

**BC WIL**  
**Employer/Community**  
**Partner Survey:**  
**Qualitative Analysis**

***December, 2020***

# Qualitative Analysis - BC WIL Employer/Community Partner Survey

The following qualitative analysis was done using a structural coding technique, appropriate for analyzing open-ended survey questions. The three open-ended questions included at the end of the BC WIL Employer/Community Partner Survey have been analyzed below.

1. What lessons could you share resulting from WIL students having to work remotely? (*only asked to participants that had at least some portion of their WIL students working remotely*) [276 responses]
2. What additional support could your WIL program have provided you to support your students' transition to remote work? (*only asked to participants that had at least some portion of their WIL students working remotely*) [185 responses]
3. If you have further thoughts or concerns about your WIL hiring/engaging, please share them here. [171 responses]

For each question, the major categories and themes that emerged from the analysis have been listed below alongside an explanation of the theme and key quotes from participants. This structural coding analysis provides a first take on how to label and index data related to each of the three open-ended questions. Some of the resulting themes can form the basis of further in-depth analysis.

## 1. Lessons resulting from WIL students having to work remotely.

Major themes:

- Communication is key for remote WIL work
- Importance of students' commitment and independence

### Communication is key for remote WIL work

The need for constant communication, feedback, and check-ins was a frequently mentioned lesson from most partners that had to shift their WIL student placements to remote work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are four main sub-themes that will be described below:

- Frequent feedback
- Supervision and training
- Facilitating connections
- Software needs

All four sub-themes have in common a need for more communication and contact considering the lack of in-person experiences. The last sub-theme was included as various employers highlighted the relevance of having proper communication tools/software in place

### Frequent Feedback

Many participants mentioned the need for setting up frequent check-ins and meetings to follow-up with how students were doing, monitoring progress, and making sure they had enough to work on. Some suggest using routine reports (e.g., weekly status reports) to keep track of their accomplishments. This more frequent and detailed feedback can help the employer feel more confident about what the student is doing while also providing students with clear guidelines for their work. Additionally, this constant communication helps the students feel more supported, engaged and appreciated.

#### **Verbatim examples**

*"As a mentor and supervisor, I look for non-verbal cues to a student's comfort level with instructions or new material and those can be very difficult to pick up online. I find it essential to stop frequently and tease out feedback as I progress through introduction of new material and to ensure the student is comfortable acknowledging that they need more explanation, or to have something repeated."*

*"Encouraging students to write a weekly status report is also helpful. Full-time staff should create weekly reports as well, to keep track of what they've accomplished each week."*

*"Regular, scheduled check ins to ensure student is on track and has enough to do."*

*"Ensuring regular checks in are scheduled to assist student to feel confident and supported."*

#### **Supervision and training**

Partners also report a need for more active supervision given the barriers of remote work; additionally, training also needs to be re-oriented considering it can be difficult to train students remotely.

#### **Verbatim examples**

*"Some difficulties in determining productivity. Need a good supervisor to manage."*

*"Remote training and onboarding have become more difficult with remote work. We have been able to mitigate this by providing a direct report or work buddy for the WIL student."*

*"More active supervision is needed, scheduling more frequent check-ins is helpful."*

#### **Facilitating connections**

Many WIL employers acknowledge the lack of the social aspect as a barrier for engaging students in their new roles. This, similar to what was mentioned above, is tackled by trying to increase and improve the communications and team interactions that the student is involved in.

**Verbatim examples**

*"The one challenge was the lack of regular social interaction in an office environment (i.e. meeting more people and learning what they were working on). We encouraged our coop to work with other branches and work units wherever possible to assist in making these connections."*

*"Communication is key! Communicate often and regularly, and connect your students to the rest of your team so that your students can have multiple people to contact if they need help."*

*"Found the need to have weekly check-ins on Zoom to keep students engaged and feeling like part of the team"*

*"Need for very intentional social interaction as it can be especially hard for students to join an organization remotely and feel connected to their mentors or coworkers."*

**Software needs**

Some employers highlighted the need to have proper communication tools to communicate and involve students with their teams. This also included making sure that they had all the required resources to work from home.

**Verbatim examples**

*"Imperative to have a good team chat platform and project management platform. We use Discord and ClickUp and they are invaluable. Also need a good video conferencing platform."*

*"We got a GoToMeeting subscription and that helped us meet remotely and collaborate. We made it work."*

*"Be prepared, ensure staff have adequate resources to work from home. Teach students in advance how to log into remote networks and ensure communication methods are understood."*

## Importance of students' commitment and independence

Employers said that with the new remote work environment, they needed students that can be independent and committed to their work and learning. This means that students are proactive in looking for support and are aware of the questions they need to ask. Additionally, some employers see the benefit of having a supervisor guiding students in how to familiarize with the key aspects of their new role, before starting the actual job.

### Verbatim examples

*"Independence and self-motivation are important skills/qualities for the employee/student to have."*

*"Students need to be more proactive with asking for help or if they have questions as it's easier to do so when onsite. Take control and ownership of your experience and it will be a great one."*

*"Our student was incredibly self-disciplined and was able to self manage their time. Setting clear deliverables is essential to success."*

*"However, in a virtual environment, much of it is independent. It is necessary for the student to take ownership of their own onboarding and be proactive. Additionally, it is important to emphasize the importance of reading and reviewing onboarding content. I have found that students often want to be action oriented and start doing their tasks. They may feel behind if they are not immediately enacting their responsibilities. I have learned that they need their manager's support in 'slowing down' and committing time to self-education."*

*"If a student can show eagerness to update supervisors on the status of their work without being asked and ask for clarification when tasks are unclear, this will go a long way to a positive co-op experience."*

## 2. Additional support that could have been provided by WIL program to support students' transition to remote work

Major themes:

- Guidance on how to adapt to a remote work environment
- Financial support

### Guidance in how to adapt to a remote work environment

Many employers expressed a need for more training for students (and sometimes for themselves) in how to adapt to remote work. This has been categorized into two subthemes below:

- Supervision and training support from PSIs
- Lessons and guidelines

### Supervision and training support from PSIs

Many employers mentioned the need for training students in what was expected from them as they worked remotely. Additionally, some partners would have liked more support in supervising and checking on students as they already had an increased workload because of COVID-19, making it harder for them to find time to commit to the students.

#### Verbatim examples

*"Training for students regarding expectations for working remotely."*

*"Continue to prepare the student to understand the importance of engagement and presence - and that it is especially important (and more difficult) when working remotely during a pandemic."*

*"Working remotely requires a skill set that involves both self-managing yourself and being able to work more effectively/ manage others. Students could benefit from workshops or guide on how they structure work effectiveness, communicate at work, or how to initiate and develop relationships."*

*"More supervision support from their department staff to check in regularly with their student, and not rely on the supervisor of the placement organization, to have to monitor if the student plan is not adhered to. Our managers have added to their workloads with extra precautions for covid-19, we do not have extra time to commit to administration details that could be monitored by the department staff team."*

### Lessons and guidelines

Related to a need for more training and support in what to keep in mind while working remotely, employers would have liked to see guidelines on remote work. This could be in the form of best practices, lessons from other employers, workshops, or other resources, both for the students and the employers.

#### Verbatim examples

*"Workshops for students on how to work remotely effectively may be helpful for them to establish routines."*

*"Guidelines and information for students on what it means to work remotely. A list of considerations and practical suggestions for maintaining extended remote working periods would likely be helpful."*

*"More guidance/resources for onboarding a student remotely and keeping them engaged and connected with the team. We had very limited experience with this and are still learning as we go."*

*"Any 'lessons learned' from other employers in terms of how they have been managing with WIL students working remotely."*

### **Financial support**

Many employers said they would have liked more funding (and more help navigating the available grants) for either their hiring or for the student's costs related to the required additional tools for working remotely.

- Funding and navigating grants
- Financial support for remote work tools

### **Funding and navigating grants**

#### **Verbatim examples**

*"Financial support / funding so we could bring on more resources."*

*"Perhaps a bit more clarity on grant timelines -- i.e. when the evaluation period will be and if a grant was approved, when it would be granted. The process in itself did not seem as easy and required quite a bit of investment in time to complete. With limited resources/time, there were missed opportunities for grants due to the amount of information required of employers."*

*"More funding directly for organizations as it takes a lot of extra administration and staff time [to] have a remote work student."*

### **Financial support for remote work tools**

#### **Verbatim examples**

*"(...) provide funding for remote gear, lap tops, monitors, cameras for video meetings."*

*"Offer subsidy or a rental program for hardware such as computer monitors as our organization currently do not have such a system."*

*"Academic pricing for software licenses wouldn't hurt, IT checklist for students."*

### 3. Further concerns about WIL hiring/engaging

Major themes:

- Communication/reporting issues – need simplification and more information
- Lack of staff resources for onboarding/supervising

#### Communication/reporting issues – need simplification and more information

One of the main concerns expressed in this question was the lack of a simplified way to apply to and report/follow-up on WIL placements. Some of the subsidiary and grant programs are seen as challenging to navigate. Additionally, some partners do not have clear information about what is available and when and who to contact about WIL hiring/engaging.

#### Verbatim examples

*“Reporting is too cumbersome.”*

*“The subsidiary wage program attached to it can be challenging to navigate. This was and has been the biggest hurdle. Also knowing which ones of those programs are applicable &/or legit. Assistance with this matter the same way assistance is provided with the selection of a student, hiring steps, etc would make a huge difference. In fact, it would strengthen the relationship with the school/ program.”*

*“It would be good to get more information regarding all programs and internships, esp the length and the time when is best to advertise.”*

*“Ready to hire but please simplify the process.”*

*“It would make the process much easier if we had one point to process the paperwork rather than reaching out to the PS institution for a support letter, then to a granting body to apply for money, etc. Support from the PS institutions to fast track the process would make our engagement a more regular occurrence.”*

*“I don't know anything about WIL, the student apprentice came to me on here own. So I am totally unaware of this program. I did not know the program existed, how to access it, how to apply for it or even if I could request participation. ”*



### Lack of staff resources for onboarding/supervising

Partners reported having difficulties in providing the necessary time that each WIL student placement requires, both before, during, and after the WIL hiring/engaging happens.

#### Verbatim examples

*"It is nearly impossible in health care to free up staff time to supervise practicum students. This work has always been done off the side of staff's desks with practically no compensation. During covid, we are stretched way beyond capacity and have no additional resources."*

*"We do not have adequate capacity to supervise students and to ensure that they are following professional behaviour. Our WIL experience has been labour intensive for supervisors to ensure that WIL students are engaged and following through to meet expectations.(...)"*

*"I would love to encourage more WIL hiring in my departments - the challenges are always finding someone with the time to supervise (...). In these COVID times, my experience is that nobody is working a normal schedule: either folks have no work and are afraid of losing their jobs, or they have too much work and no time to take on more. Although I can see opportunities down the road for a WIL student, I'm afraid I don't have any at the moment - and would struggle to find the time to serve the students well."*

*"(...)because of the nature of our business, we will not be hiring any WIL students until we can resume our activities. Our need for support and our capacity to supervise has gone way down."*

*"With decreases in clients and supporting current contractors in changes in services due to COVID19, I don't have the energy required to also take on a WIL student and navigate that process with the student."*