Bridging the gap of student WIL wellbeing

The impacts of unpaid practicum on students

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NAFEA Conference, 2017, Adelaide

The cost of a thing is the amount of life which is required to be exchanged for it.

Henry David Thoreau

Thoreau, HD (1995/1854) *Walden; or, Life in the Woods.* Dover Publications: New York. (p37)

WiL Wellbeing

Exploring the impacts of unpaid practicum on student wellbeing

Deanna Grant-Smith, Jenna Gillett-Swan & Renee Chapman

Make tomorrow better.

QUT

NCSEHE
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Curtin University

QUT Business School

QUT Education

QUT Health

NAFEA
National Association of Field Experience Administrators inc

Research Questions

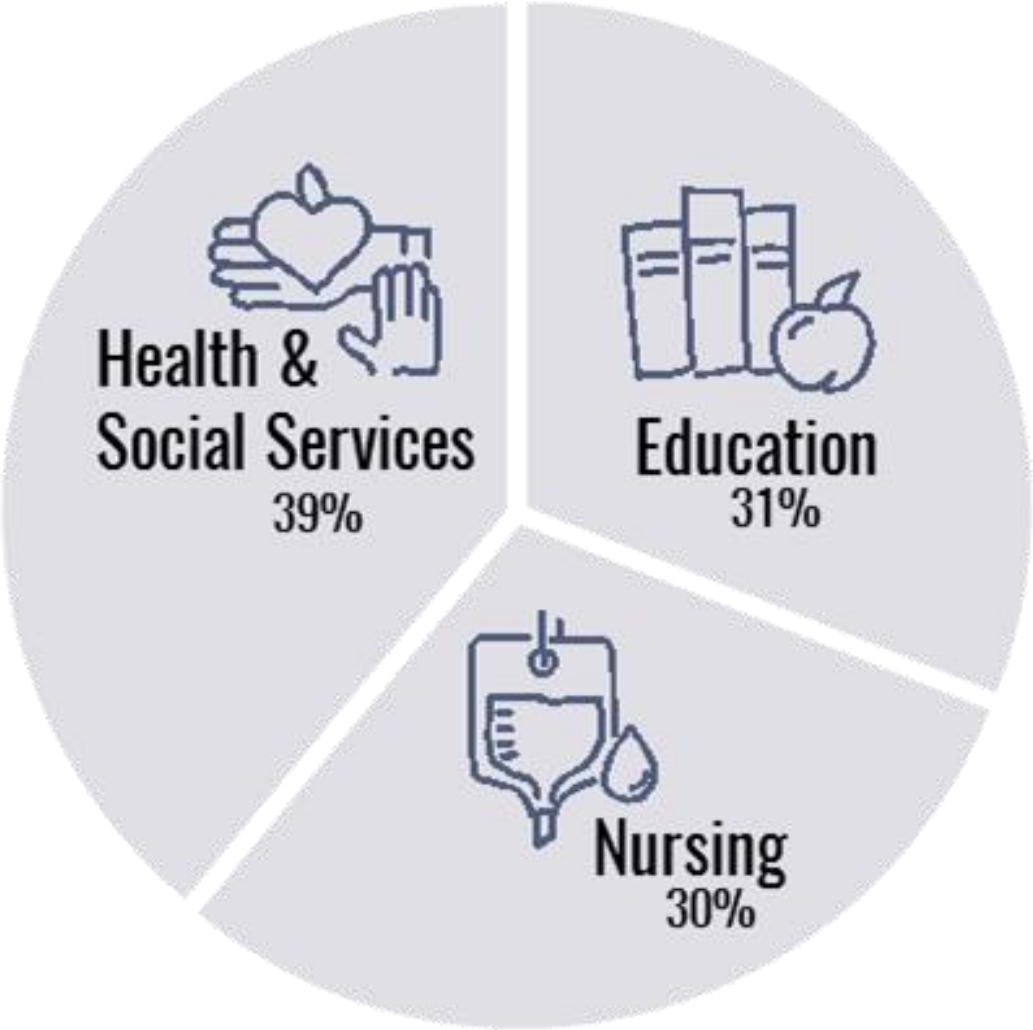
1. How and to what extent do personal factors impact student experiences of WiL?
2. How and to what extent does WiL participation impact other life domains?
3. What personal strategies do students employ to manage WiL–life and life–WIL conflicts?
4. What forms of institutional and other supports could positively influence the wellbeing of students participating in a WiL experience?

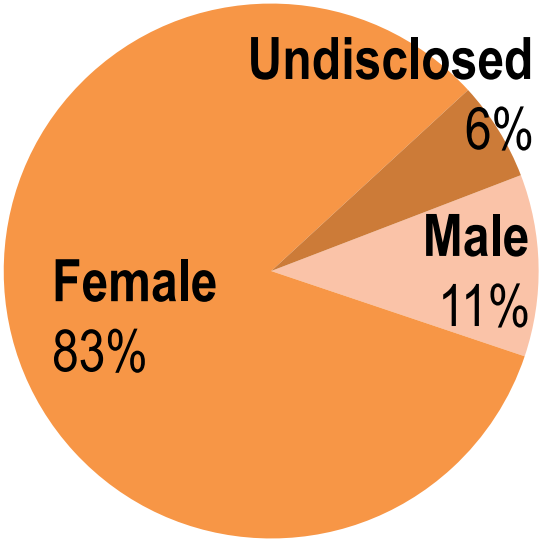
Student survey

Student focus groups

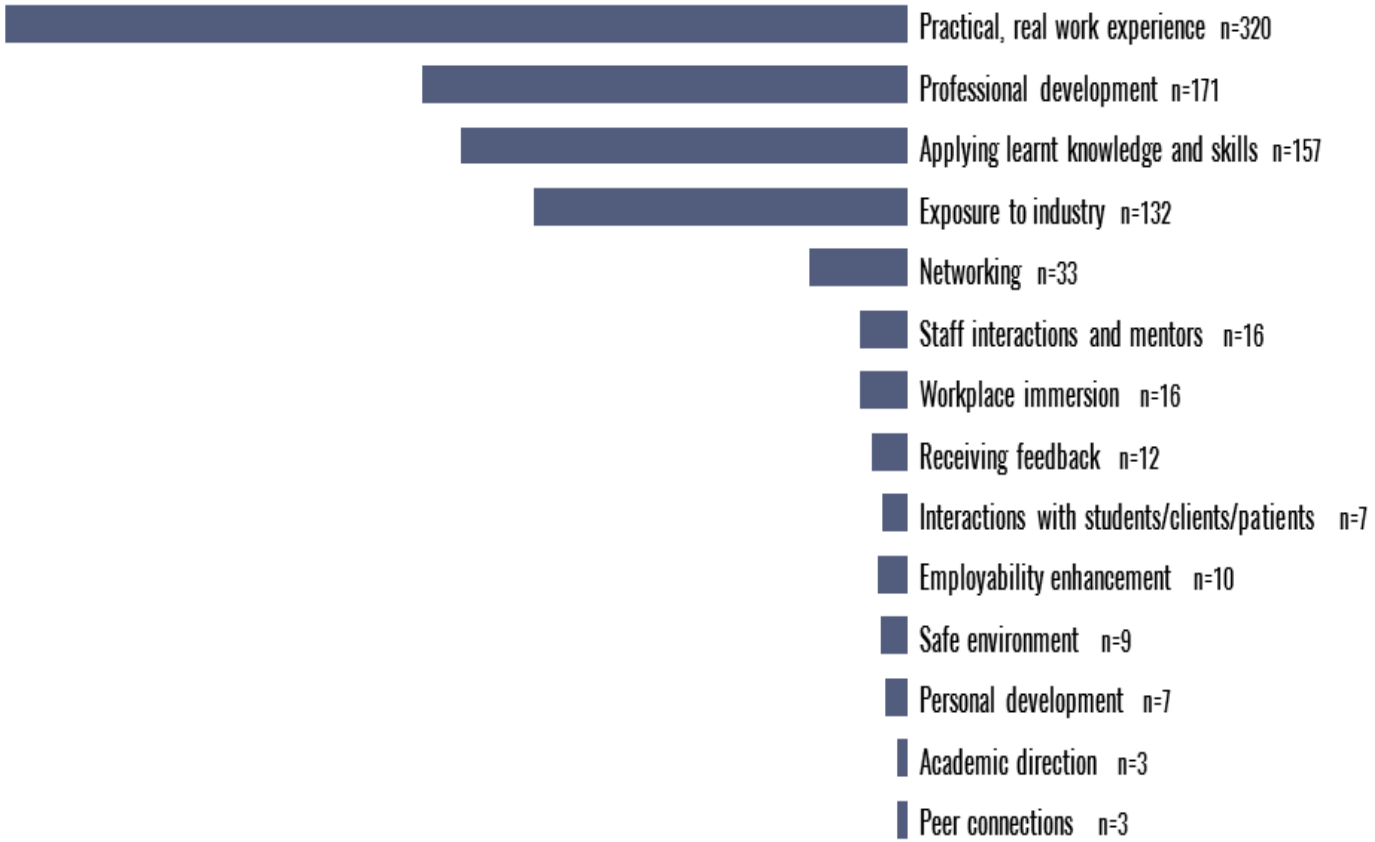
Staff focus groups

nursing; education; health & social services study areas





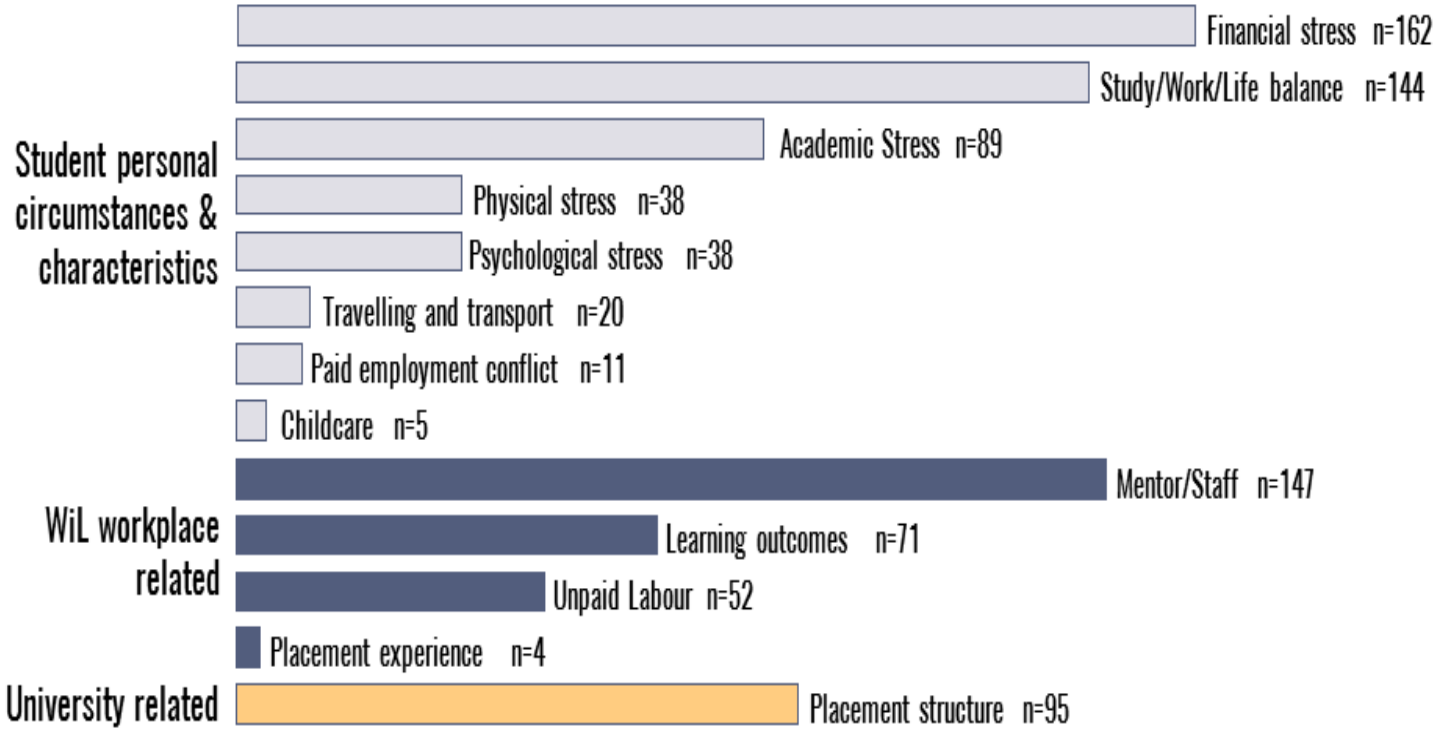
552 survey respondents



Student-identified BEST things about undertaking WiL placement

Top five student-identified BEST things about undertaking WiL placement

	Education	Nursing	Health & social sciences
1	Practical 'real world' experience (n=110)	Practical 'real world' experience (n=92)	Practical 'real world' experience (n=118)
2	Opportunity for professional development (n=52)	Opportunity for professional development (n=52)	Opportunity for professional development (n=67)
3	Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills (n=43)	Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills (n=50)	Exposure to industry (n=66)
4	Exposure to industry (n=30)	Exposure to industry (n=36)	Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills (n=64)
5	Opportunity to develop networks (n=14)	Staff interactions and mentors (n=12)	Opportunity to develop networks (n=16)

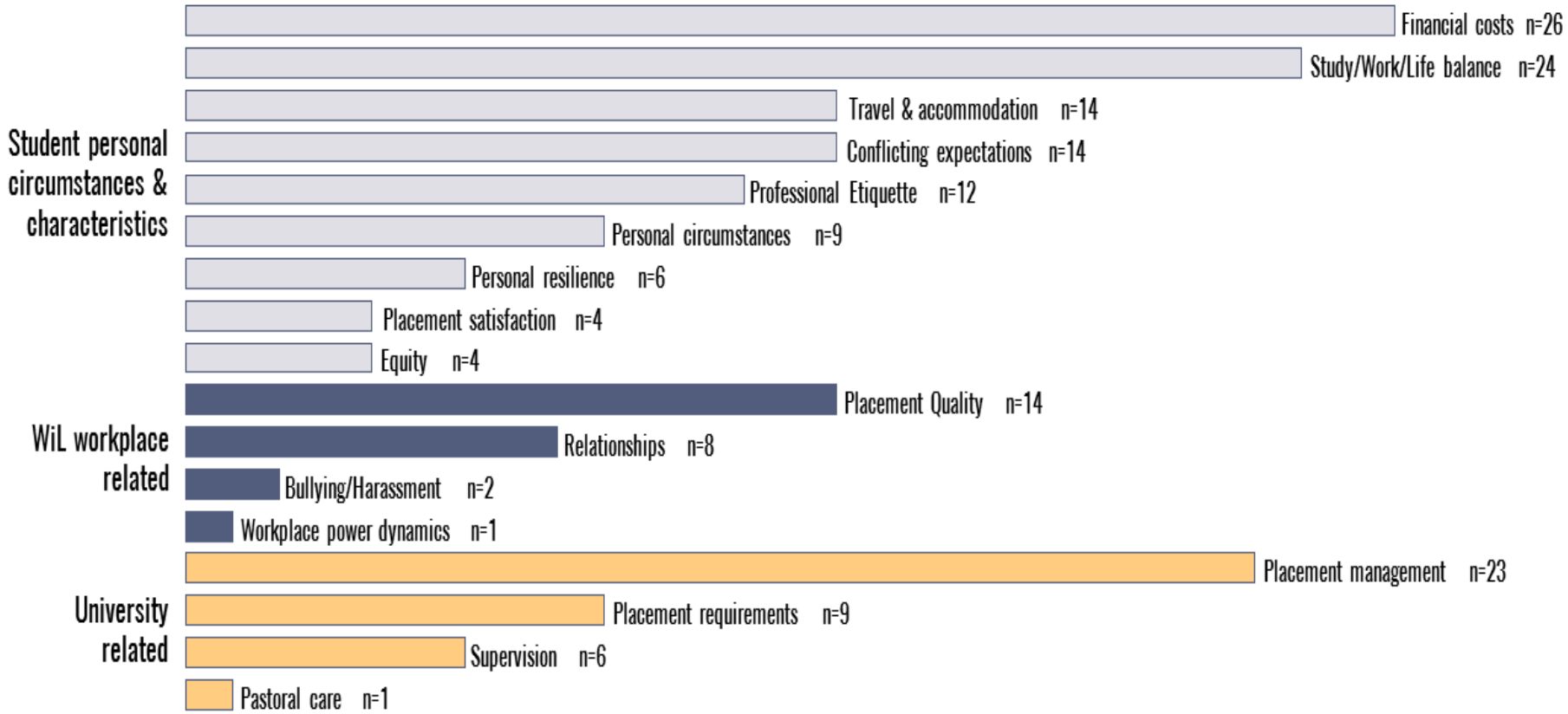


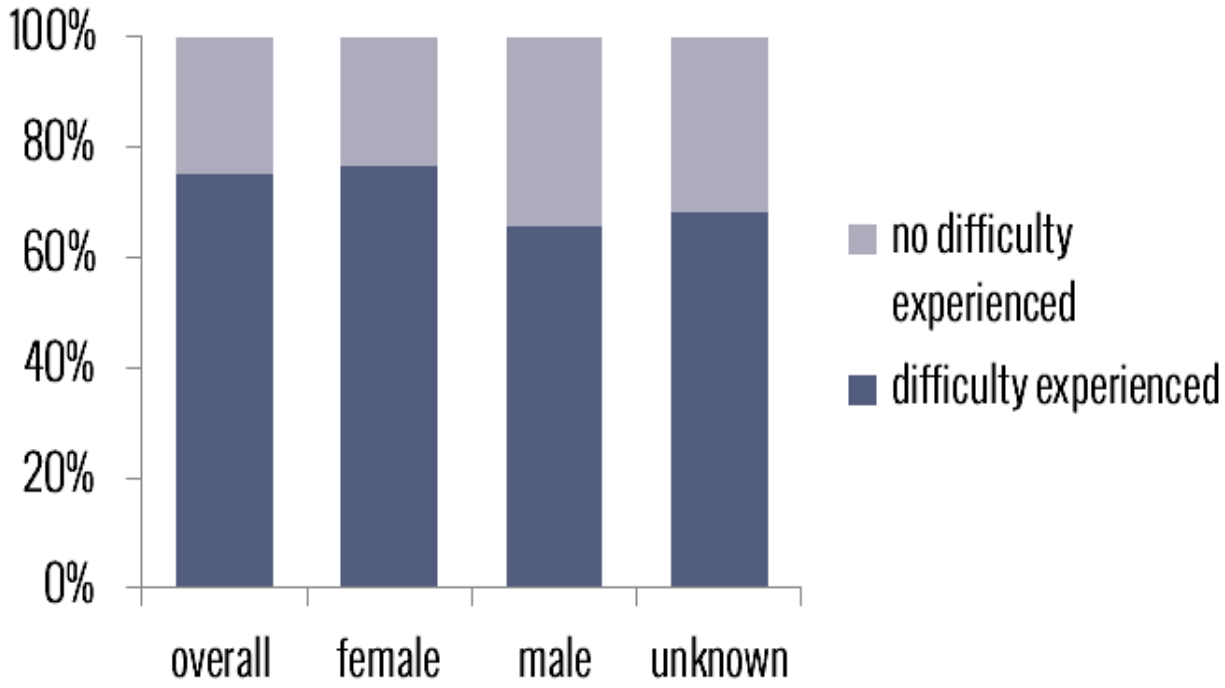
Student-identified WORST things about undertaking WiL placement

Top five studentt-identified WORST things about undertaking WiL placement

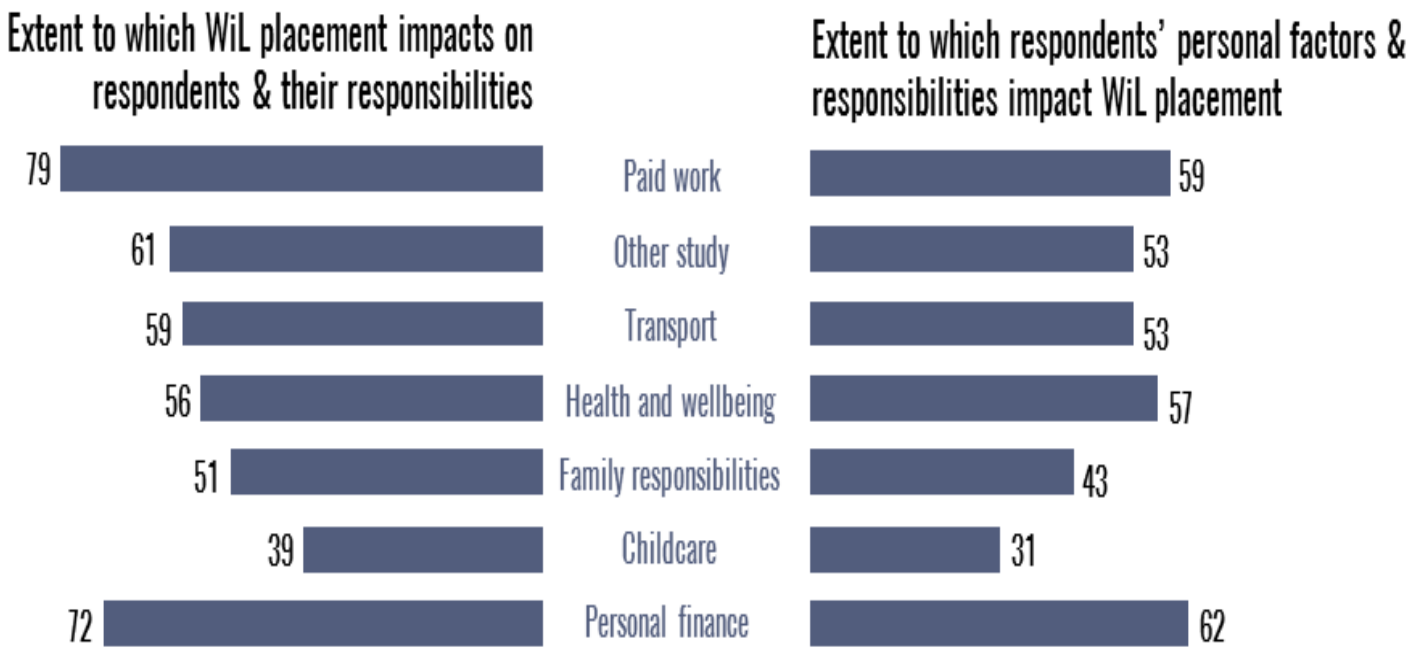
	Education	Nursing	Health & social services
1	Financial stress (32%, n=53)	Mentor/Staff (45%, n=67)	Study/Work/Life balance (38%, n=75)
2	Study/Work/Life balance (25%, n=41)	Financial stress (23%, n=35)	Financial stress (37%, n=75)
3	Mentor/Staff (24%, n=40)	Study/Work/Life balance (19%, n=29)	Mentor/Staff (20%, n=40)
4	Placement structure (20%, n=34)	Placement structure (17%, n=25)	Academic stress (19%, n=38)
5	Academic stress (16%, n=27)	Academic stress (17%, n=25)	Placement structure (19%, n=27)

Placement challenges identified in staff focus group



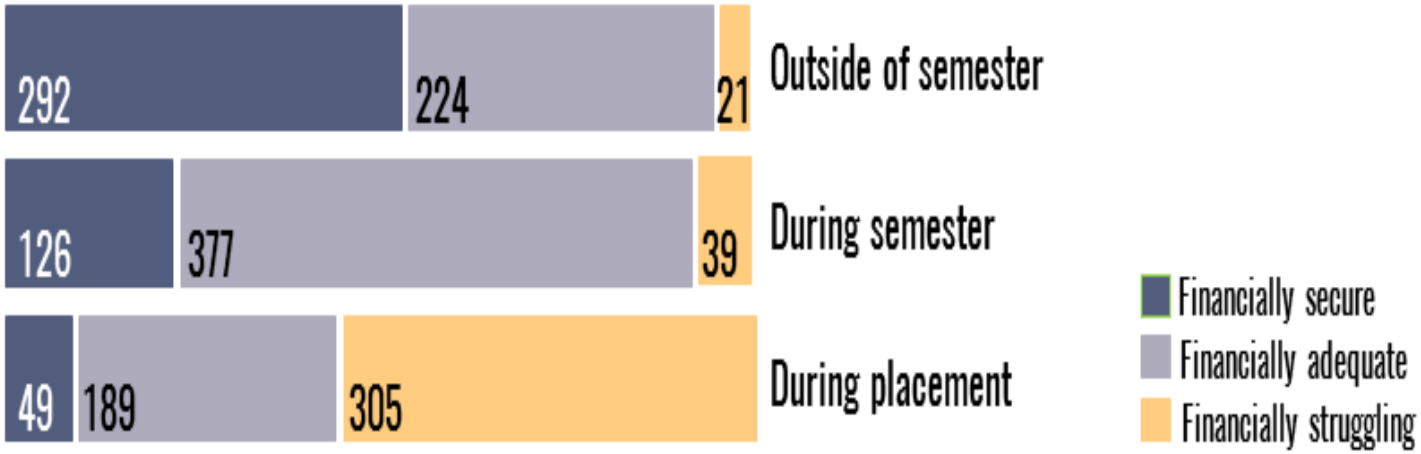


Whether difficulties combining WiL placement with other responsibilities was experienced by gender

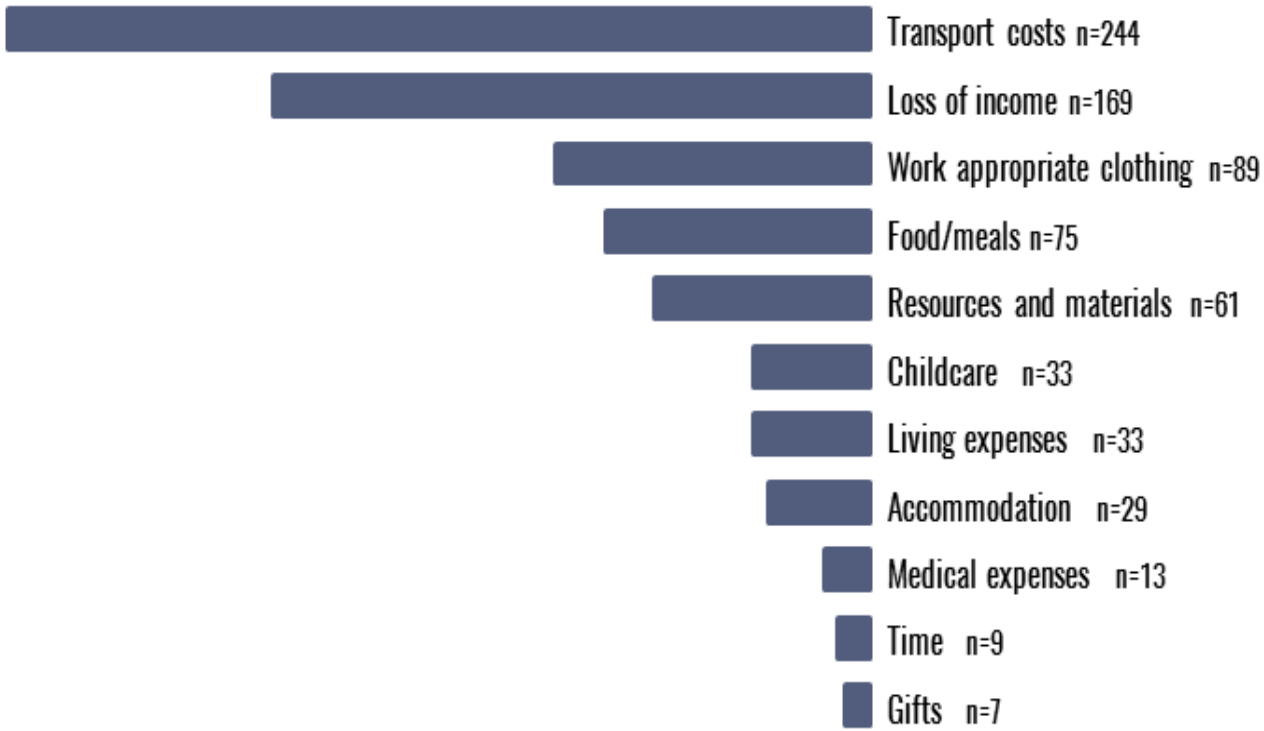


Average of reciprocal impacts of WiL placement and other responsibilities

(scale 0 – 100, where 0 = no impact and 100 = significant impact)



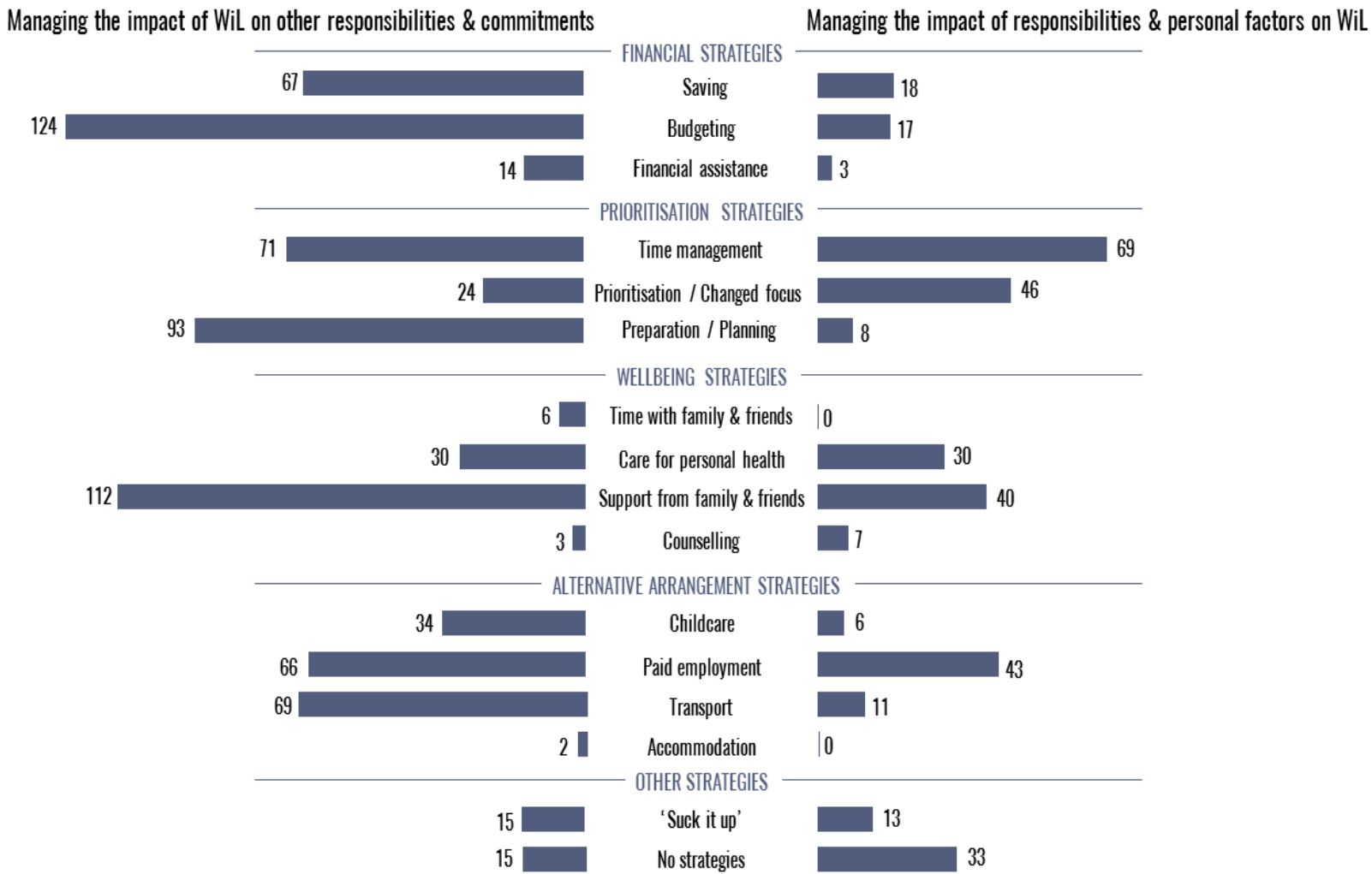
Respondent financial situation



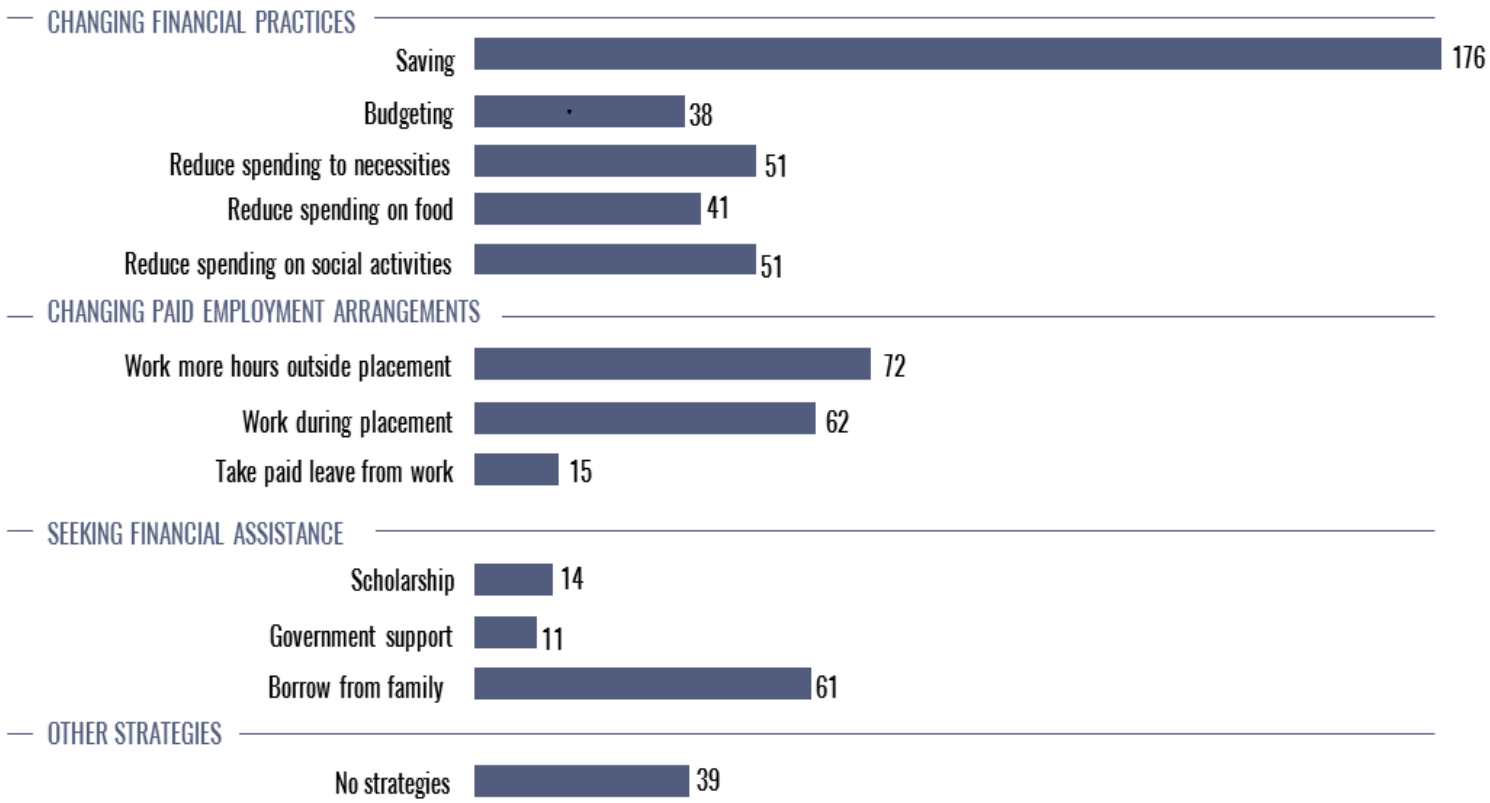
Additional costs and financial losses incurred as a result of WiL participation

Top five respondent-identified additional costs incurred as a result of WiL placement

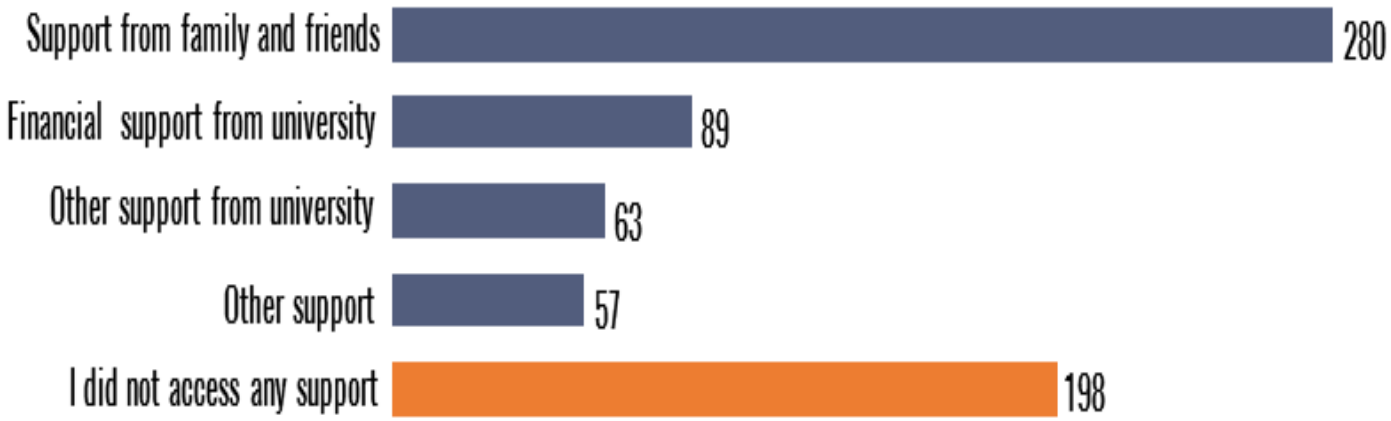
	Education	Nursing	Health & social services
1	Loss of income (41%, n=59)	Transport (66%, n=89)	Transport (54%, n=98)
2	Transport (40%, n=57)	Loss of income (42%, n=42)	Loss of income (38%, n=68)
3	Resources & materials (31%, n=45)	Food and meals (25%, n=34)	Work appropriate clothing (18%, n=33)
4	Work appropriate clothing (20%, n=28)	Work appropriate clothing (21%, n=28)	Food and meals (17%, n=31)
5	Childcare (10%, n=14)	Childcare (10%, n=14)	Accommodation (12%, n=21)



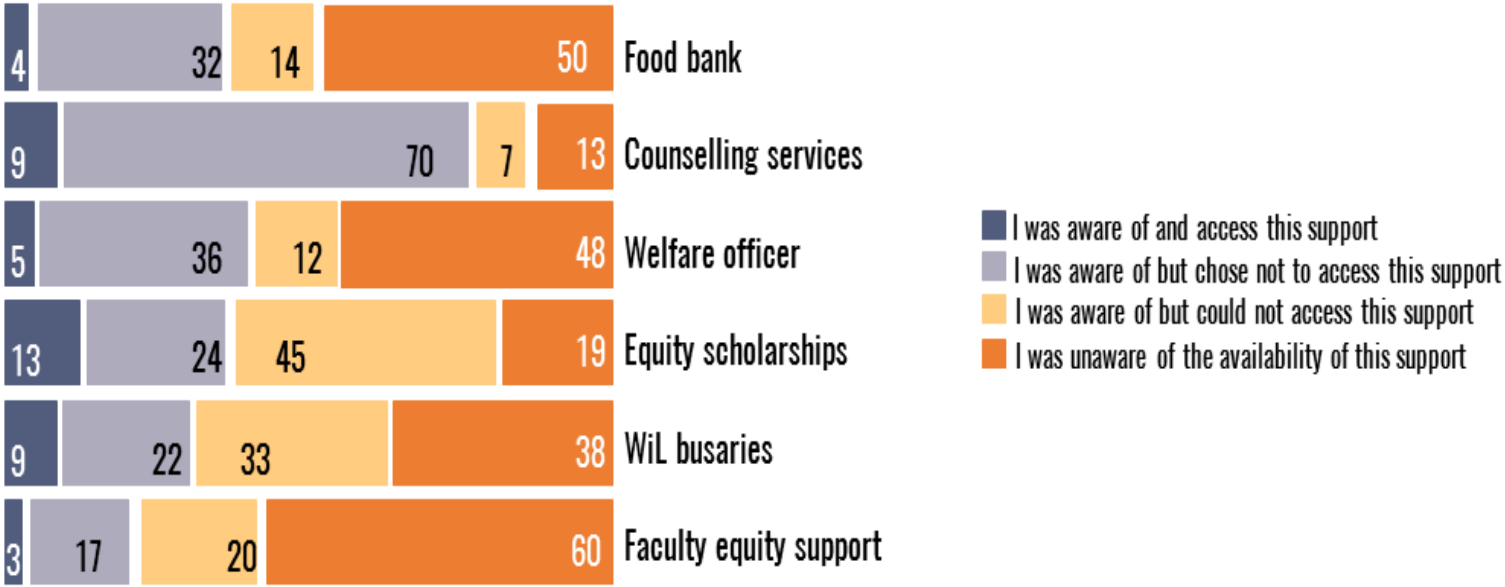
Personal strategies for managing the impacts of WiL



Personal strategies for managing the financial impact of WiL participation

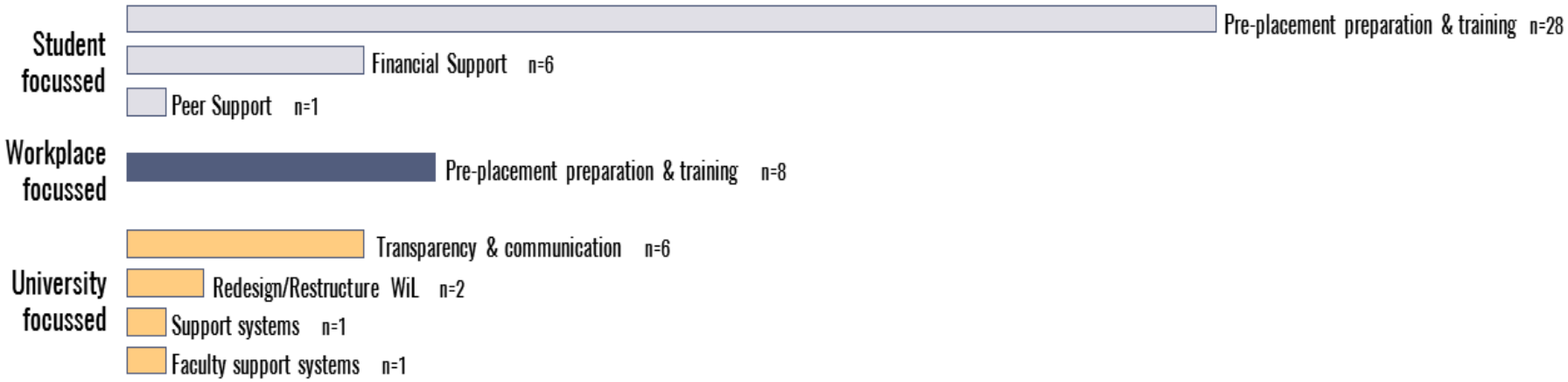


Support accessed during WiL placement



Types of university support accessed during WiL placement

Strategies to support WiL rated by order of importance in staff focus group



Key finding 1

WiL participants experience considerable levels of financial stress

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WiL participants experience considerable levels of financial stress

- Caused by a combination of the intensive unpaid nature of placements, additional costs incurred as a result of placement, relational stressors, and the financial impacts of lost wages.
- Financial stress experienced as a result of WiL is not discriminatory
- A concerning number of participants reported forgoing necessities, including food, when undertaking WiL due to financial reasons.
- Many WiL participants, particularly those with paid employment and/or caring responsibilities, experience significant role conflict as a result of WiL participation are faced with additional challenges and complexities when faced with WiL.
- Regardless of familial or employment circumstances additional financial assistance and support is required by many WiL participants to support their participation.

Key finding 2

WiL workplaces need better preparation & support to positively contribute to participant wellbeing & learning outcomes

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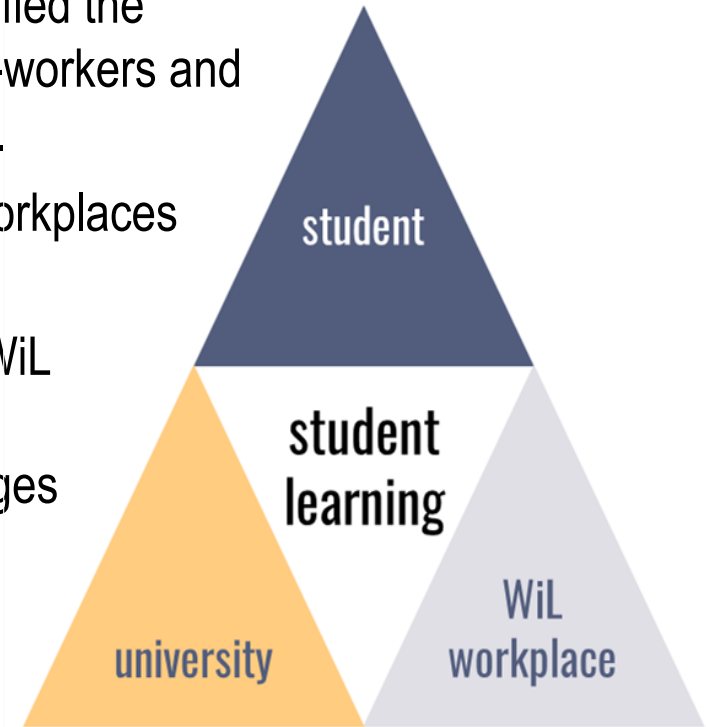
WiL workplaces need better preparation and support to positively contribute to participant wellbeing and learning outcomes

- Both WiL administrator and student participants identified the impact of attitudes and behaviours of supervisors, co-workers and clients within the WiL workplace on student wellbeing.
- Better training, support and vetting of potential WiL workplaces and supervisors is required.
- An improved triadic relationship between university–WiL workplace–student is required which centres student learning and is cognisant of the needs of and challenges faced by students in an equitable way that still allows them to develop their experience and understandings of their intended profession.



Key finding 3

Greater levels of institutional & community support are required to support WiL participant wellbeing

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Greater levels of institutional and community support are required to support WiL participant wellbeing

- More supportive supervisory relationships within the WiL workplace
- WiL participants are seeking greater levels of pastoral care, staff support and empathy from universities.
- Both WiL administrator and student participants proposed that universities and registration/accreditation bodies need to consider alternatives to unpaid WiL placements or structural changes to placement requirements which limit extended unpaid placements.
- Combined, peer, family, community and university support make an important contribution to a successful WiL experience, however, available institutional support and eligibility requirements need to be better communicated to students, particularly those that may not have existing support networks.

WiL wellbeing is achieved through a combination of institutional and community support and personal coping strategies

If you have built castles in the air,
your work need not be lost;
that is where they should be.
Now put the foundations under them.

Henry David Thoreau

Thoreau, HD (1995/1854) *Walden; or, Life in the Woods.* Dover Publications: New York. (p331)

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Access the full report from
https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/GrantSmith_WIL.pdf