Engaging with Learning: Understanding the Impact of Practice Based Learning Exchange

Final Report

September 2009

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The findings presented in this report are based on the contributions of 230 students, 192 alumni, 31 university partners, 17 university staff and 65 subject coordinators. We acknowledge and thank all those who generously gave of their time and experience to improve our collective knowledge of practice-based learning exchange. We would also like to thank our reference group of Associate Professor Richard Baker, Professor Simon Marginson and Professor Jill Wilson.

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2009
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1.0 Executive Summary

This project evaluated the outcomes of practice-based learning exchanges in undergraduate and post-graduate coursework curricula for students, non-academic university partners and universities. Practice-based learning exchange (PBLE) was defined as engaged learning activities through which students work collaboratively with partners in public, community or industry sectors. This includes, although is not limited to, industry and community-based placements and internships. The project sought to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes good pedagogical practice in embedding practice-based learning exchange in University curricula?
2. What are the outcomes of practice-based learning exchange for students, non-academic university partners and universities?
3. What are the conditions under which effective learning exchange is likely to occur?

Data collection took place in seven different degree programmes at the Universities of Melbourne, Queensland and Newcastle. The methodology included pre and post test surveying of students undertaking PBLE, a survey of alumni who had undertaken PBLE during their degrees; semi-structured interviews with 17 university staff, 31 hosts and 14 students involved in PBLE activities and curriculum mapping to identify the role of PBLE in classroom and non-classroom based learning activities.

The research findings indicate that practice-based learning exchanges are the most highly valued and powerful learning experience self-reported by students and alumni who participate in them. They have the potential to achieve a range of positive outcomes for students including:

- Greater engagement with, and understanding of, discipline specific knowledge;
- The development of higher order generic skills;
- The creation of nurturing professional relationships; and
- Enhanced graduate employability.

In addition to their benefits for students, practice-based learning exchange can lead to significant benefits for both universities and host organisations. Practice-based learning exchanges have the potential to:

- Generate learning outside universities, by encouraging reflective learning and knowledge exchange between students and staff members of participating organisations;
- Contribute to community and disciplinary knowledge through the specific projects undertaken by participating students;
- Facilitate reciprocal relationships between host organisations and universities/university staff that extend beyond the PBLE to other forms of knowledge building and action; and,
• Assist in realising the potential of universities to be effectively engaged in their communities.

Unfortunately, poor practice can lead to tensions between universities and host organisations which ultimately undermine the learning that students are able to achieve. Research undertaken for the project suggests that in order to achieve the promise inherent in PBLE for all parties, universities need to ensure that the following three areas are fully thought through:

1 The design of PBLE A poorly implemented PBLE can have significant negative consequences for student learning and self-esteem, and university-community relations. It is therefore vital that PBLE is only employed thoughtfully and responsibly. Universities should ensure that:
   • Student preparedness for PBLE is evaluated and/or developed;
   • Access and equity issues are addressed through flexibility in PBLE length and the use of PBLE scholarships;
   • Effective host involvement in PBLE is supported through preparatory resources and interactions with university staff;
   • Hosts are recognised as co-teachers in curriculum design and evaluation of learning activities;
   • Reflective learning by student participants is formalised through specific learning activities and assessment tasks;
   • Opportunities are created for shared learning through reflection within and between PBLE student cohorts; and
   • Evaluation tools are employed that are competent to assess this form of ‘beyond classroom’ learning.

2 Institutional Support despite being the learning experience most highly valued by students and alumni, PBLE commands relatively low institutional status, both within teaching programs and in relation to other forms of academic activity. To combat this universities should:
   • Promote and champion PBLE at the senior leadership level;
   • Broaden knowledge of effective PBLE design through university teaching and learning centres;
   • Systematically address PBLE in workload allocation criteria;
   • Appropriately recognise and adequately resource academic coordination work;
   • Support peer-learning and exchange between university staff involved with PBLEs across disciplines and faculties;
   • Facilitate opportunities for peer learning and exchange between university staff and host organisation staff; and
   • Encourage further debate and reflection on PBLE curriculum design

3 Relationships with Hosts strong competition for PBLE experiences between institutions is placing high demands on host organisations, which may ultimately reduce the availability of PBLE opportunities. It is therefore advisable for universities to consider:
   • Some degree of central coordination to ensure that hosts do not receive excessive numbers of requests to host students from university staff members;
   • Ensuring that partnerships with hosts are built and maintained in ways which ensure that benefits are mutual; and
   • Opportunities for hosts to be consulted in curriculum design, assessment activities and research partnerships.

Resources for stakeholders can be found at:

2.0 Project Objectives

The aim of this project was to evaluate the outcomes of practice-based learning exchanges - between students, non-academic university partners and universities - in undergraduate and post-graduate coursework curricula, in order to advance innovation in university learning and teaching.

For the purposes of this project, we define practice-based learning exchange as engaged learning activities through which students work collaboratively with partners in public, community or industry sectors.

This includes, although is not limited to, industry and community-based placements, exchange programs, internships, and leadership and community engagement activities supplementary to the formal curriculum. The concept is rooted in ideas of civic engagement and service learning, but stresses that all partners in the exchange - students, community partners, university staff, the University – learn, research and teach as an effect of the exchange.

The project was underpinned by three objectives:

- To explicate what constitutes good pedagogical practice in embedding practice-based learning exchange in University curricula;
- To evaluate the outcomes of practice-based learning exchange for students, non-academic university partners and universities; and
- To shed light of the conditions under which effective learning exchange is likely to occur.

For the purposes of the project, we defined outcomes as: skills, knowledge, dispositions (including civic dispositions) and networks developed through learning exchange. In order to better understand the nature and outcomes of learning exchange between students, university partners and academic staff, we examined both the short-term and intermediate effects using a longitudinal methodology.

We have sought to disseminate learning from this project through the development of the following resources:

- This project report, which is available online at http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/campus/teaching-learning/library/
- A series of short advice guides for students, teaching staff, university leaders and PBLE hosts, which have been disseminated to teaching and learning units at all Australian universities, and are available online at http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/campus/teaching-learning/library/
- Various academic publications arising from the project
3.0 Background and Rationale

In the contemporary era, university graduates face a range of demands to be adaptive learners and global citizens. The growing emphasis on graduate attributes and skills over the past two decades has been informed by changing approaches to learning and teaching, and shifting public policy agendas. These variously emphasise: the employability of graduates as a quality assurance performance measure of universities and a human capital objective of governments; the commitment of universities to extending disciplinary knowledge and affects; and the obligations of higher education institutions to equip graduates for the complex world they inhabit. University graduates are increasingly participating in a knowledge economy which requires flexibility, adaptability and self-reflexivity (Parker 2003). More broadly, they are required to participate in a world characterised by risk, transition, and uncertainty (Barnett 2004).

Within this context, there has been renewed attention in recent times to universities’ responsibilities to instill in their graduates civic dispositions toward global citizenship and prepare them for labour-market participation in the knowledge economy (see Toohey, 1999; Parker, 2003; Barnett et al, 2001; Barnett, 2004). This has been accompanied by increasing discussion about the role of universities as publicly-minded institutions more broadly (see Boyer 1990). While individual universities articulate their motivations differently, they have in common a shared commitment – which is reflected across the Australian higher education sector - to what we are conceptualising in this project as ‘practice-based learning exchange’. While there is increasing interest in what we might call a ‘curriculum of engagement’ in Australia, there has to date been relatively little evaluative research resulting in systematic development of practice in this country.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The project has been informed by three bodies of literature: the pedagogical literature on developing graduate attributes in a global world; educational research on the role of universities in stimulating civic engagement; and the literature informed by education and organizational studies, which examines the effects of experiential learning on learning outcomes.

We take the concept of learning exchange (see for example Meyers 2005; Wright et al 2007) as our analytical starting point. In understanding learning as an exchange, we are drawing upon epistemological ideas that stress the active nature of knowledge and acknowledge the multiple roles that learners and educators take when they engage in learning. Building on models that understand the teaching-learning relationship as a process of ‘co-learning’ rather than a monologue within which an ‘expert’ imparts knowledge to a passive learner, learning exchanges recognise that all parties within a learning relationship increase understanding and co-construct knowledge. In looking to practice-based learning exchanges, we further embed learning in networks of multiple relationships – with public, community and industry partners – and in the world.

3.1.1 Developing Graduate Attributes in a Global World Since the mid-1980s, governments in Australia and elsewhere have increasingly scrutinized the practical skills and personal attributes developed by university curricula (Barnett et al, 2001). This increasing scrutiny partly reflects pressure for universities to produce graduates ready for labour-market participation in the so-called ‘knowledge economy’, and growing demands for accountability where universities are publicly subsidized (see Toohey, 1999; Parker, 2003; Barnett et al, 2001; Barnett, 2004).
Many higher education writers are critical of what they view as an instrumentalist agenda, which constructs universities as ‘roll-on-roll-off skilling factories’ whose educational aims are strictly goal-oriented (Parker, 2003: 529). In pedagogical terms, a number of writers suggest that the project for contemporary curricula is not simply to equip students with workplace skills, but to engage them in learning processes which develop the attributes necessary for citizenship in the global era. Parker (2003) describes this as viewing learning as a developmental and transformational activity, rather than a goal-oriented one. This suggests that, while the push toward ‘generic skills’ may be bound up with a goal-oriented agenda to demonstrate the public relevance of university education, the push towards ‘graduate attributes’ is reflective of a transformational agenda which seeks to ensure that changing curricula enable graduates to develop the knowledge, skills, dispositions and networks necessary to inhabit and contribute to an increasingly complex world. While skills are one important part of this transformation, the notion of attributes more comprehensively embodies the transformative educational effects sought. The conceptual debate has been robust in recent years; however, it has not been well supported by empirical research.

3.1.2 Civic Engagement and Higher Education The literature on civic engagement may be broadly divided into research on civics education specifically and a broader conceptualisation of universities as civic institutions. For the purposes of this project, the latter body of literature has greater relevance. Stimulated by Boyer’s (1990) discussion of the need for universities to embrace a ‘scholarship of engagement’, this work has given rise to an articulated policy commitment in the United States to service learning – which ‘combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service’ (Service Learning Clearinghouse website, 2007). Poulin et al (2006: 174) distinguish between professional internships and service learning on the basis that professional internships ‘are not required to incorporate methods of service learning or necessarily to promote civic engagement’. For the purposes of this project, we employ the concept of learning exchange to accommodate service, professional and other learning activities based on interactive experiential learning based in practice that has outcomes for all involved.

There has been a range of quantitative and qualitative studies that have identified the positive effect of service learning on students’ learning outcomes (see Eyler et al, 2001 for a summary). This research has been primarily concentrated in North America (Annette, 2005) and has focused for the most part on snapshot analyses of students’ immediate learning outcomes. To date, there has been relatively little research that examines the intermediate outcomes of activities consistent with practice-based learning or that considers the outcomes of learning exchanges for university partners (for a notable exception, see Brisbin et al, 2003).

3.1.3 Experiential Learning and Learning Outcomes Experiential learning has been a broadly accepted approach to learning and teaching in postsecondary courses for decades (see for example Peplau 1957). In developing his Experiential Theory of Learning Carl Rogers (1969) identified two types of learning: cognitive and experiential. By the term ‘experiential’ he was referring to the acquisition of applied knowledge. The work of David Kolb (1984) contextualised this type of learning within a cyclical pattern of experience, observation, reflection, and action, a model that can suit a range of learning styles and which links directly to concepts of “lifelong learning” and “communities of practice”. When used effectively experiential learning features practical experiences that encourage students to move from passive learning to higher-order active modes of reflection and learning. Gibbs (1987)
showed that deep learning is best achieved by practicing new abilities and behaviours, receiving feedback, noting consequences of those behaviours and integrating the newly learned skills into practices. The incorporation of these “adaptive learning” techniques which encourage deeper learning through a focus on developing an understanding of, and making decisions about, the information being presented, encourage greater engagement with the topic, and better prepare students for the increased complexity of subsequent subjects and the workplace.

Yet, the experiential learning model is not universally accepted. Several commentators suggest the model ignores different learning styles and does not adequately recognise diversity within a student cohort; carries with it personal and professional risks for both students and teachers (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994); and incorporates flawed arguments with undermine its validity (Webb 1980). Despite concerns about the limitations of a singular focus on experiential learning, there continues to be interest in the approach, with numerous studies demonstrating its benefits. Universities world-wide are becoming conscious of the need for graduates to possess a range of skills and abilities beyond their distinctive disciplinary knowledge, and which directly prepare them for the workplace.

Learning outcomes associated with this instructional style reflect learning associated with the adaptive domain described within Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, particularly the higher-order generic skills. Bloom’s taxonomy provides three categories or domains of the learning environment. One of these – “the adaptive domain” is concerned with values and attitudes, and provides a useful framework for identifying how students might demonstrate their learning through their actions and behaviour. Citing an Australian study by AC Neilsen, Lublin (Lublin n.d.) indicates that employers believe graduates lack generic skills such as critical thinking, oral business communication and problem solving.
4.0 Research Design

4.1 Sample

The project originally aimed to evaluate the outcomes of learning exchange via comparative case study analysis of four degree programs:

1. Master of Public Policy and Management (University of Melbourne)
2. Master of Cultural Materials Conservation (University of Melbourne)
3. Bachelor of Development Studies (University of Newcastle)
4. Bachelor of Social Work (University of Queensland).

However, during the data collection phase, progress was more rapid than expected and the scope of the project was thus expanded to take in practice-based learning exchanges in three more degree programmes:

5. Bachelor of Arts (University of Melbourne)
6. Bachelor of Human Services (University of Queensland)
7. Bachelor of Environmental Management (University of Newcastle)

The expansion in scope generated significant benefits in terms of the range of data collected and the strength of findings.

The seven programmes that were looked at encompassed several major differences which will be referred to throughout this report. These differences were: whether students were at the undergraduate or postgraduate level and whether or not participation in the practice-based learning exchange was compulsory or optional for students enrolled in a particular degree programme. A summary of these differences can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy and Management</td>
<td>Postgrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Materials Conservation</td>
<td>Postgrad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Studies</td>
<td>U-grad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>U-grad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>U-grad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>U-grad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Management</td>
<td>U-grad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Variations amongst Programmes

There were other significant differences which will also be discussed. First, depending on particular programmes, the length of the practice-based learning exchange varied considerably, from two weeks to three months. However most student respondents (61 per cent) undertook a placement of between 3-6 months and participated in their host organisation for 10-20 hours per week (37 per cent) or more than 20 hours per week (50 per cent). Second, the organisations that hosted students were extremely varied and included hospitals, community health services, legal services, art galleries, libraries, archives, museums, state government departments, Indigenous tourism operators, peak bodies and national and international non-government organisations. Third, the activities that students undertook depended both on the degree they were enrolled in and the organisation in which they undertook their practice-based learning exchange. These included, but were not limited to, advocacy, case management, heritage conservation, consultation with stakeholders, counselling, community development, developing
short courses, coordinating activities such as conferences, field and desktop research, health promotion, preparing reports, policy revision and writing briefs.

4.2 Methodology

The project used inductive and deductive research methods to explore the outcomes of practice-based learning exchange activities for university students, university alumni, host organisations and university staff. It utilised a mixed method of research, comprising in-depth, semi-structured interviews and surveys (both online and paper-based). The individual elements of the project proceeded as follows:

4.2.1 Interviews with Hosts University staff were asked to give the team contact details for those hosts who were either currently supervising students during their practice-based learning exchange or had done so in the recent past, and who would be prepared to be interviewed. As names were put forward, hosts were contacted and, if possible, interviews were arranged. Interviews took place in a location nominated by the hosts or by telephone, lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were digitally recorded. All hosts received plain language statements and signed letters of consent. Furthermore, a transcript of the recording was sent to each participant after the interviews for their approval. A total of 31 hosts were interviewed.

In the case of the University of Queensland, only three hosts were willing to be interviewed for the project. After further attempt was made to solicit the feedback of other hosts through an online survey but responses were minimal. The team considered that this silence was a reflection of the specific challenges in practice-based learning exchanges in the areas of Social Work and Human Services in Queensland, with immense competition between universities to place their students and significant demands on hosts in their supervision activities. However, without feedback from this group, it is not possible to arrive at concrete conclusions.

4.2.2 Interviews with University Staff All university staff in the seven programmes listed were contacted and interviews were arranged at a time convenient to them. Once again, staff members were given plain language statements and signed consent forms, interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, interviews were recorded and each participant was sent a transcript of their interview for approval. All staff that were approached agreed to be interviewed, with 17 interviews conducted in total.

4.2.3 Pre-Practice Surveys with Students Staff in the four degrees that were initially included in the project were contacted and asked to suggest a suitable time and place for project members to survey their students prior to them beginning their practice-based learning exchange. At the given time, project members gave a short introduction to the project, distributed plain language statements and consent forms to students. Project members emphasised that the participation of student was voluntary. Those who were willing to participate were then given surveys and completed them immediately, with project members waiting to collect them in the class. This process took about ten minutes. Overall, 230 ‘Pre-Practice’ surveys were collected.

4.2.4 Post-Practice Surveys with Students Staff in the same four degrees were later asked for a suitable time and place for project members to distribute follow-up surveys to students who had completed, or were in the latter stages, of their practice-based learning exchange. In several cases the same procedure as
above was followed, although the number of students that completed surveys was dependent on the number who attended class on that particular day. However, due to the nature of some programmes, there was not always another opportunity for all students to be assembled and, in this case, email addresses for students were obtained from staff and surveys were emailed to the students, who could then complete and return them at their own convenience. Some students did not respond, possibly because they had already left their university, and others required reminder emails. Overall, 166 ‘Post-Practice’ surveys were collected.

4.2.5 Single Surveys with Students Due to a faster rate of progress in data collection than anticipated, practice-based learning exchange in three additional degrees were included in the project. Given that students in these programmes had already commenced their practice-based learning exchange it was too late to disseminate pre-practice surveys. Therefore, a ‘Single Survey’ was disseminated to students in these degrees which combined features of both the pre-practice and post-practice surveys. In two cases these surveys were disseminated in class, following the procedure described above, and in one case students were emailed surveys. A total of 33 ‘Single Surveys’ were collected.

4.2.6 Online Survey for Alumni At the suggestion of Professor Richard Baker, a member of the Reference Group for this project, the decision was made to collect data from university alumni who had participated in practice-based learning exchange during their degrees. The intent was to ascertain the extent to which the practice-based learning exchange had influenced their career directions and civic engagement in the long term. To this end, the email addresses of alumni were collected from the Advancement Offices of each university and from one alumni society. Each alumnus was sent an email inviting them to participate in the project and a follow-up email with a link to an online survey. A total of 192 surveys were collected.

4.2.7 Curriculum Mapping In addition to learning about practice-based learning exchange from the perspective of hosts, students and university staff, the project team were also interested in discovering the extent to which teaching staff incorporated practice into other areas of the curriculum. A survey was distributed by email to all the teaching staff on three of the four initial degree programmes included in the study, asking them about case studies, assessment, guest lecturers and other aspects of their teaching. In all, 65 responses were received.

4.2.8 Interviews with Students At the end of the ‘Post-Practice’ survey, students were asked to supply their email address if they wished to be interviewed. These students were then contacted and interviews were arranged where possible. Once again, the procedure described above was used. A total of 14 interviews were conducted. Initially we had planned to interview many more students. However, the qualitative elements of the survey had been responded to at length and it became clear that student interviews were not providing us with any new information but were simply re-iterating the feedback in the surveys. Thus, interviews were curtailed.
Overall, the following data were collected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with hosts</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with university staff</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-practice surveys with students</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-practice surveys with students</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single surveys with students</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online surveys with alumni</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject curriculum mapping</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with students</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Data Collected

4.3 Data Analysis

As described above, all interviews were digitally recorded and then sent to a transcription service. They were then transcribed verbatim and the relevant transcripts sent to participants for validation. Few changes were made. Interviews were then analysed thematically. Given that interviews were conducted over a period of several months, analysis took place in stages. This meant that categories were constantly revised and updated to ensure that they were relevant to all transcript contents. In addition, the qualitative elements of survey responses were analysed thematically, with categories again regularly updated throughout the data collection process. The quantitative data derived from all three surveys with students and from the online survey with alumni was entered into SPSS, where it was subject to statistical analysis.

Given that the project team was geographically located throughout Australia, compilations of data were regularly disseminated electronically and the team held two team meetings – one in Newcastle and one in Melbourne – in order to discuss the data collected and to agree on the most significant themes that had arisen, in addition to any major differences by location.
5.0 Findings

The findings from this project are reported thematically, allowing for triangulation between the different groups of respondents, and are organised into several key themes. Each section reports on both quantitative and qualitative data from students, alumni, university staff\(^1\) and hosts\(^2\) in order to elaborate the discussions. Relevant literature is referred to throughout.

The first section addresses ways of embedding practice in degree programmes in order to facilitate optimal learning for students. It demonstrates that when alumni reflect on their degrees, practice-based learning exchange is the activity which they feel they learnt the most from and also valued the most in comparison to all other activities. Furthermore, current students also value their practice-based learning exchange very highly and partner organisations greatly value the contributions which students make to their organisations. While not all students have the opportunity of undertaking a practice-based learning exchange, there are many ways in which practice can be incorporated into the curriculum. From the curriculum mapping exercise it is clear that university teaching staff already incorporate practice-informed elements into their teaching and assessment of students in a number of ways, but there are further possibilities for this to occur which would mutually benefit students, partner organisations and universities.

The second section looks at good practice in practice-based learning exchanges. In order for a practice-based learning exchange to be valuable for all participants it is essential that universities first consider their main purpose. In finding suitable hosts it is also important for universities to emphasise the establishment of lasting and reciprocal relationships with partner organisations which benefit all parties. A further vital element is to ensure that a practice-based learning exchange aligns with the academic goals of students as well as with the needs of hosts, in addition to giving students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. University staff also need to consider whether practice-based learning exchange should be an optional or compulsory element of a specific degree. This is particularly important given that whether a practice-based learning exchange is compulsory or optional markedly affects the ways in which students perceive their experiences.

The third section discusses the lasting impacts on students that come from their participation in practice-based learning exchange. Many students find that their practice-based learning exchange helps them to gain employment, that they meet people who have a profound influence on their lives and that they are strongly influenced in the directions in which their careers take, at the same time as gaining confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, practice-based learning exchange increase the extent to which students are interested in engaging in certain civic activities, enhance their civic values and increase their knowledge of community problems. For their part, hosts emphasise the value of exposing students to ‘real world’ realities during their practice-based learning exchange, with this a particularly important factor for indigenous hosts.

The fourth section discusses the importance of relationships in practice-based learning exchanges, not just in facilitating learning but also in terms of outcomes for participants. The project findings suggest that hosts are more critical to student learning than has previously been acknowledged. Not only do hosts take their responsibilities as educators very seriously, they also find that they themselves learn

\(^1\) Each staff member will be identified by a different alphabetical letter
\(^2\) Each host will be identified by the letter ‘h’ and a number
a great deal from their interaction with students. The interpersonal aspects of practice-based learning exchange greatly enhance the growth that students are able to undergo and the roles of hosts as mentors are highly valuable. However, institutional relationships between universities and partner organisations tend to be less successful. Not only does this make practice-based learning exchange more stressful for all concerned, it also means that universities miss out on the myriad of other ways in which they could build mutually beneficial relationships with partner organisations.

The fifth section addresses the challenge of clarifying the roles and objectives of each party in practice-based learning exchange. If this is not done, there is the potential for great confusion amongst students, university staff and hosts about the part that they are expected to play during practice-based learning exchange. Students need to have a clear idea of what they hope to achieve from practice-based learning exchange, universities need to thoroughly brief hosts about students and their learning needs and hosts need to plan suitable activities for students to undertake. Furthermore, many hosts require some training on how to supervise students, particularly on the extent to which they should give them autonomy in their activities.

The sixth section addresses access and equity issues for students. While practice-based learning exchange are highly valuable activities for students to engage in, not all students find this easy or even possible. The biggest constraints to student involvement in practice-based learning exchange are financial restrictions and caring responsibilities. Students who attempt to juggle various commitments find that their practice-based learning exchange is less valuable than other students with fewer restrictions. Universities may wish to consider ways in which they could support students in order to ensure that their access to practice-based learning exchange is equitable.

Finally, the last section discusses the support that universities give to practice-based learning exchange. While universities tend to value practice-based learning exchange in theory, institutional support tends to be patchy, which adds to the difficulties of staff who try to establish and run practice-based learning exchange programmes. Some university staff find that workload committees struggled to recognise the input required to run practice based learning exchange programmes and this could have a negative impact on academic careers.

5.1 Embedding Practice in University Curricula

There is significant evidence that ‘Service Learning’ programmes undertaken by students at universities in the USA are extremely valuable for student learning, with Bringle and Hatcher arguing that they “enhance[s] student achievement of core educational outcomes” (2000: 274). However, the ‘Service Learning’ model is not one used by Australian universities, who instead offer their students a range of options to engage with practice, such as internships and placements, referred to here as ‘practice-based learning exchange’. Unfortunately, there is little research on these programmes, forcing project members to fall back onto the literature around Service Learning. While there are many overlapping features between the various types of student practice, it is important to acknowledge that similar features and outcomes cannot be assumed. Thus, it was crucial in this project to examine the extent to which the benefits of practice reported in the USA were equally true, or untrue, in the Australian context of practice-based learning exchange.
The first stage of this project sought to examine whether participation in practice-based learning exchange did indeed “enhance student achievement of core educational outcomes”. To this end, the project sought to uncover the extent to which students had both valued the practice-based learning exchange that they had engaged in, and also the extent to which they felt that they had learnt from their participation. The students who were surveyed for the study were typically consumed with the practicalities of undertaking practice-based learning exchanges and other university subjects and, while they were able to comment on their recent experiences they were still too close to their studies to be able to reflect on them. Therefore, the reflections of the 192 alumni who completed an online survey were crucial. In order to ascertain the feeling of alumni towards practice-based learning exchanges in the context of their overall degrees, alumni were asked to evaluate a range of activities that they had undertaken during their studies and to report the extent to which they had learnt from and valued them.

As the table indicates, those alumni who responded to this question felt that they had learnt the most from practice-based learning exchanges, with 89 per cent of those who had undertaken these reporting that they had learnt ‘a great deal’ in contrast 64 per cent for the next activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Didn’t do this</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>Not much</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>A bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in a PBLE</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to lectures / seminars given by staff</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking a research project</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to lectures / seminars given by guests</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assignments</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying degree material to your workplace</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class based discussions with classmates and staff</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading case studies</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading theoretical materials</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal discussions with classmates</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Learning from Activities

Practice-based learning exchanges ranked significantly higher in terms of their reported benefits for learning than all other learning activities that respondents had undertaken. When these figures are broken down by degree type, practice-based learning exchanges remain as one of the top three activities that alumni reported learning the most from in all programs.

Alumni were also asked to consider which activities they had found to be the most valuable during their degrees. As the table indicates, once again, practice-based learning exchanges were ranked first, with 84 per cent of those who had undertaken them rating them as “very valuable”, and a further 14 per cent rating them as “somewhat valuable”. When the figures are broken down by degree, practice-based learning exchanges were judged as the most valuable activities for all degree programmes.

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2 The percentage of those who did not undertake an activity was removed from the further analysis
Table 4 – Valuing Activities

This feedback from alumni is clear and consistent. Not only were practice-based learning exchanges rated as by far the most valuable activity that alumni respondents had undertaken during their degrees, they were also rated as the top activity that respondents had learnt from. It is also interesting to note that seminars given by guests were rated as the second most valuable activity that respondents had valued (although only the fourth ranked activity that they reported learning from). In many cases guest lecturers will have been professionals from a relevant field and this therefore indicates the learning value of another practice-based element.

While unable to reflect on all the activities in their degrees, the 166 students who had undertaken a practice-based learning exchange were asked whether or not the practice-based learning exchange had been a rewarding and worthwhile experience, and 95 per cent agreed that it had been. This concurs with the high esteem in which alumni also held these learning activities. Furthermore, several students commented that the practice-based learning exchange they had undertaken had been “by far the most exciting and best learning experience of my degree” or “the single best thing I’ve had the opportunity to do while at university”. Students valued the contacts they had made, the new skills they had learned, the experiences they had undergone, the challenges they had had to face, the exposure to the day to day workings of a professional environment and the autonomy they had been given.

Students felt that they had been able to gain opportunities that they would otherwise not have had access to through their university studies. One student suggested that “the networks built and skills developed will never be achieved in a classroom environment” and another that without the practice-based learning exchange they “would only have learned this well after the completion of my studies. I am a few steps ahead of everyone else :-)”. A third reflected that “it taught me so much more than university itself”. Many students found that the practice-based learning exchange “brought all of my learning experiences together” and helped them to

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The percentage of those who did not undertake an activity was removed from the further analysis.
“conceptualise myself as a practitioner rather than just a university student”. They strongly expressed the view that a practice-based learning exchange is “a necessary and important part of the course” and one summarised by stating:

I cannot put into words how worthwhile my experience has been. It has brought all of my learning experiences together and I feel far more confident in my ability as a [professional], a work colleague and a team member.

These findings suggest that practice-based learning exchanges are powerful forms of learning. Furthermore, it supports, from a pedagogical perspective, the focus that contemporary universities have on contributing to their wider communities. Different universities give this kind of activity different names. At the participating universities, The University of Melbourne calls this ‘Knowledge Transfer’, The University of Queensland ‘Engagement’ and The University of Newcastle ‘Community Partnerships’. It can be defined as “the two-way flow and uptake of ideas between [a university] and the broader community”5. When we look at the place of practice-based learning exchanges in these relationships, the benefits to all are clear. As one staff member explained:

the knowledge transfer triangle comes into this – the university gets something out of it, because we learn from the community they go to, the hosts; the hosts get an informed student, hopefully in their field, and they build into the later mix of what goes into their employment […] and the student gets that, you know, that valuable experience that they wouldn’t previously have had, which is fantastic [c]

5.1.1 Practice in the wider curriculum While each of the seven degree programmes focused on in this project included a specific practice-based learning exchange subject, we were also interested in discovering the extent to which practice informed the other subjects in the students’ degrees. To this end a curriculum mapping exercise was carried out. All subject coordinators of subjects that were taught in Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Human Services at The University of Queensland and the Master of Public Policy and Management and the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation at The University of Melbourne were contacted, and asked to complete a short survey about the teaching and learning strategies used in their curricula. A total of 65 surveys were completed, a return rate of 59 per cent.

Seventy-one per cent of subject coordinators reported involving guest lecturers in some of their teaching. Of these, 89 per cent reported using guest lecturers drawn from professions which involved the practical application of the subject’s content, and who were thus able to bring a practice-based perspective to the class. Subject coordinators reported that professional guest lecturers were involved in an average range of 10-25 per cent of classes. Furthermore, a third of subject coordinators reported that other guest lecturers were used, including “research students”, “Indigenous workers”, “senior policy officials” and “other colleagues”, although one subject coordinator complained that they “do not use guest lecturers primarily because of School restrictions on using them”. As we have seen in the tables above, alumni rated ‘listening to lectures and seminars given by guests’ as the second most valuable activity, and as the fourth most effective in terms of learning.

While only one respondent in this study specifically mentioned policy restrictions on the use of guest lecturers, anecdotal evidence suggests that budget constraints and other matters regularly make it difficult for subject coordinators to involve guest lecturers in the teaching of subjects, with inconsistent approaches to the issue of payment. Given the frequently expressed desire for universities and external organisations to work more closely, the real cost of these kind of practical restrictions may be higher than the budget benefits gained and this is an area that may require some review in order to facilitate greater involvement of guest lecturers. Our findings suggest also that it is particularly important that mutually beneficial, and sustained, relationships are built with the organisations that provide guest lecturers, and with the individuals themselves. Feedback from two of the practice-based learning exchange hosts, who had also been involved as guest lecturers at one of the participating universities, was that they felt that the university’s attitude to them was rather exploitative. As one reported “our staff were being asked to provide teaching courses ... they were short staffed ... at very short notice as well” [h12], commenting that “it’s sort of stopped now because we got a bit shirty about it” [h12]. Another commented on the university’s attitude in their search for guest lecturers; “So it was just ... who can we get in? Oh we’ve got someone for that. What’s the minimum involvement we can have in this course and still make it look legitimate? Oh beauty we’ve got week nine, seven, four, one” [h17]. It is clearly important that guest lecturers feel valued and that they are not used as a stop-gap measure.

5.1.2 Case studies Eighty-two per cent of subject coordinators reported using case studies in their subjects. Of these subjects, 86 per cent of coordinators reported using case studies based on the practical application of the subject content to a professional situation in which they had been personally involved. In addition, 76 per cent of coordinators reported using case studies based on the practical application of the subject content to a professional situation in which a professional contact of theirs has been personally involved. Furthermore, 76 per cent of coordinators reported also using case studies from other sources. These included material from governments, “research conducted by other academics”, case studies from “the scholarly literature pertinent to the subject content”, “teaching material passed on from former staff” and other sources.

When we look at feedback from alumni (tables 3 and 4) we can see that of all activities, reading case studies was ranked as the third to last activity that respondents had learnt from. Reading case studies was also ranked as the second least valuable activity by alumni, although once again 89 per cent reported that it was at least ‘somewhat valuable’ The feedback from alumni suggests that while case studies are widely used, staff may not be selecting case studies which students find directly relevant to their learning, or perhaps are failing to use them in a way that enhances their teaching. It is clear that some consideration of the ways in which case studies are used in classes, and the anticipated learning outcomes of these applications, would be useful (see Kreber 2001; Kuntz and Hesslar 1998).

5.1.3 Assessment Ninety-four per cent of subject coordinators reported that they set their students assessable tasks which provided opportunities for skills development relevant to professional work. These tasks include, but were not limited to, “policy strategy papers”, “applied research projects”, “a brief for a minister”, “a risk assessment”, “a survey of a cultural collection”, “direct practice skills assessed in video rooms”, “formulation of a practice framework”, “presentations”, an “analysis of media discourse” and a “stakeholder analysis”. In addition, 70 per cent of subject coordinators reported setting their students applied projects as part of their assessment for the subject. Furthermore, 69 per cent reported that their students had the opportunity to undertake assessable work which
was relevant to their workplace or civic interests and 39 per cent of subject coordinators reported that students had an option to undertake assessable work which contributed to an external organisation, such as a government department or non-profit organisation. Just 7 per cent of coordinators reported that they utilised professionals outside of the university for feedback on assessable work. When we look at feedback from alumni we can see research projects are highly rated. They are ranked as the fourth most valuable activity and the top third learning activity by alumni (see tables 3 and 4).

While nearly all subject coordinators reported that their students gained professional skills from completing assessments, fewer set students applied projects, and very few set students projects that contributed to external organisations. This is an area which may benefit from greater consideration, in order to generate learning benefits for both students and partner organisations. The majority of host organisations remarked on the amount of work that they would have been unable to complete without input from students, reporting that “we struggle with wanting to achieve excellent results with limited resources” [h1] and that “[we] need to do some work, [we] need to have something done and [we] don’t have the money to do it” [h3]. With input from students, hosts reported that “it does increase the capacity of the work we’re able to produce astronomically” [h2] and that it “adds a whole lot of research capacity … that we may not otherwise have” [h14].

While these comments were made in relation to hosting students for practice-based learning exchange, student contributions to organisations outside the university need not be limited to these arrangements. If it were possible for subject coordinators to liaise with organisations about their research needs, and then incorporate this into their assessment materials for subjects, there would be a potential for benefits to flow in several directions. Students would benefit from being able to apply themselves to practical challenges, and gain a sense of being able to make a contribution to a real-life outcome; external organisations would benefit from having some of their necessary work completed to a high standard; and the university would benefit from having students whose skills were directly applicable to a professional context.

5.1.4 Staff Experience Ninety-five per cent of subject coordinators reported having practical experience relevant to the subjects they coordinated, either through research or employment. In addition, 84 per cent of subject coordinators have been involved in research which relates to the practical application of the subject content. A quarter of subject coordinators estimated that between 75-100 per cent of their teaching in a particular subject was based on reflection on their personal experience. A further fifth estimated this proportion to be 50-75 per cent, 23 per cent estimated that the proportion was 25-50 per cent and 32 per cent estimated that the proportion of their teaching in a particular subject which was based on reflection on their personal experience was less than 25 per cent.

When we look at feedback from alumni we can see that of all activities, listening to lectures and seminars given by staff was ranked as the second activity that respondents had learnt from. However, listening to lectures and seminars given by staff, was only ranked as the sixth most valuable activity by alumni. Given the greater value that alumni gave to lectures by guests, it may be beneficial for teaching staff to spend more time integrating theory and practice in their teaching, enabling them to model the reflective learning this gives rise to.

5.1.5 Other Learning Activities Alumni were also asked to specify any other activities that they had found to be valuable during their degrees. They particularly
highlighted the value of “informal and formal networking”, both with professionals, teaching staff and their fellow students. They also suggested that group work with other students was highly beneficial for learning, reflecting that “working in groups, while not always enjoyable was a valuable learning experience because that is the reality of any workplace”. Other activities such as volunteering, involvement in union activities were also mentioned and one respondent concluded that “everything was unbelievably valuable. If only I realised how practical it all is for working”.

5.2 Good Practice

Based on experiences of service learning in the United States, Berman (2006) has proposed the following steps for the successful implementation of service-learning programs: selecting the need for the activity; finding a host; aligning the experience with educational goals; encouraging student reflection; and managing the program. All of these steps are equally important in the context of practice-based learning exchange in Australia, albeit with slightly different emphasis. The first four elements will be discussed below, and the fifth in a later section.

5.2.1 Selecting the need for the activity and finding suitable hosts

It is important for university staff to decide whether or not there is a need for a practice-based learning exchange in order to enhance the education of students in a particular degree. In the programs examined in this project, practice-based learning exchanges are either included as fundamental aspects of particular degrees – particularly in response to vocational and/or professional accreditation requirements - or are created on a more ad-hoc basis based on particular interests and contacts of individual staff members. University staff and hosts noted increasing competition from a range of universities, with university staff reporting that they are “really struggling because the hosts are disappearing thick and fast, the competition is unbelievable” [c]. On their part, hosts reported being inundated with requests from universities to host students; some of the more in-demand organisations had already begun to consider whether they would exclude students from most universities and “link up with just one university and create programs from that” [h2].

Establishing lasting relationships with host organisations requires universities to carefully consider the educational goals of practice-based learning exchanges and the potential for reciprocity between the university and hosts. Hosts reported a tendency for universities to collaborate with them on a short-term, irregular basis, with students arriving and leaving again in a matter of days or weeks. While some organisations are able to fit into this model, putting aside specific projects for students to do while they are in situ, for others this is highly problematic. The nature of work done by many organisations requires a dedicated, long term, consistent and reliable approach, and host respondents told us that it was important university staff members are open to negotiation of a model that suits all parties, not just the tyranny of the academic year.

5.2.2 Aligning the experience with educational goals

Practice-based learning exchanges generally require students to fulfill both academic goals and also to contribute to their host organisations. It is therefore important to consider how these goals align with one another. The linking of real world experience and academic concepts creates opportunities for reflection on broader social issues and helps students to better appreciate how what they learn in their courses can be used and translated in their everyday lives. Those students who had found their practice-based learning exchange to be rewarding and worthwhile were more likely to agree that it had been both highly linked to their degrees and had also helped them to
understand material they had covered in their degrees. The relationship between these factors was statistically significant\(^6\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worthwhile</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked to degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly linked (%)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat linked (%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all linked (%)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understand material</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Was the PBLE worthwhile / Linked to degree and Understand material

Students who were satisfied with their practice-based learning exchange particularly emphasised the “really good learning experience. Learning things you wouldn’t learn through readings, textbook, tutorials and lectures” in which they discovered “the necessity to ground theory and academic ideas in reality”. Those students who had been unhappy with their experience stressed issues such as “it didn’t relate to the degree” and that “it is too isolating and doesn’t feel like really important work”. However, even unsatisfactory experiences could contribute to student learning - as one disappointed student concluded, “it definitely taught me what I DONT want in a job, which I think is incredibly valuable” (sic).

5.2.3 Fostering reflective student learning

The literature on service learning from the United States suggests that the real learning from practice-based learning comes about when students reflect on their experiences (Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda and Yee 2000; Butin 2005; Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy 1999; Parker-Gwin and Mabry 1998; Pedersen, Woolum & Gagne 2007; Prentice and Garcia 2000), with some theorists regarding this as the most significant feature for promoting civic engagement (Harward 2007). This is because reflection allows students to connect their experiences of practice-based learning with their formal university curriculum and helps them to gain a critical awareness of the issues to which they are being exposed. As Parker-Gwin and Mabry argue “students will not spontaneously gain critical self-consciousness” but needed to be pushed into this (1998: 288). The method used for reflection does not seem to be important, but typical methods are getting students to keep journals, give class presentations, discuss their experiences with their peers and write reflective essays.

When asked whether they had reflected on their experience during the practice-based learning exchange, 93 per cent of the students in this sample reported that they had. When asked which methods they had used to reflect, 51 per cent reported taking part in group discussions, 49 per cent had written reflective essays, 42 per cent had kept a journal and 13 per cent had given a presentation. Other techniques mentioned particularly highlighted “discussions with supervisor”, informal discussions with classmates, friends and colleagues in the practice-based learning exchange and that they had simply “thought about it a lot”. There is clearly scope for making reflection a more consistently formal part of practice-based learning exchanges.

\(^6\) A chi square test for independence indicated a significant association between whether a student had found the practice based learning exchange to be worthwhile and rewarding and the extent to which they felt it was linked to material they had learnt in their degree, \(\chi^2 (2, n=130) = 5.98, p=.05, \phi_i=.22\). A chi square test for independence also indicated a significant association between whether a student had found the practice based learning exchange to be worthwhile and rewarding and whether they felt it had helped them understand material they had covered in their degree, \(\chi^2 (1, n=130) = 4.99, p=.025, \phi_i=-.19\).
5.2.4 Compulsory/Optional The issue of whether service learning should be compulsory or optional for students has been a subject of significant debate in the United States. For example, Parker-Gwin and Mabry (1998) found that students reacted more positively to optional, rather than compulsory, activities, because they tended to resent the time involvement required if they had not chosen to undertake the activity themselves. Once again, it is important to acknowledge that Service Learning and Practice-Based Learning Exchanges vary in significant ways, particularly as some students are required to participate in practice-based learning exchange in order to meet professional accreditation requirements. In the sample used here, 100 of the 156 (64 per cent) respondents who responded to the question reported that their practice-based learning exchange had been compulsory. As the table indicates, respondents assessed different aspects of their practice-based learning exchanges (PBLE) in different ways, depending on whether or not had been compulsory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Compulsory (%)</th>
<th>Optional (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The PBLE was a rewarding/worthwhile experience</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend the PBLE to other students taking this degree</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a good relationship with the host who had oversight for my work</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PBLE was highly linked with other aspects of my degree</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PBLE helped me understand material I had covered in my degree</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I was able to contribute to the organisation I worked with</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to continue my involvement with this organisation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PBLE has influenced me to change my career path</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Difference between Respondents, Optional/Compulsory

As the table indicates, greater proportions of respondents who had undertaken an optional practice-based learning exchange reported that it had been rewarding and worthwhile, that they would recommend it to other students and that they had had a good relationship with the host who had oversight for their work. In contrast, greater proportions of respondents who had undertaken a compulsory practice-based learning exchange reported that it had been highly linked to other aspects of their degree, that it had helped them understand material they had covered in their degree, that they had learnt things they had not expected to learn, that they had been able to contribute to the organisation they worked with and that they intended to continue their involvement with the organisation in the future.

The contrast in responses from the two groups is likely to be a reflection of the specific programmes that were included in the sample. Those for whom the practice-based learning exchange was compulsory had been enrolled in the Bachelor of either Social Work or Human Services at The University of Queensland or the Master of Cultural Material Conservation at the University of Melbourne. These degrees are highly vocational in nature, with students undertaking placements with hosts who are professionals in exactly the field that students had been studying. For example, Social Work students did practice-based learning exchanges with social workers, family services and counselors while Cultural Materials Conservation students were hosted by conservators working in public institutions or in the private sector. The feedback from students was supported by

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7 A chi square test for independence indicated a significant association between whether a student had undertaken a compulsory or optional practice based learning exchange and whether or not they had found that it was highly linked to material they had learnt in their degree, \( \chi^2(2, n=149) = 7.81, p=.02, \phi=.23 \).

8 A chi square test for independence, with Yates Continuity Correction, indicated a significant association between whether a student had undertaken a compulsory or optional practice based learning exchange and the extent to which they felt it had helped them understand material they had learnt in their degree, \( \chi^2(1, n=155) = 15.5, p<.000, \phi=-.34 \).
the feedback from alumni from these degrees. Alumni who had been engaged in a compulsory practice-based learning exchange were more likely to report that their experience had been highly linked to other aspects of their degree (49 per cent) than alumni who had been engaged in an optional practice-based learning exchange (35 per cent).

In contrast, those who had opted to do a practice-based learning exchange were enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree at The University of Melbourne or a Bachelor of Environmental Science or Development Studies at The University of Newcastle. The practice-based learning exchanges that students undertook were broadly in a similar field to their degree but were not necessarily directly linked to what they had been learning. As several respondents reflected, “it wasn't really linked to my current studies but it was never meant to be”. However, they were not only able to apply skills that they had learnt in their degrees, they also enhanced these skills and respondents suggested that this was "highly useful in other subjects". 99 per cent of alumni who had undertaken an optional practice-based learning exchange reported that they had learnt different things, or learnt things in a different way to their usual coursework. As one commented:

The internship was crucial to understanding that the academic approach does not always translate smoothly to the 'real-time' experience. The theoretical and practical approach taught in the course became more efficient in practice during the internship and for me this was the most important learning outcome

What the feedback from respondents indicates is that while there are differences in the experiences of students who undertake either a compulsory or an optional practice-based learning exchange, there are advantages to each particular method. It would seem that the expectations of students are crucial – those expecting to enhance their skills in a particular area and to look upon host organisation as a future employer are more likely to value aspects that enhance these areas. This is supported by hosts reporting that they used the practice-based learning exchange to “get to know potential employees” [h8]. In contrast, those who are undertaking a practice-based learning exchange in order to gain insight into a new field, and to expand their skills, are more likely to value other aspects.

The feedback from students and alumni suggests that the potential for learning which is embodied by incorporating practice into learning is profound. However, there are several key aspects which need to be considered if engagement with practice is to engender optimal learning outcomes for students:

- Identifying that there is a genuine need for a practice-based learning exchange in a particular degree
- Ensuring that suitable hosts are available and building sustained relationships with them which are beneficial to all parties
- Aligning practice-based learning with broader educational goals and ensuring that students are given the opportunity to apply theory to practical situations
- Encouraging students to critically reflect on their experiences by making this a formal part of the practice-based learning curriculum

And more generally, when considering ways in which practice can be incorporated into other areas of curriculum:
• Inviting guest lecturers who are able to give students an insight into professional practice in related fields
• Utilising case studies which are directly related to the practical world into which students will graduate and are directly relevant to students' learning
• Using case studies as a form of experiential learning to foster students' critical thinking and problem solving
• Setting research projects which engage students in responding to practical challenges and which may be able to contribute to external organisations
• Teaching staff reflecting on ways in which their practical experiences have related to theory and modelling reflective learning for students
• Giving students opportunities for networking with professionals in their fields

5.3 Lasting Impact

When asked about the lasting impact that the practice-based learning exchange had had on them, more than half of respondents (59 per cent) reported that it had had a significant impact in giving them work experience that had helped them to gain other employment. This factor was the most significant factor for Social Work and Cultural Materials Conservation alumni and the third most important for Public Policy Management and Development Studies alumni.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>%</th>
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<th>Unsure 1</th>
<th>A slight impact 2</th>
<th>A significant impact 3</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>0.92</td>
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<td>It convinced me to do a job that allowed me to help others and improve society</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>It led me to work in a similar organisation</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It led to a job with the same organisation</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Lasting Impact of Practice-Based Learning Exchange

In addition, half of respondents had been convinced to do a job that allowed them to help others and improve society as a result of the practice-based learning exchange. This factor was the most important for Public Policy Management and Development Studies alumni and the second most important for Social Work alumni. The third most important impact of the practice-based learning exchange was in helping them to meet people that have been useful in their careers. Overall, 44 per cent of respondents reported that the practice-based learning exchange had had a significant impact in this area. This was the second most important factor for all alumni other than those from Social Work, for whom it had had the third most significant impact. The majority of respondents (60 per cent) have remained in contact with people from the organisation that had hosted them during the practice-based learning exchange, many as friends but some as colleagues.

Finally, 32 per cent of respondents felt that the practice-based learning exchange had had a significant impact on leading them to work with the same organisation, while 30 per cent felt that it had had a significant impact on leading them to work in a similar organisation. Indeed, 57 per cent of respondents reported that they had continued their involvement with the organisation once the placement had finished. This included as volunteers or as employees, some casually or for a short time directly after graduation and some for a long period of time. In contrast, 30 per cent reported that the practice-based learning exchange had influenced them to change their career paths. Some respondents reported that it had confirmed, or sparked,
their interest in a particular area, with one stating that “the placement reiterated that for me”. Others found themselves “more aware of the implications of taking on certain work” and some had re-thought their career choices, having been “turned off” a particular area of work.

Alumni were also asked if the practice-based learning exchange had had any additional impact on them. Many of their comments related to heightened self-awareness and self-confidence. As one respondent stated:

the sense of accomplishment was huge. I had believed for a significant time that completing prac and hence the degree was something that I couldn’t do. Achieving this improved my self-esteem, my sense of self-worth, my sense of achievement. I now believe that I can do achieve in other areas of my life.

Furthermore, some respondents reported that they had been made aware of the value of practice-based learning exchanges and of the importance of good supervision. This had influenced several to go on to be supervisors of students themselves, with one alumnus suggesting “it’s why I’ve since been a Field Educator myself, and why I place emphasis on encouraging students to develop their interests, passions, and connecting with other uplifting and positive people/colleague”. In addition, 14 per cent of respondents reported that the practice-based learning exchange had changed their understanding of the role of the University. Those that agreed that it had done so observed that it demonstrated the importance of “interaction with the community” and the value of “a partnership approach to the learning experience”. It also demonstrated to respondents that the role of the university was to “facilitate experiences that lead to learning, not just pass on knowledge” and to “lay down the foundations for real world experience”.

5.3.1 Civic Engagement

Universities are increasingly being called upon to assist in the development of students’ personal attributes so that they may become active citizens (Chanock 2004) and to reconnect with their communities. Many theorists consider that ‘engaged learning’ techniques, such as practice-based learning exchange, are the best way to achieve this (Battistoni 1997; Butin 2005; Checkoway 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 2000; Harward 2007; Kezar and Rhoads 2001; Kirlin 2002; Rhoads 2003; Schneider 2001; Swaner 2007). As Swaner suggests, these give students exposure to “increasingly complex ways of knowing and doing [which are] interactive with social contexts” (2007: 19).

Given mixed findings from other empirical research, it was important in this project to discover to what extent practice-based learning exchanges did encourage students to become active citizens. Students were asked to rate attributes, knowledge and activities in relation to citizenship both before commencing their practice-based learning exchanges and after their completion, and alumni were asked the same question. Students demonstrated increases in their civic engagement in two areas. First, they reported changing their opinions on several civic values and endeavours. Specifically, they reported increases in the extent to which they agreed that the following were important (in descending order of highest positive change to lowest change): To help others who are in difficulty (+7%, 96% agree); To influence social policy (+5%, 91% agree); To volunteer my time to important causes (+5%, 78% agree); To value social and cultural diversity in the

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9 Students were invited to note their initials and date of birth (or an equivalent identifying marker) on the two questionnaires. While the first questionnaire was completed by 230 students and the second by 168 students, only those students identified as completing both questionnaires (pre and post) have been included in the final sample, a group of 92 students.
community (+2%, 98% agree); and To develop my personal values (+1%, 96% agree).

Furthermore, students reported an increase in knowledge about problems facing their communities when compared with an average person their age. As the table indicates, community knowledge was the only domain in which students reported that they were significantly more informed as a result of their practice-based learning exchange; with an increase of eight students (10 per cent) reporting that they were “much more informed”, while there was little change in national or global knowledge. This effect was articulated by respondents, with comments such as:

it certainly opened my eyes too - I mean, the type of internship - where I was doing my work … you know, really tough situations. So it sort of - it opened my eyes as to how real it was in where I live

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th>Slightly less informed</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly more informed</th>
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<td>-2</td>
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<td>-3</td>
<td>+6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Knowledge of Community, National, & Global Issues

When we consider civic activities, while there was a slight increase in student participation overall, the time period of the study was too short to indicate any major increases, although there was one increase that was statistically significant - Raised funds for an organisation (+11%). Interestingly, the participation of alumni was greater than students for every single civic activity, for example Participated in a march/public meeting/rally (students = 19%; alumni = 43%); Contacted a politician (students = 28%; alumni = 50%); and Boycotted or deliberately bought certain products (students = 54%; alumni = 71%). Overall, these results suggest that while there were some gains, “no single intervention, particularly over the course of a semester, can be expected to have a dramatic impact on student outcomes (Eyler and Giles 1999: xvii)”. However, given the difference between students and alumni in each it is possible that practice-based learning exchanges may result in increased civic engagement activity over time.

For their part, hosts put a great deal of attention on ensuring that students were exposed to real world realities during their practice-based learning exchanges, which one hosts referred to as “the polishing on your academia” [h24]. While some hosts accepted that this could be “distressing sometimes for students” [h28], the

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10 A paired sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the change over time of respondents’ self-reported knowledge of problems in their communities, the nation and the globe. There was a statistically significant increase in knowledge of community problems from the pre-survey (M=3.69, SD=0.92) to the post-survey (M=3.98, SD=0.78), t (88) = -3.13, p<.005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in respondents’ knowledge of problems in their communities was -0.29 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.48 to -0.11. The eta squared statistic (0.16) indicated a large effect size.
majority felt that it was important for students to be forced to challenge their assumptions and to learn that civic engagement “is about participation and about listening, not telling ... it’s about the spirit of partner” [h4]. Many hosts found that students were already socially aware but that the practice-based learning exchange would give them a sense of their own responsibility and agency, or the sense that they could “make things happen by getting in there and doing them myself” [h4]. Indigenous hosts also emphasised the importance of students being able to learn about the realities of life for Indigenous people in Australia in order to broaden their awareness. As one Indigenous host suggested:

If they go through a whole process of studying ... and never be touched by an Indigenous entity, well how healthy is it going to be at the end of that – when they actually qualified – how qualified are they if they’re living in a country where they never have spoken to the original inhabitants? [h22]

Thus far the focus has been on students and their learning outcomes from the integration of practice into their degrees. This focus suggests that the ‘experience’ is the teacher. However, our findings highlighted the vital role of the relationship between students and hosts as a true form of learning exchange. This area will be discussed below.

5.4 Relationships

In the majority of discussions of practice-based learning, the experience itself is viewed as the teacher (Swaminathan 2007), with the benefits for students accruing from exposure to a real-world environment. This view encompasses what Cruz and Giles (2000: 28) refer to as a “glaring omission” - the ‘by whom’ and ‘how’ element of practice-based learning. Specifically, it ignores the crucial role of staff in the organisations which supervise students during their practice. Despite the fact that there is widespread acknowledgement of the need to represent the voices of hosts in the vast US literature on service learning (Bringle and Hatcher 2002; Ferrari and Worrall 2000; Cruz and Giles 2000; Liederman et al 2003; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2000), very little empirical work has been conducted into the perspectives, motivations and concerns of hosts (Swaminathan 2007; Miron & Moely 2006; Sandy & Holland 2006; Simons and Cleary 2006; Staton, Giles & Cruz 1999). Redressing this silence became a crucial element of the project.

5.4.1 Hosts In the limited research that has been done, it seems that that partner organisations are concerned with the same outcomes of practice-based learning as universities, namely academic achievement, civic mindedness and increased career options and knowledge (Sandy 2007; Sandy & Holland 2006; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf and Gross 2003). In the only significant research project which took the perspective of hosts into account, Sandy (2007) found that hosts feel that participating in education is an even more compelling reason to become involved in practice-based learning than benefits to their organisation. This project sought to discover whether this was equally the case in the sample used here.

Thirty-one hosts were interviewed about their experiences of hosting students from the degree programmes represented in the study. They were asked which factors motivated them to become involved in supervising students who were undertaking a practice-based learning exchange and highlighted a range of factors which are summarised in the list below. They specifically highlighted that students:
• increased the capacity of work that host organisations were able to do (a particularly important issue for NGOs)
• brought new skills into the workplace which allowed their organisations to undertake new activities
• stimulated hosts’ thinking with fresh ideas and kept them up to date with the latest research and developments at universities
• pushed hosts to refresh their memories on relevant topics and caused them to reflect on their own practice and question how and why they did certain things
• were friendly and got on well with hosts, with many developing close friendships

Furthermore, hosts valued the opportunity to help students improve their skills, partly in order to fulfil responsibilities to their profession, partly in order to give the assistance to current students that they had been given at the same stage and partly to increase the pool of talent which was available when they came to recruit staff in the future. Many hosts reported employing students after their practice-based learning exchanges, and greatly valued being able to evaluate them in the practice context. The following quotes summarise some of these themes:

If you’ve got a good student, and by that I don’t even mean academically good. I mean common sense, wanting to learn, proactive in experiencing all of these things. They’re... it’s just a gift, it really is. And the more they’re proactive, the more they can help you with. [h29]

what students do – particularly really intelligent, on-the-ball students like [name of student] – what they do is they put you on the spot all the time. They say to you, “Why do you do it like that? Why don’t you do it this way? Why is that like that?” And you have to stop [h18]

It benefits us as an organisation to have graduates who come out and are work-ready and understand what’s required in a workplace because then graduates can slot into the workplace much more easily and are immediately much more valuable than if they have to do all of that learning in their first year out [h25]

This feedback, which was thematic in interviews with hosts, highlights the reflective learning effects of practice-based learning exchange for hosts, as well as students. In this sense, practice-based learning exchange appear to advance disciplinary or professional learning beyond the university, by facilitating learning exchange between those ‘in the field’ and those ‘fresh from the classroom’, which Butin (2005) describes as a ‘post-modern’ practice.

5.4.2 Students From their perspective, students commented on the importance of the relationship with their host supervisor. 96 per cent of students reported that they had had a good relationship with their host supervisor. This was the case for all those who undertook a practice-based learning exchange in Cultural Materials Conservation, Public Policy and Management, Arts, Development Studies and Environmental Science, 97 per cent of students who undertook a practice-based learning exchange in Social Work and 79 per cent of those who undertook a practice-based learning exchange in Human Services. Whether or not students had had a good relationship with their host supervisor was clearly a profoundly significant element of the practice-based learning exchange.
Just 3 per cent of those students who reported that they had had a good relationship with their field supervisor reported that the practice-based learning exchange had not been worthwhile. However, amongst students who reported that they had had a poor relationship with their field supervisor, half felt that the practice-based learning exchange has not been worthwhile\(^{11}\). Furthermore, 43 per cent of those students that reported having had a poor relationship with their host also felt that they had not been able to contribute to the host organisation (in comparison with 8 per cent of those who had had a good relationship)\(^{12}\). In addition, all of those students who reported having had a poor relationship with their host felt that they had been influenced to change their career path as a result, while this was only the case for 42 per cent of those who had had a good relationship\(^{13}\). Finally, only 57 per cent of those who reported having had a poor relationship with their host felt that they would recommend the practice-based learning exchange to other students, while this was the case for 93 per cent of those who had had a good relationship\(^{14}\). Overall, not having a good relationship with a host supervisor clearly negatively influences the entire practice-based learning exchange experience for students, which highlights the importance of good relationships in this kind of learning activity.

Students who completed the ‘post’ survey were invited to specify which people had been their main contacts during the practice-based learning exchange and in which ways they had been helped by these individuals. 198 contacts were specified in total and 69 per cent of references were made to host supervisors, demonstrating their incredible importance to students during the practice-based learning exchange. While university coordinators were also seen as important, they were referred to only 17 per cent of the time. When it came to the help that these contacts had given them, students commented on a very wide range of ways in which they had been assisted.

Supervisors were regularly referred to as “mentors” and students praised their approachability, guidance and encouragement, and particularly valued hosts giving them the opportunity to try new activities and trusting them to take on projects. As several students reported, their supervisors were absolutely crucial to the success of their practice-based learning exchange:

> We had several discussions about the purpose of social work and social work theories and this enabled me to consider other perspectives. She also enabled me to reflect on my social work practice within the organisation.

> She would meet with me nearly every time I was in the office; going over where I was, any questions I had, as well as to discuss various aspects of the organization.

\(^{11}\) A chi square test for independence, with Yates Continuity Correction, indicated a significant association between whether a student had had a good relationship with their supervisor and whether or not they felt the practice based learning exchange had been a worthwhile experience, \(\chi^2 (1, n=124) = 16.85, p=.000, \phi=-.44\).

\(^{12}\) A chi square test for independence, with Yates Continuity Correction, indicated a significant association between whether a student had had a good relationship with their supervisor and whether or not they felt that they had been able to contribute to the organisation, \(\chi^2 (1, n=151) = 6.10, p=.01, \phi=.26\).

\(^{13}\) A chi square test for independence indicated a significant association between whether a student had had a good relationship with their supervisor and whether or not they felt that they had been able to contribute to the organisation, \(\chi^2 (2, n=154) = 17.22, p=.000, \phi=.33\).

\(^{14}\) A chi square test for independence, with Yates Continuity Correction, indicated a significant association between whether a student had had a good relationship with their supervisor and whether or not they felt that they had been able to contribute to the organisation, \(\chi^2 (1, n=156) = 6.42, p=.01, \phi=.26\).
A lot of learning has come through conversations with them and them assisting me. If I had had a different supervisor I think that this placement would have been very difficult.

5.4.3 Alumni When alumni were asked to specify what had been the most rewarding aspect of the practice-based learning exchange, almost every single respondent pointed to the relationships that they had made. These “interpersonal aspects” of the learning experience included relationships with co-workers, other professionals and clients. Alumni particularly emphasised the value of their relationships with supervisors in host organisations. The value of “having a brilliant mentor”, in addition to working within a team of professionals, meant that they had felt supported and included, had been able to learn from those experienced in a particular field, had been given support in developing their own skills and confidence and had had their contributions taken seriously. 59 per cent of alumni, varying from 55 per cent of Social Work Alumni to 88 per cent of Public Policy and Management alumni, were still in touch with people from their practice-based learning exchange, some as colleagues and some as friends, with this. Finally, alumni also highlighted the satisfaction they had gained in their dealings with clients and on the support they had gained from their fellow students. These comments from alumni highlight some of the benefits:

- I gained a great deal of confidence in myself, ability, skills and knowledge
- Being respected as a equal contributor to the team by colleagues and having support from them and talking to them
- Everything about the placements was rewarding. The work, the supervisors, the contacts, the learning, and mostly the growing

Overall, it is clear that relationships between hosts and students are vital – not just in terms of stimulating student learning, but also in terms of the reflection and learning of hosts, employment outcomes for both hosts and students and for personal enjoyment and satisfaction. While curriculum design typically emphasises the importance of social relationships – the social context - for learning, learning theory has focused less on the significance of relationships as an outcome of learning. Our findings suggest that positive relationships are an important outcome of practice-based learning exchange. However, some relationships produced less positive outcomes.

5.4.4 Institutional Relationships In addition to the relationship that they developed with students, hosts felt that another crucial success factor for practice-based learning exchanges was the relationships with the university staff who were responsible for connecting students with hosts. Some hosts were satisfied, reporting “I’ve been very happy with the relationship we’ve had. It has been honest, it has been open, it has been respectful on both side, I would believe” [h28] and appreciated that university staff were working hard to make practice-based learning exchanges run as smoothly as possible. Hosts emphasised the value which lay in university staff making an effort to build relationships with them and one commented:

- I think a lot of internships really come down to one on one relationships between the student, the staff member and the staff member of the organisation [h1]
However, other hosts complained that they had too little contact with university staff and reported that they would appreciate more involvement or input” [h13], particularly if any changes were to be made to practice-based learning exchange. Hosts particularly expressed frustration with feedback mechanisms and the failure of university staff to recognise that it is not the experience alone that teaches students but that hosts play a crucial role as educators, with one host wishing for “a bit of recognition you know that we are actually part of your educational structure” [h22]. This concern is reflective of Ward & Wolf-Wendel’s (2000) suggestion that university staff need to be conscious to operate within a paradigm of ‘doing with’ hosts, rather than ‘doing for’ them. Including hosts in the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of practice-based learning exchanges has the potential to not only create more cohesive and well-designed programmes for students, but also to reinforce the partnership between universities and hosts. Hosts in this study reported that they “fill out their assessment report and we send that back and we never hear” [h17], and that university staff were not always good at acknowledging their efforts in hosting students. Hosts particularly felt that it was essential to have close relationships with university staff in case there were problems and in order to ensure that “everybody leaves in good terms and relationships aren’t damaged” [h29].

Moving beyond practice-based learning exchanges, hosts suggested that their expertise could be utilised by universities to a far greater degree and several were keen to be consulted on the curriculum design in order to ensure that students were getting the optimal education to prepare them for future practice, with one reporting:

> there is a drift in terms of when students come in here, um, what they’re learning at University and what the real world of practice is like…there’s a gap. There’s a big gap. And it would, I think that’s, there’s another piece of work that we need to do, in terms of collaboration with the University [h28]

Furthermore, hosts wished to have greater research links with the university. As one host suggested, “there’s all this knowledge there on tap, why not turn the tap on?” [h26]. Hosts reported that they frequently had the need for some specialised research and were interested in building research partnerships with universities, while “at the moment we feel we’re doing a lot for [the] uni and not getting much back” [h14]. As one host commented:

> I’m going to develop all these contacts, and the university develop all these contacts, then where they lead mightn’t be the issue, it’s just the fact that they’re there, and someone else can decide how they want to use them ... let’s just see where it goes [h26]

Overall, it is clear that the relationships formed during the practice-based learning exchange are an absolutely essential part of the experience for students and hosts alike. It is also clear that the relationship between universities and host organisations is an area in which there are currently some problems, and in which the potential for meaningful and mutually beneficial engagement, not only in practice-based learning exchanges but also in the form of curriculum advice and research collaborations, have not yet been fully optimised. This is a particularly critical issue in that there is increasingly intense competition among universities for hosts for their students, with the result that many hosts find themselves overwhelmed by requests from universities. As hosts point out, “you can’t just keep taking more and more on because then you don’t have time to do anything else” [h13], and some hosts reported that they have begun to consider establishing an
exclusive relationship with one university and then refusing to host students from all other institutions.

5.5 Roles and Objectives

The literature on service learning in the United States highlights practical challenges for organisations which host students (Blyth, Saito & Berkas 1997; Sandy 2007; Swaminathan 2007; Vernon & Foster 2002). A particular aspect commonly highlighted is a lack of awareness amongst hosts of the role service learning plays in course or degree program assessment and requirements (Vernon and Foster 2002) and differing perceptions of university staff and hosts’ responsibilities and roles (Blyth, Saito & Berkas 1997; Swaminathan 2007). The project here investigated whether similar issues arose in relation to practice-based learning exchange in Australia.

5.5.1 Hosts

Hosts reported a significant degree of confusion and uncertainty about the roles that they are expected to play as supervisors and mentors of students in their care. This was related to several key issues. First, many hosts found that students were not clear about what they wanted to achieve during the practice-based learning exchange, or had unrealistic expectations. While some provided students with a pack of information to read in advance, most did not and instead suggested that universities should run training sessions for students prior to their commencing practice-based learning exchange. This could involve preparing them for the kinds of contexts in which they were likely to find themselves, and, as one host suggested:

you can then sort of try and shape the sort of experience that students have, the way they engage with it … You can try and frame the sort of perspective that people have on it [h4]

Secondly, a number of hosts referred to the challenge posed by differing expectations from students, the hosts themselves and university staff, arguing for a need for clarity in the roles and responsibilities of each party. Much of this confusion related to a lack of briefing from universities. While some university staff discuss expectations and roles at length with hosts, others do not, often due to a lack of time and resources if they find themselves responsible for placing a large number of students in suitable organisations. Nevertheless, hosts felt that universities should be giving them a great deal more support and advice on how to supervise students, suggesting that negotiating expectations before the start of practice-based learning exchange was beneficial.

In addition to conversations with university staff and students, hosts also felt it was important to receive thorough documentation from universities about how their roles as supervisors and how best to go about ensuring that students gain from the practice-based learning exchange. While many universities do currently provide some information, hosts felt that this was often insufficient and that they were left “just kind of guessing” [h17]. The uncertainty about roles was particularly relevant to hosts given that a large proportion undertake considerable preparation prior to the arrival of a student, planning which activities will best suit individual students and ensuring that they will be properly supervised and without knowing what they were expected to do, some hosts felt that this was wasted effort.

A third challenge reported by hosts reported was not receiving many details about students in advance of their arrival. While some hosts interview prospective students, many do not meet a student until the start of the practice-based learning
exchange and suggested that it would be useful to be given information on a range of factors including: how students are matched with particular hosts; how the practice-based learning exchange fits in to students’ degrees; and what students have previously studied and where their knowledge and skills gaps are. Overall, the plea for greater information was consistently strong from the majority of hosts and two hosts summed this up by reporting:

No-one ever says anything to a host organisation about how do you support your student. What sort of training should you be providing? How competent are they? What level of experience have they had previously? How do you lead someone in, so in the first week, you assign them tasks, in the second week you jointly assign tasks and the third week, they create their own tasks and report to? How do you create that journey for them, which for me is actually what dictates whether or not your experience is great [h4]

I guess something that would be useful is a storybook, like narratives of previous projects. So just short snippets … examples of previous projects … four or five pages; not a big publication, but it could be tales of community and university students’ engagement. And to me what would be the most valuable thing would be the voices of people that have been involved … I think I would get a lot out of that [h26]

5.5.2 Students and Alumni The lack of clarity about roles and expectations between hosts and staff was also felt by students and alumni. Students reported that they would like to have been better prepared by their universities for the practice-based learning exchange. They particularly felt that they needed more assistance in finding a host in the beginning, guidance from the university about how to manage their workloads, an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and the chance to “hear about everyone’s experience” and to compare notes with other students. 26 per cent of students surveyed felt that they had not had a clearly defined role during their practice-based learning exchange. While it is likely that this figure is partially representative of a mismatch between students’ expectations and the reality that they encountered, feedback from students clearly indicate that some students had not been adequately supervised, with one student even reporting that they had had no face-to-face contact with their direct supervisor at all. Students also reported not having things explained to them, being excluded from day-to-day activities, being given tasks that were “crazy difficult” or no tasks at all, and that host organisations were ill-prepared for their presence, with students suggesting that hosts needed training in “how to properly supervise students”, which reflects the discussion above.

Many of the student respondents who felt that their roles had not been clearly defined reported that their tasks had included activities such as “shadowing”, “observing”, “helping”, “assisting”, “floating around” or “helping out”. They also reported a doing a larger number of administrative tasks. Perhaps the absence of one specific task that they could focus on and feel a sense of ownership over meant that they had felt disempowered. It is also possible that they had felt their tasks to be insignificant. It seems that the perception of students that the work they are undertaking is important and beneficial is crucial to their sense of satisfaction during a practice-based learning exchange. As alumni reflected, the opportunity to achieve “tangible results that actually made a difference to the community” and to see “the impact my interventions had for people” was particularly valuable.
Another issue was that while many hosts stressed that students should be “proactive” [h29], and that part of their role was to teach students to take initiative, this “sink or swim sort of support” [h4] was obviously highly challenging for some students. However, part of the necessary process for students to go through in terms of their professional and personal development is coping with work that is not clearly defined and many students and alumni did realise that despite finding practice-based learning exchange “very, very stressful”, this was actually a step on the path towards learning. As one student and one alumnus reflected:

All experience, positive and negative, is an opportunity for learning

The placement wasn’t easy, but I don’t think that’s a negative. Learning is challenging, new experiences can be challenging, but that’s a wonderful thing.

Overall, issues around expectations and roles are clearly critical in ensuring beneficial outcomes from practice-based learning exchanges for both student learning and for host organisations. From the perspective of quality control, universities have a responsibility to ensure that students are supervised in a suitable way and, as a student suggested, it is important that universities conduct some “initial investigation ... about the organisation before referring students”, as well as regularly checking that things are proceeding well during the practice-based learning exchange. It is likely that greater communication between universities, hosts and students, as well as clearer expectations for each party, would help to ameliorate many of these concerns.

5.6 Access and Equity

Given the benefits outlined above which accrue to students enrolled in practice-based learning exchange, it is important that all students have equal opportunities to participate. However, the project suggested that this was not the case. For the four programmes included in the project in which participation was optional for students, it is impossible to ascertain to extent to which any other students had been unable to participate. However, three of the programmes were compulsory for students and when we look at challenges that these students faced it is clear that equitable access is a significant issue.

It is well-documented that university students are increasingly obliged to undertake paid work in order to meet both basic living expenses and the growing costs of education (see McInnis, 2001; McInnis 2003; White, 2007; James et al, 2007). In our study, of the 69 undergraduate students aged 25 years and under, 67 per cent reported being employed, working an average of 16 hours per week. Furthermore, many students also had considerable caring commitments, with the hours spent on these as high as 38 hours a week for some students. Due to these competing commitments, many students and alumni reported significant difficulties in undertaking a practice-based learning exchange. Those who had given up part-time work in order to participate reported that they were very concerned about being able to support themselves financially, while others who had continued to work part-time had found that juggling all their commitments had been exhausting and stressful, negatively impacting the health of some students. The longer the practice-based learning exchange, the more heightened these concerns were. Many students and alumni reported that balancing practice-based learning exchange, paid work, caring commitments and other university studies was “a nightmare”. As they argued:
It’s nearly impossible to undertake a full-time placement, complete university work, AND work in your usual part-time job.

The university needs to be more aware of and responsive to the stress that juggling a 4 day placement, 2 uni subjects, paid work and family commitments can impose on students.

In response, a significant number of students, alumni and hosts suggested that there should be “greater financial assistance” available for students who undertake practice-based learning exchange, arguing that “even being paid a minimum wage would have been helpful”. As one student pointed out:

Getting paid for placement hours would allow a reduction in external paid work. This would provide for a better and more engaged placement experience as fatigue/illness is an issue.

The impact of having to juggle a number of competing commitments clearly meant that some students did not find the practice-based learning exchange to be as positive an experience as it could have been. When we divide students into two groups based on the level of competing commitments they had during the practice-based learning exchange, we can see that a higher proportion of those with high commitment levels reported that they would like to have done something different and a lower proportion that they would recommend the practice-based learning exchange to other students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Low (%)</th>
<th>High (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student would like to have done something different</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student would recommend PBLE to other students</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBLE was highly linked to other aspects of degree</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBLE helped student understand material covered in degree</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learnt unexpected things</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learnt different things, or learnt in a different way, compared to usual coursework</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student felt they were able to contribute to the organisation</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student intends to continue involvement in organisation</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Students' Reported Gains from the Practice-Based Learning Exchange

Furthermore, those with a high level of commitments were less likely to report that the practice-based learning exchange had been highly linked to other aspects of their degree, that it had helped them understand material covered in their degree, that they had learnt unexpected things or that they had learnt different things, or learnt in a different way, compared to their usual coursework. Moreover, those with a low level of commitments were more likely to have felt able to contribute to their host organisation and to report that they planned to continue involvement in that organisation. Overall, it would seem that competing time commitments not only make it difficult for some students to participate in practice-based learning exchange at all, they also diminish the gains that participation can give students. It is therefore critical that universities consider ways of ensuring equitable access to practice-based learning exchanges by finding ways to ameliorate some of the restrictions that students face.

15 Those with ‘high’ levels of commitments reported that they had at least 20 hours of work and/or caring commitments per week. Those with ‘low’ levels of commitments reported that they had less than 20 hours of work and/or caring commitments per week.
5.7 High Value, Low Status

Given the immense value to both current students and alumni, including for learning, it would be expected that universities would do all they could to support and facilitate practice-based learning exchange. Based on research done by Hinck and Brandell 2000 at 225 colleges and universities in the United States, and Butcher et al. (2003) at Australian universities, there are four major measures that we would expect universities which genuinely support and promote practice-based learning exchange to have adopted (see also Bringle and Hatcher 2000 and Cushman 2002):

- references to practice-based learning in mission statements and evidence that it is viewed by the university as an important part of teaching and learning
- support for practice-based learning activities from the leadership and administration of universities.
- recognition and rewards for the university staff involved in establishing and managing practice-based learning exchanges
- centralised institutional support for those engaged in facilitating practice-based learning exchange, led by a respected senior academic in order to demonstrate the importance and credence of practice-based learning
- financial support to ensure equitable access amongst students.

In the majority of Australian universities, including the three in the study here, most of these characteristics are absent. The university staff that coordinate practice-based learning exchanges typically expressed doubt that the university understood their significance, instead focusing on “the standard big relationship business too much … they don’t realise the subtle, nuanced exchange that actually might be hard to measure” [a] and while there may be public expressions of support, one evaluated this as “lip service around the University structure around how this is valued… because I don’t see it valued at all. That’s been absolutely, personally my experience” [h]. The disconnect between institutional value placed on practice-based learning exchange and the value attributed to it by students and hosts is reflected in reports from university staff coordinating practice-based learning exchanges that their involvement was actually having a negative impact on their careers. Staff often felt that their schools and faculties did not regard the work involved in practice-based learning exchanges as “substantive academic engagement” [a], and lacked understanding of the curricular work associated with executing successful practice-based learning exchanges. As one staff member explained, “people assume that because you’re not face to face in the subject than it’s not the same as a teaching load” [a]. This had a significantly negative impact on their capacity to do research, and hence their career prospects, with one complaining “my publication record because of the enormous amount of administrative, internship and teaching has been … I’m averaging only one [journal article] a year [b].

Part of this problem came down to the difficulty of getting workload committees to understand what is involved in coordinating a practice-based learning exchange. All staff agreed that it “is incredibly time consuming” [b] and that it involves all kind of intangible interactions with students, such as “a student who – sometimes you’ll spend, even before they’ve gone out on their placement, you’ll have them in here once a day before they go out, panicking or upset” [c]. Due to the anomalous nature of these activities, staff were frustrated that “workload scales don’t particularly take into account the extra demands, so they’re not kind of embedded in the normal, I suppose, parameters of subject-based courses… I guess you could say that therefore they’re kind of marginalised” [l]. Several coordinators reported they had
previously had administrative support but had lost this due to cut-backs in their universities, at the same time as the number of students enrolled in practice-based learning exchanges had increased, and were concerned that this would have a negative impact on overall quality of the programmes. Overall, staff felt that awareness of the challenges in coordinating practice-based learning exchanges “needs to really have a much stronger presence in all of the university talk” [h]. Hosts also spoke in support of university staff, with one arguing that “I would certainly endorse the fact that I think the field education is absolutely essential ... but I’m not sure that the Universities do resource it to the level that it needs” [h28].

Overall, it is clear that despite the high value of practice-based learning exchanges to students, universities themselves have much work to do to effectively support and value these programmes and the staff and students who are involved in them.
6.0 Conclusions

Government, employers, universities and students have all identified that a range of factors including course relevance, graduate employability and the development of a range of higher order generic skills and knowledge, in addition to discipline specific knowledge, are important elements of tertiary education. Findings from this project and elsewhere show that practice-based learning exchanges (PBLE) have the potential to explicate and deliver these curriculum aims and objectives, however this promise is often not fully realised. Aspects of curriculum design, student and host preparedness, academic staff engagement and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning can all impact on the quality and relevance of the experience.

The findings from the project illuminate a number of issues relevant to all Australian higher education institutions engaged in developing graduate attributes and facilitating engagement between universities and the wider communities they are meant to serve. The project’s central concern has been to improve our understanding of the value of practice-based learning exchanges and to determine best practice for how PBLE should be embedded in university curricula. Accordingly, our recommendations address the positive benefits of PBLE and then look at some practical concerns and issues relating to its implementation. Our findings indicate that PBLEs:

- Are the most highly valued and powerful learning experience self-reported by students and alumni who participate in them;
- Build professional and interpersonal relationships that are valued and used by students beyond university;
- Generate learning outside universities, by encouraging reflective learning and knowledge exchange between students and the staff or members of participating organisations;
- Contribute to community and disciplinary knowledge through the specific projects undertaken by participating students;
- Sometimes facilitate reciprocal relationships between host organisations and universities/university staff that extend beyond the PBLE to other forms of knowledge building and action; and,
- Can assist in realising the potential of universities to be effectively engaged in their communities.
7.0 Implementation

7.1 Striving for Good PBLE Curriculum Design

PBLEs are utilised in diverse contexts for the purposes of achieving different disciplinary, vocational, and civic learning outcomes. They are variously informed by professional accreditation demands, institutional commitments to particular types of student experience, and the learning practices and theories employed by academic staff. They may be integrated as learning activities within classroom based subjects, or stand alone as learning units. With regard to the latter, seeking a ‘one size fits all’ approach to effective PBLE curriculum design is neither possible nor desirable. However, our findings suggest that, across a wide range of contexts, effective PBLE curricula have the following features:

- Student preparedness for the PBLE experience is evaluated and/or developed;
- Effective host involvement in the PBLE is supported through preparatory resources and interactions with university staff;
- Hosts are recognised as co-teachers in curriculum design and evaluation of learning activities;
- Reflective learning by student participants is formalised through specific learning activities and assessment tasks;
- Opportunities for shared learning through reflection within and between PBLE student cohorts;
- Evaluation tools that are competent to assess this form of ‘beyond classroom’ learning; and
- Academic coordination work is appropriately recognised and adequately resourced.

However, our findings also suggest that effective PBLE curriculum design is not always adopted, due to lack of knowledge amongst staff, and the relatively low status – and associated resource constraints - of this kind of learning and teaching activity. At an institutional level, these limitations could be ameliorated by:

- Actively promoting effective PBLE design through university teaching and learning centres;
- Incorporating a specific focus on PBLE curriculum design in graduate certificate programs in learning and teaching that are increasingly undertaken by new academic staff;
- Supporting peer-learning and exchange between university staff involved with PBLEs across disciplines and faculties;
- Supporting opportunities for peer learning and exchange between university staff and host organisation staff through events that recognise hosts as co-teachers and learners; and
- Encouraging further debate and reflection on PBLE curriculum design through incentives to publish on this topic in relevant scholarly journals.
7.2 Operational and Institutional Constraints to Good Practice

Our project finds that effective development of PBLEs faces a number of challenges:

- Despite being the learning experience most highly valued by students and alumni, it commands relatively low institutional status, both within teaching programs and in relation to other forms of academic activity;
- Academics involved in delivering PBLEs identify a range of gaps and overlaps in the administration of these subjects that could be addressed through some centralised coordination.
- Student access to PBLEs can be constrained by financial and caring responsibilities;
- Strong competition for PBLE experiences between institutions is placing high demands on hosts, which may ultimately reduce the availability of PBLE opportunities; and,
- A poorly implemented PBLE can have significant negative consequences for student learning and self-esteem, and university-community relations. It is therefore particularly important that PBLE is only employed thoughtfully and responsibly.

There are a number of strategies that could be used to ameliorate these problems:

7.2.1 Better institutional support for PBLE University staff have reported that workload allocation, and other indicators that recognise work value is lower for PBLEs than for standard coursework subjects. This model ignores the teaching and learning, industry networking, student advisory and administration input required to achieve the stated and desired range of benefits for all partners. Universities need to value the work at an institutional level. This can be done through:

- systematically addressing PBLE in workload allocation criteria;
- providing adequate resourcing;
- rewarding and recognising staff involved; and,
- promoting senior leadership championing of PBLE.

7.2.2 Addressing Access and Equity Issues Access and equity issues need to be systematically addressed. In particular, we recommend:

- PBLEs of different lengths/types to accommodate diverse needs
- A broadening of the use of PBLE Scholarships, especially where the PBLE is a compulsory part of the curriculum requirement for professional entry to the field.

Where possible, course convenors and professional bodies may need to (re)consider the minimum required length of PBLE along with possible initiatives to address the access and equity issues arising from extended placement requirements.

7.2.3 Addressing Competitive Pressures There is increasing competition between universities, particularly in metropolitan cities, to find suitable host organisations for their students. This has the potential to damage relationships between universities and their partner organisations. While respondents in this project highly valued the inter-personal relationships between university staff and individuals in host organisations, and were against central university coordination of PBLE, there is clearly a need for some degree of information sharing within, and potentially between, universities in order to ensure that particular host organisations are not overwhelmed with requests to host students.
There is clearly a need for universities to improve the way in which they build partnerships with host organisations in order to ensure that benefits flow in more than one direction. This could be done at a high level in the leadership of universities, for example by the Vice Chancellor’s Committee advocating support from the government (such as subsidies) for organisations that host students. It could also be done at the local level, with universities increasing the involvement of hosts in discussions about curriculum design, including authentic host assessment activities in the curriculum and following up opportunities for building research partnerships with host organisations.
### 8.0 Sharing the Project Findings

Project findings will be shared with colleagues nationally and internationally using the following dissemination strategy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissemination Strategy</th>
<th>Deliverables to be provided</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Short Term Impacts</th>
<th>Long Term Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symposium on project findings (to be hosted by Teaching and Learning centre at one of the participating universities)</td>
<td>Full reports available for participants (including good practice checklists for coordinators and university leaders)</td>
<td>University staff (academic and professional)</td>
<td>Raising awareness of key findings to generate discussion at all levels of universities and to stimulate information sharing between university staff directly engaged in PBLE</td>
<td>Policy changes (including in the areas of Teaching and Learning, Faculty support for PBLE and the relationships between universities and external partners) to ensure that PBLE outcomes are improved for students, partners and universities and that PBLE engagement leads to ongoing partnerships between universities and partners, with mutual benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email link to report on university website</td>
<td>Specific summary report for university staff and prospective staff, including good practice checklist</td>
<td>PBLE coordinators and other interested university staff</td>
<td>To encourage university staff to implement changes to PBLE for the benefit of students and partners</td>
<td>Improved outcomes for students and greater involvement of partners in curricula design and assessment of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email link to report on university website</td>
<td>Specific summary report for students and prospective students, including good practice checklist</td>
<td>Students - those who participated in the project and other students engaged in PBLE</td>
<td>To make students aware of the potential gains from PBLE and their responsibilities in preparation and planning for PBLE</td>
<td>Students will be better prepared for PBLE and will have considered their learning objectives and professional development needs prior to commencing PBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email link to report on university website</td>
<td>Specific summary report for partners and prospective partners, including good practice checklist</td>
<td>University partners - both those who participated in the project and others who work with participating universities</td>
<td>To raise awareness amongst partners of students’ learning needs and ways in which partners can facilitate these</td>
<td>Partners will be better prepared to supervise students during the PBLE and will engage universities in discussions about curricula and assessment of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email link to report on university website</td>
<td>Specific summary report for alumni</td>
<td>Alumni (those who participated in the project)</td>
<td>To make alumni aware of report findings (as promised)</td>
<td>Alumni who go on to become partners will be better able to meet learning needs of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Review</td>
<td>Article on some of key project findings and their implications for the HE sector in Australia</td>
<td>HE Policy makers</td>
<td>To provoke discussion of key benefits and challenges of PBLE and areas in need of greater policy development in the Australian HE arena including Teaching and Learning policies, Staff Development policies and Staff Workload Measurements</td>
<td>Policies, both institutional and national, which enhance outcomes of PBLE for all participants and engage universities in sustained relationships with partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct delivery</td>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>ALTC</td>
<td>Make ALTC aware of key findings and their potential impact on the HE sector</td>
<td>ALTC to advise sector on policy changes which would facilitate PBLE and improve PBLE outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 journal articles (in high ranking national and international academic journals)</td>
<td>Key findings of project and their implications for International academic community with interest in PBLE related issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Dissemination Strategy
9.0 Critical Success Factors

The principal factors that supported the success of the project were:

- Clear and considered engagement of all chief investigators in the project design and implementation;
- A highly skilled and committed project manager and excellent research assistants at participating universities;
- A high level of engagement from all stakeholders involved in the project – their ‘buy-in’ assisted with the quality and quantity of data collected;
- Regular meetings and the use of collaborative project management software to ensure opportunities for planning, reflection and refinement; and
- Excellent input from a high level advisory group, which improved the project design and the quality of outputs; and
- A strong commitment to sharing research knowledge, which appeared to (pleasantly) surprise some of our stakeholders, particularly senior university staff.

In addition, the team learnt never to underestimate the desire of students, academic staff and university partners to be engaged in research where they see a clear benefit from the work. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of our participants.

Factors Impeding Success Poor communication between participating universities in the negotiation of the funding contracts were a significant impediment to the project and threatened to derail good relations between the chief investigators and their respective schools.
10.0 Linkages

10.1 Disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages

The project was explicitly interdisciplinary, bringing together chief investigators from four disciplines (political science, geography, cultural materials conservation, and social work), and focusing on the examination of learning programs across seven disciplines. The project findings suggest that there are many common practice-based learning exchange experiences across disciplines. However, it also illuminated the need for nuanced thinking about the disciplinary and professional differences. In particular, the experience of social work and human service students differed considerably on a number of variables, based on the compulsory nature of practice-based learning exchange and the disciplinary conventions that attach to practice-based learning exchange in relation to the human services. Similarly, findings from the Cultural Materials Conservation cohort challenged us to take care in interpreting findings, particularly in relation to questions of civic engagement in practice-based learning exchange, because of its strong vocational focus. The interdisciplinary learning have informed data analysis and led to greater rigour of analysis than would have been possible through a single disciplinary, or even cross-disciplinary, study.

10.2 Links with other ALTC projects

No particular links were developed. At ALTC’s urging, we were approached by a group conducting national research on vocational learning. We made several attempts to accommodate that team’s request to meet and share knowledge, but ultimately the logistics proved too difficult for the other team and they withdrew their approach.
References


