

## **WIL in Science: Probing alignment of student, employer and institutional conceptualisations of 'employability' to optimize science student participation in WIL**

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Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has long been an integral part of accrediting STEM courses (e.g. Engineering), but its place in non-accrediting disciplines such as biology and chemistry has not been prominent. Recently, this has begun to change – the place of WIL in science courses has received increased attention (Johnson 2014, Chuck 2015, Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver 2017), and Universities have been working to include opportunities for WIL in science courses. In our work implementing WIL in Science at ECU we have been surprised to observe a level of reluctance among students to take up the opportunities offered. Our experiences suggest that Science students may undervalue WIL, and that their perception may be influenced by the language used to discuss the topic - specifically the concept of 'employability'. We surmise that students' limited understanding of how employability is inferred and communicated in Science may interact with a mismatch between student, University and employer conceptions of what it includes, potentially eroding students' willingness to participate.

We will discuss our response to this dilemma, which is to examining the nexus between employability and WIL in science by asking three key questions:

1. How do undergraduate science students conceptualise 'employability'? What key themes, aspirations and concerns emerge from their understandings?
2. How do the concepts of 'employability' among Science students compare with those of employers in their disciplines and with the institutional discourses around employability? What are the points of intersection, divergence and potential miscommunication?
3. What gaps and opportunities for enhanced participation of science students in WIL can be identified on the basis of this knowledge?

Based on the outcomes of this research, we intend to design targeted, course-level interventions aimed at enhancing students' understanding of the links between employability and WIL, and so maximize uptake of WIL in science at ECU.