INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING ON SCIENCE STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Daniel Czech[a], Julia Choate[a], Jessica Jong[a], Maxine Bonham[b], Tracy McCaffrey[b]

Presenting Author: Daniel Czech (daniel.czech@monash.edu)
[a]School of Biomedical Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne Victoria 3800, Australia
[b]Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food, Monash University, Melbourne Victoria 3800, Australia

KEYWORDS: Work Integrated Learning, professional identity, employability

BACKGROUND
Australian science graduates have among the lowest full-time professional employment of all undergraduate courses (GOS-L 2018). It is hypothesised that professionally open-ended science degrees do not currently create significant opportunities to develop professional identity, leading to poor professional employment outcomes. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has been proposed as a means to develop professional identity among business students (Jackson 2016), however little evidence demonstrates the impact of WIL on science students' professional identity.

AIMS & METHODS
We investigated the impact of WIL on Nutrition Science and Biomedical Science students' professional identity. Employing a mixed-methods approach, students were surveyed pre- (N=52) and post- (N=22) placement, and in a focus group (N=6). Thematic analysis was conducted to identify convergent themes.

RESULTS
We find evidence to suggest that WIL may help science students develop professional identity, although barriers remain. Students responded that WIL helped to develop their professional identity, and identified more strongly as 'general professionals' after placement. Exposure to professional environments, interaction with placement supervisors and work-related tasks were the top enablers to building professional identity.

CONCLUSIONS
These findings help to inform science educators about the role of WIL in developing graduate employability by better understanding complex notions of science students' professional identity.

REFERENCES
GOS-L (2018). *Graduate Outcomes Survey - Longitudinal medium-term graduate outcomes.* Quality indicators for learning and teaching, Department of Education and Training, Canberra.
Jackson, D. (2016). Developing pre-professional identity in undergraduates through work-integrated learning. *Higher Education 74*, 833-853.