WIL IN SCIENCE: GROWING FACULTY LEADERSHIP

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'It is relatively well accepted that teaching is seen as the poor cousin to research among academics … well I often feel that WIL teaching is the poor cousin of teaching!' (Edwards et al., 2015).

Background

A recent national study commissioned by the Office of the Chief Scientist shows how far science falls behind its technology-oriented peers, engineering, IT and agriculture, in providing exposure to the broader work environment (Edwards et al., 2015). Science students, undergraduate and postgraduate, have far less access to WIL opportunities and do not engage with it at rates equivalent to their peers in related professional disciplines. At the same time, employers argue that their needs for science- and technology-trained people are not being met (Prinsley and Baranyai, 2015). This presentation describes a new national initiative, WIL in Science, that addresses leadership for work-integrated learning in Faculties of Science and presents early findings from the project.

WIL in Science project

The WIL in Science: Leadership project was established in 2015 by the Australian Council of Deans of Science (ACDS) to create a national network of leaders for WIL in Science and build expertise in WIL leadership in Science. In December 2015, the project brought together Faculty nominees for the first national WIL in Science forum to form the national network. The diversity of Forum participants reinforced the observation from Edwards et al. (2015) that, despite widespread support for WIL, different institutions had very different levels of maturity in development of WIL programs.

In 2016, the project has funded a series of lighthouse projects that describe the journey towards effective WIL for Science faculties. The six lighthouse projects have been grouped as (1) setting up Faculty WIL programs; (2) developing alternative approaches for WIL and (3) extending WIL and building capacity for the future. These projects illustrate the multilayered leadership required for WIL (Patrick et al, 2014).

Early findings

Feedback from forum participants and project leaders demonstrates the variation in WIL practice amongst science faculties in Australian universities which ranges from universities that mandate a WIL experience in all courses for every student to institutions which only offer work experiences as voluntary, extra-curricular activities. A survey of WIL leadership practice indicates key challenges include funding, workload allocation, staff capacity, lack of specialist WIL expertise and systematic support for WIL. Interaction between lighthouse project teams reveals the importance of peer-to-peer learning for WIL program development.

References

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