Guest editorial:
"New problems, new solutions"

We are delighted to present this special issue, a first-of-a-kind driven by practitioner, researcher and learner dialogue across the globe, emerging from the first global, year-long Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Unconference that took place during 2022–2023. The special issue topics address *the link between WIL and grand challenges*. Emerging topics, seemingly prompted by the COVID-19 crisis, include collaboration and teamwork, international networking, student well-being and risk, professional identities, the future of the workplace and the surrounding ethical considerations (e.g. Billett, 2021; Leal Fihlo *et al.*, 2022a, b; Moser *et al.*, 2022). Some of these reflect the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) which highlight the short and long term issues (and solutions) around work and technology, climate change and adaptation, equality and social mobility and just transitions and peace (e.g. Leal Fihlo *et al.*, 2022a, b; Woods *et al.*, 2022). Each of these could not be more pressing in global news as we launch this special issue – in some parts of the world, organizations are declaring climate emergencies and in some areas, poverty emergencies.

The special issue is the product of an international WIL unconference. As such, it aimed and succeeded to include global voices and partnerships in identifying WIL emerging challenges and addressing these from a global perspective. Contributions include nine different countries from West to East and North to South. Modes include human resource challenges as well as university focused work-based learning (WBL), WIL, placements, cooperative education and more. These span multiple disciplines and include both qualitative and quantitative studies. As such the special issue aimed and succeeded to include one of the most diverse contributions within this field to date and support the writing and research endeavors of all contributors. The special issue contributes to the most recent and emerging challenges in the field of WIL. This means the special issue includes new and important perspectives, providing a more holistic and inclusive perspective of WIL from around the world, defining and tackling global and emerging challenges through methods which fundamentally connect learning and workplaces, for example, work-integrated learning, work-based learning, workplace learning and practicum (Wall, 2017).

As can be gleaned from practitioner-oriented media, the nature of work continues to change, fueled by and coupled with changing technologies and learning (see Kropp and McRae, 2022). One of these trends relates to the flexibility in both work location and working times, where employees are measured by their outputs rather by a rigid set of hours worked. Another trend relates to employers expecting to "rent" talent to fill their skills gap, as companies' skills needs are expected to grow faster than their ability to upskill their employees. At the same time, remote workplace learning continues with the rise of subscription services to lifelong learning, immersive learning and the use of artificial intelligence in the classroom (Marr, 2021). What do these emerging trends in the world of work and training mean for the university student, the institution and therefore for WIL design and delivery? What opportunities will present themselves, and which problems should we expect to tackle?

Addison and Williams in their article, "**Predicting Student Retention in HEIs – A Case for Reducing Socio-economic Inequalities**" (2023) reminds us that WIL has ambitious goals to increase employability for all through widening access and increasing social mobility. They remind us of the UNSDGs and how in many developing countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, post-Covid, there are still many inequalities, increased further by increasing crisis, and that education still faces many challenges in reducing inequalities. Addressing the inequality of gender from a private university in Spain

perspective, Garate, Agirre-Aranburu and Miguel in their article, **"Understanding the characteristics of work that foster workplace well-being in an apprenticeship programme and their effects on apprentices' employability. Exploring the gender moderation effect"** (2023), remind us of what WIL can contribute in employability and they address the specific factor of gender in WIL outcomes. These outcomes are further extrapolated from research across the United Kingdom (UK), India, Canada and Italy by Nimmi, Smarty, Geetha, Alessio and Reena in their article, "**Future of Work – Apprehensions and Excitement of Management Graduates"** (2023) indicating the need for psychological strength, skills enhancement and a future mindset.

Although there is ample research to indicate the positive impact of WIL, many challenges are still prevalent, exacerbated by Covid and continuing crisis. Alteri in their article, **"You have to Pay to Play: Housing Costs and Barriers to Participation for Student Interns"** (2023) illustrates a specific inequality in internships when interns cannot afford the housing associated with the internship opportunities.

One solution provided by Dean and Rook in their article, "**Towards sustainability: A typology for non-placement work-based learning"** (2023) is the non-placement, citing examples such as hack-a-thons, consultancy and simulation-based learning, to list but a few. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can supply viable and sustainable solutions. A solution for the challenge of upskilling and reskilling in mid-career is addressed by Alicon and Kalinaki in their article, "**Positioning Higher Education Institutions as work-based ICT Integrated learning theatres for employee mid-career development; a strategy for HR Capacity Building"** (2023).

Due to Covid shifting many of the rules in the world of work, Lourens and Uren in their article, "**The Professional Identity of Intern Psychologists during the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa"** (2023) study specifically the impact of Covid on psychology interns during Covid in South Africa and how during such crisis resilience can be built. Gerhardt and Puchkov explore this further by studying the response of students during a crisis using the Kubler-Ross crisis cycle as a lens in their article, "**Preparing for the Future: Understanding collective grief through the lens of the Kubler-Ross crisis cycle**" (2023). Crisis is non-linear meaning everyone experiences it differently with implications for institutions on the way they deal with it. One helpful solution, is present by Nottingham and Mao in their article, "**Understanding the role of learning communities of practice within a Degree Apprenticeship to enhance inclusive engagement"** (2023). They suggest learning communities that prioritize inclusivity. The special issue is then concluded with a focus on Gen Z by Drewery, Truong and Fannon from Canada in their article, "**Gen Z Students' Work-Integrated Learning Experiences and Work Values"** (2023). In their research, they emphasize the development of work values as a key focus in this post-Covid world.

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Further reading

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