WEBINAR # 1
Engaging Diverse Students in WIL
19 March 2014

SUMMARY NOTES

The OLT Project Webinar was moderated by project team member, Sonia Ferns from Curtin University on behalf of the Project Team.

The webinar formed part of the project data collection and was digitally recorded for research purposes. The Webinar Powerpoint presentation is available on the OLT WIL Project website.

157 registrations were received for the Webinar with 98 participants in attendance on the day. 72 people joined the webinar from interstate whilst 3 participants joined from abroad (NZ, Vietnam and USA). A total of 29 higher education institutions were represented at the Webinar.

The keynote speaker, Amanda Willis, Director, Corporate Values and Equity, Curtin University discussed the importance of equity considerations in Work Integrated Learning, barriers and challenges, and a paradigm shift from bolt on responses to equity to an embedded approach to inclusive practice.

Following Amanda’s presentation Judy Hartley, Manager, Student Equity Services at Griffith University facilitated a live and online discussion about themes/issues and questions that emerged. These are summarised below:
Themes/Issues:

1. Equity does NOT mean treating all students the same. MUST deal with barriers and acknowledge/respond to student differences.

2. Broader conceptualisation of diversity beyond identifiable equity groups.

3. Barriers to consider: Aspirations, Awareness, Financial cost/burden/debt, Educational preparedness, Logistics/transport, Family/community support needed to succeed, Feelings of isolation – “will there be others like me”, Responsibilities – ie., family, work, community, etc

Barriers include:

   i. Financial and time constraints students face.
   ii. Partner ‘push back’ regarding acceptance of the “non-cookie cutter” type students plus international students. Low level awareness by employers in a number of key areas
   iii. Visa used as a “blanket” reason by some (maybe many) organisations to exclude international students altogether * N.B one participant said employers argue that new 2 year temp Visa isn’t sufficient time for them to get ROI – needs to be 4 years plus why go to all the bother of taking an international student when equivalent local student is available.
   iv. Adequate resourcing by universities to support alternate models/modes.

4. Considerations for inclusive WIL: Flexibility, Support, Loyalty (to student vs partner – tension because we rely on partners to provide WIL).

Enablers include:

   i. Education for employers in relation to a number of issues, including: financial/time constraints of students; requirements and benefits of equity/diversity; Visas can allow employers to “try before they buy”; legal obligations re discrimination (both direct and indirect forms of).
   ii. Opportunities for dialogue between stakeholders re issues will help bring about change etc.
   iii. Alternate modes and models. The one to get most attention was idea of using student’s paid work for WIL. One university has developed a couple of units so students can utilise existing work – with a certificate for related activities. Few challenges with doing this also raised i.e., clarity re what’s required via WIL; student’s paid work may not address very specific skills needed for some professions;
   iv. Other models / modes suggested – use of on-campus activities; live case studies.
   v. Need for inherent requirements to be made clear – will help re students with disabilities but also re determining alternate models/modes.
   vi. Support for students – coaching and mentoring.
5. Labour Laws that protect students (those involved in delivery of WIL need better understanding of existing laws which do provide adequate protections for WIL students).

6. Need shift from “bolt on” to embedded support.

7. Need to work with/educate employers.

8. “Statement of Intent” has implications for WIL - these include:
   i. Some unis will need to give higher priority to WIL (others already do).
   ii. Massification of WIL means need to “scale up” current efforts i.e., more resources and more coordinated approach to managing internal support.
   iii. More coordinated approach between unis and employers to fulfil.

9. Definition of WIL goes beyond placement model. Need to be careful not to “put fence around” definition otherwise we will limit innovation – innovation needed to address issues of access and equity.

10. Need to see students beyond identifiable equity groups – look for and appreciate difference in our students and understand the different learning contexts they are exposed to.

11. Need to encourage equity groups to be part of finding solutions – could do by having students form groups where they have peer support, a presence and then can raise issues as a collective. Warning raised - need to be careful not to expect too much in this regard – particularly if the students have not had opportunity to engage with WIL in the first place. Suggested that we need to provide opportunities and then ask for input regarding how to improve access and equity.

Questions to consider:

1. Educating employers – how to?

2. Encouraging employers to employ a wider range of students?

3. Encouraging institutions to engage with the wider issue of equity in WIL?

4. Dealing with issues of health and safety within workplaces and students with disabilities accessing WIL experiences?

5. What can we learn from VET/TAFE sector?