

**WIL-ing the BA:  
Work experience opportunities in the  
Australian Bachelor of Arts**

**Summary report**

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## Key terms and definitions

<b>Work Integrated Learning</b>	“Integration of theory and practice knowledge whereby academic learning is aligned with its application in the workplace” (Edwards, Perkins, Pearce, & Hong, 2015, p. 23).
<b>Employability</b>	“A set of achievements- skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006, p. 8).
<b>Graduate attributes</b>	“Graduate attributes are an orienting statement of education outcomes used to inform curriculum design and the provision of learning experiences at a university. They are descriptions of the core abilities and values a university community agrees all its graduates should develop as a result of successfully completing their university studies” (Barrie, Hughes, & Smith, 2009, p. 1).
<b>Cooperative education</b>	Cooperative education is a structured educational strategy integrating (institutional) studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student’s academic or career goals. It provides progressive experiences in integrating theory and practice. Cooperative education is a partnership among students, educational institutions and employers with specified responsibilities for each party (The National Commission for Cooperative Education, 2002). Cooperative education considers curriculum, educational provisions and pedagogy in terms of place or setting. It acknowledges the particular contributions of different kinds of settings, both institutional and workplace, and privileges neither (Billett, 2007).
<b>Service learning</b>	Service learning is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).
<b>Experiential learning</b>	Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner "touches all the bases" – experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learnt (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).
<b>Undergraduate research and inquiry</b>	Healey and Jenkins (2009) offers the University of Gloucestershire definition of undergraduate research and inquiry as “student engagement from induction to graduation, individually and in groups, in research and inquiry into disciplinary, professional and community-based problems and issues, including involvement in knowledge exchange activities” (Childs et al., 2007).
<b>Students as Partners</b>	Whereby students and faculty engage in learning and teaching partnerships that potentially lead to increased engagement with learning and enhancement activities, transformed thinking about teaching and learning, and developed awareness of one’s own role and agency in the wider academic learning community (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2016).

## Acronyms

<b>ACDS</b>	Australian Council of Deans of Sciences
<b>ADT&amp;L</b>	Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning. Also known as Associate Dean Academic
<b>BA</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>DASSH</b>	Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
<b>HASS</b>	Humanities, Arts and Social Science disciplines or subjects
<b>OLT</b>	Office for Learning and Teaching
<b>WIL</b>	Work Integrated learning

## Executive Summary

There is an increasing trend in Australian universities towards offering internship-based courses in undergraduate degree programs. In a professions-based program such as engineering or dentistry, the shape and nature of these courses may be obvious. It is less so in generalist programs such as the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science. This project built on previous projects, [Nature and Roles of Arts Degrees](#), [Employability of BA Graduates](#) and [Benchmarking the Australian BA](#) that had identified challenges in incorporating workplace learning opportunities into BA programs.

The project aimed to raise awareness of WIL practices evident in the Australian Bachelor of Arts (BA) program. The project team worked with key stakeholders to collate, curate, and promote effective practices of workplace learning opportunities in the BA. The project:

- provided an updated and expanded web resource with examples of models of workplace learning opportunities evident in the contemporary Australian BA;
- facilitated a colloquium for BA academic leaders to develop and share models of workplace learning opportunities that meet the unique needs of the BA; and
- engaged in a range of dissemination activities to encourage awareness and implementation of workplace learning opportunities in the BA and other generalist undergraduate degree programs.

The project took a staged approach, drawing on an appreciative inquiry methodology. The first stage identified what is already being done in Australian BA programs. This stage mapped current WIL offerings objectives, activities and structure. In Stage Two, coordinators, Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning), school administrators and students were invited to a colloquium to explore the models identified in Stage One. Participants explored models in practice using an appreciative inquiry approach, appreciating what works and envisioning what an ideal might be. The final stage resulted in the development of materials published on the DASSH website including:

- a dataset of current WIL practices in BA programs across Australia;
- a summary report outlining current trends in practice;
- a summary report that summarises project outcomes and describes models of WIL in the BA that were identified and proposed; and
- case studies and examples of the models in practice.

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# 1. Project Approach

## 1.1. Background

While Australian higher education has always been “*primarily concerned with preparation for the professions*” (Davis, 2013 as cited by Probert, 2015), Australian higher education is increasingly tasked with providing a workforce suited to an innovative, entrepreneurial economy (CEDA, 2015; Kinner, 2015). The inclusion of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in contemporary higher education is often described as a means to meet the vocational aspirations of modern graduates (Abery, Drummond, & Bevan, 2015) and the societal and economic expectations of a work-ready workforce (Carr, 2009). WIL is commonly positioned in the literature as the “*integration of theory and practice knowledge whereby academic learning is aligned with its application in the workplace*” (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 23). In professions-based programs such as engineering or dentistry, the shape and nature of WIL experiences may be obvious. It is less so in the Bachelor of Arts (BA), a program traditionally associated with generalist, less vocational outcomes (Barnett, 2004; Carr, 2009; Parker, 2003). Yet, BA programs across Australia are progressively including WIL activities in their core activities (Gannaway & Sheppard, 2013; Gannaway & Trent, 2008).

This shift towards an increasingly outcomes-orientated and vocations-focused education (Bridgstock, 2013; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Marginson, 2004) is at odds with the outcomes traditionally associated with liberal arts programs (Carr, 2009). The inclusion of WIL in the BA generates a tension between traditional perceptions of higher education as “*a developmental and transformational activity*” (Parker, 2003) and modern expectations of producing economically productive graduates (Barnett, 2000; Nussbaum, 2010). It is a difficult task to balance assuring graduate employment outcomes with maintaining the integrity of the BA as a liberal arts program. Getting it wrong can result in fragmented and unstable curricula (Gannaway, 2014), affecting student enrolment and attrition rates. In a time of increasing dependence on market share, volatile student enrolment numbers can result in program closures (Thornton, 2010).

While there are a number of studies that are related to the nature and scope of WIL in professions-based programs, there are few that exist for generalist programs. This absence is gradually being rectified, with recent studies focusing on the generalist STEM disciplines (see, for example, “*Work Integrated Learning in STEM in Australian Universities*” (Edwards et al., 2015), an Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report offering new insight into WIL in the STEM disciplines). Yet, few studies have been conducted that have provided empirical data related to understanding the transition of liberal arts graduates into the world of work. While some have related liberal arts degrees with job outcomes (Adamuti-Trache, Hawkey, Schuetze, & Glickman, 2006; Lin, Sweet, & Anisef, 2003) and others have explored the education and employment outcomes of Australian BA graduates (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013), it is rare to find sector-wide studies that explore WIL for liberal arts students.

This extension grant project expanded the findings of three previous projects funded by the OLT and its predecessors and a benchmarking project commissioned by the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH). The first project, “*Nature and Roles of BA*” (Gannaway & Trent, 2008) provided datasets outlining the type and nature of work experiences evident in BA programs in 2008. This dataset was updated in 2012 in a project funded by the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

(DASSH) “*Benchmarking the Australian BA*”(Gannaway & Sheppard, 2013). A comparison between the two datasets indicated a number of changes. New models were observed to have emerged; units have been closed in a relatively short period as institutions have experimented with implementing these types of experiences. A further project, “*Employability of BA Graduates*”(Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013), funded by the ALTC and completed in 2011, identified employers’ expectations of graduate attributes and graduates’ perceptions of skills and attributes attained as a consequence of engaging with the BA program.

Each of these projects identified that work experience or Work Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities into the BA program did exist, but were not necessarily core aspects of the BA program curriculum. The reports identified challenges in implementing these opportunities into BA programs. These challenges were attributed to the wide variety of potential employment paths taken by BA graduates and to the intrinsic nature of the BA that relies on students to self-select units of study.

These observations indicated a rationale for further investigation into the ways that WIL has been implemented in BA programs since 2007 and to consider whether there is a model of WIL that addresses the educational intentions of a generalist Australian BA degree program.

## 1.2. Project Aims

This project aimed to update exemplars of workplace learning opportunities identified in the *Nature and Roles of Arts Degrees* project to both raise awareness of, and encourage uptake of, effective WIL practices in BA programs.

To achieve this aim, the project was designed to:

- identify common features and models of effective WIL currently in use in Australian BA programs;
- identify exemplary cases and models with potential for translation to other contexts; and
- develop strategies to encourage adoption and translation of practices between disciplines and programs.

The project team also actively sought opportunities to identify the potential for expansion of project findings and outcomes to other generalist degrees, such as the Bachelor of Science.

## 1.3. Project Methodology

Project activities were conducted between November 2015 and September 2016 and focused on all 35 Australian universities that offered a generalist BA during that period. A generalist BA was defined as an undergraduate program that:

- focuses on humanities, arts and social science (HASS) disciplines;
- requires students to engage in a breadth of study across disciplines;
- offers a range of majors and has little requirement for engagement with core units outside of the majors; and
- has a flexible structure allowing for student choice (Gannaway, 2015).

The project took a staged approach, drawing on an appreciative inquiry methodology. Appreciative inquiry studies are typically conducted as incremental, participatory inquiry

over four phases: (i) the **discovery** phase during which time participants “reflect on and discuss the best of what is concerning the object of inquiry”; (ii) **dream**, when participants consider an ideal that meets the “common aspirations of system members”; after which participants (iii) **design** “concrete proposals” for further consideration prior to implementation in (iv) the **delivery** or **destiny** phase (Bushe, 2011, pp. 88 - 89).

#### 1.4. Project Activities

This project focused on the first three phases associated with appreciative inquiry, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Staged approach and timeline**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<b>Stage 1: What’s being done (discovery)</b>	<p><b><i>Develop models of WIL (currently in use and emerging)</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the existing data sets from previous studies</li> <li>• Map current state of offerings (purpose, content activities and structure)</li> <li>• Identify common features of practice in work experience opportunities in the BA curriculum</li> </ul>	<b>November 2015 – February 2016</b>
<b>Stage 2: What’s ideal (dream)</b>	<p><b><i>Consider unique needs of the BA and develop contextualised models of WIL</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with sector</li> <li>• Action-planning workshop</li> <li>• Project team meetings</li> <li>• Review of exemplars and models</li> <li>• Engagement with ACDS Lighthouse projects</li> </ul>	<b>March 2016 – July 2016</b>
<b>Stage 3: What’s possible (design)</b>	<p><b><i>Consider the viability of models and outcomes</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DASSH ADL&amp;T network conference</li> <li>• Meetings with interested groups</li> <li>• Project team meetings</li> <li>• Engagement with ACDS Lighthouse projects</li> <li>• Finalise the dataset of exemplars and models of WIL in the BA</li> <li>• Publish on the DASSH website</li> </ul>	<b>July 2016 – September 2016</b>

## 1.5. Data collection and analysis

In Stage One, current and emerging WIL practices in BA programs were identified via a desktop audit. The data collection process traced unit offerings in BA programs in 2015 and in 2016. All units listed were searched using key search terms such as work placement, work experience, professional practise, practicum, field work, in-country fieldtrips, independent research projects, internships, community-based learning, service learning, performance projects, field classes, overseas intensive subjects, study units, research topics and study tours<sup>1</sup>. The search highlighted a number of units, which were then interrogated further. Units which did not adhere to the broader definition established by Smith et al were removed. The remaining units were returned to program conveners and Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) at the respective institutions to have data collected verified as being an accurate reflection. The verified data were then subjected to further analysis, with the project team seeking commonalities and differences to help identify emergent categories and themes.

Initial trends were identified. A scope of the current literature was also conducted, with a focus on what was being observed in WIL practices in disciplines outside of HASS-based programs. Emerging models from the BA data set were considered and reviewed against trends observed in the current literature

In Stage Two, BA coordinators, Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning), teachers and administrators further explored emergent models and trends at the colloquium event, meetings and conferences.

A colloquium was held at The University of Queensland St Lucia campus on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016. A general invitation was sent to Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning and BA coordinators across institutions in Australia and New Zealand. Fifteen people plus five members of the project team attended the colloquium. There were two representatives from NZ and apart from local participants a number of people came from institutions as widespread as Tasmania and South Australia. The day was designed to have tangible outcomes and produced an action plan for the future. Participants were presented with data emerging from Stage One and were asked to consider WIL opportunities that are unique to the generalist BA.

Stage Three included updating and expanding the existing datasets and resources. Examples of models of workplace learning opportunities were disseminated to refine the models and to encourage awareness and implementation of workplace learning opportunities in the BA and other generalist programs.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this project study abroad exchange programs were not included.

## 2. Findings

This section provides a summary of the findings of the project.

### 2.1 A State of Churn

The BA, and WIL activity within the BA, is in a state of constant change. Data collected in December 2015 had changed by February 2016 and again by July 2016. As a consequence, these findings can only be considered a snapshot. This state of volatility gives clear indication that this is an emerging space that is evolving in reaction to institutional and Commonwealth pressures and to feedback from students and key industry stakeholders.

### 2.2. WIL in the BA

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in the BA is used as an umbrella term incorporating a number of work-based activities that prepare students for employment. These activities encompass industry-based projects, community-based projects, research related topics, fieldwork and clinical placement. The project team focused on 35 of the 39 universities that had a program specifically titled “Bachelor of Arts” listed in their 2016 offerings. The project team drew the Smith et al definition of WIL as experiences that support students in gaining explicit educational outcomes through formal learning with formative and summative assessment, and acquire workplace experience through some form of supervision (Smith et al., 2009). Units of study in BA programs across Australia that exhibited these features were identified through a desktop audit. As a result, it was apparent that 30 of the 35 universities with a BA offered a WIL experience in 2016, with many BA programs offering multiple WIL units of study. As evident in Table 2 below, most of the WIL activities offered were embedded in the curriculum of specific majors.

**Table 2: WIL activity structures within the BA**

Code	Description	N
<b>Program</b>	BA students must complete this experience in order to graduate from the BA	4
<b>BA elective</b>	Optional unit that can be taken by students enrolled in the BA	20
<b>Major</b>	WIL activity is only available to students undertaking a specific major within the BA	85
<b>Open Elective</b>	WIL activity is available to any discipline across the university	14
<b>University-wide</b>	All students enrolled at this institution must complete in order to graduate	1

This finding suggests that the majority of WIL opportunities are discipline-based, rather than serving generic or BA level outcomes. Opportunities with direct links to particular professions were readily available. Examples include professions such as media and journalism, theatre, arts and drama programs, anthropology and archaeological fieldwork and public relations and political internships. Examples of WIL appropriate to developing skills suited to more generic career paths were less evident.

There was, however, a group of WIL units where the experience was less contingent on the discipline and available across the BA program at a program level. These WIL experiences provided an umbrella course for students to complete an internship, work experience or

work in a volunteer capacity. These experiences engaged the student in the world of “work”. The emphasis in the learning outcomes of these units was for students to become familiar with appropriate workplace etiquette, protocols and behaviours to support their transition to the world of work. These experiences tended to be more prosaic in nature and designed to equip the student with generic employability skills. Such units of study typically included CV writing, interview skills, and workplace behaviours as core components of study.

There were some WIL units evident that were specifically designed to link the distinctive outcomes of the BA to what the BA graduate could contribute to multiple workplaces. This more explicitly espoused purpose for WIL in the BA appeared to be evolving even during the life of the project, with very few evident in December 2015, but increasing across 2016. These courses tended to be “capstone” in nature and operated as a type of “finishing school”, attempting to draw the sometime disparate threads of the degree into a coherent whole.

There were no instances identified where there was a conscious effort to explicitly transform students’ understandings to support students to integrate their learning across diverse disciplines or to support the integration of HASS theoretical and discipline-based learning into the generic world of work. This type of WIL activity was, however, one that was mentioned by project informants as a future aspiration.

### **2.3. Challenges of WIL in the BA**

During the life of the project a number of challenges of including WIL in the BA were identified by the project team and project participants. These impediments not only included the general impediments as identified by previous research into WIL in generalist degrees (Edwards et al., 2015), but also issues associated with the BA specifically.

A summary of the more general issues included the following:

- The increased numbers of students engaging in higher education and the uncapping of university places means that there are simply more students requiring a WIL experience. It is difficult to attract enough employers to provide a useful experience for students. There are moves to provide alternative WIL experiences that may not necessarily be associated with an external workplace, however these too require resources.
- The general lack of funding support leading to the under resourcing of WIL; although new university priorities are seeing more resources allocated to work experience opportunities there is still considerable shortfall. The sustainability of funding is also an issue.
- The lack of processes and infrastructure for developing WIL institutionally was seen as a challenge (although this is changing). There is also the perception that if the current interest in promoting WIL and employability is not developed from the ground up then any development and expansion work in the area may not be sustainable (Edwards et al., 2015).
- Further general impediments to institutional and staff buy-in included the idea that students were not necessarily ready and able to take up a WIL experience. The process might be seen as a detriment to the student’s progress and also potentially damaging to the university reputation.

- While many types of WIL activities have been available in programs of studies in past years, what is changing is the upscaling of WIL programs. In some instances, institutions are now stating that there will be a WIL experience available for every student and in at least one case that a WIL experience will now be a mandatory part of each student’s study program. This upscaling of WIL in different forms certainly means changes in the way institutions need to think about WIL.

The project team and participants involved in the project determined there were more specific challenges to expanding and implementing WIL in the BA and more generally across HASS disciplines. In a brief overview, the following themes emerged during the project life:

- The absence of value placed on WIL within many of the HASS disciplines. This issue was exemplified by the difficulty in expanding WIL activities when they were often reliant on a single champion or a small group of WIL supporters; the lack of professional and academic staff buy-in; the recognition of the time poor academic; and the general indifference to providing WIL across an already crowded curriculum.
- The more tenuous link between the BA and professional career outcomes becomes increasingly problematic when associated with the current discourses of employability and productivity. Some discipline based degrees already providing forms of WIL had a history of engagement with work experience i.e. journalism, archaeology, anthropology etc. These provided some early working models. However, the situation becomes more complex when BA degrees with non-specific professional outcomes are required to provide WIL within the curriculum. New models have emerged or are emerging signalling a genuine intention to change, however the success of these models is yet to be ascertained.
- The often, less generously funded BA means that it is more difficult to provide a valuable WIL experience to all. Often WIL opportunities have hurdles to participation including GPA, application processes, institutional requirements and extra costs associated with uptake. Lack of “industry” connections also means fewer positions available.
- The BA attracts different types of student, many are mature aged, already working in fulltime positions, with families and are increasingly time poor. Including the extra burden of WIL in the study program is seen as one more impediment to overcome. Even the school leaver funding their lifestyle by working part or full time and engaging in a social life is also recognisably time poor. A further indication of student perspective is that if the WIL experience is not assessed or valued then the student will not see any benefit in taking part.

This brief overview of some of the challenges for implementing WIL in generalist degrees and in the BA in particular covers some of the issues. There are, however, often more complex issues at play that are context dependent. These are not referred to in this section, however they too are entirely relevant when examining the complication of WIL at an institutional level.

#### **2.4. How WIL is structured into the BA**

WIL activities are scaffolded into the BA in three main ways, as illustrated in Table 3. Note that examples of the Program category are explored in the supplementary “Models in Practice” report.

**Table 3: WIL structure evident in the Australian BA (Healey & Jenkins, 2009)**

Type	Features
<b>Bolted-on electives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• operate independently of the BA program curriculum intentions of disciplinary majors</li> <li>• elective or optional unit</li> <li>• address institutional directives</li> <li>• often made available to meet institutional missions/directives or pressure from students to provide WIL opportunities</li> <li>• students expected to find their own placements and produce a generic report on their learning</li> <li>• restricted to students with high grades</li> <li>• take the form of               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>shell</i> units providing students and administrators opportunities to incorporate internships into the program structure</li> <li>○ generic training to develop CVs or highlight employability capacity acquired across the program</li> </ul> </li> <li>• either               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ open elective for all students across the university or</li> <li>○ restricted to BA enrolments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• occur at any point of study</li> <li>• do not draw on the BA experience in an explicit manner</li> </ul>
<b>Embedded in the major</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prevalent in disciplines with professions-orientated opportunities or closer associations with industry or community partners. Anthropological and archaeological fieldwork and political internships also readily available</li> <li>• forge a link between the student academic experience and work life in the discipline</li> <li>• either               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ optional electives within majors</li> <li>○ <i>core</i> units in the major, which students are required to complete in order to complete the major</li> </ul> </li> <li>• most occur in the final year of study</li> <li>• do not draw on the BA experience in an explicit manner</li> </ul>
<b>Program level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• units are part of a purposefully redesigned BA with a <i>spine</i> of common required units</li> <li>• WIL forms core unit to the program, which students are required to complete in order to complete the major</li> <li>• capstone WIL-based units in final year of study</li> <li>• integrate learning across the whole program</li> </ul>

## 2.5. Types of WIL activities

Along with the increase in the number of WIL experiences on offer there was also a noticeable divergence in the types of WIL experiences available in the BA.

Examples of the types of WIL activities evident in the BA were categorised into nine different types (illustrated in Table 4 below). These categories indicate that students are able to engage with Work Integrated Learning in the BA in activities broader than a conventional understanding of a work placement or internship. The different types of WIL evident in the BA suggest that BA teachers are seeking novel and innovative approaches to meeting the challenges of providing opportunities for students to apply theory and to gain valuable work-place experience, despite the challenges identified.



**Table 4: Types of WIL experiences provided in the BA**

<b>Type of WIL</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Placements</b>	Short or long term placements in a workplace – could be community-based organisations, NGOs, private or public sector, industry.
<b>Projects</b>	Industry or community sponsored projects that are designed to address a particular issue or problem. Projects set by academic staff that respond to one of the major social, cultural and economic challenges of the 21st century.
<b>Simulations</b>	Activities that are specifically designed to simulate a work environment, using equipment and practices that are standard in the industry.
<b>Field observation</b>	Activities that expose students to an environment where they can observe the application of theory into work practices or the outcome of such work.
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	Activities in which students develop their own business/social enterprise to address a social need or fill a market niche that they have identified.
<b>Service</b>	Activities which meld learning with community service or volunteer activities.
<b>Research</b>	Activities for undergraduate students who work alongside academics to gain research experience or who conduct research in the workplace.
<b>Generic</b>	Generic preparation for the world of work.
<b>Blended</b>	The WIL unit combines different types of WIL within one unit of study.

In order to provide appropriate experiences for all students, institutions were moving from standardised models, which included a work placement in industry and/or service, to innovative models to meet the various challenges outlined previously.

As part of the project, four cases were developed that provide insight into the directions these institutions (see website link/ appendices) were taking. A summary of these cases (see Table 5) provides insight into the diverse approaches being adopted to provide work experience for students.