

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to questions raised in the Accord Discussion Paper. We have selected questions relevant for ACEN and put together responses with input from our members. Please note that we have used the term work-based WIL for learning that takes place in a work environment in different disciplines (e.g. placement, internship, practicum, professional experience).

Q8 What reforms are needed to promote a quality learning environment and to ensure graduates are entering the labour market with the skills and knowledge they need?

- **Support for ongoing identification of capability gaps** and understanding how different WIL experiences can be designed to bridge gaps for the benefit of all stakeholders. For example, supporting higher education institutions in facilitating relevant 'value mapping' exercises with potential or existing industry partners to contextualise training needs relative to the aims, requirements and outcomes of different types of WIL that also meet student and institution needs.
- **Introduce sector-wide measures and reporting** in higher education institutions to ensure that WIL is high quality and fit-for-purpose, demonstrating learning gain (e.g. pre-post capability audits) and the ability to practically apply or transfer capabilities and knowledge in a contemporary work environment (e.g. industry partner feedback on student performance). This could be achieved through collaboration between ACEN, the Department of Education and other designated bodies (e.g. Social Research Centre) on the development of requisite sector-wide measures and will enable external referencing and benchmarking.
- **Introduce sector-wide measures and reporting** among industry partners to gauge engagement in quality WIL, student performance and outcomes. For example, data could be gathered on quality of student capabilities, knowledge, performance and work readiness compared to industry expectations and needs; availability, engagement and co-design of WIL; return from investing in WIL; impact of WIL on workforce development planning; translation of WIL participation to graduate employment; impact of WIL on specific business types, industries and regional economies; linkages, including partnerships, research and commercial agreements associated with or developed through WIL; and increased workforce participation of equity groups and Indigenous graduates from WIL.
- **Initiatives that facilitate a shift** from WIL that operates in discipline siloes to transdisciplinary arrangements to advance capabilities critical for future work and innovation.
- **Introduce research funding** to support the design, implementation, evaluation and improvement of innovative, inclusive and flexible models of WIL that advance career-readiness among graduates to meet the demands of contemporary and future work practices and are evidence-based.
- **Actions to initiate a cultural shift** among employers across industries that they share responsibility for contributing to the training and development of future graduates, not just advising on labour market demands. This requires campaigning from government and relevant professional associations and bodies that encourages industry involvement in the co-design and delivery of WIL that is accessible for all students across disciplines.
- **Balancing theory with practice** through scaffolding of WIL experiences through all courses, socialising students into work environments and building their capacity to reflect and act based on professional judgement and cultural appropriateness in context.
- **Establish evidence-based curriculum standards** and expectations for the design and implementation of inclusive, quality WIL through, for example, supporting ACEN in the review and update of the [ACEN National Quality Framework](#) (2019). Given COVID-19 and the shift to a

significant amount of online WIL, the curriculum design standards within the framework require a refresh.

- **Clarification and documentation of stakeholder responsibilities, standards and expectations** involved in designing, delivering and supporting WIL across disciplines and industries. For example, who is responsible for developing industry to be effective mentors and supervisors of WIL students.
- **Funding for industry** to (i) support ongoing participation in WIL and normalise quality WIL across industries; (ii) adequately prepare staff and provide resources for supervision, mentoring and feedback for a quality WIL experience; and (iii) support making accommodations and adjustments for diverse learner needs. Examples include direct payments, tax incentives, industry schemes and training vouchers for staff supporting WIL students.
- **Funding for higher education institutions** to enable the design and implementation of high quality, inclusive WIL and associated processes (including the professional development of staff) which are normalised in courses and enable all students to leverage the benefits of WIL. Priority can be given to funding programs that encourage participation among certain student groups and meet particular workforce needs.
- **Funding for relevant peak bodies** (e.g. ACEN) to lead the professional development and mentoring of staff involved in WIL (industry and higher education institution), enabling them to 'train the trainer'.

Q13 How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have relevant skills for the workforce?

- Fostering an environment in which employers see themselves as part of the learning equation by providing discreet projects or a series of activities that contribute to the development of future graduates. Accord can support the creation of this environment through funding models such as: (i) organisations remunerate students for completing projects/activities with 'matched' funding for SMEs and not-for-profits (e.g. 50% of student salary paid by organisation and 50% by government), (ii) financial or logistical support for organisations taking part in WIL programs, or (iii) funding that incentives inclusive practice.
- Targeting the involvement of industries, sectors and organisation types that are typically less engaged in WIL (e.g. SMEs, public and not-for-profit organisations and industries outside of Health and Education). For example, supporting WIL in innovation hubs, university-based incubators or co-working spaces with shared supervision, feedback and coordination to increase engagement by SMEs, or supporting virtual WIL for regional organisations.
- Opening the discussion and creating channels for industry, government and higher education institution stakeholders to consult on and shape the learning outcomes of graduates. This includes establishing shared understanding of relevant capabilities, knowledge, attributes and values across industries and sectors and establishing clear stakeholder roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in developing graduates.
- Encouraging and supporting the co-design of WIL curriculum, endorsing threshold standards (similar to VET training packages) and the applicability of those standards across traditional (e.g. higher education institutions, TAFE) and other (e.g. private education providers, micro-credential offerings) providers.
- Revisiting how partnerships work (or don't work), including systematic barriers for students to participating in courses (such as significant hours of unpaid practicum), operational barriers for higher education institutions in delivering courses (e.g. sourcing host partners for significant components of WIL) and organisations in attracting and retaining talent in professions.
- Identifying ways to collectively build a career ladder for graduates across disciplines/professions that are experiencing acute skills and talent shortages (e.g., teaching, nursing and other caring work).
- Recognising that upskilling should not reside entirely with the individual and providing funding to higher education institutions and industry to support and provide access to students and graduates for lifelong and life wide learning.
- Developing measures of success or indicators that articulate collaboration among stakeholder groups.

Q14 How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education change in the decades ahead?

- **Introduce sector-wide measures** that are embedded in higher education institution systems to monitor, report, evaluate and benchmark student participation in various types of WIL across different groups, disciplines and stage of study. These can create a WIL indicator in the Student Experience Survey, Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) and Graduate Outcomes Survey-Longitudinal (GOS-L) to gauge participation in WIL.
- **Introduce sector-wide measures** for gauging the impact of different types of WIL on the student experience (e.g. academic outcomes, retention), aspects of student employability (e.g. confidence, professional identity, career development learning) and career outcomes (e.g. job attainment). Mandatory internal reporting on different types of WIL will enable a WIL indicator in the GOS and GOS-L to gauge the impact of WIL on employability and employment outcomes.
- **Introduce sector-wide measures** to monitor external partnerships for WIL at different qualification levels and across disciplines. These can include: (i) data on industry engagement, communication and/or education that maps employer-defined capability gaps, what WIL is and what it can realistically achieve and the differing needs of each stakeholder; (ii) the number of placements in different industries, sectors, and organisation types; and (iii) proportion of re-engagement in WIL across different sectors, industries and organisation types.
- **Encourage thinking beyond mandatory WIL.** Shift in focus from mandatory work-based WIL, identified through outdated measures in CRICOS, to all forms of WIL, whether core or elective. Examples of other forms of WIL include projects, consulting or competitions.
- **Distinguish WIL from paid work.** Both core and elective WIL have a primary focus on learning which is distinct from paid work which is primarily focused on the production of tangible outcomes and subsistence-related employment. An important example is that WIL should not feature in the calculation of international students' 48-hour fortnightly work cap.
- **Practice that is equitable and inclusive,** minimising systemic barriers and adequately preparing and supporting students from diverse backgrounds to engage safely and meaningfully in different forms of WIL (see bullet below on funding for students).
- **Funding to industry to increase student participation in work-based WIL.** This is important for bridging capability gaps and attracting and retaining students in courses with interwoven WIL that are experiencing talent shortages.
- **Funding to increase WIL participation among less advantaged students.** According to Verity Firth, 15 Australian universities enrol 60% of low SES students. We know additional academic and transitional support is required to ensure access and success through to completion and employment - so adjusting funding for those institutions doing most of the work here will genuinely support widening participation and extending benefits of higher education (including WIL) to more. This could include direct payments to students (e.g. stipends or studentships) that are underrepresented in higher education.
- **Greater flexibility among accreditation bodies on WIL arrangements.** WIL requirements should focus on the development and transferability of knowledge and capabilities into practice and should not lead to loss of employment during study and therefore financial hardship. More flexible arrangements include: (i) undertaking virtual WIL, in line with contemporary work practices; (ii) completing WIL in organisations not necessarily allowed to their future occupation, recognising the development and application of transferable skills; and (iii) completing WIL overseas on an independent basis (e.g. nursing students undertaking clinical placements in UK/EU hospitals under the supervision of appropriately registered/qualified staff).
- **Greater flexibility in academic WIL models** to better meet student and industry needs. Flexibility may include scheduling WIL outside of traditional semester cycles, including self-paced, modular

design, and incorporating a range of WIL experiences within courses that effectively target capability demands and cater to students' diverse characteristics.

- **Normalise paid work-based WIL.** If students are working and expected to perform the duties of fully qualified staff while doing work-based WIL, they should be paid accordingly. Undertaking extended periods of mandatory work-based WIL that is unpaid is forcing students into poverty and increasing attrition. Students being paid for their time would increase accountability among industry partners and students. This could be achieved through wage subsidies for organisations funding work-based WIL, relevant Departments supporting funded places for students undertaken mandatory work-based WIL (e.g. Health, Education), subsidy payments and stipends or grants paid directly to students.
- **Make WIL partnerships a priority for industry** (including SMEs and not-for-profit organisations) through government promotion and incentives.
- **Brokering services by local industry bodies and professional associations** to facilitate work-based WIL. These can identify capability demands and map to WIL experiences and outcomes in collaboration with higher education institutions, source and screen WIL opportunities, promote WIL to industry and raise awareness, support virtual options for regional businesses, gather feedback from organisations to gauge participation, quality and the impact of WIL.

Q23 How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government and universities to solve big challenges?

- Increase linkage type grants which are broad in scope, align with economic needs and appropriately balance applied and 'blue sky' research.
- Create shared understanding of the value and opportunities that collaborations can bring.
- Set out expectations of engagement, including boundary-crossing and understanding the value and constraints of WIL experiences, clarifying that the primary focus is learning.
- Provision of research funding to support collaboration that identifies and evolves best practice in WIL that aligns with workforce needs.
- Funding of collaborative initiatives which focus on co-creation in designing and implementing at-scale, transdisciplinary WIL arrangements that target specified community or industry-focused problems.
- Funding support for initiatives that advance higher education institution collaboration with SMEs and regional businesses for the purpose of WIL.
- Infrastructure funding to build ecosystems that support WIL collaboration between students, higher education institutions and industry partners for WIL (e.g. hubs). Tri-partnerships which enable SMEs and NFPs to participate with the support of industry mentors (as often unable to resource supervision, guidance and feedback) would upscale WIL and enable participation among all organisation types.

Q27 How can we improve research training in Australia including improving pathways for researchers to gain experience and develop high-impact careers in government and industry?

- Remove the 40-hour cap for international higher degree by research students to enable them to engage more easily in work-based WIL.
- Provide targeted incentives and support for industry partners to engage with and develop higher degree by research students that are prepared for careers beyond academia, such as through WIL.
- Review PhD scholarships which are unattractive in the current labour market.
- Revisit the structure of PhD programs that incorporate work-based WIL, three years is too short. This requires a framework that clearly articulates how work-based WIL experiences provide training/capabilities relevant to both research degree progress and the research candidate's career goals, avoiding the potential exploitation of research candidates as cheap labour.
- Funding support to compensate candidates at market rate who are working within an organisation as part of their PhD.
- Incentivise industry to attach PhD projects to existing R&D work with a clear value proposition for all stakeholders.
- Reward schemes to encourage greater focus on communicating value proposition of PhD studies and impact measures.
- Better support for collaborations between higher education institutions and government/industry, such as encouraging academic staff to undertake sabbatical/study leave to work in appropriate industry and staff in government/industry to received discounted/reciprocal arrangement training in research methodologies to explore areas of industry practice.
- Encourage higher education institutions to view researcher training as a continuum of learning that can begin from the start of an undergraduate degree, to gradually build work-relevant capabilities that are valuable at each education level (e.g. graduate certificates) and career stage up to and including researcher higher degrees and beyond.