Capacity building through WIL in the Hospitality HE sector

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Dissatisfaction with graduate employability has been elevated within contemporary discussion with particular references made to a lack of general job skills and practical experience. Such dissatisfaction transverses disciplinary boundaries and is of heightened concern for the hospitality industry due to the service orientation of the work and rapid expansion of hospitality programs including key industry players penetrating the education market.

This paper examines the perspectives of recent graduates, employers and educators to establish the contribution of WIL to enhancement of hospitality graduate employability. Specific aspects of WIL that need to be managed for realisation of benefits and minimisation of negatives were identified. A mixed methodology was employed to triangulate the data, commencing with a quantitative online survey followed by qualitative focus groups.

The study concluded that graduates who have had experience of WIL in their tertiary studies are more attractive to employers and that extensive and varied contexts of engagement with WIL initiatives significantly enhance the perceived employability and performance of hospitality graduate employees. Progression of the Hospitality WIL agenda within the university format was found to be inhibited due to course simplification and standardisation together with an increased channelling of hospitality content away from universities and into TAFE Pathway Programs. The study developed a number of recommendations and guidelines for effective integration and reinforcement of WIL in hospitality tertiary education.

Keywords: Work integrated learning, capacity building, graduate employability, hospitality tertiary education