The ACEN Student Scholarship: a profile of financial hardship and Work Integrated Learning

Keri Moore  
*School of Health and Human Science, Southern Cross University.*

Sonia Ferns  
*Curtin Teaching and Learning, Curtin University*

Deborah Peach  
*Science and Engineering Faculty, Queensland University of Technology*

An increasing emphasis on embedding Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in the curriculum has impacted on teaching and learning approaches in Australian higher education institutions (Higher Education Base Funding Review: Final Report, 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 financial costs experienced by students studying subjects with a Work Integrated Learning component.

In 2010 the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) responded to this issue by offering three modest student scholarships based on evidence of hardship. Data collected from over 1000 applicants between 2010 and 2012 indicate travel, accommodation, food, clothing, equipment and loss of income are of major concern especially for students on lengthy placements involving relocation. 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 (DEEWR, 2011, p.94). This paper considers costs from the student perspective and highlights major concerns identified through ACEN scholarship applications over a three year period. The implications for ACEN are described and recommendations documented which outline ACEN’s role in ensuring that these issues are given greater consideration across the sector.

**Keywords:** Work Integrated Learning, practice-based learning, financial hardship, costs, scholarship

**Background**

Most Australian universities now have operational and strategic targets associated with embedding WIL in the curriculum (Skills Australia Annual Report, 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.

However, 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. For example, participating in WIL can cause hardship for already disadvantaged students:

As much as this WIL placement may help me for my future, I have still been financially impacted as a result of it. I have lost my Centrelink Youth Allowance, which was roughly $250 per fortnight. In addition, I was working on a casual basis at a job that was situated near my home, and gave me a higher hourly rate than that of the WIL placement. I have lost my student travel concession, because I am no longer a full-time student as a result of the full-time WIL placement. I also need to catch the train to work every day, which equates to an expense of roughly $35 each week (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

The federal government 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 (DEEWR, 2011, p.115). 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 e.g. 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, 2011). Consideration must therefore be given to the financial hardships experienced by some students who participate in WIL. This paper contributes to our
understanding of these issues through a brief analysis of applications received for the ACEN Student Scholarships from 2010 to 2012. This analysis is intended to provide an evidence-base to identify and to 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 these issues. 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 in ensuring that these issues are given greater consideration across the sector.

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, 2011; 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. For example, professions such as nursing and engineering have traditionally stipulated professional competencies to be aligned to subject learning outcomes as evidence that the degree program will deliver appropriately skilled employees (Council of Higher Education, 2011). The approach of explicitly addressing industry defined attributes is being adopted by a growing number of professions (Milne, 2009). 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 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 will gain employment upon completion.

The ACEN Student Scholarship

First introduced in 2010, the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) offers annual scholarships to provide financial support for students who are required to complete a WIL activity in the workplace as a mandatory component of their studies. Only students from universities that are financial members of ACEN are eligible to apply. Initially three scholarships of $1000 each were offered. In 2012, ACEN increased the funding allocation to five scholarships of $1500 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, three scholarships were offered with 828 applications received from across all states of Australia, including two overseas applications. One hundred and twenty three eligible applications have been received for the five scholarships at $1500 each in 2012.

In 2010 applications were submitted in hard copy resulting in a manual selection process which incorporated time intensive administration. To improve efficiency and data collection methods, the process moved to an online submission in 2011. The online application form used in 2011 and 2012 facilitated analysis of a large number of applications with data easily down loaded into an excel spread sheet. This made it possible for the selection panel to review columns of responses to the same questions as opposed to across rows of whole applications. This was found to be an effective and efficient way of sharing work load. This type of systematic approach also permitted the reviewers to engage in analysis of the applications on an ad-hoc basis. In 2011 other improvements were made in the application and assessment process and adjustments made to the questions to allow applicants to better describe their unique circumstances.

This analysis of the 2011 and 2012 applications is based on a mixed method approach to maximise the findings through the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data sets. Analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken to assess the impact of multiple aspects associated with financial hardship experienced whilst engaged in WIL. SPSS was used to analyse data where multiple responses were possible. Multivariate analysis of data was also undertaken. 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. However, 366 of 826 in 2011 respondents indicated either the city or town where they were undertaking the WIL activity or identified that it was undertaken in a rural, regional, or metropolitan setting. These data strongly influenced the decision to change the criteria in 2012 thereby
confining applicants to a more specified placement. 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 and 2012 have been identified and are presented below. The next section presents the data related to the characteristics of the applicants including their study location, WIL location, sources of income, and financial impact.
Results

Study location

While applications were received 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 Griffith University (22%), Charles Sturt University (17%) and Southern Cross University (10%) in 2011 (see Table 1).

Table 1: 2011 Applicants by university

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

Universities with less than 10 applications 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.

In 2012, Curtin (20%), Flinders (16%) and Griffith (14%) had the most applications (see Table 2). The number of applications is likely due to the promotion of the scholarship opportunity at those universities.

Table 2: 2012 Applicants by university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Number of applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curtin University of Technology</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flinders University</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith University</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash University</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Universities with less than 10 applications were: University of Western Sydney, Southern Cross University, Charles Sturt University, James Cook University, Victoria University, University of Sydney, Central Queensland University, Notre Dame University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Queensland University of Technology, RMIT University, Canberra University, University of Newcastle, The University of Queensland, University of South Australia and University of Southern Queensland.

Academic programs

The most represented academic programs in 2010 were Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Applied Science and Bachelor of Social Work compared to Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Occupational Therapy in 2011. 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 5 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. Table 2 shows the 2012 applications by degree.

Table 3: 2012 Applicants by degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Number of applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine Surgery</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were less than 10 applicants from each of the following Bachelor Degrees: Applied Science - Medical Imaging (Medical Radiations - Medical, Imaging/Radiography), Nutrition and Dietetics, Business in Hotel and Resort Management, Education - Early Childhood Education, Education (Primary), Engineering, Environmental Science and Management, Learning Management (Early Childhood), Music Education, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Physiotherapy/Exercise Science, Social Science with Honours, Social Work, Speech Pathology and Veterinary Science.

Also, there were less than 10 applicants from each of the following Graduate Diplomas: Dentistry, Education (secondary), Learning and Teaching, Graduate Entry Masters of Occupational Therapy, Graduate Entry Medical Program, Medicine, Surgery. Less than 10 were received from the Masters of Engineering Science, Environmental engineering, Nutrition and Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Diagnostic Radiography, Engineering in Structural and Geotechnical, Nutrition and Dietetics, Physiotherapy and Social Work.

Table 3 highlights the emphasis of health disciplines, possibly a result of large cohorts, professional accreditation requirements, and an increased awareness of the demands WIL places on students.

**Location of WIL placement**

In 2010 and 2011 applicants were not asked directly where their placement was located. However 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 for rural, regional and metropolitan where applicants named a town or city as the location of their placement during the 2011 applications:

- **Rural** – population less than 10,000
- **Regional** - population 10,000 – 200,000
- **Metropolitan** - population greater than 200,000 or capital city.

Of the 366 students where location of the placement was known, 32% indicated that they would be undertaking their WIL in regional areas, 31% in metropolitan areas and 31% in rural areas. 5.5% of applicants indicated they were intending to undertake overseas placements (2% of the total 826 applicants). In 2011 all States had applicants undertaking metropolitan placements and in either regional or rural locations. New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria had students undertaking placements in metropolitan, regional, rural and overseas settings. Tasmania had only metropolitan and regional settings. In Western Australia, no regional placements were identified. Charles Sturt University, University of Newcastle and Southern Cross University had the highest number of rural and regional placements however, it should be noted that all three of these universities are located in regional areas. Applicants intending to participate in overseas placements were also enrolled in a range of universities across the country.

In 2011 the Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Occupational Therapy and Bachelor of Physiotherapy had the highest number of applicants undertaking rural and regional placements. Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Bachelor of Veterinary Biology had significantly 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 2012 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 the Australian Government, Department of Health and Aging (2012).
Sources of income

In 2010 and 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). See Figure 2. Applicants in 2012 were not asked about sources of income.

![Figure 1: Applicants income sources of income for 2011 (multiple responses allowed)](image)

Financial impact of WIL

In the 2011 scholarship round, loss of income was reported as the primary concern for most applicants with 72% indicating that they would have to give up paid work in order to complete their WIL activity. A small number of applicants also indicated they would have reduced Centrelink benefits as they would no longer be 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 (see Figure 3). (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.

Fourteen point five percent indicated that they would spend more on food when on placement. 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. Three point five percent 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.

The self-reported living status of the 2012 applicants, Figure 3 shows 50% applicants were single, self-supporting.
Figure 3. Self-reported living status of 2012 applicants.

Fifty-six percent of the 123 applicants for the 2012 scholarship 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 2011 the loss of income, the cost of petrol or other transport and the cost of food was of considerable concern to applicants across academic programs, particularly for those studying Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Education. Funding the cost of uniforms or suitable clothing was a recurring theme, particularly for these applicants. The cost of materials required to successfully complete the WIL placement was also high for applicants studying the Bachelor of Education. In 2012, 58% of applicants cited rent, 60% food and 81% transport as out-of-pocket expenses incurred during WIL.

Discussion

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:

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 organisation that practices the principles of fair trade: creating real opportunities for otherwise disadvantaged people (Scholarship Applicant, 2011)

I envisage the opportunity to complete this internship will be both challenging and rewarding and will help me to develop the skills required in textile product development. Plus, I will be exposed to a completely different culture and trust that I can learn from this both personally and professionally (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

One month working in [name of organisation] 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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

….. involved attending at least five of the women's antenatal appointments with either their midwife or doctor, attend their birth which could take up to 12 hours and attend at least three of their postnatal appointments with their midwife or doctor. This involved travel to and from the hospital for shifts and births and also travel to and from wherever the women saw their midwife or doctor (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

Although extremely time consuming and demanding the placement is invaluable to my learning experience (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

Clearly, the examples given above highlight the extraordinary opportunities students have exposure to during their tertiary education to delve deeply into their disciplinary practices in a variety of settings (Patrick, Peach & Pocknee, 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, 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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

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.

We were told by our lecturers that we will be unable to work due to the full-time work commitment (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

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% two weeks, 6% three, 13% four, 17% five and 60% other lengths of time. 92% said they would be engaged in the placement for more than 4 days of each of those weeks.

**The Costs of WIL**

A high number of applicants in 2011 were undertaking placements in rural or regional settings. Many of these applicants spoke of wanting to gain a range of experiences in diverse metropolitan, regional, and rural 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 a need to relocate, the period of time away from home, the associated costs, and loss of income. This was particularly prevalent in education degrees.

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 alot, 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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

The cost of petrol, public transport and other travel was also of concern to most applicants. Applicants 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.

I will be travelling the 160km round trip each day to the placement, as we live 80 klns away from [name of town], where the school is, and so will incur large expenses for petrol costs (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

Other applicants were concerned about the cost of public transport, or felt they would need to utilise 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) (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

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 a 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 that they would need to bring some teaching resources for their classrooms.

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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

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 centres. 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.

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 (Scholarship Applicant, 2011).

**Conclusion**

This analysis of ACEN’s WIL Scholarship applications between 2010 and 2012, shows that students value the opportunity to participate in WIL programs and 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.

The data show that while universities mentioned in the applications are providing a good mix of metropolitan, regional, and rural placements across the 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, long-term effort is required for change. The core challenge is to make university affordable and accessible to all those who aspire to further education (QUT, 2011). ACEN will continue to offer the scholarship into the foreseeable future in efforts to support students most in need. However, the scholarship is a limited resource and more needs to be done to raise concern across the sector about the cost of WIL to students. This paper is intended to raise awareness so that ACEN, in collaboration with colleagues from the disciplines, university equity services, and student associations can advocate on behalf of students. Approaches must also be made to federal government and industry to find ways to increase funding and develop strategies to reduce costs for this important aspect of the university curriculum.
**Recommendations**

Academics need to be mindful when designing WIL activities so that students are not overburdened with excessive costs. Universities may need to consider offering different modes of WIL for the same learning objectives to accommodate students’ diverse needs and circumstances.

**Future research**

The findings here have stimulated further research into the costs of WIL to the students. ACEN members have generated a research proposal: *Responding to inequity and disadvantage within work integrated learning experiences.*

**References**


Supporting low-income students and widening participation at QUT. (2011). *QUT Equity Services Training and Development Program*


**Copyright © 2012 Keri Moore, Sonia Ferns, Deborah Peach**

The author assign to the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN Inc.) an educational non-profit institution, a nonexclusive licence to use this document for personal use and in courses of instruction, provided that the article is used in full and this copyright statement is reproduced. The author also grants a non-exclusive licence to the Australian Collaborative Education Network to publish this document on the ACEN website and in other formats for the Proceedings ACEN National Conference Melbourne / Geelong 2012. Any other use is prohibited without the express permission of the author.