

Stakeholder Summary

Work-integrated learning benefits students' careers – but some benefit more than others

Internships, field placements, co-op and other forms of postsecondary work-integrated learning (WIL) help college and university students clarify their career interests and get jobs relevant to their education and career ambitions, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). But more work is needed to ensure that graduates of all program areas experience benefits from WIL participation.

Project description

In the third and final phase of a multi-year study of WIL, *Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector: The Pathways of Recent College and University Graduates* followed up with WIL and non-WIL students 18 months after graduation to examine their educational and employment outcomes. The same group of students — from 13 Ontario colleges and universities participating in the previous WIL studies — had also been surveyed at graduation in spring 2012.

A total of 3,340 respondents completed the follow-up survey in fall 2013, which explored how WIL graduates differ from non-WIL graduates in further postsecondary education and labour market entry, status, experience and outcomes. Analysis included institution type (college and university), program area, credential and type of WIL activity.

Findings

While WIL appears to help both college and university students get a better sense of their career goals and pursue relevant employment, not all graduates of all program areas benefited to the same extent from WIL participation, according to the study. Arts and humanities and social sciences university graduates had the lowest levels of WIL participation and even those who participated in WIL experienced fewer labour market benefits.

College graduates experienced fewer benefits to WIL participation than university graduates, although the authors note that this could be a reflection of the fact that college education is generally more career-focused and relatively few students graduate without some kind of WIL experience.

There were no noteworthy differences in time to employment between college WIL and non-WIL participants. Among university respondents, WIL participants were more likely than non-WIL participants to have had a new job arranged before finishing school, whereas non-WIL participants were more likely to have continued working in a position they held while they were a student. Many WIL graduates contacted previous WIL employers as part of their job search process.

For both college and university respondents, employed graduates who participated in WIL were more likely to feel that they were appropriately qualified for their job, that their job was related to their long-term career goals and that their job was related to their studies.

The study found that the mean annual income of employed college graduates was \$31,402, which did not differ significantly by WIL participation. University graduates who participated in WIL did, however, see an earnings premium. The average annual income of WIL participants was significantly higher than that of non-WIL participants (\$45,646 vs. \$36,813). This earnings premium held for graduates of business, science and engineering, and health sciences and social services programs but not for social sciences and arts and humanities graduates. The study also found that debt levels did not differ substantially by WIL participation for college or university graduates.

The findings are aligned with earlier HEQCO research in the series on WIL. The research found that [institutions](#) and [employers](#) view work-integrated learning as an important part of the student experience, preparing students to enter the labour market with relevant, transferable and marketable skills. [Faculty](#) with WIL experience believe even more of it should be available to students and employers, while nearly half of [students](#) with no WIL experience would pursue a WIL option if they could start their postsecondary education over again. The research also found that a key challenge is ensuring that the supply of quality WIL opportunities meets the demand from students, faculty and postsecondary institutions.

Recommendations / further research

The authors say that additional effort is needed to ensure that students in all academic program areas experience benefits from WIL participation, especially university arts and humanities, and social sciences. WIL opportunities have traditionally been developed for programs with clearer career pathways, such as business, health, engineering and education and the same models may not be as easily applied to the arts and humanities, and social sciences.

Additional research could examine the nature and extent of WIL benefits to college graduates, as well as whether there are longer-term career benefits associated with WIL participation. The data collected for this study could also be used to examine whether there are differences in outcomes based on WIL characteristics or the socio-demographic or academic characteristics of students.

Authors of Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector: The Pathways of Recent College and University Graduates are Julie Peters, Peggy Sattler and Jenna Kelland, Academica Group.