Inclusion in Work-integrated Learning: Lessons from Administrators, Employers and Students

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Executive Summary

As a form of experiential learning (EL), work-integrated learning (WIL) integrates formal education with hands-on practice in a relevant workplace setting. WIL contributes to improved labour market outcomes for graduates, builds job readiness and develops self-efficacy and skills (McRae & Johnston, 2016; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Ramji et al., 2016; Stirling et al., 2016). To realize the full benefits of WIL, however, students should have experiences, in both their institution and workplace, that are *inclusive* (Bowen, 2018; Fleming & Haigh, 2018).

'Inclusion' is a term that encompasses ideas of equity, diversity, accessibility and decolonization. Students who feel comfortable to be themselves, ask questions, have access to supports and a collaborative organization experience better wellness and learning in WIL (Davis et al., 2020; Bowen, 2018). Despite these findings, studies have not yet explored how students experience such feelings of inclusion during WIL, and there is little federal or provincial direction for building, measuring or instilling inclusive WIL practices.

To help fill this gap, HEQCO conducted surveys of students, employers and institutional administrators in collaboration with Academica during the 2020-21 academic year, resulting in a sample of 312 students, 109 employers and 111 postsecondary education (PSE) administrators. We asked if and how inclusive training opportunities, supportive PSE and work environments, and awareness of and access to support services impact student satisfaction. We asked employers and institutional participants who should be responsible for the management, improvement, training and tracking of inclusive supports. And we inquired about gaps in inclusion practices and what practitioners could do to address them.

Findings show that student perceptions of satisfaction with their WIL experience are positively associated with accessibility and inclusion. Students who received inclusion training (53% of our sample) were more likely to report satisfaction than those who did not (40% versus 31%). A supportive environment, including dedicated mentorship, intentional onboarding procedures and facilitated opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with colleagues, was fundamental to the experience of inclusion. Most students said they felt supported by PSE staff (78%), their WIL manager (72%) and their WIL coworkers (71%); students who felt supported were more likely to indicate being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their WIL experience.

Awareness of, access to and the ability to engage support services when needed impacted accessibility and inclusion. Sixty percent of students were aware of support services; 41% of those who were aware of supports said they were "very satisfied" with their WIL experience. Students who knew how and where to go for assistance were far more likely to say they were satisfied with their WIL (85%) compared to those who did not know where to go (63%).

Stakeholder groups disagreed about the division of responsibility for and management of inclusion in WIL. Twenty-two percent of administrators said they did not know how to improve accessibility and inclusion in WIL and expressed disagreement about who should be responsible for workplace inclusion training: 30% of employers said their department should be responsible whereas 34% believed that institutions should be responsible.

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To improve inclusion and satisfaction in WIL, HEQCO recommends the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), Ontario PSE institutions and WIL employers work together to:

- Ensure students know how and where to access support services; provide incoming WIL students with a list of services as part of orientation and onboarding processes to make sure they are aware of available supports and how to access them.
- Embed inclusive practices at every stage of the WIL experience. Institutions can coordinate with WIL employers to provide inclusion training and instruction to students and their workplace managers.
- Collect data to inform the development of services and initiatives to increase inclusion in WIL. PSE institutions and government have an important role to play in setting expectations and standards of conduct around inclusion in WIL.
- MCU should lead consultation with institutions to embed EDID into institutional and public guidelines about experiential learning (EL) and WIL.

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Introduction

In work-integrated learning (WIL), higher education and workplace environments overlap. WIL is a form of experiential learning (EL) that encompasses co-op, internships, field placements and community service, and integrates theoretical and/or formal education with practical experiences in a relevant workplace setting (Sattler, 2011).[1] By providing PSE students with applied training, networking connections, skill and professional development, opportunities for personal growth and enhanced self-awareness, WIL enables successful transitions into the labour market (McRae & Johnston, 2016; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Ramji et al., 2016; Stirling et al., 2016).

To realize these benefits fully, WIL students must also have experiences, in both their institution and in the workplace, that are *inclusive* (Bowen, 2018; Fleming & Haigh, 2018). This ensures WIL benefits are enjoyed by all students, including those historically disadvantaged, in their school-to-work transitions (Hora et al., 2020). Literature suggests that students who feel included — who are comfortable enough to make mistakes and ask questions, and who have access to supports and experience a collaborative organizational environment — have better WIL outcomes with respect to both wellness and learning (Davis et al., 2020; Bowen, 2018).

'Inclusion' is a broad term that encompasses related ideas of equity, diversity, accessibility and decolonization. These concepts are at once distinct and interconnected, and often summarized by the acronym EDID (equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization). Defining inclusion in higher education can be challenging because it is both a process and a result (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). Determinations of whether an environment is inclusive are far from objective; they depend on individual perceptions and interpretations of experience. In this study, inclusion in WIL is defined as a student's ability to be their authentic self, experience fair treatment, feel valued for who they are and make meaningful contributions without having to conceal or feel ashamed of their identity (in defining the term, we draw on work by Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019; Sarkar, 2015; Shore et al., 2018; and Mor Barak & Daya, 2013).

Workplace inclusion develops through social interactions and may be communicated to employees and WIL students through organizational initiatives such as training, policies and supports (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019; Shore et al., 2018). In the context of the institution, inclusion is developed through interactions with WIL administrators, the WIL hiring process, access and availability of support services and a student's personal balance of school and work, involving finances, school workload, family responsibilities and so forth. Exploring inclusive experiences in WIL is further complicated by the overlap between institution and employer. Thus, students encounter multiple policies and practices within both their PSE institution and in their WIL workplace, and each has the potential for inclusive or exclusive practices (see Figure 1).

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[1] For this study and accompanying surveys, we use a definition of WIL developed by Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada: "Work-integrated learning is a form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting. WIL experiences include an engaged partnership of at least an academic institution, a host organization, and a student. WIL occurs at the course or program level and includes the development of student learning objectives and outcomes related to employability, agency, knowledge and skill mobility, and life-long learning" (Approved by CEWIL Canada membership on November 3, 2021).

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Figure 1

Factors Affecting Inclusion for Students Participating in WIL
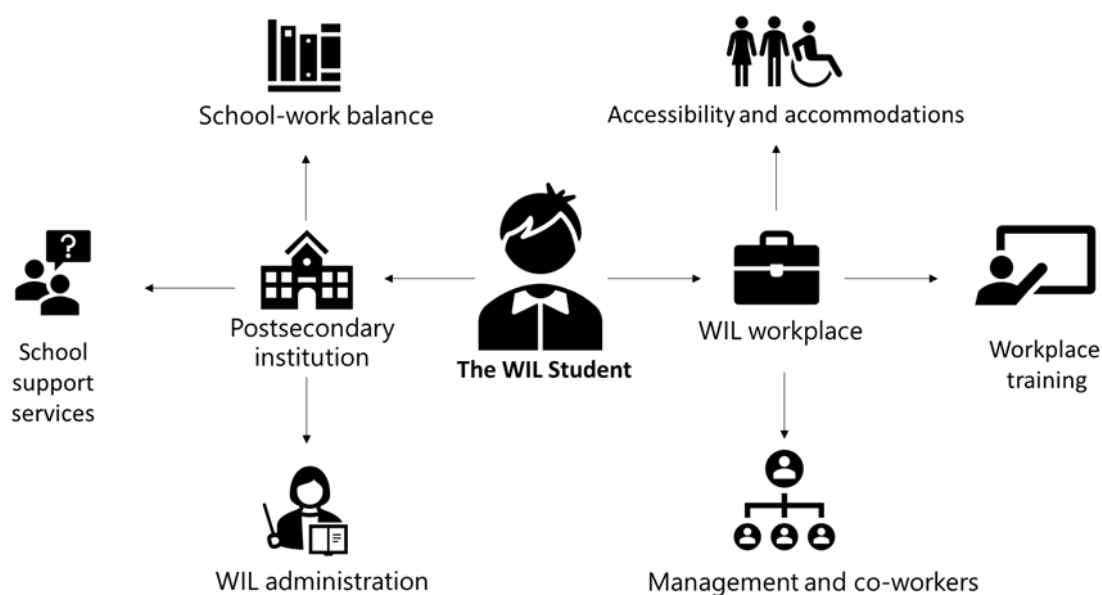
Note: This image illustrates the number of opportunities, at both their PSE institution and in the workplace, that a student participating in WIL may be made to feel welcomed and encouraged to participate based on their identity.

Despite the challenges related to defining and measuring inclusion, Ontario's PSE institutions are working to provide inclusive environments in all spaces where learning happens (in classrooms, in WIL and in remote and hybrid learning classrooms). Many employers are doing the same in places of work (Shore et al., 2018). There is limited Canadian scholarship about students' ability to access WIL opportunities and the challenges associated with this process, in part due to inconsistent and poor data collection. Research that is available shows students from equity-deserving groups are underrepresented among WIL participants, and -some students experience disproportionate financial barriers, such as high tuition for certain forms of WIL and/or the inability to undertake unpaid WIL because they require paid work (Hora et al., 2020; Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019; Gatto et al., 2021). These studies help us understand who is included in WIL, but there is little research about students' perceptions of inclusion *during* their WIL experience.

To help fill this gap, HEQCO surveyed the key stakeholders involved in WIL, including students, employers and institutional staff. Our respondents describe efforts toward, and experiences of, inclusivity training, support services, their availability and accessibility-related barriers. Institutional and workplace participants also describe how inclusion efforts might be shared, measured and driven. With a better understanding of student experiences, rates of satisfaction, and institution and employer perspectives, we identify best practices and recommendations for institutions and employers to ensure WIL benefits all students.

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Literature Review

The majority of Canadian literature about WIL gathers and analyzes students' and graduates' perceptions of WIL experiences (Sattler & Peters, 2013; Peters et al., 2014). Previous HEQCO research on the subject of WIL explored student and faculty perceptions of WIL, best-practices in WIL pedagogy, the increasing prevalence and varying success of remote WIL and student experiences of WIL through the lens of identity. Literature focusing on inclusion in WIL describes it as layered, experienced in multiple circumstances and surroundings, including PSE (institutional), organizational (workplace) and interpersonal contexts.

Institutional contexts serve as the foundation for WIL experiences; institutional policies and commitments that incorporate inclusion in the broader learning space also apply to WIL experiences. Inclusive education and, by extension, inclusive WIL, emphasize student participation and progression (Hockings, 2010; Halle and Dymond, 2008) and supports successful graduate outcomes. Institutions also work directly with employers to develop placement opportunities and environments that aim to be inclusive for all students. Institutional data collection and evaluation efforts help WIL administrators understand the efficacy of programs to increase participants' sense of inclusion (Robinson, 2021).

Similarly, much of the student experience of inclusivity happens in the student's work placement, during which they are subject to the organizational practices of their employer. Mallozzi and Drewery (2019) assert that inclusive organizations create environments in which individuals from diverse backgrounds can fully participate and contribute to the best of their abilities. Inclusive workplaces may be created through a combination of organizational practices and interactions among employees; these elements contribute to a positive work setting for all employees (Nishii & Rich, 2013). There is abundant literature that demonstrates the positive impact of inclusive workplace practices among non-student employees (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Hur, 2020). Individuals who work in environments that facilitate inclusion and interpersonal connection are more likely to be productive and contribute more to their organizations, enhancing job performance, increasing motivation and reducing burnout (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Sulea, 2014). While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for developing inclusive environments at work, key strategies emerging from the literature include training and workshops; orientation and onboarding activities related to EDID; and confronting implicit (or unconscious) bias (Onyeador et al., 2021; Summers et al., 2014; Bezrukova et al., 2016). Dedicating time to inclusion training also signals the value organizations place on EDID principles (Gamage, 2022) — by integrating training into work hours, employers communicate that the activities are essential to the organizations' work and culture.

Interpersonal connections with workplace mentors, co-workers and managers also influence an individual's experience of inclusion. These relationships emerge in the literature as a driving force for feelings of belonging and satisfaction among employees (Brimhall et al., 2022) as well as WIL students (Fleming & Haigh, 2018; Davis et al., 2020). Mentorship practices contribute to higher rates of satisfaction with WIL (Brimhall et al., 2022; Rillotta et al., 2021; Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019), and regular communication with co-workers and supervisors provides students with a sense of connection and belonging and helps them understand the value of their work (Pretti et al., 2020). Feelings of inclusion contribute to students' satisfaction with their tasks and

commitment to an organization (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019; Hur, 2020; Sarkar, 2015; Shore et al., 2018; Mor Barak & Daya, 2013). Negative interpersonal dynamics can in turn hinder feelings of inclusion (Magras, 2018).

Student satisfaction is strategically important in PSE. Not only are institutions invested in students and graduates who recommend their pathways and speak positively about their experiences, but institutions also understand that satisfaction is positively linked to student retention and persistence. Engagement with knowledgeable and supportive advisors strongly influences student satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Soria, 2012; Tinto, 1994). Student satisfaction takes on an additional dimension in the context of WIL, wherein postsecondary institutions "will ultimately be held responsible for the quality of students' placement experiences" (Smith & Worsfold, 2013, p. 1070).

There is a high level of federal and provincial investment in WIL, and some acknowledgments of the importance of inclusion, but little direction for building inclusive WIL experiences. Inclusion and access have also not been emphasized as an aspect of quality WIL by organizational bodies involved in WIL. Provincial and federal communities of practice, namely EWO and CEWIL, have occasionally raised inclusion alongside equity and accessibility as priority areas for WIL, but both stop short of either prescription or practical suggestions. Other provincial government initiatives follow suit. For example, the Ontario Government's Guiding Principles for Experiential Learning remind EL institutions and employers to provide students with accessible and inclusive environments, but provide no direction on what that means, or how to do so (MAESD, 2017). Likewise, the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee, established in 2017 and tasked to recommend an accessibility standard to identify and address barriers in PSE, references EL in its recommendations under "expanding experiential learning opportunities" for students with disabilities,[2] stating that institutions should work with host organizations to develop accessible and inclusive supervision guidelines (2022).[3] However, the Committee does not provide institutions with guidelines or principles for effective ways of doing this. The Ontario Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP) also focuses on inclusion-related concepts of accessibility and equity and provides funds to support outreach, transition and retention for underrepresented students in PSE. While a 2021 HEQCO review found some OPAIP-funded projects are related to EL,[4] there is no directive for OPAIP to support WIL or to establish inclusive practices therein.

Literature on inclusion in the workplace demonstrates both the importance and the interconnectedness of belonging, interpersonal relationships and satisfaction. But studies have not yet explicitly explored how students experience such feelings of inclusion during WIL, at work and within the PSE institution, which is our only means to verify if WIL practices are indeed inclusive. With few exceptions, limited resources make measuring or instilling inclusive practices

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[2] The Committee cited Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a tool to improve access and inclusion. UDL is a framework to support access and inclusion for all students, the goal of which is to "improve teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST, 2018).
[3] The committee reviewed all comments, finalized their recommendations and submitted them to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility for consideration. As outlined in the AODA, the minister shall decide whether to recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the proposed standard be adopted by regulation in whole, in part or with modifications.
[4] OPAIP can be regarded as envelope funding, which means that institutions may use this funding to develop programs responsive to their needs as long as they fall within OPAIP's broader goals of supporting access and inclusion. In a 2021 HEQCO evaluation of OPAIP, 32 colleges and universities reported running 23 programs related to experiential learning between 2018-2021 (Chatoor, 2022).

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in WIL challenging. In response, our study engages students, administrators and employers directly on their experience of inclusivity and probes those directly involved for their insights into the management, improvement, training and tracking required for inclusion efforts and supports.

Research Questions and Methodology

Our research was guided by the following questions:

- How do factors related to inclusive training opportunities; supportive PSE and work environments; and awareness of and access to support services impact student satisfaction with WIL?
- From the perspective of employers and institutional participants, who should be responsible for the management, improvement, training and tracking required for inclusion efforts and supports?
- Based on the above, do gaps exist in inclusion practices in WIL? If so, what can practitioners do to address them?

This report shares lessons from student, employer and institutional WIL experiences during the 2020-21 academic year. HEQCO developed the student and employer surveys, and Academica Group administered them in fall 2021, resulting in a sample of 312 students and 109 employers. HEQCO also developed the administrator survey and circulated it to institutional staff via the EWO listserv and through our social media channels between November 2021 and January 2022. The survey garnered 111 responses. Screening questions were used to ensure respondents had participated in a WIL placement during 2020-21. HEQCO staff conducted data analyses using STATA, Excel and NVivo for descriptive statistics and coding of qualitative responses.

The first section of the survey focused on general questions related to institution, workplace type, sector type and academic programs. The second section focused on general WIL characteristics (such as whether the placement was remote, hybrid or in-person). The third section focused on students' experiences of inclusion and accessibility[5] during their WIL. Students completed a fourth section on demographic characteristics. Tables 1, 2 and 3 offer a breakdown of student, administrator and employer characteristics. In this report, "significant" refers to measured statistical differences where $p<=0.05$.

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[5] Accessibility in our context refers to students' ability to participate in a WIL placement and to access support services relative to their needs; there are aspects of our study which touch upon this (such as accessibility-related services and knowing where to go for help).

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Table 1

Characteristics of Student Sample

Characteristic	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Women	62	191
First Generation	22	67
Black, Indigenous, or Person of Colour	60	188
LGBTQAI+	21	66
Identifies as Having a Disability	15	48
College	37	114
University	63	196

Table 2

Characteristics of WIL Administrator Sample

Characteristic	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Colleges	44	52
University	56	67
Central Ontario	53	59
Southwestern Ontario	37	41
Eastern Ontario	6	7
Northern Ontario	4	4

Table 3

Characteristics of WIL Employer Sample

Characteristic	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Private Sector	63	69
Public Sector	37	40
Executive or Leadership Position	45	49
Mid-Management Position	40	44
Staff	15	14
<50 employees	17	18
51–499 employees	49	54
>500 employees	34	37
Education Sector	10	11
Manufacturing Sector	10	11
Professional, Scientific or Technology Sector	17	18
Construction Sector	11	12

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Data Presentation and Analyses

Inclusion Training Opportunities

We asked students about programs and services available from their institution or employer at any time during their WIL. Did they receive dedicated inclusion (or EDID) training? Did they feel comfortable asking about EDID-related questions? Did they know about available support services? And did programs or supports impact their overall satisfaction? Fifty-three percent of all students in our survey said they experienced some form of EDID training as part of their WIL, and 73% said they felt comfortable asking EDID-related questions. Figure 2 shows student satisfaction as it relates to EDID training and engagement opportunities.

Figure 2

Student Satisfaction with WIL by EDID Training and Comfort Level
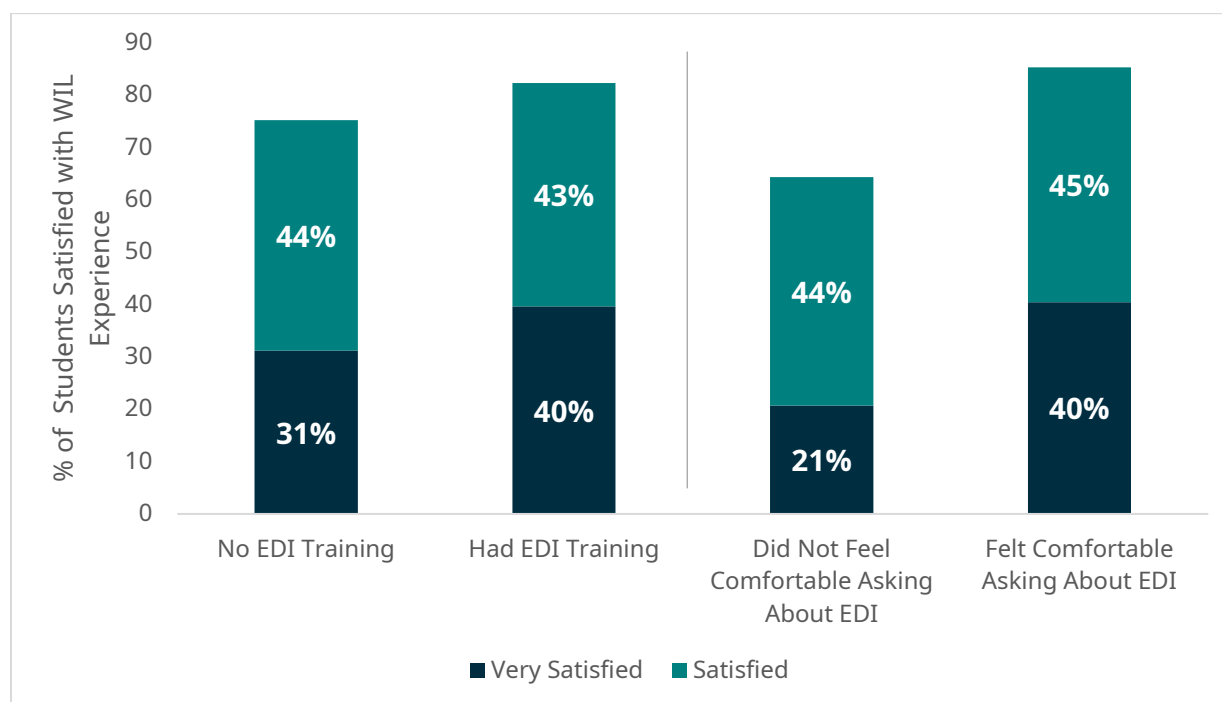
Note: This figure presents the percentage of student respondents who were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" based on whether they received EDID training and if they felt comfortable asking about it.

Our data point to the positive impact of training related to inclusion on student satisfaction during WIL. Students who did not receive EDID training during their WIL were less likely to report that they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their experience (75%) than those who did (83%); those who received EDID training were also nine percentage points more likely to report they were "very satisfied" with their WIL experience than students who did not receive EDID training (40% versus 31%). Students who felt comfortable asking their institution and/or employer about EDID training were also significantly more likely to say they were "satisfied" with their WIL experience (85%) than those who were not comfortable (65%). Students who were

comfortable asking about services reported being "very satisfied" with their WIL experience at nearly double the rate as those who were not comfortable (40% versus 21%).

We asked WIL administrators and employers about the availability of inclusion training, and measures that could improve inclusion. Both groups identified several measures that would benefit them and their ability to enhance students' experiences. WIL administrators listed measures such as guidelines on equity and inclusion, sexual harassment and workplace harassment and instructions/knowledge on how to ask questions about EDID for data collection. Employers were most likely to cite providing mentorship and a description of the accessibility and related features of the internship site as practices that could improve inclusivity and accessibility. Nearly half of all employers and two thirds of WIL administrators indicated that additional staffing in dedicated EDID roles would help make WIL more accessible and inclusive.

Supportive Work Environments

Next, we asked students if they felt "supported" by their institution, manager and co-workers during their WIL placement. Figure 3 shows that students who feel supported by their institution, their coworkers and their placement manager were more satisfied with their WIL experience.

Figure 3

Student Satisfaction by Feelings of Support During WIL Experience
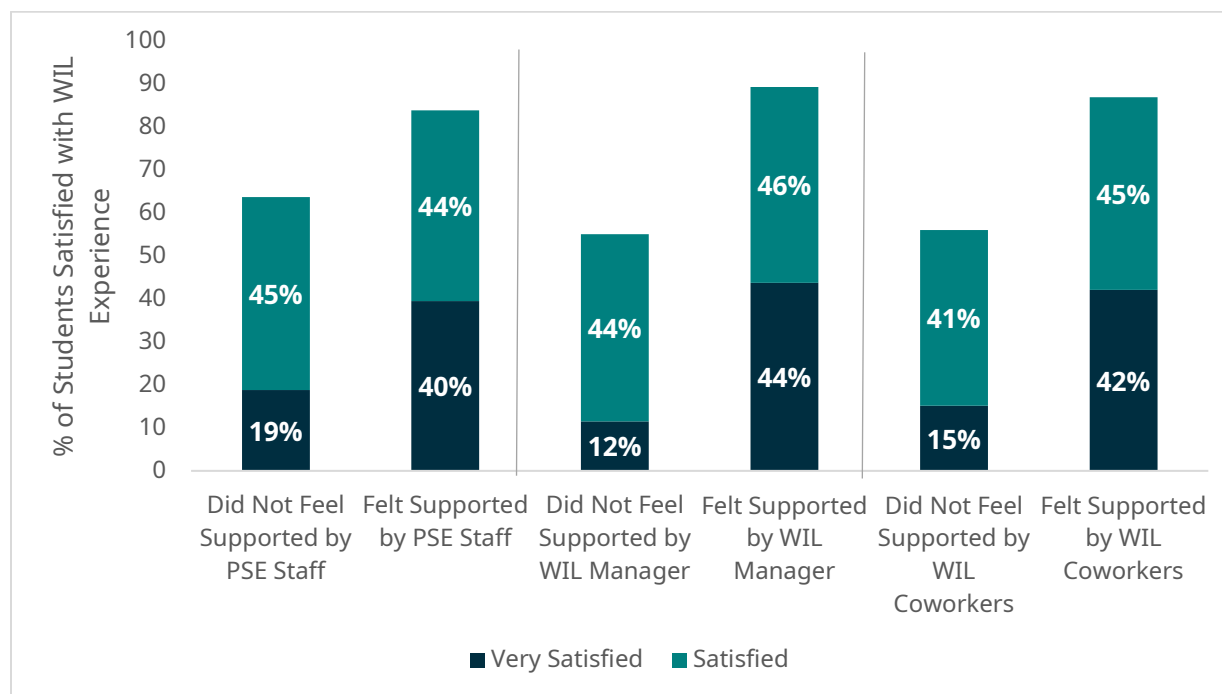
Note: This figure presents the percentage of student respondents who were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" based on whether they felt supported by PSE staff, their WIL manager and their WIL coworkers.

Results from the survey demonstrate that experiences of support — both with PSE staff and in WIL contexts — have a statistically significant impact on a student's satisfaction with their WIL placement. Most students said they felt supported by PSE staff (78%), their WIL manager (72%)

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and their WIL coworkers (71%). Students who felt supported by PSE staff and their WIL manager were more likely to indicate being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their WIL experience than those who did not (84% versus 64% for PSE staff and 89% versus 55% for WIL managers). Support from WIL managers helps ensure "very satisfied" participants: among those who felt supported by their WIL manager, 44% were "very satisfied" compared to 12%: a difference of 32 percentage points.

In qualitative responses to the survey, several students commented on the importance of supports during the application, recruitment and onboarding processes. Research supports these reflections, showing that issues of inclusion in the workplace manifest for students on their first day, and that intentionally establishing a commitment to inclusive culture should begin during orientation (Van Buuren et al., 2021). In their framework for supporting students with disabilities, Summers et al. (2014) suggest training should happen early and include online interactive tutorials; these help students become aware of their rights as well as institutional procedures for accessing accommodations.

Inclusive work environments also provide professional and interpersonal supports (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019). Stakeholders in the study mentioned providing dedicated mentorship, intentional onboarding procedures and facilitated opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with staff. Students require supports for a host of reasons — to understand the organization's mission, values and day-to-day activities, as well as their specific job requirements and the tools they need to complete tasks. While building students' job-related abilities and capacities, support activities assist students with important networking skills that can help them in the job-search process (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019; Stirling et al., 2016).

Supports may be overt, such as those offered through a deliberate training program, more nuanced or diffused across touchpoints. For example, one student respondent described the importance of being properly introduced to a new workgroup:

> A more structured introduction to the team would have been nicer. I showed up early and the only person who knew I was coming was my supervisor so the rest of the team was very confused why I was there.

Perceptions of inclusion in one's immediate workgroup are effective at improving job satisfaction, in particular for Black, Indigenous and other employees of colour, impacting the organizational culture of inclusion because workers feel more committed and comfortable in their roles (Brimhall et al., 2022). Research stresses the strong positive correlation between constructive relationships with coworkers and overall job satisfaction, which resulted in increased perceptions of inclusion (Magras, 2018). Taken together, these findings reflect the impact of inclusion efforts and strategies at both the organizational (training and supports) and interpersonal levels (relationships with co-workers and managers) — efforts that help create an inclusive climate in which students can flourish (Nishii & Rich, 2013).

Knowledge of and Access to Support Services

We asked students if they were aware of such services offered by their institution and/or employer and if they knew how to access them when needed (see Figure 4). The survey

defined support services (also known as 'learner support services') as tutoring, language/writing centres, math centres, academic advising, career advising, campus mental health services and skills workshops (e.g., time management skills, study skills, note-taking skills, etc.). These provisions contribute to an inclusive environment, helping students participate fully and meaningfully in their learning (Mallozzi & Drewery, 2019). Sixty percent of students were aware of support services, and awareness of support services is significantly associated with higher student satisfaction in WIL. See *Student Identity and Work-integrated Learning (WIL): Exploring Student Experiences of WIL by Demographic* (Chatoor & Balata, 2023) for additional context related to experiences of WIL by demographic characteristics.

Figure 4

Student Satisfaction in WIL Experience by Awareness of Support Services
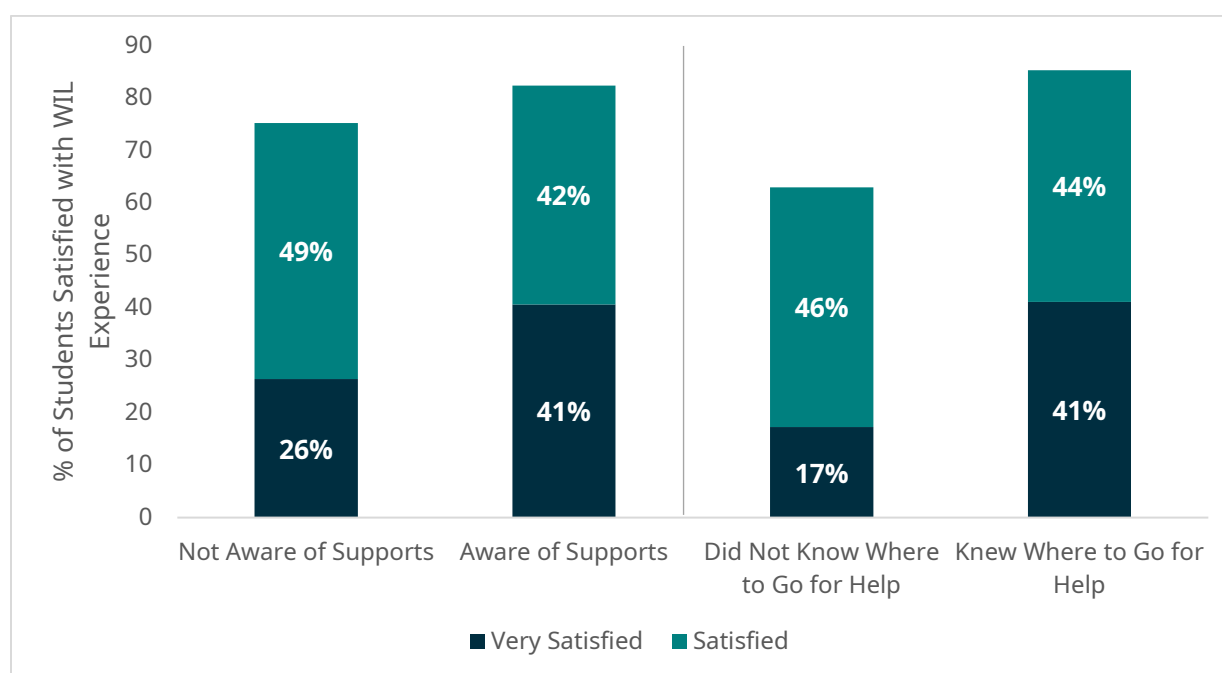
Note: This figure presents the percentage of student respondents who were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" based on whether they were aware of support services and whether they knew where to go for assistance.

Sixty percent of students were aware of supports, and 74% said they knew to where to go for help. Forty-one percent of those who were aware of supports said they were "very satisfied" with their WIL experience compared to 26% of those who were not aware of supports. Likewise, students who knew how and where to go for assistance were far more likely to say they were satisfied with their WIL (85%) compared to those who did not know where to go for support (63%). Among those who knew where to go for help, 41% were "very satisfied" in their WIL experience compared to 17% for those who did not know where to go for help.

Of students who used support services, 90% found them useful. However, few students (19%) used these services, and 32% of students who did *not* use access and inclusion supports also said they needed them at some point. These data suggest that support services are clearly

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beneficial for those who access them, but there is room for both greater awareness of EDID and accessibility supports and greater efforts toward expanding access and availability.

In qualitative responses, students reiterated the importance of being aware of supports and how to access them during placements. Notably, this included both supports and training that help students feel more confident in their skills. For example, one student who had a positive WIL experience provided this suggestion for improvement:

> The environment I am working in has an amazingly positive and supportive team. The only thing I wish I had was [a] training agenda and materials to assist me and guide me to learn their systems and engineering documents in an effective way.

Knowing how to access programs for support during WIL may not be straightforward for some students; students with disabilities, for example, transition from the K-12 system (which provides services to them) to postsecondary, where getting support is entirely self-directed (Chatoor et al., 2022). For some groups of students, therefore, providing resources about the services offered to support them is particularly important (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). WIL students who require support or accommodations may not only need to find services relative to their institution, but services specific to WIL — either through the WIL administrators in their school and/or through the employers with whom they are placed.

Responsibility for Inclusion Efforts in WIL

Both institutions and employers have implemented strategies to foster inclusion. The majority of students in our survey experienced EDID training, felt supported by their institution and WIL manager and were aware of support services offered. However, our findings reveal gaps about the division of responsibility for inclusion in WIL and how this should be managed and directed.

Employers and administrators agree that there is room to improve accessibility and inclusion in WIL and shared perceptions regarding the need for more training and supports; for example, only 9% of PSE WIL administrators said their department is doing enough. WIL administrators and employers also expressed uncertainty about how improvements can be made and who should be responsible. Over one-fifth of administrators (22%) said they didn't know how to improve accessibility and inclusion in WIL. There is also some disagreement between stakeholders about who should be responsible for workplace inclusion training: 30% of employers said their department should be responsible whereas 34% believe that institutions should be responsible.

Employers and administrators also agree that data on inclusive practices (such as provision of EDID and accessibility services) should be tracked, but diverge in opinion on responsibility for this task. Fifty-one percent of employers believe that it's their responsibility to track data related to inclusion, while 34% of employers believe it's an institution's responsibility. Meanwhile, WIL administrators were most likely to suggest that Institutional Research Departments (31%) should take responsibility for tracking, followed by their own department (29%). Notably, 20% of administrators said they don't know who should be responsible for tracking. Putting these data together, 60% of institutional respondents and 34% of employer respondents believe that data collection is an institutional responsibility.

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The discrepancies we see in who should take responsibility for ensuring and tracking inclusion in WIL highlights the value of a structured and strategic approach — clearer guidelines and policies to embed inclusion. It will require the engagement and effort of all WIL stakeholders to make the WIL experience more inclusive; stakeholders must work together to develop a system of accountability and to track progress in ensuring an inclusive experience for all WIL participants. However, given that students are the primary reason for and receivers of WIL, PSE institutions may be best positioned to influence what inclusion should look like from a programming perspective and when procuring relationships with third-party employers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study demonstrates that accessibility and inclusion are positively associated with student perceptions of satisfaction with their WIL experience. This involves awareness of and access to support services and the ability to engage support services when needed. These findings reinforce previous research emphasizing the importance of practices and experiences at the individual, organizational and institutional levels.

In WIL placements, students' experiences of institutional, organizational and interpersonal inclusion interact and influence each other. Institutional practices of inclusivity shape how employers are engaged and how they are prepared for student workers; student expectations and preparations are shaped by institutional practices and organizational environments. In turn, students' experiences of interpersonal inclusivity can have positive impacts for the institution through rates of satisfaction as well as for the organization through enhanced productivity and engagement. EDID training provides learning opportunities for WIL students and can clearly communicate an organization's priorities (Davis et al., 2020). Each element is influenced by provincial policy and funding guidelines, or lack thereof.

We offer the following recommendations:

1a) Existing access and inclusion supports are effective, so make sure students know how and where to access them.

Most institutions have programs in place to support students during WIL, but many students are not aware of them, or are not sure they would be helpful. Institutions (and employers) should step up efforts to develop, advertise and disseminate support services and resources that address best practices around inclusion. This will ensure that WIL students have the education and tools necessary to ensure a positive and inclusive experience. Support services may include skills workshops related to work etiquette and practices, resumé and cover letter workshops, language/writing centres, academic advising, career advising, accessibility offices, campus mental health services, EDID offices and so forth.

Employers could also consider providing their incoming WIL students with a list of existing workplace accommodations as part of onboarding (such as screen readers, closed captioning for virtual meetings, organizational contacts for EDID-related issues, and beyond).

1b) Embed inclusive practices at every stage of the WIL experience.

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Inclusion instruction should be part of orientation for WIL participants at the institution and in the workplace. This should actualize as a commitment to process transparency in placement postings and during application and hiring. Institutions can also expand efforts to coordinate with WIL employers to ensure that inclusion-relevant training and certifications, such as Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) training, EDID training, and beyond, are part of onboarding.

WIL stakeholders, and particularly institutions, should ensure that all staff involved in delivering WIL (i.e., mentors, administrative staff and faculty) receive up-to-date inclusion education to achieve a basic knowledge of inclusive principles and practices.

2) Collect data from students and employers to inform the development and implementation of services and initiatives to increase inclusion in WIL.

Institutions should lead the effort to collect data about students and employers engaged in WIL to inform programming. Data about student demographics, identity, satisfaction, academic performance and experience would help institutions that organize WIL placements better track, measure and set improvement goals related to all aspects of quality, which should include inclusion (and incorporated ideas of EDID). Postsecondary institutions have an important role to play in setting expectations and standards of conduct around inclusion for their students and the employers with whom they partner.

3) Government should work with institutions to provide leadership for support standards for inclusion in WIL.

Despite the positive impact of inclusive WIL experiences for students, and beyond compliance with AODA requirements, there is little mention of inclusion — including other aspects of EDID — in institutional or public guidelines about EL. This complicates the process of responsibility and consistency across the province. Government should work with institutions and WIL experts through organizations such as EWO to update the provincial EL guidelines (published in 2017) to reflect principles of inclusion, equity and accessibility clearly and promote a series of best practices and resources upon which institutions and WIL practitioners can draw. Leadership from government in this space would emphasize the importance of access and inclusion as part of quality WIL.

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