

Industry views on Satisfaction and Value of Work Integrated Learning Placements in Health Services Management

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This paper describes the findings of an exploratory study to understand industry satisfaction with administrative procedures and the value of student Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements in health services management. The research aimed to collect data to identify potential areas for improvement of administrative processes for WIL and to determine the value received from host sites through student placement. We used a survey to collect both quantitative and qualitative data using an instrument we developed for this study. The survey was distributed to workplace supervisors hosting health services management students. Using descriptive statistics and analysing responses received the views reflected that students complete work of value within their organisations and students are placed in a diverse range of health care settings private, public, and non-government organisations.

Feedback received from workplace supervisors has been used to improve WIL administrative processes, streamline communications, and provide further clarity of expectations. This paper will be of interest to Universities who offer niche programs, such as in health services management, and in describing the value of WIL from industry perspectives. The study has also identified future areas for research such as replication of the survey and testing in other academic disciplines who support work integrated learning courses.

Keywords: supervision, value, student learning, work integrated learning, industry placement

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Introduction

Over the last decade, Australian universities have operated in a volatile and uncertain environment with increased learning, teaching and research demands, funding pressures and a focus on working more closely with industry. Recently, attention on performance based funding and indicators related to outcomes such as graduate employment have been further emphasised (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2018). Many universities have recognised the importance of WIL to support student employability and a University in southeast Australia (hereafter called 'the university') has offered this to health service management (HSM) students since 2009. Over this time, and working with the health sector, students have completed health service management placements in a broad range of settings and completed projects in workforce planning, strategy development, policy and planning, governance, electronic patient records, informatics and health accreditation (McConnell et al., 2019).

Students value WIL and this is evidenced in student feedback over the short and longer terms and it is well recognised that it is beneficial to their future employment prospects (Ferns & Howitt, 2019; Martin & Rees, 2019). Industry partnerships are integral to the success and sustainability of WIL placements and placement quality noted to impact upon employability (Morse, 2007; Smith et al., 2019). From an industry perspective, value can be measured in terms of opportunities for collaboration, altruism and the delivery of work of value to their organisations (Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; Morse, 2007). The sustainability of WIL programs are also dependent upon factors such as the achievement of mutual benefits for each partner, recognition of the partnership, trust and a shared vision (Fleming et al., 2018). With a strong understanding of these factors, this project was initiated to determine if health service management student placements provide value to the hosting organisation and to determine supervisor satisfaction with processes to support and enable health services management WIL.

Rationale for the study

The Masters and Advanced Masters in Health Services Management are post-graduate programs offered by the University and WIL courses offer students the opportunity to translate theory into practice and to gain the necessary attributes and skills necessary to work as a health services manager. Since 2009, successful WIL offerings have been part of the University program and whilst numbers are small in our Program, WIL continues to be popular with students. In 2018/2019 industry partners strongly supported HSM WIL as we have built relationships, trust and worked towards ensuring students are adequately prepared and can meet industry expectations. Students undertaking WIL are placed for four full-time days a week in the workplace where they complete a major body of work or deliverable, such as a project (McConnell et al., 2019). Students must complete a set number of credit points (unit of value giving weighting to course work) and courses prior to WIL and all students who meet these requirements are accepted into the course. There are no minimum GPA requirements necessary for enrolment. Prior to placement, students complete a form outlining their health service management interests, career prospects and strengths and weaknesses. Students also make a 3-minute 'pitch' regarding their interests and 5-year career outlook. Information collected is used to assist the academic and placements officer to identify a suitable placement.

The HSM WIL course is very popular with international and increasingly with domestic students, typically clinicians wanting to enhance their opportunities to move from clinical to healthcare managerial roles. Health industry partnerships are integral to the success of the WIL courses and the health organisation's support through supervision, identification of suitable projects and opportunities, mentoring and engagement are highly valued by the university. Simple administrative processes and the provision of the right information to support a quality experience is an important focus for those who convene and facilitate student placements. Understanding the value of placements from multiple perspectives and the satisfaction of host-sites can inform placement design from administrative and academic viewpoints. This study was initiated as a quality improvement project to understand and measure the satisfaction, value and benefits to health industry partner organisations who host students.

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Research questions

Do the current administrative processes and documentation support workplace supervisors to deliver student industry placements?

Sub-question

Do workplace supervisors receive value from hosting student placements and how can this be measured?

Objectives

This research had two objectives. Specifically, we intended to:

- Identify areas for improvement or refinement of administrative processes to support industry supervisors and assure their satisfaction when working with our University when hosting placements.
- Determine the value received from host sites through health service management student placements.

Methods

Surveys or questionnaires are one of the most widely used primary data gathering techniques because they are efficient and economical (Gray, 2014; Liamputtong, 2013). The workplaces, hospitals, aged care centres and non-government organisations providing health services where health service managers are placed are busy and student placements create additional workload. The researchers determined that in order to capture responses from workplace supervisors that the administrative burden should be low.

The project was completed between November 2018 and April 2019 and applied the following:

1. A Literature Review and environmental scan was conducted to inform the study and design of instruments.
2. Audit of the University, Health Service Management WIL placement documentation and current administration procedures.
3. Survey of HSM Placement organisation/sites regarding satisfaction and value of student HSM WIL placements. The survey was deployed using Google Forms and was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Questions were formulated in line with the research objectives and included demographic information. A Likert scale was used for the majority of questions asked in the survey with some questions that allowed respondents to comment on specific aspects of placement administration.

Forty invitations were sent to current placement sites to complete the survey. All sites that had hosted student placements in the most recent 2 trimesters were surveyed. No participants refused to participate however not all participants responded to the invitation.

Ethical approval for a Quality Improvement study was obtained from University Ethics Committee - 2018/343.

A descriptive analysis of quantitative data was performed using Microsoft Excel. The small number of qualitative data provided in comments section was analysed, and feedback grouped according to key concepts.

Results

The literature review was used to inform the study design. Academic papers related to the specific focus of enquiry were reviewed however we were unable to identify a suitable validated tool for survey of WIL sites that was relevant to health services management.

Audit of the University, Health Service Management WIL placement documentation and current administration procedures

Since the introduction of the Health Services Management WIL courses in 2009 a combination of program documentation, spreadsheets and the university's supported placement system SONIA have been used to manage the identification of students for WIL, the matching process and placement supervisor contact and other information. SONIA is an enterprise-wide solution used to manage placement allocations, store and collect documents and mandatory requirements such as those required in health for example immunisation history, criminal and other record checks.

It was recognised during 2018 that a 'one stop shop' approach was needed with a single source of 'truth' readily available to both the placement officer and the academic convenor. The administrative processes, steps and documents required were mapped and it was clear that there were opportunities for simplification of workflows.

Communication with workplace supervisors is critical and ensuring that the right content, volume, not too many or too few are generated between the university and placement supervisors is imperative. The content and volume of communications is important in terms of engagement and 'ease of doing business' with the university. Both volume and content were considered in the audit and analysis of placement documentation and administration processes.

Key issues identified in the audit were:

- Multiple locations for student and placement information with discrepancies noted in contact details. Need to update details in spreadsheets and SONIA leading to additional administrative effort and overhead.
- Repetition of steps and potential for reduction of wasted or repeated tasks
- Opportunity to review timing and content of communications with industry supervisors.

Survey of Health Services Management Industry Placement Sites

Forty surveys were sent out as well as two reminder emails. Fourteen of the forty were completed - a 35% response rate.

Due to the small study size the findings may not be generalisable however, responses received provide valuable data to inform the WIL courses in the Programs at the University and other health service management programs considering WIL placements. Fourteen

industry supervisors responded to the survey, most respondents were female and most in the 40 – 59 age group (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). More than 50% of placement site supervisors (7/14) work in public sector health care organisations, typically hospitals or government departments. Most respondents hold managerial roles (n=12) (Manager, Director, Practice Manager, Executive Manager) and two-project management or clinical system support roles, see below.

Age group and gender	20 to 39	40 to 59	60+	Grand Total
Female	21%	36%	7%	64%
Male	7%	21%	7%	36%
Grand Total	29%	57%	14%	100%

Table 1 Respondents by gender and age groupings

The study demonstrated that the WIL management team works with a broad range of health service organisations and positions within organisations as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.** . Most students are supervised by a Director, Manager or Executive Manager providing students with opportunities for mentoring and to see how health services managers at this level lead and manage.

Position	Nongovernmental organisation (NGO)	Other	Private	Public	Grand Total
Manager			1	3	4
Director		1	1	2	4
Practice Manager			2		2
Executive Manager	1		1		2
Project Manager				1	1
Clinical System Support				1	1

Position	Nongovernmental organisation (NGO)	Other	Private	Public	Grand Total
Lead					
Grand Total	1	1	5	7	14

Table 2 Respondents by position and workplace sector

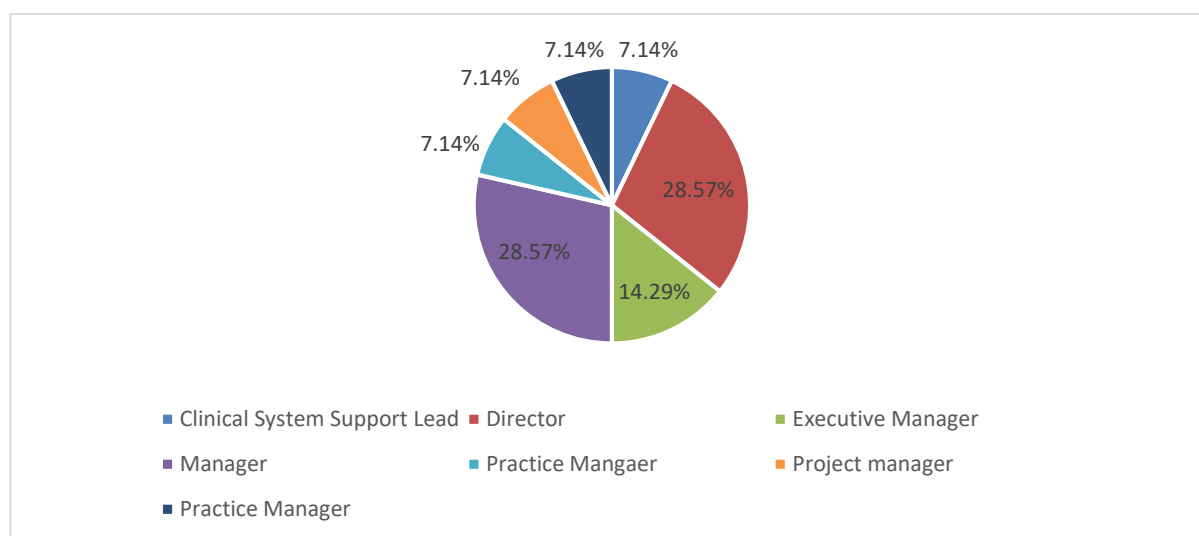


Figure 1 Pie chart showing percentages of supervisors who responded to survey by their position titles.

WIL students on placement in 2018 by sector

As the largest sector in health, the survey demonstrated that the public sector generously hosts the largest number of placements. The private sector also supports students in addition to NGOs. Percentages of respondents by sectors is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**

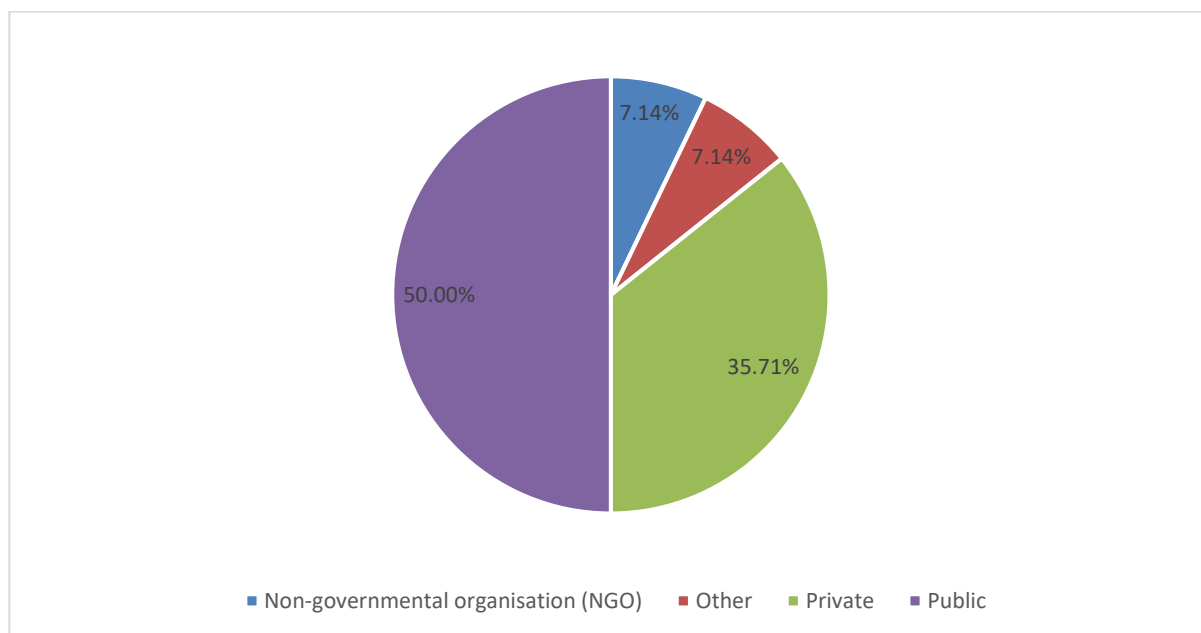


Figure 2 Percentage of respondents to the survey by workplace sectors

Aspects of hosting a health service management work integrated learning placement that were most useful or valuable.

11 responses were received to a question that asked about value of hosting a placement ranging from limited value (n = 1) to high value (n = 10).

Respondent’s comments have been summarised in relation to the value to organisation, supervisor and the project work that students complete whilst on placement. Common themes from the data are shown in Table below.

Organisation	Supervisor	Project work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to develop and maintain links with University. • Showcase employment opportunities to future employees. • Additional resource with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support student development through mentoring • Shared learning and development • Connection with students and providing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background research • Fresh view on issues • Sharing of ideas • Solution development • Completion of projects and deliverables that

Organisation	Supervisor	Project work
<p>time to focus on specific projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health service management expertise 	<p>them with opportunities to learn and to progress work readiness</p>	<p>would not have been completed with current resourcing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students became integrated within organisational teams. Student projects have potential to add value to the current work in progress and the organisation. Project outcomes have assisted with change management.

Table 3 Value provided to organisations, supervisors and the completion of project work by students

Improving the supervisor experience

11 responses were completed in relation to a question that asked supervisor what the university could do to improve the supervisor experience. In the main, comments were positive, and supervisors satisfied with the level of communication and content of communication. Some suggestions were made as to timing of communication (prior and during placement) and these are summarised in Table below.

Prior	During
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a joint briefing of the student to ensure that the expectations are clearly set and can then be monitored by the university team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrive at the workplace with the student on their first day and confirm expectations

Prior	During
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a short information session or workshop to give tips including subjects like how to choose an appropriate project for the student and examples of past projects. • Share more about the objectives of the WIL student in undertaking the university HSM program. • A pre-meet with supervisors would help some to fully understand the role and expectations. Or quarterly presentations to potential supervisors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps support orientation on the first day of placement • Access to resources to help guide students. • Ensure all parties understand the expectations and learning required.

Table 4 Approaches suggested to improve supervisor experience when hosting HSM student WIL placements

Improving the student learning experience

Some supervisors suggested that closer monitoring of students and support would help to assist students to operate more effectively in the work environment. Supervisors valued the support of the academic convenor and placements officer to answer student questions and provide feedback in a timely manner. Clarity of expectations regarding student performance and further information about the learning goals of the student whilst on placement was raised.

Responses also suggested that supervisors did not understand the difference between the roles of academic convenor and placements officer. Supervisors commented that they valued the responsiveness of Academic and Placements officer in person, to emails and phone. Example feedback about the support provided by University WIL staff is described here:

- 'The information about the student was sent to us in a timely manner and contained everything we would need to know'.

- ‘They are helpful and quick to reply to questions’.
- ‘Provided guidance when needed regarding processes, assessment etc’.
- ‘Made the linkage between course of study and placement very clear’.
- ‘Accessible, responsive, knowledgeable, helpful, collegial.’
- ‘Very, very engaging. Great guidance. Patient, clearly enthusiastic about the student success and experience as well as the overall project - definitely a positive and if we have the project need, we will participate again’.

Skills and knowledge development during WIL placements

Supervisors were asked to rate the student’s health service management skills/knowledge during their placement. Supervisors rated students’ skills and knowledge after placement more strongly than at the start of placement reflecting improvement through applied learning and skills development in the health service management WIL course. See figure 3.

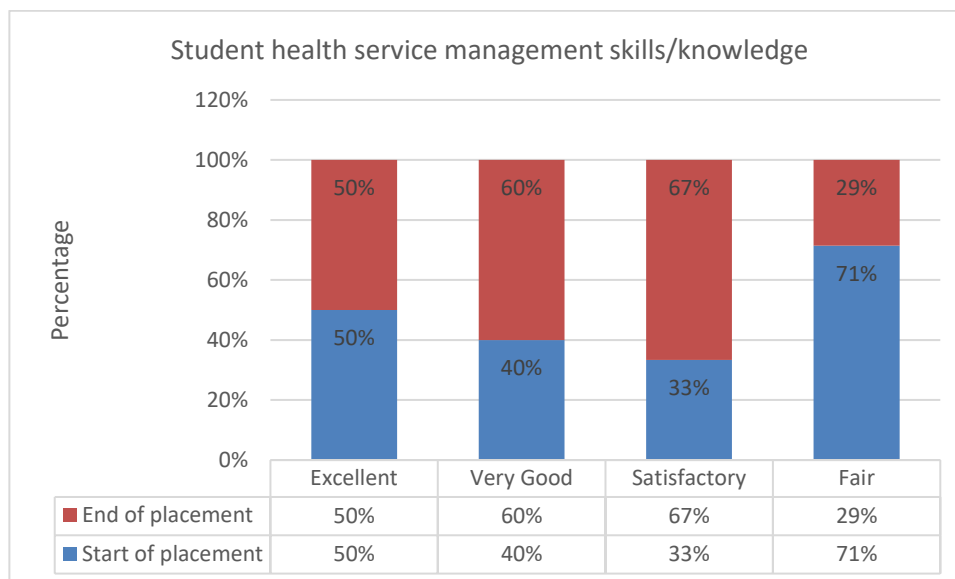


Figure 3 Student HSM Skills/Knowledge at commencement and end of placement – ratings by supervisor by percentage

Value of the student placement to the organisation

Most supervisors agreed or strongly agreed that the work completed by students contributed to organisational objectives and that the work will be used and/or adapted by the host site. It was clear however, that students could be more effective team members

as only (63%) agreed or strongly agreed to this question. One constraint maybe that student placements are not paid and are focussed on learning and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. *Table* below shows this.

Value of student placement to the organisation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Grand Total
Student was an effective member of the work team whilst on placement	36%	27%	18%	18%	100%
Student work contributed to organisational objectives	36%	45%	9%	9%	100%
Student work will be adapted and/or used by the organisation	45%	27%	18%	9%	100%

Table 5 Value of student placement to the hosting organisation as described by survey respondents

The survey responses also reflected that the final deliverable or project was in the main (73%) of value to the organisation. However, that 23% of supervisors conveyed that work was not of value suggests that the University has further work in preparing and supporting students to deliver what is expected by industry.

Other

Suggestions from supervisors to strengthen processes included the following:

- Value in a pre-placement visit by the student.
- Reciprocity could be strengthened by host sites presenting on campus so that students are aware of expectations.
- Increasing the frequency of University visits during placement
- If needed, University academic staff to assist with the identification of appropriate projects.

Discussion and key learnings

This study has demonstrated that health service management industry supervisors value the WIL placement and the work that students complete. This exploratory study also set out to determine and identify areas for improvement of administrative procedures for WIL and importantly, understand the value received from host sites through student placements.

Feedback from some survey respondents indicated that further clarity of expectations from the University, materials to assist supervisors and support for students is critical and this concurs with research conducted by (Jackson et al., 2017). These issues are important and relate to the sustainability of WIL programs as they increase in popularity. Industry relationships are key to this and Fleming et al., (2018) note the importance of reciprocity, co-ordination, communication, trust, expectations, resources, learning and recognition in sustaining successful WIL learning relationships.

Developing learning throughout our program so that WIL students are better prepared in report writing for business and delivering oral presentations will help to ensure that student work meets expectations of industry (Jackson et al., 2017). Communication skills as an essential requirement for success in the workplace and preparation for employment as health service managers was also identified in research conducted by (D. Messum et al., 2011, 2016; D. G. Messum et al., 2015).

As a result of this study, we identified areas for improvement to streamline processes for both host sites and the WIL team. Strategies we have now adopted to strengthen include:

- Reduced redundancy of administrative processes by removing spreadsheets and using the SONIA student placement management platform as a single source of truth.
- Management of all administrative processes and most student and supervisor interactions and data gathering through use of placement management systems such as SONIA.
- Reduced and streamlined communications with supervisors, recognising the burden caused by volume of email communications.

- Provision of an information package for supervisors on day 1 summarising key requirements, a student profile and checklist of actions for week 1 of placement
- Increased frequency of site visits during the placement for identified or 'at risk' students.
- Stronger industry involvement in planning for and the orientation of students to ensure expectations are outlined and skills that will be needed clearly articulated to prospective students.
- Provision of opportunities for the University to share research and latest evidence on health services management.
- Further scaffolding the learning and development of communication skills, both oral and written, throughout the health services management degree

We now have an instrument that can be used to measure host site satisfaction of WIL administrative processes/procedures and the value of WIL to industry partners on an ongoing basis. This will continue to be used as part of our ongoing quality improvement practices. This study also contributes to the body of knowledge for a niche academic program, health services management and factors contributing to supervisor satisfaction and ensuring that student placements provide value.

Limitations and future research

Study findings are based on an exploratory study in a niche post-graduate program. Due to the small study size the findings may not be generalisable but may inform other health service management programs considering WIL placements. Reproduction of the study in other WIL courses will test the relevance of questions in measuring value and satisfaction in other disciplines. In addition, using the survey that has been developed more widely will test for validity and provide a larger data set for analysis. This will enable obtaining further and more diverse views. It is our intention to repeat the survey on an ongoing basis.

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Notes on contributors

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Sheree Lloyd is a health information manager, educator and project manager with over 30 years' experience in academic and health service management roles. Sheree is a Certified Health Information Manager, Fellow of Australasian College of Health Service Managers and member of the Australian Institute of Digital Health. In 2019 she attained a PhD on innovation and high performance in rural health settings.

Danielle Waid

Danielle Waid organises Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements in collaboration with the WIL Academic Convenor. Danielle provides WIL placement support and advice to students and engages with new and current industry partners. Danielle has experience working in the health sector as an allied health practitioner and a Masters in Health Services Management.

Mark Avery

Mark Avery teaches, conducts research and consults in health leadership and management. His research interest areas include leadership and management in healthcare; patient safety and quality care; community information in health services. In addition to his university experience, Mark has over 35 years' experience in leadership, management, and corporate roles in both the public and private health care sectors in Australia and the United Kingdom. His career and experience have been at senior executive, chief executive, consultant, board director levels in hospitals, community health and regulation.

SL was the Chief Investigator for the study. SL and DW contributed to the design of the study. Literature searches were conducted by SL. Analysis was conducted by SL, DW and MA. SL completed the first draft, edited by all. All authors agree on the final version of the article.

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