity and challenges to providing WIL experiences for students with disability. A case study multi-method approach comprising an online survey and focus groups was undertaken. Host organizations, represented by supervisors, providing WIL to students enrolled in health courses at two Australian higher education institutions participated. The perceived need for student disclosure, office building limitations, and host organization limited knowledge of WIL expectations, training and student needs impeded the development and provision of optimal WIL experiences for students with disability. A strengths-based approach is proposed to improve the inclusion of host organizations in stakeholder collaborations, their capacity and confidence to support students with disability on WIL and to provide relatable student WIL experiences.

Keywords: Disability, university students, strengths-based, host organizations.

Equitable and successful work-integrated learning (WIL) requires a tripartite arrangement, whereby collaboration between stakeholders (universities, host organizations and students) occurs across all stages of the WIL continuum, before, during and after the WIL experience (Campbell et al., 2019; Patrick et al., 2008). However, host organizations are often not included in these collaborations despite being identified as key in the development and sustainability of higher education WIL (Campbell et al., 2019; Lawlis et al., 2023; Patrick et al., 2008; Universities Australia et al., 2015). Specifically, the 2008 national scoping study stated a need for a stakeholder integrated approach and documented the importance of employers in providing effective WIL experiences (Patrick et al., 2008). The 2015 *National Strategy on Work-Integrated Learning* took this further and identified a need to build support for host organizations to increase WIL participation as one of the eight key areas to ensure the advancement of WIL (Universities Australia et al., 2015). Similarly, the 2019 *Framework of Assuring Quality in Work Integrated Learning* (Campbell et al., 2019), has included stakeholder engagement as one of the four framework domains and reiterated the importance of stakeholder partnerships including host organizations, in the design and strategic approach to WIL and quality of the WIL experience (Campbell et al., 2019). These

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documents, while revolutionary in the advancement of WIL over the last 15 years, highlight the complexity of developing and conducting effective and appropriate WIL experiences. Further, these documents suggest collaborative stakeholder engagement has not been fully achieved, particularly in relation to the inclusion of host organizations in the WIL process. Host organizations have indicated their willingness to provide more meaningful and inclusive WIL for students with disability (Mackaway, 2019) and their important role in achieving effective WIL cannot be overstated. Host organizations provide an opportunity for students to translate classroom theory, knowledge and skills into work activities, provide exposure to the work environment and foster future workforce development and direction (Mackaway, 2019; Rodger et al., 2011).

Domestic students with disability enrolling in Australian higher education institutions has increased, from 5.5% of total enrolments in 2014 to 7.4% in 2020 (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, 2023), with many of these students required to undertake one or more WIL experience as part of their degree. These figures do not fully represent the number of actual students with disabilities enrolling in higher education institutions as they only include students who have chosen to disclose their disability. This paper refers to and uses the term students with disability to align with the People with Disability Australia language guidelines (People with Disability Australia, 2023). The term students with disability (and student with disability), utilizes person-first language with disability used as an uncountable noun. To ensure students are protected and provided with an optimal education experience, Australian higher education institutions and host organizations are required to follow the 1992 *Disability Discrimination Act* (Australian Government, 1992) and the *Disability Standards for Education* (Australian Government, 2005), whereby it is unlawful to deny or limit a student's access to any benefit provided by the educational authority and to have curricula components that excludes individuals with disabilities from participation. Higher education institutions also must make reasonable accommodations to ensure such access and opportunity to benefit from WIL. Similarly, host organizations are required to follow the same legislation (Australian Government, 1992), and ensure staff with disability have flexible work arrangements and workplace adjustments. For many organizations, WIL interns are treated as staff and thus this legislation applies to the intern by extension. In relation to WIL, the 2008 *WIL (Work-Integrated Learning) Report* recommends that stakeholders ensure equitable participation and access by all students by collaboratively developing WIL funding structures, policies, and strategic approaches (Patrick et al., 2008). Further, a key area of the *National Strategy on Work-Integrated Learning* is to address equity and access issues to enable all students to actively participate in WIL (Universities Australia et al., 2015). A lack of understanding from universities and host organizations around students living with disability has resulted in specific requirements of individuals or diverse learning requirements not being considered in current WIL pedagogical practices and has in many instances created deficit-focused perceptions of these students as problematic, increasing student marginalization (Brown et al., 2006; Bulk et al., 2017).

Students living with disability experience many emotions when engaging in WIL due to concerns of social isolation, discrimination, fitting-in and expectations of being able to do the job (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Brown et al., 2006; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Nolan et al., 2015; Rowe et al., 2019). The students' experience is heavily influenced by host organization and WIL supervisors' views of them, their disability, equitable learning experiences and the pressure to disclose their disability (Brown et al., 2006; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Hirneth & Mackenzie, 2004). While there is limited peer-reviewed work relating to host organizations, and the provision of WIL for students with disability, those who have published report mixed views when supporting students with disability (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Hirneth & Mackenzie, 2004; Langørgen et al., 2020; Nolan et al., 2015; Rowe et al., 2019). These views are often centered around the host organizations and WIL

supervisor's previous experiences (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013), limited understanding of legislation and policies, limited access to and participation in training (Beas-Collado & Carbo-Badal, 2020; Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Langørgen et al., 2020; Ryan, 2011) and the health professions view that individuals with a disability should not be working within that profession (Epstein, Rose et al., 2022; Ryan, 2011). A recent scoping review proposed that a shift in culture, views and behaviors by host organizations and their staff from a deficit-perspective to a positive or strength-based approach is required to facilitate inclusive WIL experiences for students with disability (Lawlis et al., 2023). A strengths-based approach focuses on the positive aspects of the group or phenomenon, such as a person's ability, capacities, and knowledge rather than deficits or individual differences. The approach involves individuals, groups and organizations knowing their own talents or others encouraging those to engage in positive behaviors to develop and apply their strengths to their field of work (Cederbaum & Klusaritz, 2009; Lopez & Louis, 2009) while also fostering acknowledgement of one's own limitations, negative behaviors and actions. It is anticipated that moving to a strengths-based approach, host organization cultures, behaviors and practices can change to more actively engage them in the WIL process. For example, this can be achieved by embedding facilitated collaboration between all stakeholders and the nurturing of host organizations through the WIL process.

The importance of improving host organization understanding and capacity to provide appropriate and bespoke support in delivering successful WIL is key to the student's experience and future career goals. Given the strategic intent to grow WIL equitably across the Australian education sector and the limited evidence base relating to host organizations' provision of WIL for students living with disability, there is clearly a need to improve the capacity, processes and quality of WIL provided to these students. To do this effectively, an understanding of the challenges from the perspective of host organizations is required. Thus, the research question addressed by this paper is: "What are the capacities and challenges of host organizations providing WIL for students with disability?" Subsequently, this paper shares the study findings, arising from this research question, and documents host organizations' knowledge, processes, capacity and challenges to provide WIL experiences to students living with disability.

METHOD

Study Design and Participants

A case study multi-method approach, conducted at two Australian higher education institutions, comprising an online survey and focus groups was undertaken between February and April 2022. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC-9333) and the Edith Cowan University Research Ethics Committee (2021-03033-ANDREW). Consent was obtained from host organization representatives prior to conducting focus group discussions. For the purpose of this study, a WIL experience is classified as either a placement or internship.

A purposeful sample of 40 WIL supervisors from host organizations who had previously provided a WIL opportunity for university students enrolled in health science, nutrition, psychology, public health and occupational therapy at the two higher education institutions were invited to participate. The sample comprised community-based health organizations, private practice, non-government and government organizations, and charities. Once agreement to participate had been received, the host organization representatives were sent a copy of the participant information sheet, link to the online survey with the consent form, and a time to attend a focus group discussion.

Twenty-eight host organizations providing a WIL experience for students from Occupational Therapy (n=12), Nutrition (n=9), Health Science (n=7), Psychology (n=7), Public Health (n=5), Human Movement (n=4), Counselling (n=2), Medicine (n=1), Exercise Physiology (n=1), Environmental Science (n=1), Chemistry (n=1) and Social Work (n=1) participated in the survey. Twenty of these host organizations were represented in the focus group discussions. Only one representative from each host organization participated in the online survey and the focus group discussions.

Survey and Focus Group Question Design, Data Collection and Analysis

The online survey and focus group questions were informed by the literature (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Hirneth & Mackenzie, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010; Ryan, 2011) and developed by the research team. Online survey questions comprised open text and closed questions that focused on the host organization's awareness and knowledge of relevant policies and procedures, current practices, and challenges when supervising a student with a disability on a WIL experience. The questions were piloted with two organizations prior to conducting this study, with no changes made. The focus group questions aimed to expand on the findings from the survey and identify resources and needs of the host organization to provide an exceptional WIL experience for students with disability. Examples of questions from the focus groups included: what information and resources they require to engage with and support students with disability, support received from the university, what challenges organizations have experienced when supporting a student with disability on WIL, and what concerns have prevented organizations from hosting students with disability on WIL.

Participants completed the online survey a week prior to attending the focus group, with the survey developed and administered through Qualtrics. Five focus groups, as described by Nyumba et al. (2018), were held online with a total of 20 participants, using Microsoft Teams. Focus group discussions lasted on average 45 minutes, were transcribed by the Microsoft Teams program, downloaded, and checked. Notes were taken during each focus group. Video recording of the focus group discussions did not occur to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Basic statistical analysis including distribution and count were used to analyze the survey data. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the focus group discussions. Inductive thematic analysis utilizes a bottom-up approach whereby the themes are driven by the participants views (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). The data was individually analyzed and coded, connections between the codes were identified, then sub-themes and themes developed (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS

Survey Findings – Work-Integrated Learning for Students with Disability

Of the 28 survey responses, 14 (50%) host organizations indicated they had not hosted a student with a disclosed disability, five (18%) organizations had hosted one student who had disclosed their disability, and nine (32%) organizations had hosted two or more students who had disclosed their disability. Nine (32%) supervisors stated the student openly disclosed their disability and/or required accommodation/s. Seven (50%) of those who had hosted a student with disability implemented reasonable accommodations for the student with host organizations stating the implementation of accommodations assisted the student. Reasonable accommodations implemented by the host organizations included: providing students with a suitable quiet or low sensory space to sit when the student became too overwhelmed, additional time to process or work, reduced workloads, a more

structured approach to the WIL experience with the use of timers and visual supports, and office flexibility such as having the ability to work from home. Office and technical changes included providing lower lighting, adjustments to set-up desk heights and computer monitor display, and provision of headphones. Four host organizations (n=28, 14%) stated they conducted a disability audit of the office to ensure the student's accommodations could be met. For example, in one organization, physical adjustments were made to the office to ensure they could accommodate a student in a wheelchair.

All organizations indicated they would like to receive information about reasonable accommodations prior to the student commencing the WIL experience, with some suggesting this be provided by the student at the time of the interview if the student felt comfortable. Otherwise, organizations believed the university should communicate information relating students' disability and the associated reasonable accommodations in the first instance. The preferred method of receiving information from the student or university regarding reasonable accommodations was via email (n=11/28), hard copy letter, or reasonable accommodation plan (n=3/28) with a follow-up conversation either via the phone or face-to-face (n=3/28) to confirm student needs and plans. Host organizations stated they were not provided with certain details and requested they be provided with the students' emergency contact details, university contact details, knowledge of the university student services to refer students and information about all conditions not just physical disability, as shared by the following host organization representative:

We were never informed of mental health implications and this has been the hardest issue to deal with mostly because we've not been informed. There still seems to be a belief that only mobility/visible disabilities are the ones that need to be communicated. This has left both us and the student flailing. (Survey participant 15)

Nine (n=28, 32%) host organizations have a policy and/or procedure in place for WIL experiences for students with disability. Other organizations stated they induct students using their workplace policy/procedure for newly commencing staff. Most host organization representatives (93%, n=26/28) were unaware of any legislation/rules and regulations specific to hosting students with disability on WIL. All host organizations were unaware of university policies and guidelines around hosting students with disability on WIL.

In relation to safety processes, host organizations apply the same staff policies/procedures to those students, with and without a disability or condition. Similar to commencing staff, students participate in an induction, including orientation and on-boarding. One organization employs an Inclusion Protection Officer, to provide additional support to staff and students if needed. Another created a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP) for a student with disability while on WIL.

Focus Group Findings

Five focus groups comprising 20 host organization representatives were conducted. Not all host organization representatives who completed the online survey attended a focus group. All representatives completed the required online survey prior to attending the focus group. Host organization representatives were from a variety of organizations, for example, private practice, health clinics, community based-health organizations and non-government organizations that provided placement/internship experiences to students.

The overall mood of each focus group was positive with participants open to hosting WIL students with disability. Seven host organizations had already hosted a WIL opportunity for students with a disclosed disability. The host organizations identified a number of limiting factors to providing a valuable WIL experience for students with disability, these have been combined into three key themes of: perceived need for the student to disclose their disability or accommodations, host organization's limited capacity to providing a WIL experience, and university responsibilities to involve host organizations in the WIL process (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Themes and subthemes to providing a WIL experience for students with disability from the host organizations' perspective.

Theme	Sub-themes
Perceived need for the student to disclose their disability or accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosure is the only way to understand what the student needs • Engaging in a universal approach to identifying strengths and weaknesses
Host organization's limited capacity to providing a WIL experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited staff knowledge about disability • Office building limitations • Lack of funding to provide resources for physical disabilities
University responsibilities to involve host organizations in the WIL process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors to improve host organization engagement in the WIL process • Providing resources to help understand WIL expectations and needs of students with disability.

Perceived Need for the Student To Disclose Their Disability or Accommodations

The host organizations' perceived need for the student to disclose their disability was a main topic of discussion across the focus groups. All host organization representatives acknowledged and respected that students do not have to disclose their disability under the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992). There was, however, overwhelming agreement by the host organization representatives that either the student needed to disclose their disability or the university had a responsibility to share this information with the host organization. According to the host organization representatives, being aware of either the disability/condition or reasonable accommodation was critical as they could: be better prepared, address trauma and/or triggers (particularly if the student experiences mental health conditions), determine the student's suitability to observe or engage with clients, and determine if reasonable accommodations were required. Host organization responses suggested the only way to find out what a student needed and to provide an optimal WIL experience was for students to disclose.

Disclosure was perceived by host organization representatives to help better understand the student's needs and how the student manages their disability and their skillset. Host organizations stated that knowing this information allowed them to better target activities and empower the student during the WIL experience. Essentially, host organizations reported, it is about "understanding the individual" (Focus Group participant 3) and "making the placement/ internship work for them [the students]" (Focus Group participant 1), and as summarized by the following host organization representative:

It's the same as whether I have a competent or not yet competent intern, we still need to understand what their skill set is and how we can best use them. So, I don't look at it in terms of like, this is a challenge. It's just understanding what that individual can do so not knowing is the worst thing. (Focus Group participant 3)

Host organizations reported that not knowing or understanding the student's disability and needs prior to the student commencing the WIL experience not only has a significant impact upon the WIL opportunity commencing but also continuing. Changes may be implemented too late, negatively impacting the staff and student confidence, and the student progression through their course, as one host organization representative explained:

But I think if it gets to the point where it becomes apparent that the internship is not possible. ... I don't know how to move forward with this. It's not suitable for this person that might be kinder than trying to get some kind of result out of them that they're not able to actually reach. (Focus group participant 2)

Despite their perceived need for disclosure, host organizations acknowledged that many students perceived disclosure differently and indicated this created challenges to understanding the students' needs. The host organizations believed that changing the narrative, engaging in more effective communication strategies, and providing a safe space for students to speak out was key to ensuring students can see the benefits in acknowledging and disclosing their disability or condition. This in turn can facilitate change within the host organization and university processes. Speaking to these points two host organization representatives' explained:

I think the important thing from the perspective of the student is they know that by declaring their disability and having those discussions up front it doesn't disadvantage them and actually advantages them. So, I think it's really important that they don't have fear of not going to get a placement. (Focus group participant 13)

If they feel that it will impact them, then we need to ensure the students feel confident to speak out to ensure students get help where needed. (Focus group participant 3)

Some host organizations though did not believe disclosure was required to better understand the students' needs and that it was the host organizations that needed to change their practices. Representatives from these organizations reported using a universal approach whereby every student is "treated the same." According to these host organization representatives, most students regardless of whether they have a disability or not will need something put in place to help address any challenges, weaknesses or gaps in their skillset and it was about identifying these early. One way is to find out specifics about the student and ask questions such as, "what would you do in this scenario?" (Focus group participant 1) early on, so then the WIL can be individualized to the student regardless of whether the student has a disability or not:

On day one I ask everyone what are their strengths, what are their weaknesses? Well, what do they think their weaknesses are and what are they afraid of, and what do they want to get out of the internship? (Focus group participant 1)

Having a conversation with the student and not assuming anything because a lot of disabilities are hidden and it's not obvious. So, it's having a conversation about what reasonable accommodations a person has. I'll do that for every single student that would do an internship

or program with us. So just treating them exactly the same, so that they can declare if they've got a disability or need some type of accommodation. (Focus group participant 11)

Host Organizations Perceived Limited Capacity to Providing a Work-Integrated Learning Experience

Host organizations reported numerous challenges to providing a WIL experience for students with disability. Many host organization representatives acknowledged training was needed to change host organization views as staff within these organizations do not fully understand disability or reasonable accommodations and felt that hosting a student with disability created a lot of work, as shared by one host organization representative:

For me as a supervisor taking on an intern with a disability, there's a higher level of responsibility that I have towards that intern, so I would like to establish beforehand with the third party what their needs are so that I can meet it and what my expectations are and if that's reasonable for them to come into the internship and be able to complete that without excessive stress. (Focus group participant 2)

More difficult challenges were related to the provision of physical resources. Old office buildings have limited space to provide a non-sensory room and offices located on the second floor reduce capacity to make reasonable accommodations for specific physical needs, as stated by one host organization representative:

The biggest hurdle we have at the moment is we don't have wheelchair accessible toilets. We have gender neutral toilets and we have private accessible spaces. We have to actually say from the get-go, we have a wheelchair accessible toilet in the building next to us. But in terms of offering someone an adequate solution, it's just not really reasonable to expect them to go out of the building, down the road around the corner with the special key. (Focus group participant 4)

In many cases, the host organizations stated they do not have the financial means to purchase required equipment and suggested that the university provide or hire out physical resources and equipment such as sit-stand desks, headphones, and Braille keyboards. Alternatively, host organizations reported students could obtain this equipment from their disability provider.

University Responsibilities to Involve Host Organizations in the Work-Integrated Learning Process

Overall, the host organization representatives were very happy with the support provided by the universities, although they did not believe they were equal partners in the WIL process and provided some suggestions to improve the level of host organization involvement. Host organizations stated that communication was key. Improved communication could be implemented through pre-WIL meetings with the university to ensure students and supervisors were familiarized with the internship/placement and reduce anxieties for both the student and host organization. More regular contact with the organization and students regarding student requirements particularly around reasonable accommodations and risk management were also identified as areas where further communication and support from the university was needed. The host organization representatives felt navigating university policies and procedures were challenging. Making these more accessible would allow host organizations and their staff to better understand university WIL requirements and students with disability. Finally, despite best attempts by university staff to be flexible and provide students with extra time due to mental health, host organizations stated the rules around extensions were sometimes limiting particularly when students were experiencing mental health episodes.

All host organization representatives agreed additional resources were needed to assist and support them when hosting a student with disability. These resources would not only provide host organizations with the confidence to support a student with disability, but ensure they have things in place before and during the WIL. The host organizations preferred resources that were a combination of easy to read, short, concise, interactive, module-based and easily accessible, and could include checklists, case studies, e-learning modules, workshops and information packs.

DISCUSSION

Exceptional WIL experiences for students with disability require the collaboration of all stakeholders (universities, host organizations and students). The host organization, in particular, can influence the student's view of the profession, their place within that profession, working environment (Langørgen & Magnus, 2020), and the student's future working life. If host organizations are not adequately included in stakeholder collaborations, there is a risk of a poor WIL experience for all involved (Langørgen & Magnus, 2020), including a reputational risk for the host organization and university (Cameron et al., 2019). Since 2008 there has been a call to include and support host organizations in the WIL process (Campbell et al., 2019; Patrick et al., 2008; Universities Australia et al., 2015). Host organizations generally felt included and supported by the university, although study findings indicate that improvements are needed to address the challenges to ensure better host organization understanding, involvement, and delivery of a WIL experience for students with disability. The challenges documented in this study are similar to those reported over the last 10-15 years (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Cameron et al., 2019; Hirneth & Mackenzie, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010; Ryan, 2011). Therefore, a different approach is needed to overcome the complex and intertwining challenges WIL stakeholders, and in particular, host organizations face in achieving an optimal WIL experience. Focusing on host organizations, the authors suggest a strengths-based approach to better engage, inform and prepare the host organization and the relevant WIL supervisor when engaging with students with disability.

Using a Strength-Based Approach to Change Host Organization Perceptions Around Disclosure

Utilizing a strengths-based approach is particularly important when addressing disclosure of disability. Students are not required to disclose their disability under the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1992). Despite this, host organizations in this and other studies believe they should be informed of a student's disability and/or the reasonable accommodations to ensure they, and their staff, provide a relatable and quality WIL experience (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Cameron et al., 2019; Rankin et al., 2010). By not disclosing, host organizations believe they cannot provide the required duty of care to their staff, patients and clients (Rankin et al., 2010) and for some there is a potential financial, reputational and legal risk (Cameron et al., 2019). Those contributing to the studies are, therefore, stating a positive and engaging WIL experience cannot be achieved unless a student discloses their disability, condition and/or the required accommodations. A strengths-based approach can challenge this thinking. Disability is individualized and many agree requires an individualized approach when providing a WIL experience (Beas-Collado & Carbo-Badal, 2020; Griffiths et al., 2010). Host organization representatives in this study also acknowledged that students with disability should not be singled out or treated differently, a sentiment also expressed by students (Brown et al., 2006; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Hirneth & Mackenzie, 2004; Langørgen et al., 2020). Regardless of whether a student has a disability or not, they may need assistance while participating in a WIL experience to achieve the required outcomes as highlighted by those involved in this study. A challenge for the host organization has been how to communicate with students with

disability to understand, identify, and then provide the relevant supports without singling them out to ensure an equitable WIL experience. Identifying these needs can be achieved through pre-WIL screening questions posed to all students, such as those developed by the authors of this research (Australian Collaborative Education Network, 2022). These questions open a dialogue between the student and the host organization, and lets the student know the host organization, and by extension their supervisor, is listening and willing to make reasonable accommodations for the WIL experience where and if needed.

Advertising Work-Integrated Learning Experiences as Safe and Inclusive

The results of this study, and others (Lawlis et al., 2023), agree that students need to feel safe before disclosing and acknowledged creating the environment and culture can take time. Promotion of WIL host organizations as inclusive and accessible workplaces is one strategy to helping students feel safe. Information, such as the work environment being accessible and inclusive, the facilities available (i.e. wheelchair-friendly or provision of sensory-safe places), and their relevant policies/guidelines, could be included on the internship expression of interest form, WIL advertisement and host organization agreement with the university. Messaging such as this is often found on organizational job applications and allows those with a disability or condition to make an informed decision when choosing where to apply for a job, and in this case to undertake WIL. This information would also allow the university to better match students to host organizations, particularly in the clinical health areas (Hirneith & Mackenzie, 2004), and also encourages host organizations to better understand their capacity to engage with a student with disability and the WIL expectations. Where students are assigned to a WIL opportunity, this and other information about the organization could be provided when the student is notified of the WIL dates and location. Early information allows students with disability to undertake the necessary actions, such as planning travel, visiting the site and setting more effective goals to ensure they can gain the most from the WIL experience (Brown et al., 2006; Epstein, Rose et al., 2022; Nolan et al., 2015), while also alleviating anxieties.

Stakeholders and Champions

Moving forward, successful implementation of a strengths-based approach requires a champion (Dean et al., 2021). While each stakeholder in their own right can be the champion, and should be encouraged to be a champion, to enact immediate change the university in the first instance can facilitate the strengths-based approach through leading by example and facilitating the involvement of host organizations as a partner. After all, universities across Australia are mandating that all students have at least one WIL experience. Universities can facilitate a strengths-based approach through transparency and the development and communication of inclusive WIL policies and procedures that refer to students with disability, regular and targeted university led training for WIL supervisors and host organizations, particularly in relation to disability awareness, purpose of reasonable accommodations and disability legislation, and industry-informed resources. Training is a gap that has been identified by students, host organizations and universities (Beas-Collado & Carbo-Badal, 2020; Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Epstein, Rose et al., 2022; Epstein, Stephens et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2010; Langørgen et al., 2020; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020; Ryan, 2011). Resources, such as those developed as part of this project located on the Australian Collaborative Education Network website (Australian Collaborative Education Network, 2022), can empower host organizations to better understand their needs and capacity as well as the students' needs and WIL expectations. Continual evaluation of activities involving all stakeholders is required to ensure the changing needs of stakeholders are considered. Engaging all stakeholders in discussions, development and the delivery of WIL ensures

continued and sustainable relationships, better WIL experiences for students with disability and a sense of belonging in the workforce.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of the study include a multi-method approach that helps balance the limitations of each individual method and provides stronger evidence and confidence in the study findings. Another strength included all focus groups being conducted by the same members of the research team to ensure consistency throughout all sessions and the rigor of data collection during the focus groups. A limitation of the study is the small sample size. The findings were similar across each focus group and aligns to the literature, however, a larger scale study would strengthen the findings from this research.

CONCLUSION

This study sought host organizations' perceptions to better understand the challenges to providing WIL experiences for students with disability. Host organizations are key to the success and sustainability of WIL experiences for these students as they can influence the students' view of the profession and their place within that profession. Despite, legislation (Australian Government, 1992, 2005) and various calls to action from key WIL documents (Campbell et al., 2019; Patrick et al., 2008; Universities Australia et al., 2015), the challenges experienced by host organizations have not improved over the last 15 years, thereby negatively impacting their involvement in the collaborate tripartite arrangement required for successful WIL. Many of these challenges are focused on four areas: the host organizations' limited involvement, understanding and inclusion in the WIL process; their perception that students should disclose their disability or accommodation; their limitations to office space; and staff understanding of disability thereby engaging in a deficit discourse. To change the narrative and behavior, a strengths-based approach to designing, developing and delivering WIL is proposed. It has been recommended that higher education institutions facilitate inclusion of host organizations in the WIL process and use of universal resources to build host organization capacity. This approach will ensure sustained involvement of host organizations in stakeholder collaborations and enhance their capacity and confidence to support students with disability on WIL and to provide better student and supervisor WIL experiences. Future research is needed examining the impact of strength-based approaches in WIL.

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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 related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38).*

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, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

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

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is 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.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

*Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge.



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