Sport, recreation and event management practicum placements: What do stakeholders expect?

Ruth Sibson and David Russell
Edith Cowan University
r.sibson@ecu.edu.au, david.russell@ecu.edu.au

Structured practicum placements or Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) are a long-standing and integrated component of many university programs. One of the challenges of facilitating appropriate and sustainable WIL experiences, however, is the complex and multi-faceted nature of the relationship between the university, student and host agency/supervisor. Of particular importance, is the management of expectations and perceptions between the stakeholders, and there is limited research in this area. This paper presents the findings from the first stage of a research project which used self-completed questionnaires to compare the expectations and perceptions of sport, recreation and event management students and their host agency supervisors on the role of student practicum placements, the role of the practicum placement agency, the role of the university, the abilities of the students and the selection of a practicum placement. Overall, there was considerable agreement between the stakeholders, particularly in relation to the valuable learning opportunities WIL provides, and on the attributes, skills and abilities students need to demonstrate while on their placement; but there were significant differences between the groups, as to whether the placement should be voluntary, paid and/or for university credit, and the length of time the placement should be. Further, the expectations and perceptions students had about the role the agency should play in their future employment did not match up with those of the supervisors in these agencies. Importantly, these findings allow recommendations to be made to those who are involved in this important application of professional practice.

Keywords: workplace-integrated learning, undergraduate students and supervisors, expectations

Introduction, background and context

The requirement for students enrolled in 'practical' sport and leisure/recreation related courses to take their learning from the classroom into the field is a long established practice. In the United States for example, accrediting bodies of sport and recreation management curriculum require the recognition and inclusion of practical and experiential learning of this manner, and have done so for more than 20 years (Beggs, Ross & Knapp, 2007; Commission on Sport Management Accreditation, 2010; Cuneen & Sidwell, 1994). Similarly, educational institutions across Australia and New Zealand have developed their sport and recreation management related courses in consultation with industry and as a consequence, have provisions or requirements for work-based experiences (Lyons & Brown, 2003; Martin & Leberman, 2005). The models under which these experiences take place and the definitions used to describe this practice, however, vary significantly both within these related discipline areas and across educational fields worldwide.

More broadly, through the National Commission of Cooperative Education (NCCE) established in 1962 in the United States, the term cooperative education has been used to describe the partnership between students, employers and educational institutions which facilitates the integration of theory into practice, and is defined as "a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning, through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals" (NCCE, 2010, np). Other common terminology used to describe these learning experiences include various combinations of the terms

professional, industry, work, work-based, work-integrated, and workplace-integrated, along with the words learning, experience, placement, practicum or internship. One key difference, which has been highlighted by Cuneen and Sidwell (1994) in their discussion of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the North American Society for Sport Management's original guidelines for sport curriculum in the US, is that between practica or placements, and internships. They distinguish between "practica, which constitute part-time placement at external agencies and internships, which are full-time job commitments" (p. 5). The use of internships is more strongly linked to educational institutions in the US, as opposed to the use of practica or placements which are more often used in Australia and New Zealand.

At Edith Cowan University (ECU), as the context for this study, the term workplace integrated learning (WIL) is used to describe how work placements and practia are used to provide "learning opportunities denied in classroom settings...[and] are used often to help students develop their capacity to apply their knowledge and to streamline the transition from university to the workplace" (ECU, 2008, p. 4). Despite the interchangeable nature and variable use of these terms, and perhaps the length of time students spend in the field, it can be seen there is often significant commonality amongst the intended rationale and outcomes of the experiences. In their review of the purpose, value and structure of the practicum in higher education, for example, Ryan, Toohey and Hughes (1996, p. 357) argue that "research findings tend to indicate that, on balance, the practicum has a positive value in professional education". They note that there is evidence to suggest it is successful in the development and application of knowledge, skills and attitude, and in providing students with a greater understanding of the workplace, professionalism and career prospects. In a similar way, Cates and Jones (1999), indicate that there a number of recurring themes of cooperative education outcomes such as facilitating the development of generic and technical skills, developing connections between theory and practice, refining career plans, understanding the workplace environment and developing professionalism. Significantly, Arnold, Loan-Clarke, Harrington and Hart (1999) found that the perceived competence development of undergraduate students on work placements in business-related degrees was generally high and superior to their perceived development in their other academic work.

In their study of eight institutions involved in cooperative education in sport across the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand, Fleming and Ferkins (2005, p. 43) found that, similar to other discipline areas, "cooperative education in sport aims to give students the opportunity to apply academic theory to the workplace and to reflect on and critically evaluate the experience". More specifically, in a study of work-based placements in sport courses in Auckland, New Zealand, Ferkins (2002) identified a number of aims related to providing opportunities for students so that they are able to: integrate theory and practice; experience work settings to assist in future career choices; develop professional skills, including networking; develop practical skills and alternative methods of learning; and to evaluate themselves while being evaluated by others. The integration of such placements in these courses recognises the importance of both the 'hands-on' experience a graduating student requires in seeking an entry-level position in these industries, and role that WIL can play in the personal and professional skill development of individuals; the direct application of theoretical classroom learning to professional practice.

The benefits of WIL, however, are not simply limited to the students enrolled in the course. The host agency, as well as the university itself, should be benefiting from the process. As ECU's guidelines on workplace integrated learning indicate, "critical to sustainable workplace-integrated programs is creating opportunities that ensure those in the workplace are advantaged by the student placement and that the relationship is mutually beneficial" (ECU, 2008, p. 4). In particular, host agencies have an immediate cost benefit from the volunteer human resource(s) provided to assist in the work/tasks to be undertaken. Students who have completed their placement with the host organisation can also be a possible future source of 'known' employees, and agency supervisors may develop professionally during their supervision of volunteers.

Ferkins (2002), for example, identified that the input of fresh ideas, access to volunteers who were 'partially trained', the ability to have important projects completed that would not have otherwise been done, along with getting to know potential employees, making contact with tertiary institutions and being able to 'give something back' were all important benefits for industry. However, the complex nature and inherent challenges of facilitating a WIL partnership and experience between the university/program, student and host agency means that stakeholder outcomes are not always positive.

Of particular importance, is the management of expectations and perceptions between the stakeholders as to what the WIL experience entails and how it is undertaken, and there is limited research in this area in the sport and recreation disciplines (Beggs, Ross & Knapp, 2006; Ross & Beggs, 2007; Stratta, 2004; Williams, 2004). Previous studies, which have been conducted in the United States and Canada, have predominantly focused on internships, which are generally restricted to final year students, conducted over a longer-time frame and may have a payment attached to them. There are limited studies on WIL experiences in the sport, recreation and event management discipline areas within Australian/New Zealand university degree programs (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005; Martin & Leberman, 2005).

This paper presents the findings of the first stage of a research project which seeks to examine the differences between student and host agency supervisor expectations, perceptions and experiences of student practica which are embedded in four units, across the three years of the sport, recreation and event management courses at Edith Cowan University. In this first stage, self-completed questionnaires were administered to both the students and the host agency supervisors in the two first and second year units offered in semester one, 2010. More specifically, this paper presents the findings from the preliminary analysis of data which compares the expectations and perceptions of these students and their host agency supervisors (as whole groups) in relation to the role of student practicum placements, the role of the practicum placement agency, the role of the university, the abilities of the students and the selection of a practicum placement. It is acknowledged here that using a whole group comparison of these students is a limitation of this paper. It is likely that students who are at differing stages of their course and/or are studying units which have differing aims and objectives will have different expectations, and a more detailed analysis of these possible differences will occur as part of the wider research project once the questionnaires have been distributed to students across all four units. However, as these units are both in the first half of a students' degree and (as outlined below) they both have the same broad aim of assisting students in gaining work experience and developing employability skills more generally, as well as providing an opportunity to link theory to practice more specifically, it is still deemed as important and appropriate to compare these students' expectations versus those of their supervisors. The following provides a context and background to the requirements of the four placements and, more specifically, the two relevant to this study.

In all units, students are required to negotiate their own placement agency and supervisor, though assistance is given to students as required in finding a suitable placement. Students are briefed on the requirements of the placement in class and are provided with a set of documents. These include an information letter for the supervisor outlining the requirements of the placement, as well as approval forms which need to be signed off by all parties before the placement is approved for commencement. Although students are not visited at their placements, supervisors are asked to sign off on the hours and complete a two-page assessment form detailing the work undertaken by the student, and to provide an assessment of their personal and professional presentation, as well as any additional comments they may have. Supervisors and students are also encouraged to speak to the unit lecturer if any issues or problems arise during the placement. The completion of the placement is unpaid, and the hours form part of a requisite assessment item in each of the four units.

In the first year unit, LSC1102 Leisure Leadership and Programming, students are required to complete a placement of a minimum of 15 hours in a programming setting in the sport, recreation and/or event industries. Approved settings include private, public and not-for-profit organisations which offer sport and recreation activity programs or events for different age groups such as children, youths, adults and seniors. In this first year placement, students are expected to balance their time in observing and assisting other staff members in the 'hands-on' experiential, as well as the administrative, aspects of planning, organising, and delivering activities. As part of their assessment students are required to reflect on their experiences through journal entries, produce a CV and use the placement experiences as evidence in addressing a set of selection criteria relevant to working in a programming setting.

In the second year unit, LMS2103 Leisure Facility Planning, students are required to complete a practicum placement of a minimum of 25 hours in an approved facility setting in the sport, recreation and/or event industries. Approved settings include facilities which are managed and operated by private, public and not-for-profit organisations in the broad areas of health and fitness, sport competitions, and recreation. In this second year placement, students are expected to undertake some observations and conduct a critique and audit of the layout and management of the facility, as well as assist other staff members in aspects related to the use of the facility and the administration and delivery of its programs for members and/or the general public. As part of their assessment students are tasked with addressing two learning outcomes which are related to theoretical aspects of their unit content; they are required to critically assess the relationship between the facility's reception to its major features in regards design and layout, as well as conduct a facility access audit for people of all ages and abilities. Students are also required to set two learning outcomes which are related to their own personal development of skills (such as communication, time management, teamwork etc.). At the completion of their placement they are required to produce a CV and portfolio providing evidence which addresses the previously set learning outcomes. In all units, students are regularly encouraged by lecturers to use and reflect upon the theory and practices they are introduced to in class, as well as their experiences, in their placement setting.

Methods

The research design for this study employed a quantitative approach through the use of self-completed, anonymous questionnaire surveys. Questionnaires were considered the most appropriate method for data collection as they allowed the information to be collected in a quick and efficient manner and enabled maximisation of responses. There was a separate questionnaire for students and supervisors, which differed only in regards demographic information and the wording of the open-ended questions. All students who were enrolled in, and subsequently attended the final seminar of, the units LSC1102 Leisure Leadership and Programming and LMS2103 Leisure Facility Planning were asked to complete a questionnaire. All supervisors of these students were also mailed out a questionnaire with a reply-paid envelope, with a follow up mail-out being completed five weeks after the initial one. The research received approval from, and followed the ethical guidelines of, Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee. An information letter was provided to the participants to ensure they had full knowledge of their rights and the purpose of the research; participation was entirely voluntary with no coercion or pressure of any kind placed upon them to participate.

For both the student and the supervisor questionnaire, basic demographic information appropriate to each group was asked and then, on five-point Likert scale measures, both students and supervisors rated their agreement (with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) on a set of statements which related to the role of student practicum placements, the role of the practicum placement agency, the role of the university, the abilities of the students, and the selection of a practicum placement. The statements used were modified from Ross and Beggs' (2007) questionnaire on internships in campus recreational sport management, which had

initially been based on Knemeyer and Murphy's (2002) study of internships in logistics. The modifications were made to better reflect the nature of the short-term practicum placement being undertaken, and the Australian university and industry contexts.

As noted above, as this is the first stage of this research project only preliminary analysis (using SPSS Version 18.0.1) has been conducted on some of the quantitative data from this survey; the results of which are presented here.

Results

Participants

A total of 63 students, who were enrolled in LSC1102 and LMS2103, and attended, the final seminar of these units, completed the questionnaire. This total represents a response rate of 84%. There were fairly equal numbers of males (52%) and females (48%); the average age was 21 years and the majority of students were Australian (90%). A total of 22 supervisors completed and returned the questionnaire. This total represents a response rate of 52%. Of the supervisor respondents, 12 (55%) were from the government sector, five (23%) were from the commercial/private sector and four (18%) were from the not-for-profit sector, with one non-response.

Role of the practicum placement

Students and host agency supervisors both strongly believed that practicum placements should 'provide opportunities to apply knowledge learnt in the classroom', 'enhance future employment opportunities/career aspirations' and 'enhance communication and teamwork skills' (see Table 1). All these items ranked in the top six for both groups; however, there was some difference in these rankings. Overall, there were significant differences on 4 of the 13 items in this section. Supervisors (M=4.27, SD=0.77) were in stronger agreement than students (M=3.84, 0.87) that placements should 'enhance work-related skills (i.e. marketing, programming, budgeting, research)'. Significant differences between students and supervisors were also seen in their views on the voluntary/paid nature of placements and whether they should count towards credit for a university degree. Students rated 'count towards credit for a university degree' (M=4.53, SD=0.90) as the most important item, whereas supervisors rated this significantly lower (M=3.68, SD=0.84). On the other hand, supervisors were more strongly of the opinion that placements should 'be voluntary' (M=4.05, SD=0.84) than students (M=3.27, SD=1.10). Moreover, although both supervisors and students ranked to 'be paid' the lowest of all items, it was rated significantly lower by supervisors (M=1.59, SD=0.59) than students (M=2.80, SD=1.21). The consensus amongst students on these two items relating to payment, however, was the most mixed, as they recorded the highest standard deviations of items in this section.

Role of the practicum placement agency

The results in this section indicated that students and supervisors were in agreement with 7 out of 11 items regarding the role of the practicum placement agency (see Table 2). The highest ranked item for supervisors was 'an overview of the roles and functions of the agency' (M=4.41, SD=0.59), while this ranked fifth for students (M=4.33, SD=0.74). Conversely, the highest ranked item for students was 'a variety of experiences' (M=4.4, SD=0.73), while this ranked lower for supervisors (M=4.23, M=0.75). Two other highly rated items were 'feedback about their placement' for students (M=4.41, SD=0.87) and supervisors (M=4.36, SD=0.95); and 'orientation and induction to the workplace' for students (M=4.33, SD=0.76) and supervisors (M= 4.23, SD=0.87). Three of the items supervisors and students were not in agreement on related to future employment. The items stating that the agency should provide students with 'assistance in finding future employment', 'employment after completion of the

Table 1: Student/supervisor t-test comparison: Role of the practicum placement

Item	Student		Supervisor		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Student practicum placements should:					
Enhance work-related skills (i.e. marketing, programming, budgeting, research)	3.84	0.87	4.27	0.77	-2.07*
Enhance future employment opportunities/career aspirations	4.37	0.79	4.10	0.81	1.39
Provide opportunities to apply knowledge learnt in classroom	4.16	0.77	4.36	0.66	-1.12
Enhance problem solving skills	3.87	0.88	4.09	0.68	-1.07
Enhance communication skills	4.25	0.76	4.18	0.73	0.39
Enhance teamwork skills	4.13	0.85	4.09	0.87	0.17
Count towards credit for a university degree	4.43	0.90	3.68	0.84	3.38**
Be paid	2.80	1.21	1.59	0.59	4.48**
Be voluntary	3.27	1.10	4.05	0.84	-3.02**
Assist industry agencies in selecting future employees	3.78	0.99	3.59	0.73	0.81
Foster links between industry agencies and universities	4.02	0.73	3.70	0.80	1.65
Be a source of volunteers for agency projects/events	3.78	0.96	3.50	0.60	1.27
Inject new ideas into the agency	3.70	1.09	3.59	0.73	0.43

Note: Supervisor n=22; student n= 63; *p < 0.05, **p<0.01

placement' and 'networking opportunities' were significantly higher for students (M=4.05, SD=0.91; M=3.83, SD=0.94; M=4.40, SD=0.75 respectively) than supervisors (M=2.95, SD=1.05; M=2.91, SD=1.27; M=3.95, SD=0.65 respectively), though the standard deviation on the first two of these items for the supervisors were the highest of all items. The other significant difference related to 'opportunities to develop leadership skills', with students (M=4.13, SD=0.85) in stronger agreement than supervisors (M=3.64, SD=0.58) that this is a role for the agency.

Table 2: Student/supervisor t-test comparison: Role of the practicum placement agency

Item	Student		Supervisor		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Practicum placement agencies should provide students with:					
Orientation and induction to the workplace	4.33	0.76	4.23	0.87	0.54
An overview of the roles and functions of the agency	4.33	0.74	4.41	0.59	-0.43
An overview of the industry and where the agency 'fits' within the industry	4.13	0.85	4.23	0.69	-0.50
Opportunities to develop work-related skills (i.e. marketing, programming etc.)	4.32	0.74	4.05	0.65	1.53
Opportunities to develop leadership skills	4.13	0.85	3.64	0.58	2.50*
Networking opportunities	4.40	0.75	3.95	0.65	2.45*
A variety of experiences	4.41	0.73	4.23	0.75	1.02
Opportunities to attend meetings	3.84	1.02	3.55	0.86	1.22
Feedback about their placement	4.41	0.87	4.36	0.95	0.22
Employment after completion of the placement	3.83	0.94	2.91	1.27	3.58**
Assistance in finding future employment	4.05	0.91	2.95	1.05	4.68**

Note: Supervisor n=22; student n= 63; *p < 0.05, **p<0.01

Role of the university

As represented in Table 3, students and supervisors differed significantly on 3 out of 7 items on the questionnaire regarding the role of the university (see Table 3). The items stating that the university should 'increase the amount of time required for student practicum placements' and 'visit students at their practicum placement agency' were significantly higher for supervisors (M=3.50, SD=0.67; M=3.86, SD=0.89 respectively) than students (M=2.44, SD=1.06; M=2.54,

SD=1.18 respectively). The other significant difference related to 'reducing the amount of time required for student practicum placements', with students (M=2.98, SD=1.40) in stronger agreement, at the p<0.05 level, than supervisors (M=2.23, SD=0.92) that this should occur. However, the standard deviation on this item for the students was the highest of any item in this section. One item both supervisors and students both felt strongly about was that the university should 'provide assistance to students in selecting an appropriate placement'.

Table 3: Student/supervisor t-test comparison: Role of the university

Item	Student		Supervisor		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
To facilitate the practicum placement universities should					
Provide assistance to students in selecting an appropriate placement	4.30	0.82	4.00	0.76	1.52
Organise placements for students	2.86	1.35	3.05	0.90	-0.61
Provide an in-class induction on work place expectations & responsibilities	3.25	1.11	3.68	0.84	-1.65
Allow students class time to complete their placement	3.49	1.38	3.27	1.12	0.67
Reduce the amount of time required for student practicum placements	2.98	1.40	2.23	0.92	2.36*
Increase the amount of time required for student practicum placements	2.44	1.06	3.50	0.67	-4.37**
Visit students at their practicum placement agency	2.54	1.18	3.86	0.89	-4.82**

Note: Supervisor n=22; student n= 63; *p < 0.05, **p<0.01

Student abilities

Students and supervisors were in agreement on 16 of 17 items in this section as can be seen in Table 4. Two items supervisors and students both felt strongly about were to 'be punctual' and 'be professionally presented' with both being rated in the top three of all items. However, on both of these items, the supervisors indicated stronger overall agreement that students should be punctual and professionally presented. To 'show initiative' and 'be highly motivated' were also seen by both groups as being important. The item where supervisors and students differed significantly was 'be available outside business hours', with supervisors (M=3.50, SD=0.96) seeing this as more important than students (M=2.87, SD=1.16). Interestingly, although it rated as the lowest for supervisors and second lowest for students overall, students saw it as more important to 'volunteer in excess of the required practicum placement hours' (M=3.10, SD=1.20) than supervisors (M=2.71, SD=1.06); both these items had the highest variability amongst respondents in this section.

Selecting a practicum placement

This section comprised of 7 items related to variables students should consider in selecting a practicum placement agency. Students and supervisors were in agreement on 5 of these items as can be seen in Table 5. As the highest ranked item in this section by both supervisors and students, both felt strongly that students should select their agency 'based on future employment opportunities/career aspirations'. The items where supervisors and students differed significantly were selection of agency 'based on geographic location' and 'likelihood of future employment with the agency', with students (M=3.79, SD=0.94; M=3.70, SD=0.84 respectively) seeing these as more important than supervisors (M=3.09, SD=0.68; M=2.90; SD=0.81). Both students and supervisors disagreed that students should select an agency 'based on personal contacts/who they know', with this statement ranking the lowest of all in this section.

Table 4: Student/supervisor t-test comparison: Student abilities

Item	Student		Supervisor		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Students on practicum placements should:					
Be professionally presented	4.35	0.88	4.68	0.57	-1.65
Be punctual	4.66	0.54	4.77	0.53	-0.80
Be willing to do any job task	4.06	0.94	4.00	0.95	0.27
Be able to complete tasks in a self-directed manner	4.08	0.79	3.95	0.84	0.63
Be able to manage their time to achieve agreed goals	4.32	0.74	4.18	0.80	0.73
Volunteer in excess of the required practicum placement hours	3.10	1.20	2.73	1.03	1.28
Be available outside of general business hours	2.87	1.16	3.50	0.96	-2.28*
Have good problem solving skills	3.83	0.89	3.95	0.722	-0.61
Have good communication skills	4.21	0.79	4.23	0.75	-0.11
Have good teamwork skills	4.14	0.80	4.00	0.76	0.73
Have good work-related skills (i.e. marketing, programming, budgeting, research)	3.89	0.86	3.50	0.74	1.88
Be able to show leadership abilities	3.81	0.97	3.77	0.81	0.15
Be able to take direction	4.02	0.87	4.36	0.66	-1.71
Show awareness of their own capabilities	4.22	0.73	4.14	0.57	0.45
Be highly motivated	4.27	0.87	4.32	0.57	-0.24
Show initiative	4.38	0.75	4.27	0.55	0.62
Be treated the same as other employees	4.13	1.02	3.76	0.94	1.44

Note: Supervisor n=22; student n= 63; *p < 0.05, **p<0.01

Table 5: Student/supervisor t-test comparison: Selecting a practicum placement

Item	Student		Supervisor		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Students should select a practicum placement agency:					
Based on familiarity with the agency	3.13	0.98	2.86	0.71	1.16
Based on personal contacts/who they know	2.70	1.01	2.59	0.59	0.47
Based on ease of fulfilling university unit requirements	3.10	1.06	2.77	0.97	1.26
Based on geographic location	3.79	0.94	3.09	0.68	3.19*
Based on perceived quality of the agency	3.75	0.82	3.59	1.01	0.72
Based on likelihood of future employment with the agency	3.70	0.84	2.90	0.81	3.84**
Based on future employment opportunities/career aspirations	4.25	0.69	4.00	0.82	1.41

Note: Supervisor n=22; student n= 63; *p < 0.05, **p<0.01

Discussion

Overall the results of the study indicated that there was considerable agreement with the students and supervisors on aspects relating to the role of the placements, the agency, the university, student abilities and the selection of a placement agency. Students very strongly linked their placement opportunity and the agency they worked for to future employment opportunities, including agreeing that it was the role of the agency to assist them in finding future employment, or to provide them with employment after the completion of the placement, as well as to provide opportunities for networking; these views were significantly different from the supervisors. They also strongly agreed that they should choose their placement agency based on future employment opportunities or career aspirations, and they were in significantly greater agreement than the supervisors over choosing a placement on the basis of the likelihood of future employment with that agency. These results are similar to those of Ross and Beggs (2007) and Beggs, Ross and Knapp (2006) who found that student interns were significantly more likely than practioners to agree that internships should offer and/or provide assistance in finding full-time employment after the internship, and that students should select an internship

agency that is likely to offer a full-time position. Significantly, this expectation where the agency should be assisting or providing future employment does differ from that of the university. Although one of the key aims of the placement is to assist students in gaining work experience, and some students do manage to obtain future employment with their host agency, the university is not of the view that, it should be the direct role of the agency or as a consequence of the placement that, employment is obtained. These results indicate that better management of student expectations here is required.

Students were also of the view that the placement did have to count for credit towards their university degree, as is currently the case. Although their views of payment for the placement were significantly different to that of the supervisors, a mean of 2.8 and a ranking of 10th of 10 items in this section indicates that, as a group, students do not agree that the placement should be paid. Students also do not readily agree that the placement should be voluntary either (M=3.27, ranked 9th of 10 items). Not surprisingly, the paid versus voluntary nature of the placement seemed to cause the most disagreement amongst the students because these items, along with the statements that students should volunteer in excess of the required number of hours, be available outside of general business hours and that the university should reduce the amount of time required for student placements, as well as allow students class time to complete their placement, had some of the highest levels of variance. On the other hand, supervisors had a more polarised view in that they strongly disagreed that the placement should be paid, and strongly agreed that it should be voluntary. Students and supervisors also had significantly different opinions on the amount of time students should be required to spend on their placements, with students indicating stronger agreement with reducing the amount of time required and supervisors indicating stronger agreement for increasing it. The supervisors' view that the placement should count towards credit for a university degree was also different from that of the students, which is the same result as found by Ross and Beggs (2007). Significantly, the supervisors also had different views on the role the university should play in visiting students at their placement agency, which may also require better management of how supervisors provide assessments to lecturers of students and their work, as university staff do not currently conduct visits to students on placement.

Supervisors and students were in general agreement that the placement should enhance a range of employability skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving, as well as providing opportunities to apply knowledge learnt in the classroom. Agreement was also reached about the importance of students to present themselves on time, in a professional manner, and the requirement for students to display initiative and motivation during the placement. In regards the role of the university, students and supervisors also strongly agreed that the university should provide assistance to students in selecting an appropriate placement. They differed, however, on whether the placement should enhance work-related skills such as marketing, programming, budgeting and research with supervisors agreeing more strongly that it should. Overall, these results do support the more common understanding that WIL is important in providing learning opportunities outside of the classroom (Ferkins, 2002). However, some 'unpacking' of these learning opportunities is further required to ensure that the expectations of the key stakeholders more readily align. For example, Ferkins (2002) indicates that some of the broad aims of WIL in sport-related courses are to provide students with the opportunity to develop 'networking' and 'practical' skills. However, this study indicates that there were significant differences between students' and supervisors' views on these items, and on the role of the agency to provide opportunities for leadership skill development, so discussions amongst the three stakeholder groups are required to better manage these competing expectations.

Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that while there are a number of similarities between the expectations and perceptions of students and supervisors about the role of student practicum placements, the role of the practicum placement agency, the role of the university, the abilities of the students and the selection of a practicum placement, there are also a number of differences. Both groups agreed on the valuable learning opportunities the placement provided, and to a large extent on the attributes, skills and abilities the students needed to demonstrate while on their placement; but there were significant differences in the perceptions between the two stakeholder groups, as well as areas of tension amongst the student group, as to whether the placement should be voluntary, paid and/or for university credit, and the length of time the placement should be. Further, the expectations and perceptions students had about the role the agency should play in their future employment do not match up with those of the supervisors in these agencies, nor does it match with that of the university.

As indicated, the matching up or balancing of these expectations is critical to the sustainability of such WIL opportunities. In order to reduce any issues associated with these current differences of opinion, it is recommended that lecturers, during the explanation and discussion of placement experiences with students, emphasise more explicitly the benefits (i.e. application of knowledge and skill development, as well as obtaining work experience to add to their CV) of the placement experience for their overall future employment, at the same time as advising students they should not necessarily expect employment opportunities to be provided by their host agency/supervisor. It would also be worthwhile to emphasise the credit students receive as part of their coursework as a way of reducing the tension between the paid/unpaid nature of the work to be completed. The rationale of length of the placement that is being undertaken, along with its role in the three year degree, might also be better explained and linked again to the benefits of the WIL experience. Students also need to be reminded of the expectations of their role, including demonstrating attributes and skills such as punctuality, professional presentation, motivation, communication and, where possible, initiative. As another significant element of the placement experience, lecturers should ensure that students receive relevant feedback about their placement from the agency. The results have also highlighted areas for improvement in the university's relationship with the supervisors. Ensuring that supervisors are aware of the level at which the student is studying, the rationale for the placement, it's link to course credit and assessment, including examining more closely the supervisor/lecturer relationship in the assessment of students and their work, as well as an explanation of where that placement experience sits within the three year degree program could assist in reducing some of the differences in expectations. Discussions with supervisors should also centre on the capacity they do have to assist students with opportunities such as 'networking', which may also assist in the future employment of students.

As previously outlined, this paper provides a preliminary insight into some aspects of the first stage of a wider research project. Once further data is collected and analysed a more complete picture of these issues will be gleaned and further recommendations for the practice of WIL placements at ECU and other institutions can be made.

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