Will the bucket overflow? Maintaining WIL capacity in the face of increasing veterinary student numbers

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As employer expectations of practice-ready graduates increase and student numbers in higher education institutions grow, competition for work integrated learning (WIL) placements is becoming more intense. Accreditation bodies require veterinary schools to provide WIL opportunities for all students in both university-operated teaching hospitals and in external veterinary workplaces. With veterinary undergraduate student numbers increasing significantly in recent years, the sustainability of the current model of WIL has been a matter of vigorous debate, but there is a dearth of scholarly literature to inform such a debate. This paper reports on a survey of 300 veterinary employers purposively selected from a university database, with questions exploring motivations and barriers to their involvement in undergrad WIL and their perceptions on appropriate remuneration for their educational role. Survey findings suggest that despite the increasing numbers of veterinary students, the majority of veterinary employers were satisfied with their current student numbers, level of (usually non-financial) reward, and cited a desire to ‘put back to the profession’ as a significant driver for their involvement in WIL. By implication, capacity for WIL placements is not an inherent threat to sustainability of current models; instead of being an absolute value, capacity can be built or diminished. Universities would do well to invest in sustaining altruistic motivation and mutually beneficial relationships with their external partners.

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