

# Technology-Enhanced Work-Integrated Learning

Dr. Camille Dickson-Deane, Dr. Keith Heggart, Dr. Charmaine Logan-Fleming

Work integrated Learning (WIL) which is known by other synonyms across the higher education landscape (e.g., co-ops, work-based learning, work study programme) encompasses various activities such as traditional workplace placements (internships, clinical placements, fieldwork, practicums), industry-partnered projects (hackathons, incubators/start-ups), simulated work environments with industry consultation and more (Barbeau, 1973; Dickson-Deane et al., 2023). As such, WIL is viewed by some as an umbrella term for an approach where curriculum integrates academic and workplace knowledge (Dollinger & Brown, 2019). This strategy occurs in different contexts, can be paid or unpaid, and from a delivery standpoint, can now include a digital component so that scalability can be accommodated (Kay et al., 2020; Universities Australia, 2019). These offerings aim to provide learners with professional practice opportunities within the classroom as a way to address skill shortages and rapidly evolving industry skills – skills that create domain-specific transferable pathways which are key for employment (Jackson, 2024).

## What does it mean in this context

Addressing employability needs via curriculum enhancements has always been a challenge for higher education institutions. One way to address employability needs is to offer technology-enhanced placements. This response will reflect an ongoing understanding of the current educational environment where occurrences such as the pandemic, weather patterns and other socio-economic ills can hinder many non-compulsory placements. The value of WIL and its ability to leverage the increasing ubiquity of digital technology, begs the call for more opportunities outside of mandatory requirements (i.e., nursing and teaching learners) to increase (Kay et al., 2020). An example here is Swinburne University, which announced that from 2021, all undergraduate learners will undertake a WIL placement as a way to leverage the opportunity presented within this approach (Zegwaard et al., 2023). Another example is Singapore's SP Jain School of Global Management which has an active policy on integrating WIL into their curriculum (SP Jain School of Global Management, 2023). These examples engage technology as a catalyst towards increased accessibility and inclusivity for learners who might have previously been unable to undertake WIL.

## The How's and Where's of implementing WIL

By diversifying how and where technology is used to implement WIL in discipline-specific spaces, the influence towards clear and direct professional practice is satisfied. Where implementation can be challenging is not only in the want for personalized experiences but also in disciplines where placements are not a requirement. Here placements can be difficult to implement within a time-tabled semester structure along with increasing cost of and for resources to embed such training into the classroom learning (Jackson & Collings, 2018). There are also other challenges which address the overlap between learner characteristics and their intentional needs for real world experiences. Some examples of gaps in implementations are 1) finding WIL opportunities for international learners who may want WIL experiences in their home countries or places where they plan to reside after graduation - cross-cultural pollination of opportunities; 2) learners in low socio-economic spaces who would not even consider WIL from a financial access point of view and 3) non-lab research learners (i.e., Masters by Research and PhD learners) who can find it difficult to locate a relevant industry partner to work on research problems. Technology-enhanced WIL can help to embed these real-world applications into the learning space context. Through this, the integration of new ways to increase access whilst reducing costs can emerge. A key example is in Japan, learning without borders is a program offered by a variety of university campuses as a virtual campus linking cross-cultural discipline specific experiences (Okubo, 2024). This example uses virtual technologies as tools to open doors to the entrepreneurial field, thus creating affordances for differently abled learners, non-traditional jobs and more.

## Answering the call of WIL

As much as WIL has found itself well-placed in many universities' strategies, implementing sustainable solutions still seems to be a hurdle. To proactively engage in using this method, one needs to think outside of the box to create new ways of offering sustainable opportunities. By using old models to create new ones, along with reviewing how course structures and designs can couple/combine/embed opportunities for WIL

should be a way forward. The education ecosystem currently is embracing numerous experiential learning opportunities via micro-credentials, competency-based learning and case-based learning strategies. Expanding WIL opportunities for all learners, whilst aligning with many government strategies (Commonwealth of Learning, 2024; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2022) using these methods as a bridge to building what can be the much needed experience for learners will enable learners to gain the enhanced learning they need for the real world.

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## Exemplars

University of Technology Sports and Exercise Science Telepractice Clinic uses Zoom with their third-year students to have them develop skills as exercise scientists and exercise physiologists. The students are all supervised by qualified and experienced professionals and they work with real clients to create and execute an exercise program.

JV-Campus is an online Japanese higher education portal that allows international students to begin learning about Japan without actually being in Japan. The Education Ministry uses this platform to engage students in a variety of topics including Buddhist art, agriculture and more.