



AUSTRALIAN COLLABORATIVE
EDUCATION NETWORK LIMITED

The impact of Work Integrated Learning on graduate outcomes – A three-year review

Report prepared by

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Context

The Australian Collaborative Education Network ([ACEN](#)) is the professional association for Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in Australia. In this brief, WIL is classified as work-based (e.g., internships, placements, practicums), non-workplace (e.g., classroom/virtual projects, consultancy) or global (e.g., industry study tour).

This brief investigates the impact of WIL on higher education graduate outcomes in 2020, 2021 and 2022. It draws on the ACEN-endorsed items in the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) of which 30, 31 and 34 universities participated in 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. The GOS measures labour market destinations of graduates four-to-six months post-course completion and levels of satisfaction with their higher education course.

Key findings

- Work-based WIL experiences during undergraduate study continue to be associated with the highest rates of full-time graduate employment.
- Students who undertake WIL are less likely to feel overqualified in their jobs, particularly those engaging in work-based experiences.
- Once employed, graduates who undertook a WIL experience continue to feel most prepared for work.
- WIL experiences have had a significantly positive impact on employment opportunities for certain student equity groups.

Suggested citation:

ACEN (2023). The impact of Work Integrated Learning on graduate outcomes – A three-year review. Australian Collaborative Education Network.

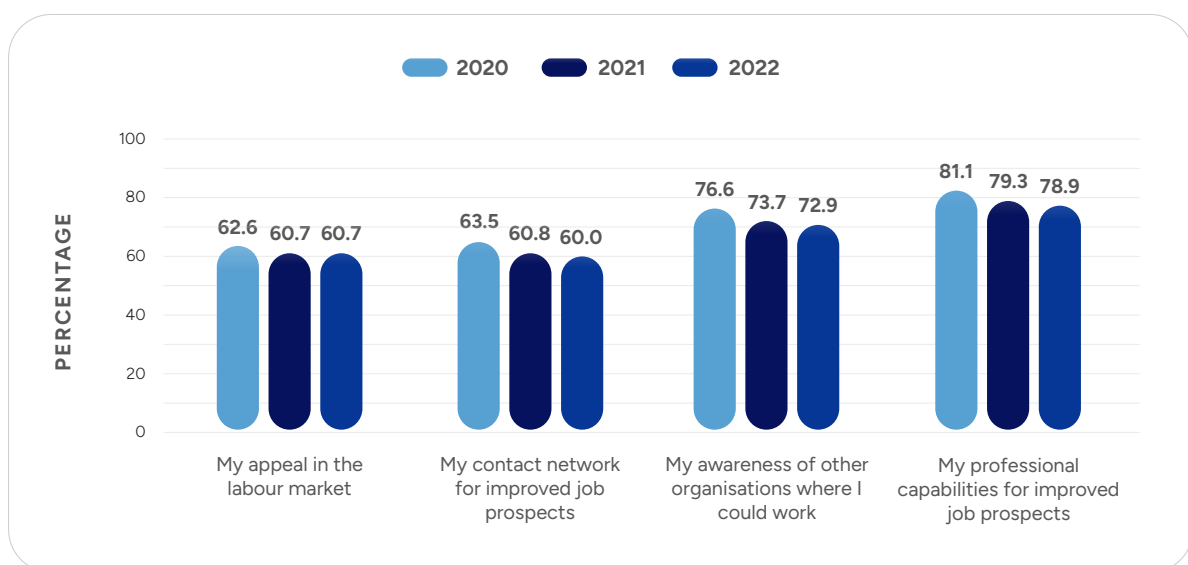
Acknowledgements:

We acknowledge the contribution of The Social Research Centre which administered the Graduate Outcomes Survey, including ACEN items. We gratefully acknowledge the support of participating ACEN members in gathering these data and the graduates of their institutions who provided responses.

WIL and perceived employability by course level

Graduates who were enrolled as both domestic and international students and took part in any form of WIL (i.e., work-based, non-workplace and/or global) were asked to consider how it helped to improve four aspects of their self-perceived employability.

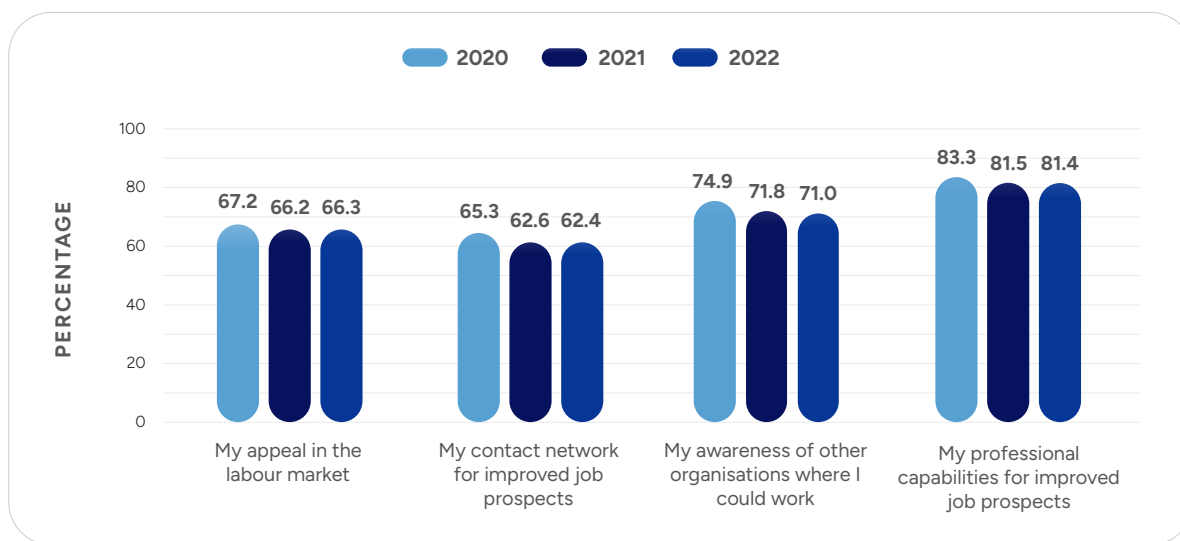
Figure 1 shows that undergraduates' self-perceptions of employability declined over time for all four indicators. However, the decline was not marked and only a few percentage points over the three year-period. The greatest decline was evidenced in graduates' awareness of other organisations where they felt they could work.



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, undergraduate, n=76,414; 2020=25,084; 2021=23,583; 2022=27,747).

Figure 1 WIL and self-perceptions of employability - undergraduate

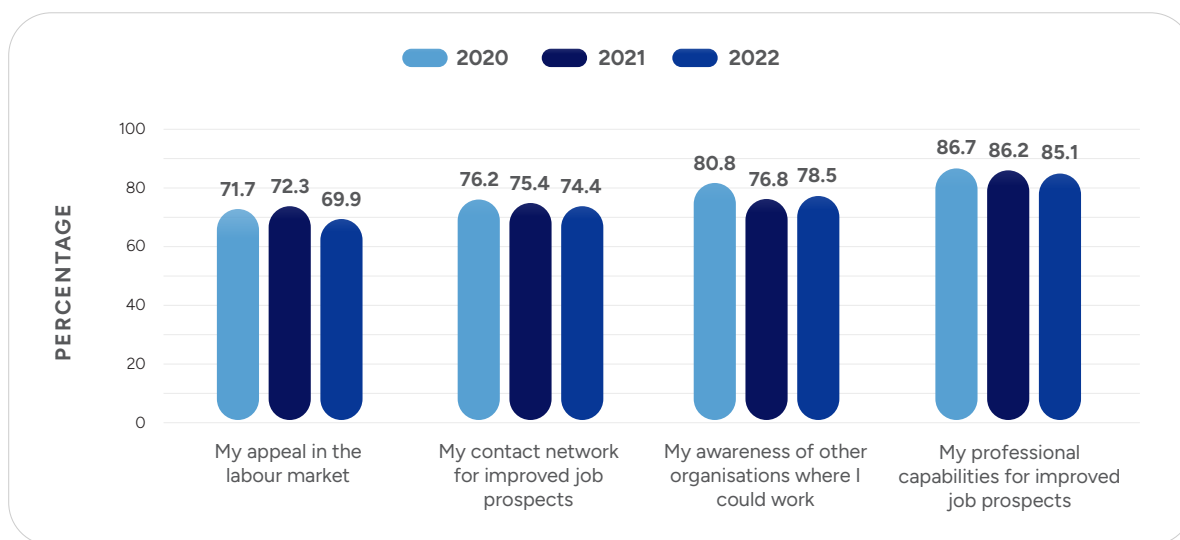
Figure 2 shows a similar decline in all four indicators of self-perceived employability for postgraduates who completed coursework degrees. Again, the decline was not considerable, ranging from one to four percentage points, with the greatest decline also recorded for graduates' awareness of other organisations where they felt they could work.



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, postgraduate coursework, n=44,786; 2020=13,050; 2021=13,766; 2022=17,970).

Figure 2 WIL and self-perceptions of employability – postgraduate coursework

The same pattern of marginal decline as for coursework graduates was evident among postgraduates completing research degrees (see Figure 3).



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, postgraduate research, n=2,306; 2020=554; 2021=714; 2022=1,038).

Figure 3 WIL and self-perceptions of employability – postgraduate research

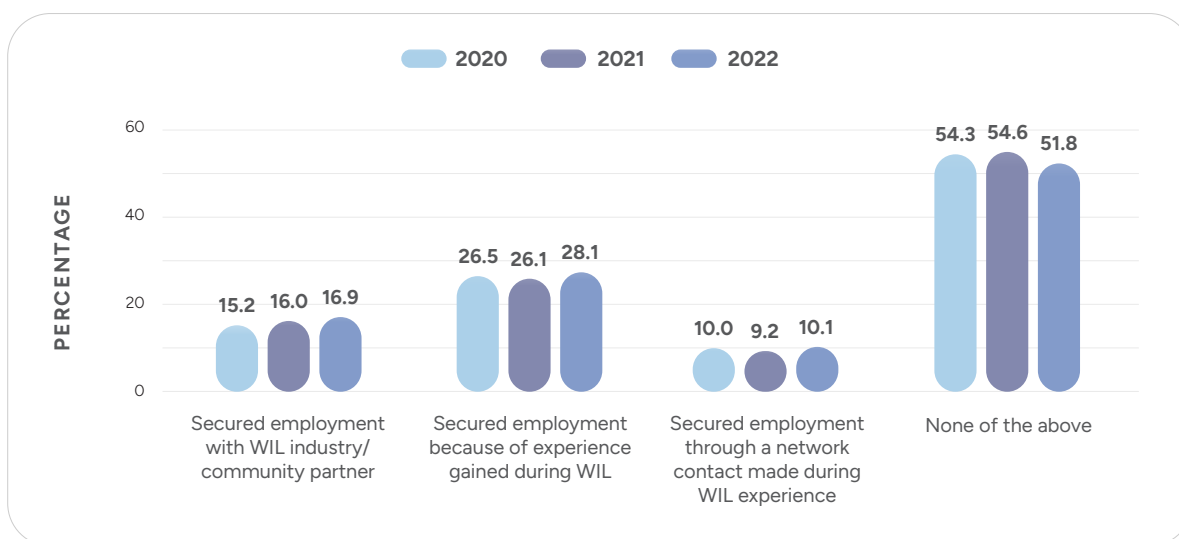
These results for the three course cohorts are somewhat disappointing. The decline could be attributed to economic uncertainty although strong recovery in graduate employment outcomes in 2022 suggests that other factors may be at play. The data highlight the importance of discipline or course-level analysis to ensure WIL offerings are developing confidence and capability, as intended.



WIL and job attainment

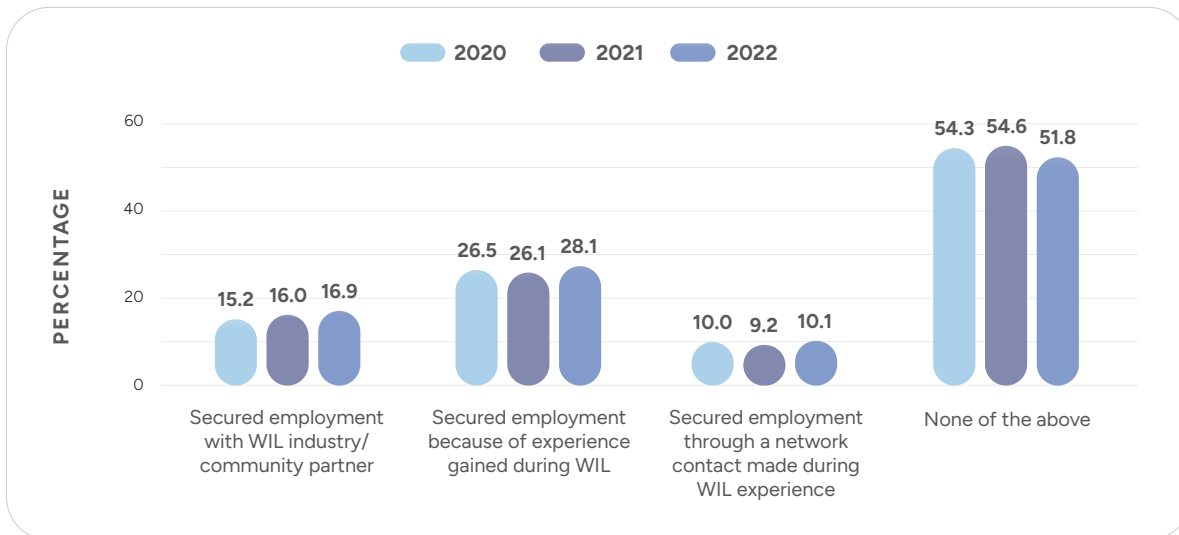
Graduates enrolled as both domestic and international students who undertook any form of WIL indicated how the experience influenced their job attainment, both directly and indirectly.

Figure 4 shows some marginal growth in the proportion of undergraduates who reported positive job attainment outcomes from WIL. This applied to securing employment both directly or indirectly through their WIL experience.



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, undergraduate, n=74,035; 2020=24,312; 2021=22,787; 2022=26,936).

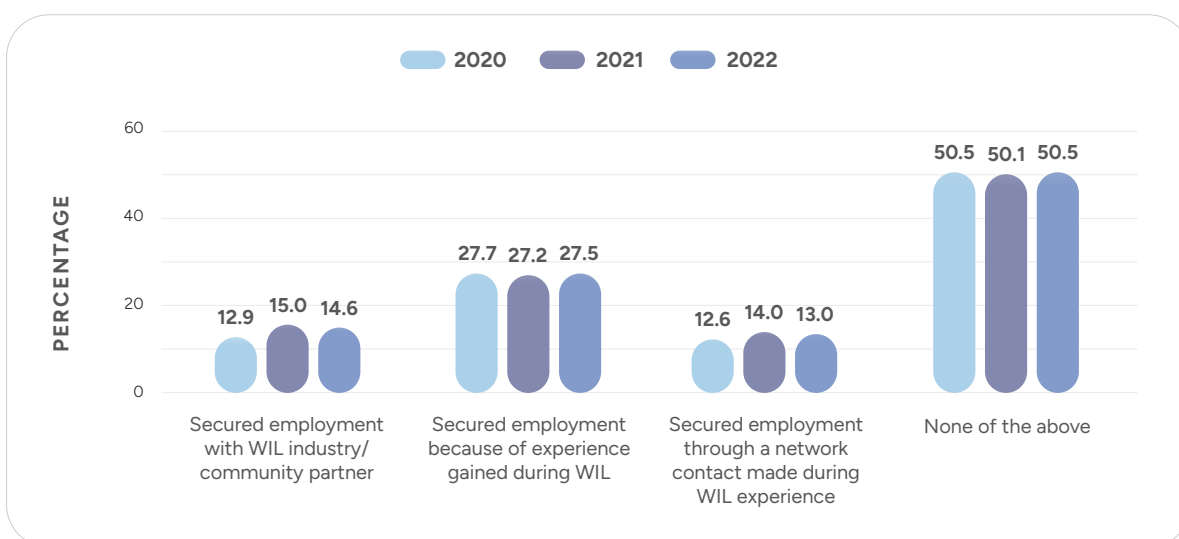
Figure 4 WIL and job attainment – undergraduate



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, postgraduate coursework, n=43,375; 2020=12,674; 2021=13,302; 2022=17,399).

Figure 5 WIL and job attainment – postgraduate coursework

An upward trend was seen in the proportion of coursework postgraduates securing employment through WIL, directly or indirectly (see Figure 5). The same held for research postgraduates (Figure 6). Again, improvements in the job attainment rates were marginal.



Base: Completed some form of WIL and gave a valid response (Total, postgraduate research, n=2,259; 2020=541; 2021=702; 2022=1,016).

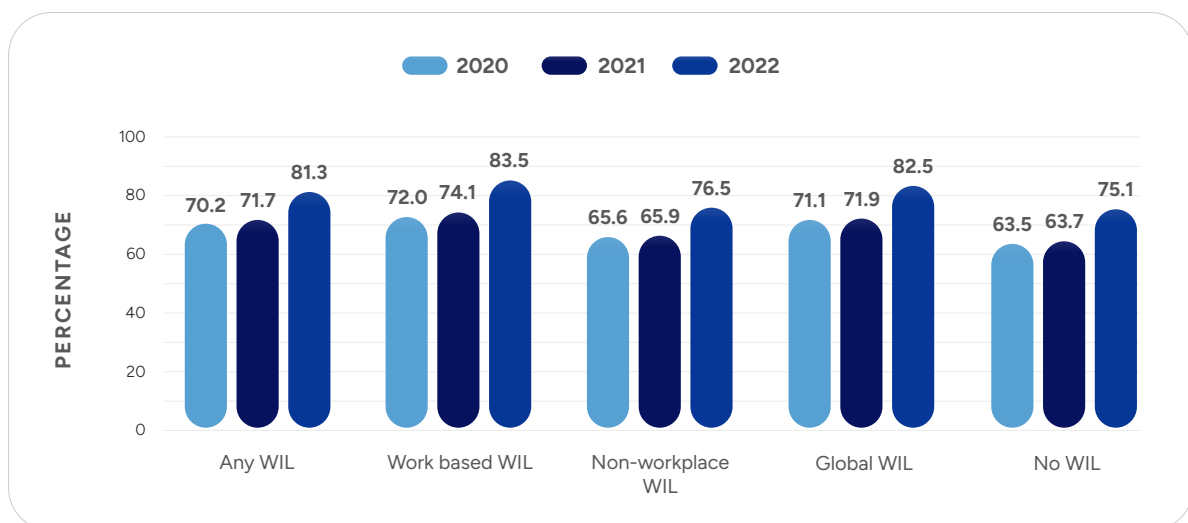
Figure 6 WIL and job attainment – postgraduate research

Overall, the positive association between WIL and job attainment was perhaps lower than we might expect, given widely reported evidence on how WIL can improve employment prospects. However, it is important to note that the sample of new graduates may not be available for employment or could be transitioning to further study.

WIL and full-time employment

Drawing on GOS measures, this section investigates the relationship between different types of WIL and full-time employment outcomes. In line with national reporting, data are presented only for domestic graduates who were available for full-time employment. The percentage represents graduates who undertook that type of WIL and secured full-time employment at the time of the GOS.

Figure 7 shows increasing proportions of undergraduates secured full-time employment over the three years, in line with falling unemployment in the broader labour market¹. Undergraduates who completed work-based WIL continue to experience the highest rate of full-time employment although the gap has narrowed with global WIL which reported a considerable percentage growth over the three-year period. There is still some advantage from completing WIL although the difference in employment rate between those doing WIL, and those not, has eroded slightly.



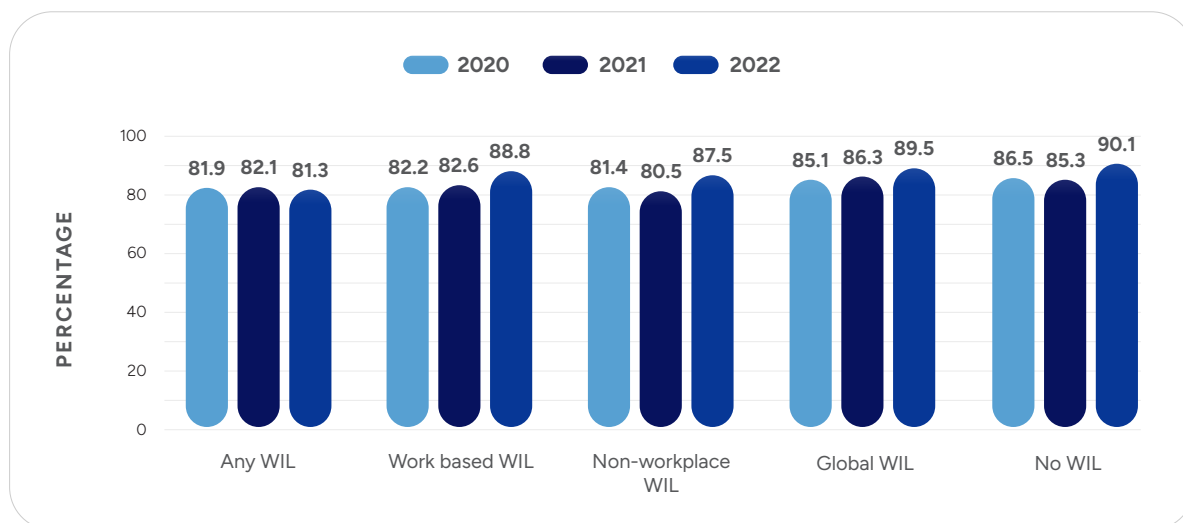
Base: Domestic undergraduates available for full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=25,404; 2021=23,884; 2022=29,189)

Figure 7 WIL and full-time employment – undergraduate

¹ Social Research Centre (2022). 2022 Graduate outcomes survey. Social Research Centre.

“ Undergraduates who completed work-based WIL continue to experience the highest rate of full-time employment

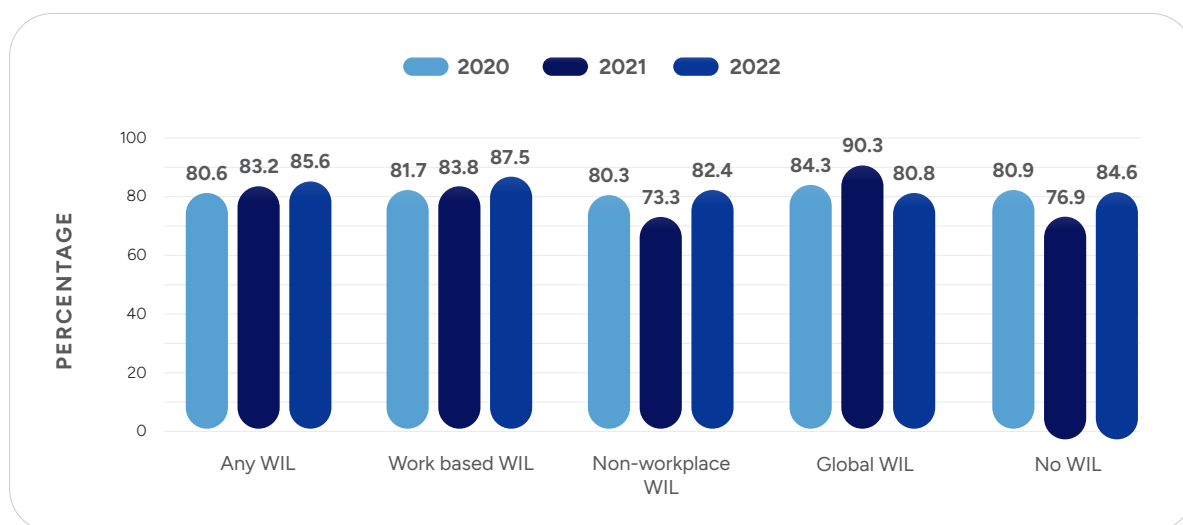
Figure 8 indicates that coursework postgraduates do not appear to benefit from WIL in terms of securing full-time work upon graduation. Lower full-time employment rates were consistently reported for those who engaged in different types of WIL, compared to those who did not. It may be that postgraduates who chose not to take part in WIL were already employed. However, the gap in full-time employment outcomes between those doing WIL, and those not, has widened over time.



Base: Domestic postgraduate coursework available for full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=13,948; 2021=13,770, 2022=17,712)

Figure 8 WIL and full-time employment – postgraduate coursework

Figure 9 shows the impact of undertaking WIL appears mixed for postgraduates completing research degrees. There was a slight increase in the gap between the full-time employment outcomes of those undertaking work-based WIL, and those not. In contrast, there was a shift from a positive association between global WIL and full-time employment in 2020 to a negative effect in 2022.



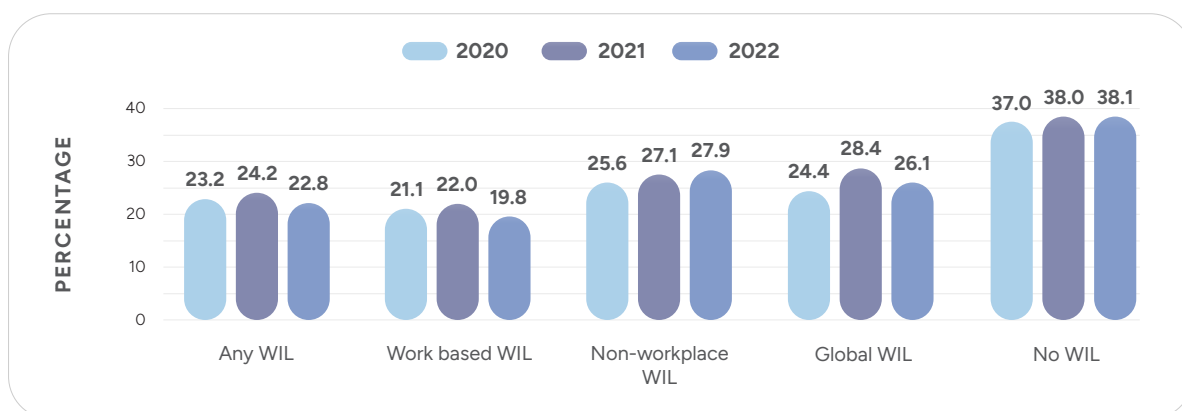
Base: Domestic postgraduate research graduates available for full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=2,154; 2021=2,058, 2022=2,232).

Figure 9 WIL and full-time employment – postgraduate research

WIL and perceived overqualification by course level

The following data explore the proportion of domestic graduates employed full-time who indicated that they are not utilising their skills and knowledge in their current job and are therefore perceived as feeling overqualified. A breakdown is provided for each course level to gauge whether different types of WIL make a difference to graduates' perceptions of overqualification.

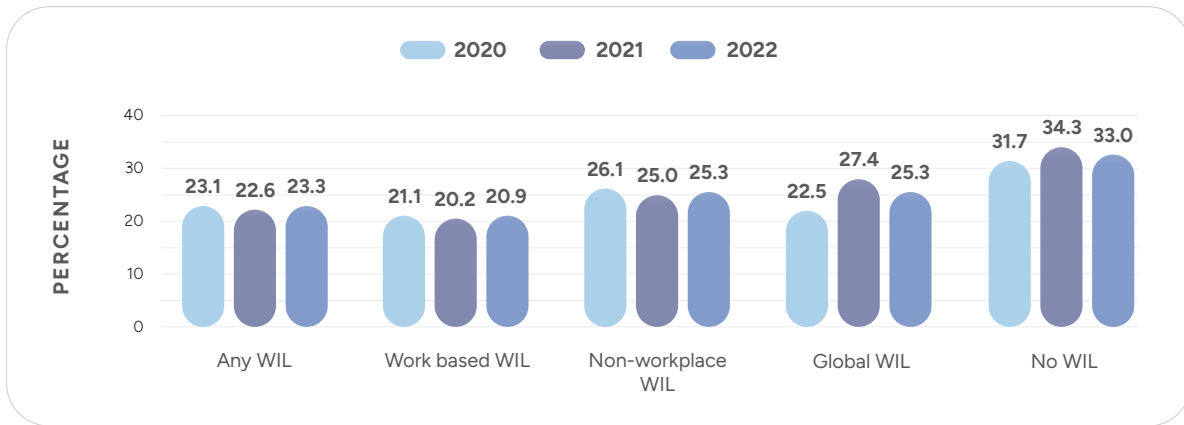
Figure 10 shows undergraduates who completed work-based WIL consistently reported lower levels of perceived overqualification in their current roles. This suggests that work-based WIL may support graduates transitioning into quality employment that utilises skills and knowledge acquired during their degree. Those completing non-workplace or global WIL also reported more favourable outcomes than undergraduates who did not engage in any WIL, although the effects from these types of WIL are less than work-based and reduced slightly over the three years.



Base: Domestic undergraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=17,104; 2021=16,310; 2022=21,196).

Figure 10 WIL and perceived overqualification - undergraduates

Figure 11 shows coursework postgraduates who undertook WIL reported consistently lower levels of perceived overqualification than those who did not engage in WIL, although the difference was less than for undergraduates. Again, the greatest impact was evidenced for work-based WIL, particularly in the last two years. The benefits from engaging in global WIL seem to have lessened over time.



Base: Domestic coursework postgraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=11,757; 2021=11,531, 2022=15,769).

Figure 11 WIL and perceived overqualification – postgraduate coursework

Figure 12 shows the positive effect of engaging in WIL for research postgraduates with respect to feeling overqualified, albeit less so than coursework graduates, particularly at the undergraduate level. The greatest impact was evidenced for work-based WIL and global WIL with perceived overqualification among these groups lessening over time and relatively lower than those who did not engage in WIL. In contrast, there was considerable fluctuation in perceptions of overqualification among those who undertook non-workplace WIL.



Base: Domestic research postgraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=1,738; 2021=1,601, 2022=1,888).

Figure 12 WIL and perceived overqualification – postgraduate research

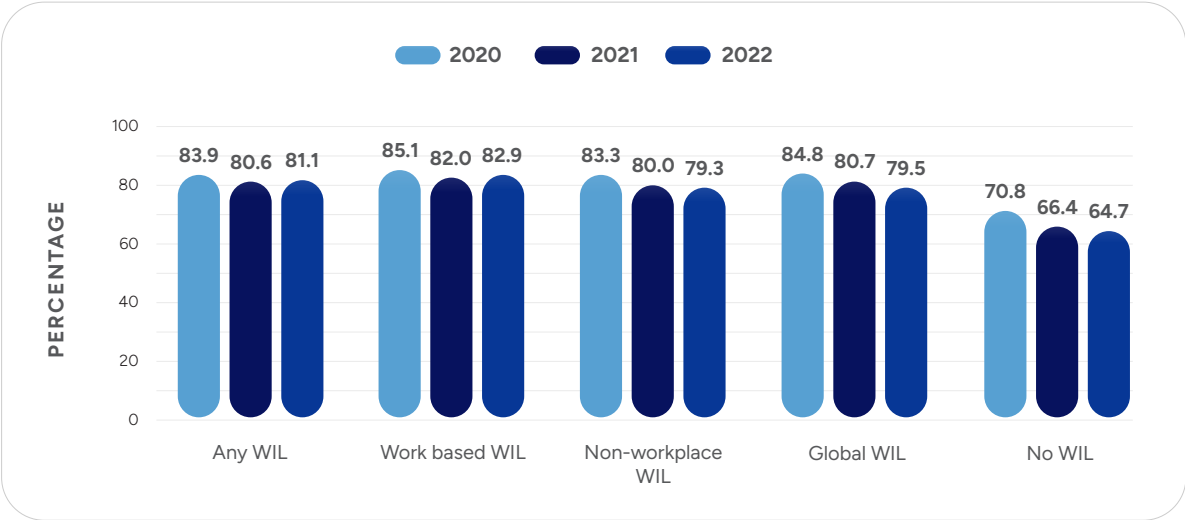
“ Data show a considerable difference in perceptions of overqualification between those who undertook work-based WIL, and those who chose not to, particularly at the undergraduate level.



WIL and preparedness for work

This section examines the proportion of domestic graduates employed full-time who stated their course had prepared them well or very well prepared for their current role. Data are presented for those that engaged in different types of WIL, and no WIL.

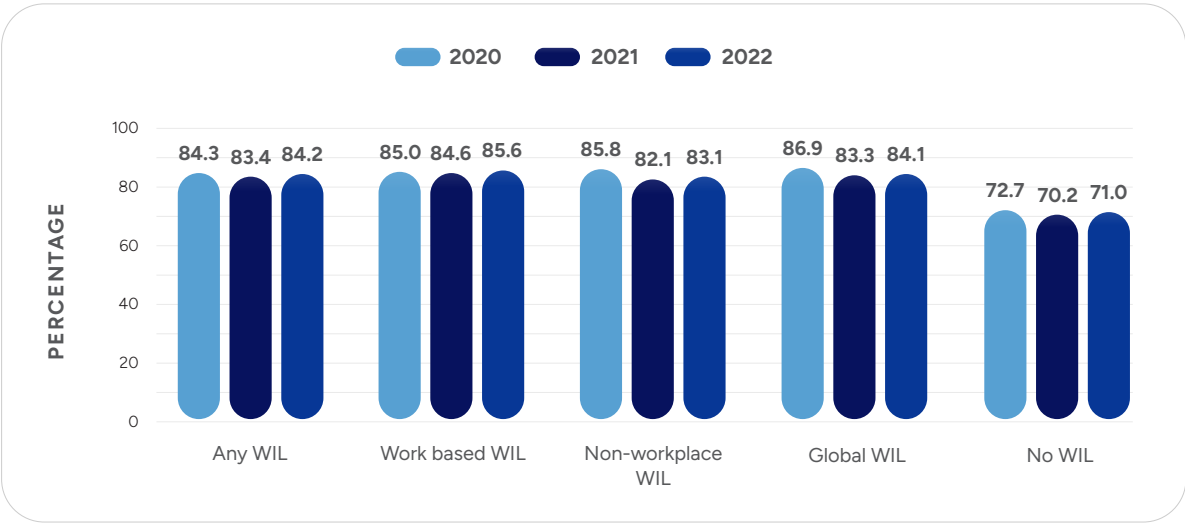
Figure 13 shows that undergraduates who took part in WIL reported higher levels of preparedness than those that did not. Undergraduates' preparedness for work declined over time, although less so for those who completed WIL, particularly work-based. The falling rates may reflect rapidly evolving skill requirements and the complexities of contemporary work practices.



Base: Domestic undergraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=17,102; 2021=16,337; 2022=21,220).

Figure 13 WIL and undergraduate preparedness for work

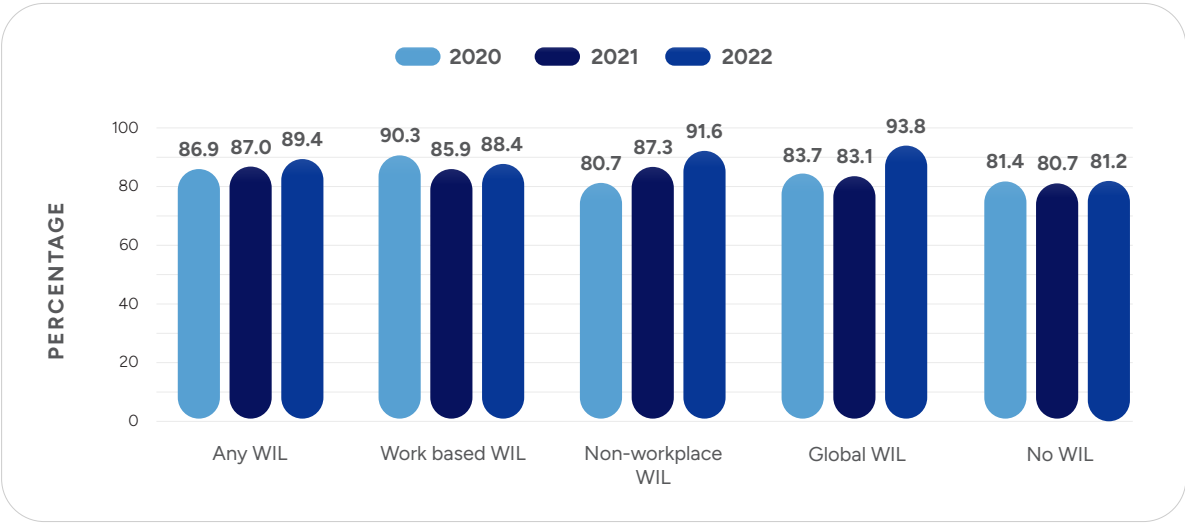
Figure 14 shows that the declining rates of preparedness seen among undergraduates were not evident in this cohort. As with undergraduates, postgraduates who engaged in WIL reported higher levels of preparedness from their coursework degrees with similar effects for the three types of WIL. Slightly declining levels of preparedness were reported for those engaging in non-workplace and global WIL.



Base: Domestic coursework postgraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response (2020=11,748; 2021=11,540, 2022=15,798).

Figure 14 WIL and preparedness for work – postgraduate coursework

Figure 15 shows a less marked impact of WIL on the preparedness of postgraduates from their research degree programs. Levels of preparedness remained static over time for those not engaging in WIL. Levels of preparedness fell slightly among graduates who completed work-based WIL while those who engaged in non-workplace WIL and global WIL evidenced increasing rates of preparedness over the three-year period.



Base: Domestic research postgraduates in full-time employment who gave a valid response w(2020=1,734; 2021=1,596, 2022=1,889).

Figure 15 WIL and preparedness for work – postgraduate research

“ Findings highlight how WIL can help new coursework graduates feel prepared for their job roles



Work-based WIL and full-time employment for equity groups

This section breaks down the relationship between work-based WIL and full-time employment for four undergraduate equity groups who were available for full-time employment.

Figure 16 highlights how regional undergraduates who undertook work-based WIL reported consistently higher rates of full-time employment than those who did not engage in that type of WIL.

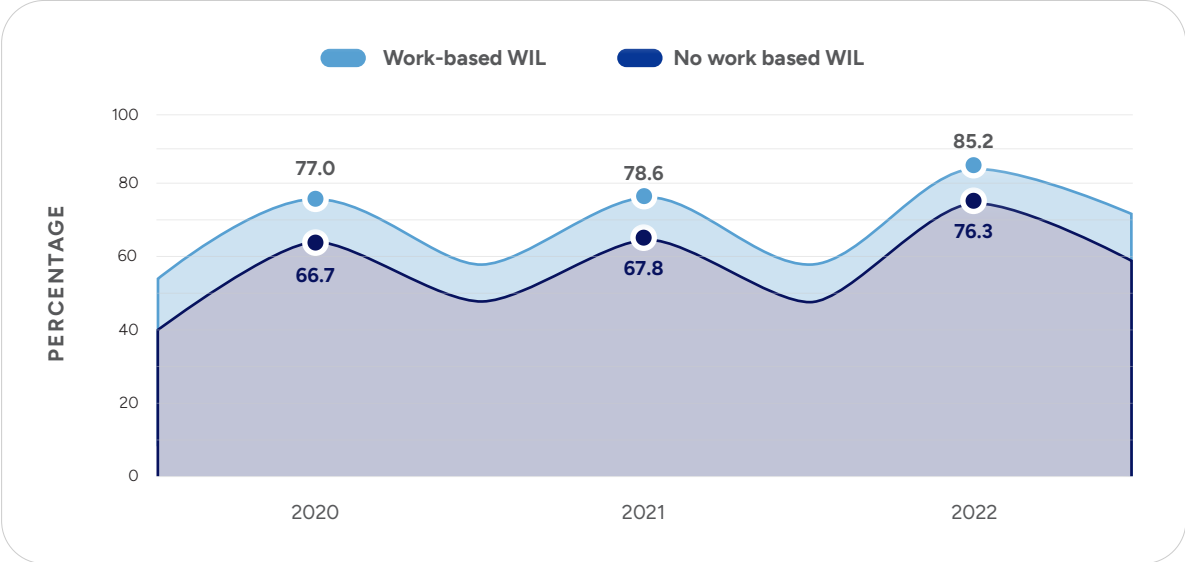


Figure 16 Work-based WIL and full-time employment – regional undergraduates

The benefit from Indigenous graduates completing work-based WIL, compared to no WIL at all, is illustrated in Figure 17, although the advantage has eroded over time. This could be attributed to their relatively strong employment outcomes post-graduation, irrespective of undertaking WIL or not.

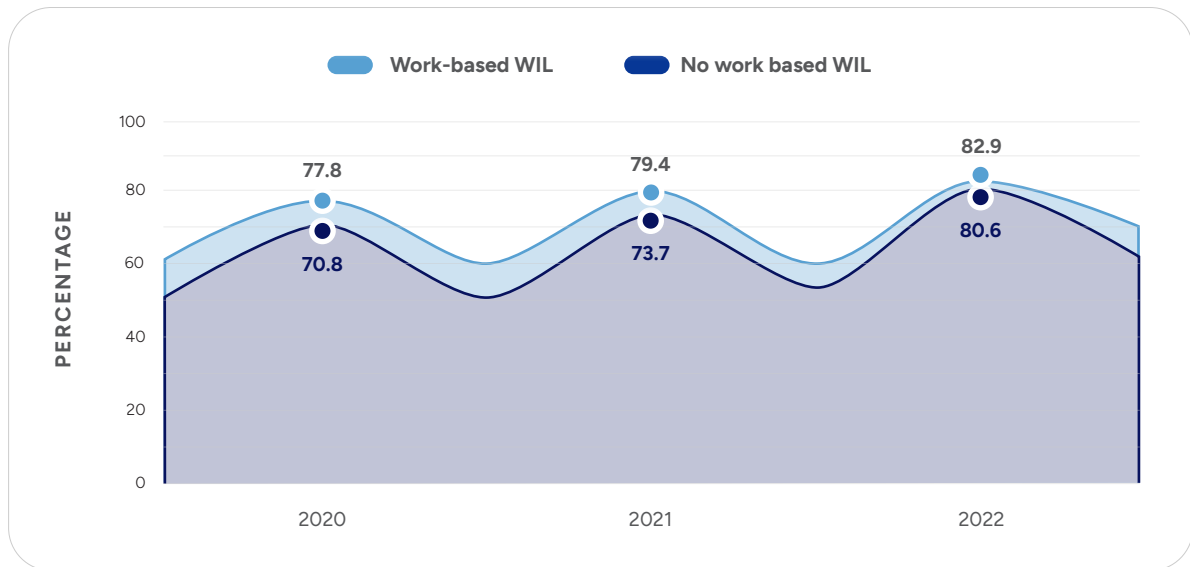


Figure 17 Work-based WIL and full-time employment – Indigenous undergraduates

Figure 18 shows a widening gap over the three-year period between the full-time employment rates of undergraduates with disability who undertook work-based WIL, and those who did not.

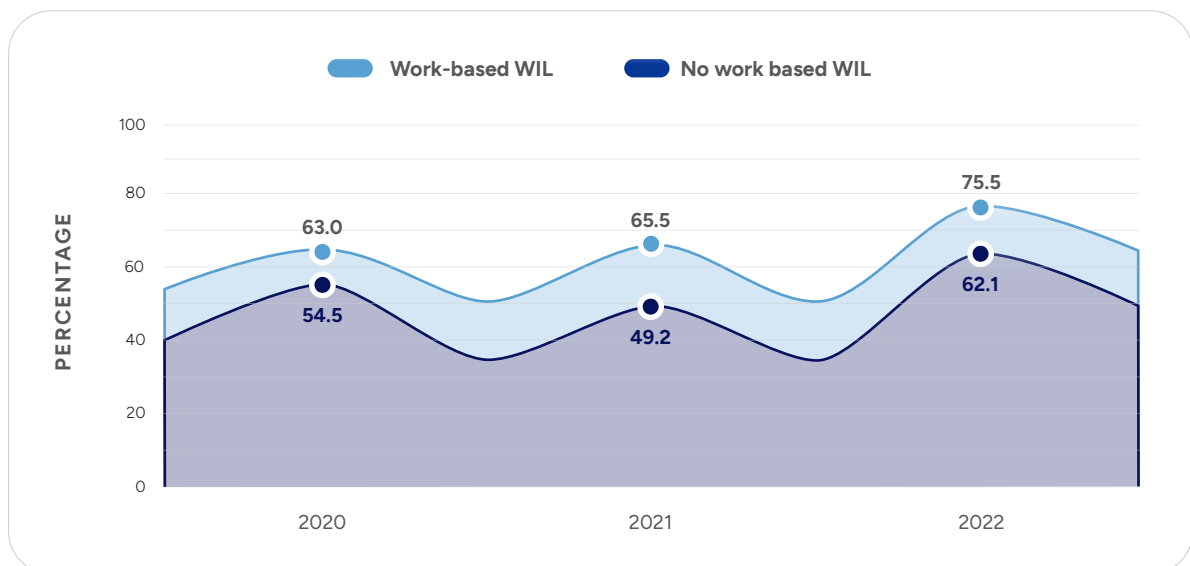


Figure 18 Work-based WIL and full-time employment – undergraduates with disability

“ Evidence points to the potential employment benefits for undergraduates with disability engaging in work-based WIL.

Figure 19 shows how graduates of low socio-economic status who engaged in work-based WIL reported consistently higher full-time employment rates than those who chose not to participate, with the gap widening over the three-year period.

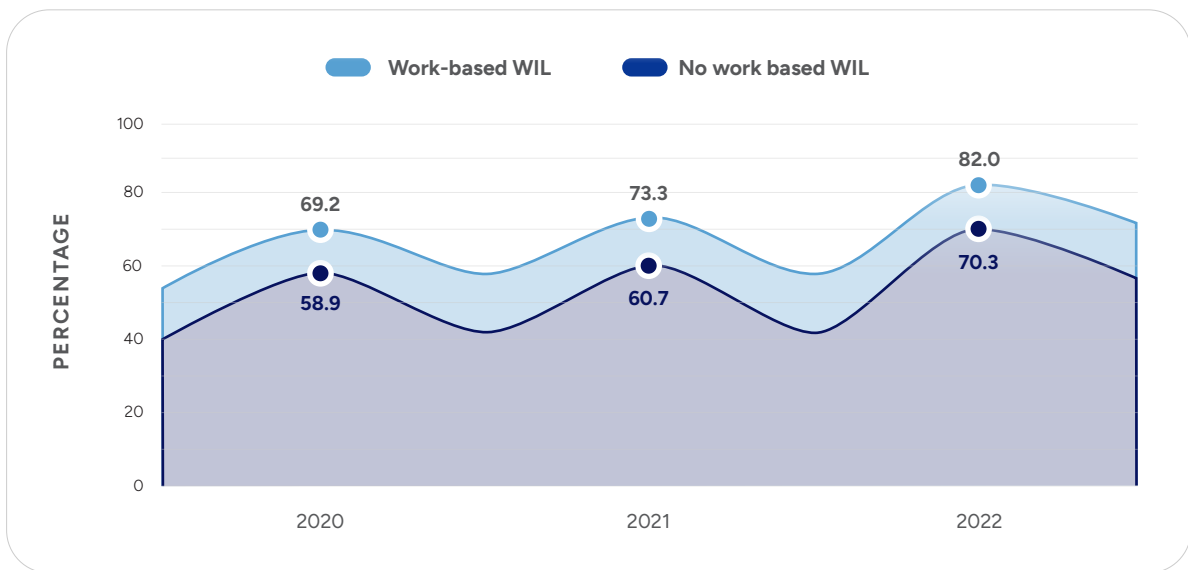


Figure 19 Work-based WIL and undergraduate full-time employment – low socio-economic status



Work-based WIL and perceived overqualification for equity groups

This section breaks down the relationship between work-based WIL and perceived overqualification for four undergraduate equity groups who were working in full-time roles.

Figure 20 illuminates the value of work-based WIL for reducing the likelihood of regional undergraduates feeling overqualified in their full-time roles. The gap in perceived overqualification among regional undergraduates between those who completed work-based WIL, and those who did not, has widened over the three-year period.

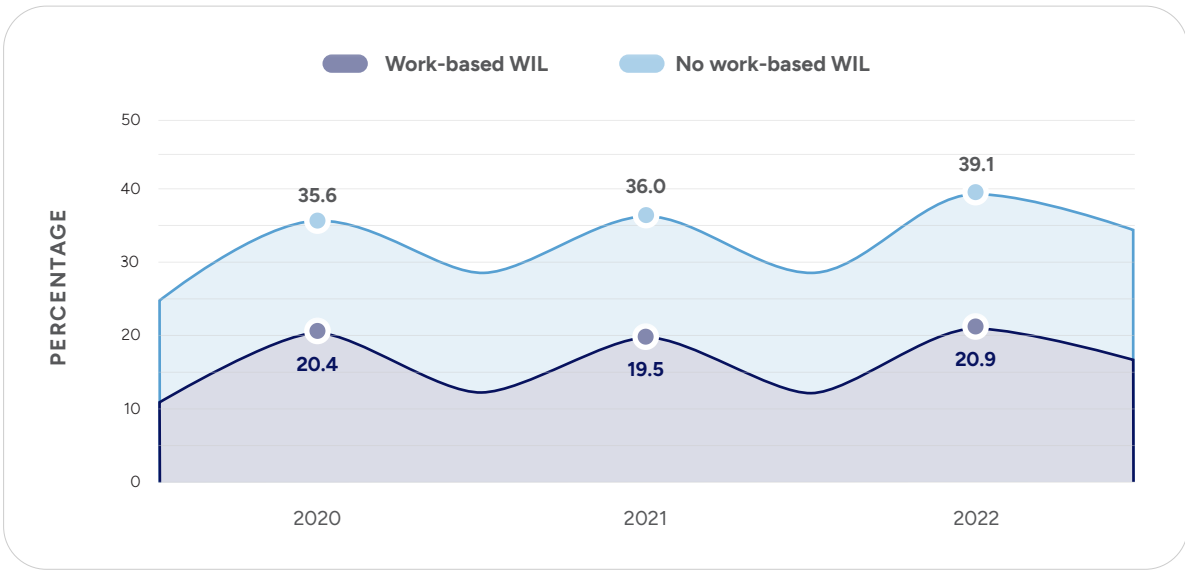


Figure 20 Work-based WIL and perceived overqualification – regional undergraduates

As with regional undergraduates, graduates of Indigenous status who completed work-based WIL reported lower levels of perceived overqualification in their full-time roles (see Figure 21). There was a rise in the rate of perceived overqualification among those not engaging in work-based WIL which warrants careful monitoring. It is important to note the low proportion of Indigenous undergraduates in higher education, leading to small sample sizes.

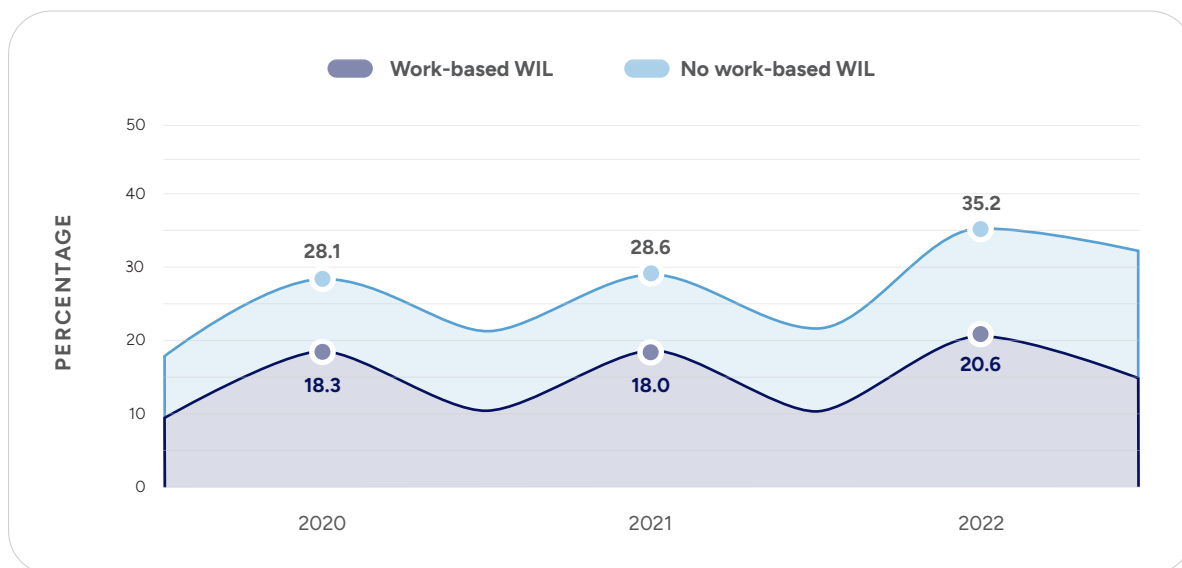


Figure 21 Work-based WIL and perceived overqualification – Indigenous undergraduates

Similar to regional and Indigenous graduates, undergraduates with disability clearly benefited from work-based WIL in terms of perceived overqualification. The evidenced gap in perceptions between those completing work-based WIL, and those not, also widened over time.

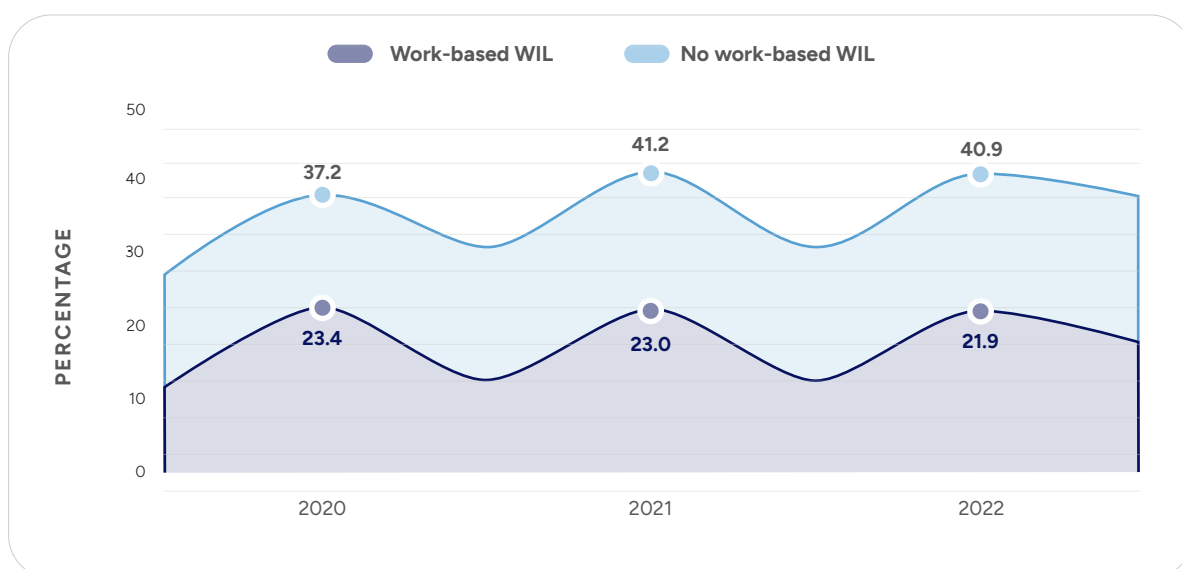


Figure 22 Work-based WIL and perceived overqualification – undergraduates with disability

As for the other equity groups, graduates of low socio-economic status benefited considerably from engaging in work-based WIL with lower levels of perceived overqualification which also fell over time.

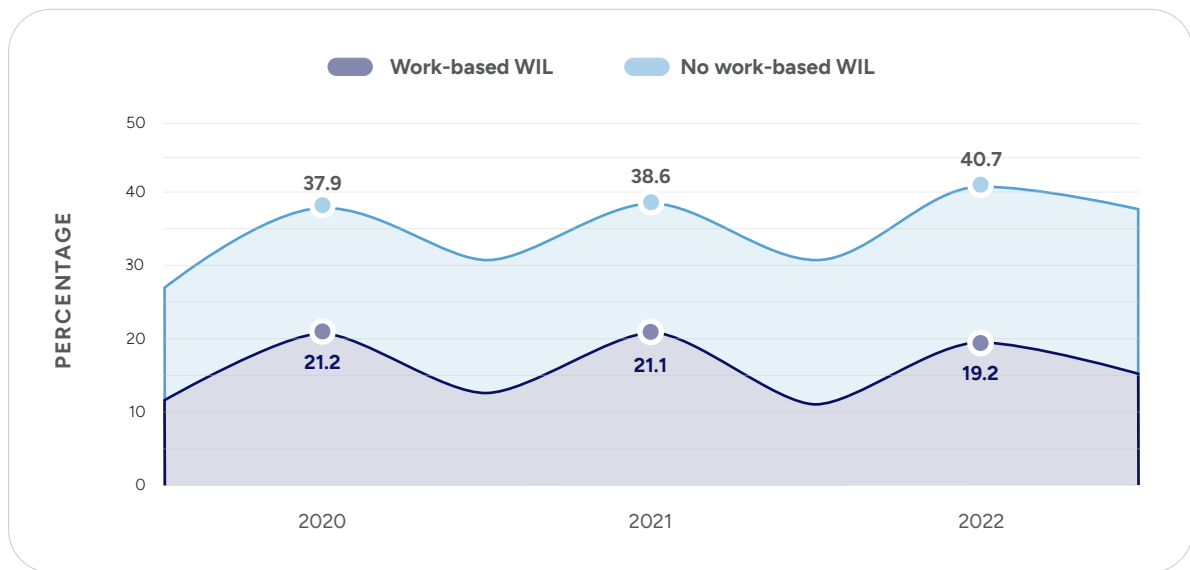


Figure 23 Work-based WIL and undergraduates' perceived overqualification – low socio-economic status