SYMPOSIUM # 3
Building Capacity for Inclusive WIL in Higher Education

SUMMARY NOTES

The Project Team conducted a workshop at an ACEN NSW/ACT full day Symposium hosted at the University of Sydney on 15 June, 2015. The Symposium was entitled “Contemporary Challenges in WIL”.

Over 90 registrations were received for this event with approximately 61 participants in attendance on the day.

The symposium keynote speaker – Allan Groth, Policy Director – Workforce Development, Universities Australia, gave a talk entitled “Influencing Policy – Art, Luck or Persistence?” This session considered some of the main factors that can enable or hinder positive developments in policy and operating environments, with a particular focus on WIL and the development and progress of the National WIL Strategy. The session drew on the experiences of participants in an interactive discussion.

A 1.5 hour project workshop was facilitated by Matthew Campbell, Griffith University/QIBT and Jacqueline Mackaway, Macquarie University. The session introduced the Inclusive WIL Principles and Guidelines, and engaged participants via group activity in applying these principles to the analysis of cases of work integrated learning practices higher education, and through reflection on their own contexts. The aim of the session was to help build participant capacity to apply the principles to their future practices in WIL. The workshop formed part of the project data collection and written notes were taken for research purposes.

A summary of key themes and issues that emerged from group discussions is provided below.

Note: there were 12 groups analyzing 6 examples of WIL practice from the field.
A summary of the groups discussions has been collated and organized according to the key themes and issues to emerge.

1) Student related issues:
   - Need to accommodate different levels of ability and commitment of students; language skills; if part time or full time; etc
   - Time required to undertake a placement (including travel) – workload implications for students
   - Financial support available to students
   - A supportive environment needs to be created so students may be more willing to disclose a special need/consideration
   - Students need resilience training embedded in program
   - Need to support students when they are in remote locations/placements – peer support; engagement sessions prior; strategy sessions
   - Barriers to some models include: Scalability issues; how to accommodate special consideration i.e., realities of and processes; workload; disclosure – self-confidence to do this; resource intensive
   - Student preparation is imperative - team building exercises prior to activities; language and communication support;
   - When using team projects need to build team culture within groups to help with disclosure matters
   - Encourage students of the value in “up-skilling” their communication skills by taking extra courses etc

2) Staff related issues:
   - Academic workload – burnout
   - Workload for all staff
   - Work in a linked up way i.e., involve Equity groups, Career and Employment services etc.
   - Support to staff – cultural competence; inclusivity; develop support groups; benefits of programs.
   - Staff need good understanding of changing Visa laws
   - Create environment for staff to have time to get to know students and partners and build relationships with both – can help with matching students to activities.
   - Being proactive vs reactive
   - Ongoing reporting/outcomes to executive

3) The practice of WIL:
   - Need to actively find ways to account for student preferences in the design of WIL activities – student involvement in negotiation may help manage personal preferences etc.
   - Need a range of programs that can accommodate different levels of achievement, different student needs etc – non-disciplinary and maybe volunteering could help address access issues.
   - Criteria for WIL needs to be thought through in relation to issues of access and equity i.e. GPA
   - Understanding expectations – clear articulation of and included in all paperwork to students and partners.
- Support provided to students and partners pre, during and after placement (include de-briefing).
- Need for close relations between universities and industry/workplaces to support quality experiences for all students. This might involve a partnership approach.
- Ensure open communication and feedback with industry.
- University sometimes needs to actively create opportunities for students - build database of employers who are willing to take range of students.
- Resource intensive exercise – staff/faculty need support
- Need to factor in organisational resources, culture and inherent requirements of the course
- Flexible practices in terms of delivery/mode/model are a positive (i.e., on-line; f2f)
- Acknowledging different knowledge, perspectives and diverse skills is a positive as opposed to a negative – changing attitudes.
- Need to mediate team projects to ensure equal participation of all students etc
- Assessment to demonstrate learned skills, and could include issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Assessment to accommodate needs, but make students accountable – include peer review, but need involvement of academic and employer; work in progress feedback can be effective to support learning.
- Opportunities needed for regular feedback (way to stay on top of issues/challenges students and groups may be experiencing)

Some questions to arise:

- What constitutes “authentic WIL”? Need to be clear about what constitutes a WIL activity and what does not – particularly when trying to accommodate a diverse cohort.
- How can inclusive practices be “scaled up”?
- How to work with an existing assessment regime which may not be very “inclusive”?
- Team work in WIL to accommodate diverse cohort – how well do we actually teach/prepare students for this? Who should be mediating this in WIL – teacher or students?
- How can special considerations be accommodated – sometimes it is just not realistic.
- What are the motives and preferences of partners in relation to access and equity in WIL?
- GPA as an access hurdle – should there be this as a criteria for access?

Challenges:

- Internal marketing can lead to competition amongst student - problem if there are not enough placements to go around.
- Nor for profit (NFP) placements versus commercial placement (perceived value of NFP over the other)
- Perceived value of a the placement model of WIL