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Challenges of Developing and Sustaining a Research Partnership for Work Integrated Learning

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Developing and Sustaining a Placement Research Partnership for Work Integrated Learning

Overview



- Why research WIL?
- Early approaches to WIL research
- Our research journey – getting started through to building knowledge
- Discussion: Research design, developing resources, cross boundary working
- Conclusions

Why research WIL?



- Work Integrated Learning (WIL) broadly defined as educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace (Cooper et al., 2010)
- UK context tuition fee reforms (Browne, 2010)
- Universities challenged to design programmes which give the skills, knowledge and experience to increase employability (Bates, 2008)
- UK CIM Survey 75% failures in education contributing to a skills crisis (Woodman & Hutchins, 2011)

Early approaches to WIL research

- I first encountered WIL research in 2007 WACE Singapore.
- Zerwaard reported, up to 1997 WIL research had been ‘limited, uncertain and sparse’ (Zegwaard & Coll, 2007)
- ‘What has been published is good’ (Bartkus & Stull, 2004)
- WIL research now diverse and multidisciplinary, recognition for the potential of WIL as pedagogical philosophy, rather than model of links between education and work (Kjellen, 2010)

This Millennium

- Choices of methodology: demonstrable quality and potential conflict with practitioner researcher
- And articulating the philosophical underpinnings and appropriate research design (Coll & Chapman, 2000)
- Beyond the JCEI, main problem lack of quantitative research, accuracy in methods (convenience sampling) (Bartkus, 2007)
- Coll & Kalnin (2009) reinforced that research should be grounded in theory

The Future



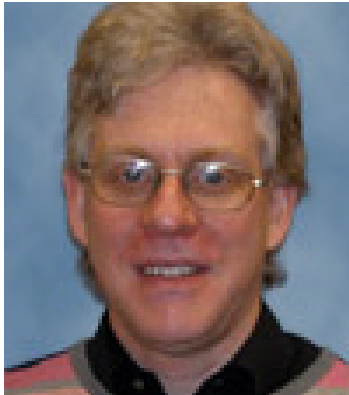
- Two re-invigorated journals
 - JCEI
 - APJCE
- WACE Research Communities
- National Research Communities
 - UK ASET Practice and Research Network

Our research journey – my journey



- Systems engineer, operational and service management in public and private sector, different careers
- Salaries, jobs, degree classifications (Ward, 2006)
- Student Placement Journeys: students, employers and tutors (Ward & Gaffikin, 2007 to 2009)
- Meet with Drysdale, WACE 2010, Graz. Subsequently joined the international research project
- 2010 Director of ASET – International Placements and Collaborations
- 2013 Co-chair ASET Research and Practice Group

The UK Research Team



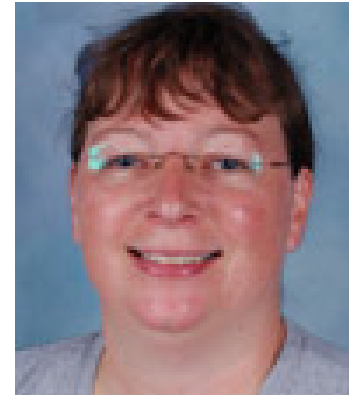
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Lisa Ward

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**Fiona Purdie
/Alison Bravington**

Research
Assistant, HHS

Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Our research journey

– UK Research Team



- Literature on limitations of practitioner researchers
- Find experienced local research partners
 - Professor - with expertise in Qualitative Methods
 - Senior Lecturer / Researcher with expertise in Quantitative Methods
 - Note, no tenure in UK universities
- Successful bid to Innovation Fund
 - RA for 40 days ‘Are placement students better psychologically prepared for life and work?’

Our research journey

Challenges



- University bureaucracy – 6 months for approval to start
- Strong field
- Short term contracts -> staff turnover -> RA leaving
- Steering group: careers and SU
- Research ethics, delays
- On-line survey design, marketing campaign balanced with lit review – multi-tasking
- Analysis very tight
- Publication simultaneous (condition of funding)

First Phase – Quantitative Study Results



- 716 undergraduate responses to on-line study
- UK Students who pursue WIL compared to non-WIL peers have
 - Sig higher hope
 - Sig higher confidence in attaining goals
 - Lower test anxiety
- Multiple experiences of WIL
 - As above plus academic self-efficacy

Second Phase – Qualitative Study



- Innovation Funding, ‘The More the Merrier: A qualitative examination of the contribution of multiple WIL experiences to student learning, personal development and preparation for employment.’
- A new RA for 40 days, project underway.

Discussion: Research design

- Mixed methods. The first and second stages of our project fit neatly together
- The quantitative study informs the qualitative study
- Quantitative study – overview of psychological factors
- Large sample size in UK
- Trial interviews developing methods
- Current research underway

Discussion: Developing Resources



- Sustainability of the project is a major issue
- Busy day jobs
- Continuity of team members
- Efforts to find further sources of funding
- Bid writing – matching criteria
- Research Assistants
 - Helps publications
 - Knowledge goes away with them
 - Stop / go project

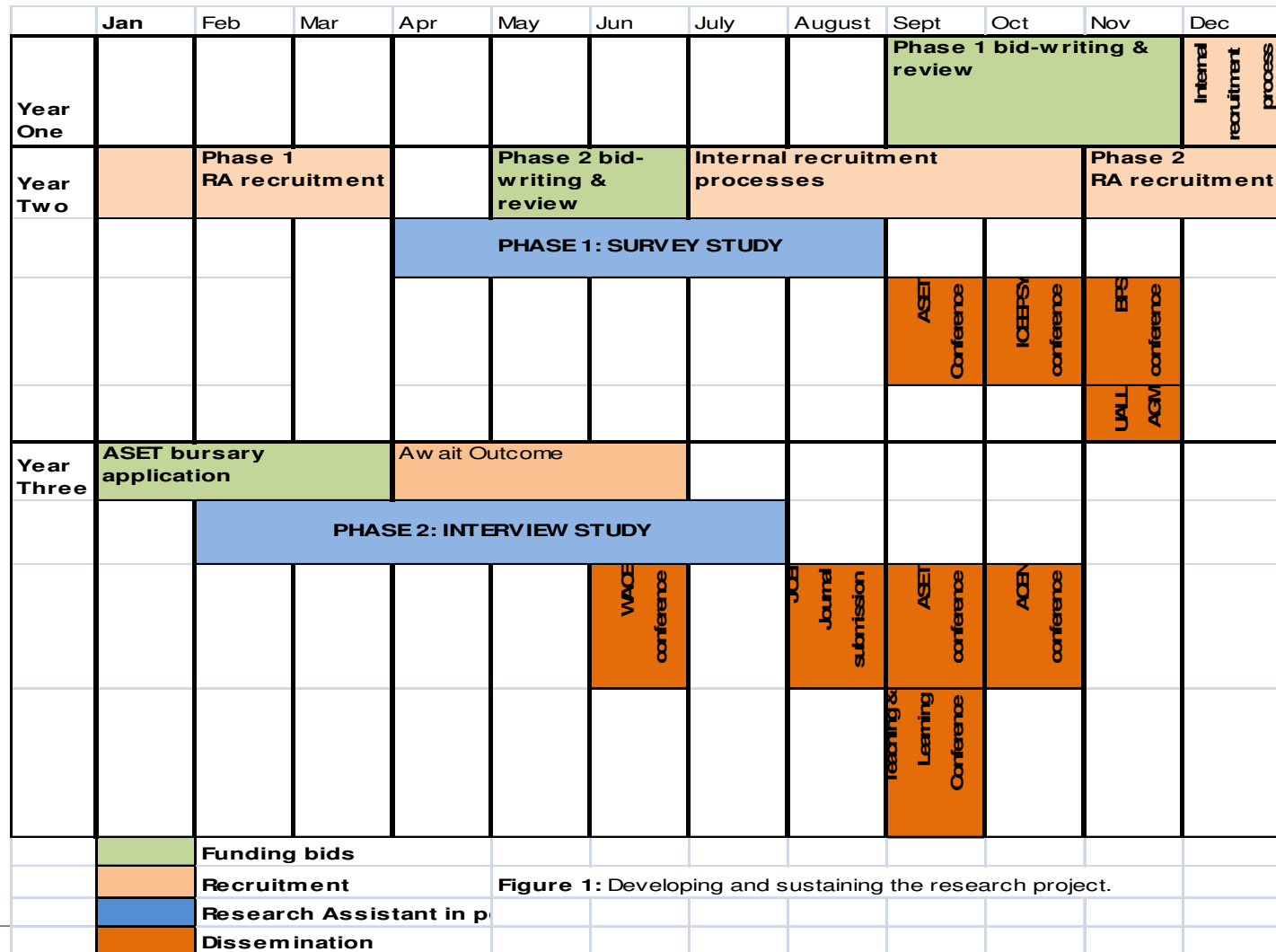


Figure 1: Developing and sustaining the research project.

Discussion – Cross Boundary Working



- ‘Boundary spanning is an area of theory and practice with great applicability to a better understanding of the activity of WIL departments’ (Peach et al., 2011)
- Boundary spanning can be applied to research partnerships bridging local and international boundaries
- Reflects importance of collaboration and dissemination
- Towards shared understanding and new ideas

Conclusions

- Taken on board the lessons from the literature
- Multi-disciplinary, multi-method nature of WIL research
- Heart of the process
 - Research quality
 - Partnerships
 - Dissemination
- Sustainability – challenges
 - RA turnover
 - Bidding for funding

ACEN Conference October 2012

**Designing a Qualitative Study into Multiple
Work Integrated Learning Experiences**

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