



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget**

**By: Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated
Learning (CEWIL) Canada**

Recommendation 1: That the government extend all of the current flexibility measures for the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) until March 31, 2023 at a cost of \$50M per year.

Recommendation 2: That the government provide additional funding of \$85M per annum to the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) for the next two years to support the creation of an additional 10,000 placements per year.

Recommendation 3: That the government provide funding of \$25M per year for two years to support critical access to technology for work-integrated learning students working remotely, especially those in rural areas.

Recommendation 4: That the government conduct a review of federal legislation, regulations, and guidelines which create barriers towards participation in work-integrated learning.

Recommendation 5: That the government enhance the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program through an extension of the current flexibility measures and by implementing several program adjustments including: increasing funding by \$180M per year for two years, increasing the length and the funding for each experience, extending the program year-round, and removing the age limits of the program so that all registered students can participate.

Recommendation 6: That the government leverage the \$150M for innovative work-integrated learning from Budget 2019 towards immersive, quality WIL experiences where students directly contribute to Canada's recovery through engagement with industry and community.

Protect and Preserve Work-Integrated Learning During Tumultuous Times

Budget 2019 provided unprecedented levels of investment in work-integrated learning (WIL) towards the goal “that within 10 years.... every young Canadian who wants a work-integrated learning opportunity should get one” (Budget 2019, p. 53). However, the impact of COVID-19 on students and the work-integrated learning ecosystem has been significant and it will take a concerted effort to ensure Canada’s position of leadership in this space is not eroded. The Government of Canada has already taken swift action by introducing key flexibility measures and enhancing investments in Canada’s youth throughout the pandemic. It will be critical to extend these flexibility measures and investments to buttress the system for the next few years. Now is the time to invest in Canada’s students - they already possess valuable skills and talents to help Canada respond to and recover from COVID-19. Through work-integrated learning, they will strengthen these skills, ultimately forming the backbone of Canada’s long-term economic recovery strategy as the skilled workforce of tomorrow. This unique generation of students, who have experienced COVID-19 personally and can apply this perspective and understanding to help facilitate our country’s rapid recovery, deserves our support now.

Recommendation 1: That the government extend all of the current flexibility measures for the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) until March 31, 2023, at a cost of \$50M per year.

CEWIL Canada data pulse polling has indicated a continued, significant downward trend for student employment: graduate job postings are down approximately 50% for the fall term and WIL opportunities are down approximately 25% for the fall term. Predictions of second and third waves of the virus are expected to create a negative impact for several years. As a result, the COVID-19 flexibility measures for the SWPP should be extended to 2023 requiring a \$50M investment per annum to support 75% wage subsidies for all placements.

Recommendation 2: That the government provide additional funding of \$85M per annum to the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) for the next two years to support the creation of an additional 10,000 placements per year.

At this time, the growth of WIL experiences for students is not the goal. Instead, supporting employers to maintain current paid opportunities is of paramount importance. An additional 10,000 placements per year will help meet this critical objective and stem the tide of cuts to student hiring.

Recommendation 3: That the government provide funding of \$25M per year for two years to support critical access to technology for work-integrated learning students working remotely, especially those in rural areas.

While work-integrated learning postings are down across the country, many Canadian organizations continue to support students by offering remote WIL experiences. Employers and community organizations are willing to recruit, onboard, and supervise students remotely but acquiring the necessary technology to support these remote WIL experiences can be a significant barrier. For some small to medium enterprises, the costs of acquiring additional hardware and software for a WIL student are prohibitive, and yet, for security and productivity reasons, it is imperative that students work on organization-issued equipment. In other instances, students in remote locations require costly internet plans to complete the daily tasks associated with their WIL placement.

The government can support the creation and preservation of valuable remote WIL experiences by investing in technology for work-integrated learning students. \$25M per year for two years could create up to 30,000 grants of between \$1,250 - \$2,000, allowing SMEs and not-for-profit organizations to purchase the necessary technology (hardware, software, internet access) to engage work-integrated learning students across the country.

Recommendation 4: That the government conduct a review of federal legislation, regulations, and guidelines which create barriers towards participation in work-integrated learning.

The Government of Canada has demonstrated world leadership in work-integrated learning through its significant investments and bold goals to increase student engagement in WIL. However, some federal legislation, regulations, or guidelines inadvertently create barriers for full student participation in work-integrated learning and disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students. Time limits on post-secondary completion for students who receive Band funding provided through Indigenous Services Canada's Post-Secondary Student Support program may unintentionally prevent Indigenous students from participating in WIL programs which often extend a student's time in degree. Students with part-time jobs often experience employment insurance challenges when they must quit that work in order to complete a WIL placement. International students, a vital source of talent for Canada's future workforce, face significant barriers towards participation in work-integrated learning with an inefficient co-op work permit process and by being excluded from federal student work-integrated learning programs.

The federal government has jurisdiction over a wide range of policies and programs that affect student engagement in WIL. CEWIL would be pleased to provide its expertise in a review of federal legislation, regulations, and guidelines which intersect with work-integrated learning. In the immediate future, CEWIL recommends that the government adjust its policies regarding international students who are crucial to both the sustainability of the post-secondary educational system in Canada as well as being instrumental in providing the skilled workforce that Canada needs to grow our economy. The government should extend eligibility for all federally funded work-integrated learning programs to international students enrolled in post-secondary education programs. Further, as work-integrated learning becomes increasingly common across post-secondary programs, the federal government should remove the need for a separate co-op work permit and that work authorization for work-integrated learning experiences be included as part of a student's study permit.

As noted by the Advisory Council on Economic Growth in 2016, "international students meet the general preconditions for proven successful economic integration – youth, language proficiency, and education...After years of studying in Canada, they tend to have strong language skills and be acclimatized to Canadian society" (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2016, p.8). According to the Canadian Bureau of International Education, 51% of international students plan on applying for permanent residence in Canada (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2016). Extending eligibility for federal WIL programs and granting authorization for WIL activities to international students will increase their chances of gaining valuable Canadian work experience which could have a positive impact on their interest in pursuing permanent residence and their ability to successfully transition into the Canadian workforce.

Recommendation 5: That the government enhance the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program through an extension of the current flexibility measures and by implementing several program adjustments including: increasing funding by \$180M per year for two years, increasing the length and the funding for each experience, extending the program year-round, and removing the age limits of the program so that all registered students can participate.

The increased investment will provide 30,000 new jobs for students at the extended length of up to 12 weeks. Further revisions to the program's parameters will allow organizations, particularly not-for-profit, arts and humanities organizations, and small to medium enterprises to benefit from student talent year-round. Thus, in addition to providing high school students with summer jobs, the CSJ can help support valuable work-integrated learning opportunities for post-secondary students. One of the challenges of the current design of the CSJ program is that many experiences are only funded for 8 weeks, which is not enough time to meet co-op work term credit requirements for post-secondary students. This leaves many students either working unpaid for the remaining weeks or scrambling to secure other employment. Extending the length of CSJ opportunities and increasing funding beyond minimum wage will allow organizations to attract skilled and innovative post-secondary student talent.

Recommendation 6: That the government leverage the \$150M for innovative work-integrated learning from Budget 2019 towards immersive, quality WIL experiences where students directly contribute to Canada's recovery through engagement with industry and community.

Innovation will be paramount to Canada's ability to rebound and recover from COVID-19. The funds allocated in Budget 2019 for innovative WIL provide a unique opportunity to evolve work-integrated learning while aiding in Canada's recovery. To achieve both aims, the government should ensure that the innovative WIL funds are dedicated to experiences with lasting outcomes, not just short-term experiences that briefly connect students with industry and community partners. Entrepreneurial WIL experiences, freelance or consulting WIL experiences, and community-service WIL experiences are examples of immersive WIL opportunities with great potential to spur innovation, aiding Canada's economic and social recovery while simultaneously enhancing the skills of our future workforce. We encourage the government to prioritize meaningful impact and innovation over high volume, short-term experiences.

WIL for Canada's Recovery

Before the onset of COVID-19, Canada was poised to have the world's strongest work-integrated learning system. Interest, support and investments in WIL were happening across the country and coming from all key stakeholders: students, educators, employers, and government. Ensuring our WIL ecosystem remains one that is sustainable and rooted in quality may be the single-most important goal to maintain world leadership in this space and to ensure our students, industry, and community are prepared to tackle the challenges of the future. Increased funding for WIL now will be instrumental to allow Canada to be positioned for growth as the urgent crises of the pandemic give way to Canada's trajectory of long-term economic recovery. WIL plays a critical role in building Canada's talent pool and preparing new workers to fill the jobs of tomorrow. Thus, investments made now will most certainly continue to bear fruit for years to come as a legacy of the foresight of the government of today.

WIL Expertise in Canada

As a work-integrated learning leader in Canada, CEWIL Canada is a membership-based association of professionals and experts. Our collective represents over 1,100 members from over 110 post-secondary educational institutions – colleges, universities and polytechnics located in every province in Canada as well as employers and government representatives. CEWIL Canada's mission is to build the capacity to develop future-ready students through quality work-integrated learning. With over 45 years of expertise, CEWIL gives its stakeholders access to a robust bank of knowledge and resources – including WIL best practices, a national statistics database, an expansive network of practitioners, and the only active accreditation program for WIL in the world. CEWIL members include many of Canada's experts on the research, pedagogy, and operationalization of diverse forms of work-integrated learning programming. CEWIL Canada is willing and able to leverage its expertise in support of pan-Canadian initiatives to support work-integrated learning both through and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.