Accessible WIL:
A Roadmap for Accessible Work Integrated Learning

Acknowledgments

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Purpose

Access to work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for students with disabilities (SwDs) is hindered by multiple barriers across different stages of the process.

This document examines the factors from the individual, institutional, and beyond the institution levels that influence accessibility at each stage of the WIL pathway, with a particular focus on helping those working in PSIs to navigate Information and Communications Standards concerning WIL.

Given that our project is centred around digital accessibility in WIL, we embrace a **broad definition of digital accessibility,** which encompasses strategies and actions related to designing websites, mobile applications, electronic documents, and assistive technologies in ways that afford people with disabilities the opportunity to acquire information, interact, and use services in an equally effective, integrated, and enjoyable manner.

Analyzing digital accessibility in WIL, specifically, means the observation of the ways in which students use digital tools to learn about and access WIL services and also fulfill their requirements once in a WIL program.

Method

The methodology used includes an environmental scan of eCampus member institutions' websites. The scan also includes government and NGO websites and industry partners. Further, key literature at the intersection of WIL, accessibility, and Dx was examined. For context on the current profile of SwDs accessing WIL opportunities, we also consulted the BHER Student Survey Report Dashboard by Blueprint ADE of pre- and post-WIL experience data. Finally, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with accessible WIL officers, advisors, and disability support officers.

Literature Key Findings

From the literature, it is evident that Ontario's WIL landscape has many barriers and challenges that impede access to WIL for students with disabilities. These barriers come from both the PSI and employer sides.

WIL offices alone often lack formalized processes to address the unique needs of SwDs and often rely on various informal mechanisms. Accessibility in the co-curricular, professional development, and WIL spaces still needs to be developed. WIL offices and accessibility offices remain heavily siloed. Tailored formal policies, formal procedures and staff training are needed.

WIL and academic educators have been reported to engage in unrecognized labour ("invisible work") in an effort to deal with systemic lacks, with negative effects on staff.

WIL students often refrained from disclosing disability and demonstrated limited selfadvocacy, citing fears of stereotyping and discrimination. Employers indicate that their resources to support students from diverse backgrounds are often either not well-developed or do not exist.

SwDs often report both physical and attitudinal barriers in their work environment.

Environmental Scan Key Findings

While all the PSIs scanned have accessibility policies, Accessibility Plans are less common. Also, PSIs vary in their approach to compliance with these standards, and so different institutions formulate their accessibility plans differently.

Accessibility services at eCampusOntario member institutions are designed in alignment with the AODA and reflect each institution's commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments.

All member institutions within the eCampusOntario network have career services websites, with some providing integrated WIL services on these platforms while some maintain separate websites dedicated to WIL-related offerings.

Despite the availability of these resources, students from marginalized groups are often not fully aware of them.

While accessibility services are available to support the learning of SwDs, our investigation revealed a significant gap in dedicated WIL services explicitly tailored to meet the needs of this student demographic. Good practices and potential community partners are listed later in this document.

The Roadmap

We developed a Roadmap illustrating the five stages that SwDs go through in WIL.
For each stage, this document describes the current issues and needs, and then provides recommendations and good practices for the individual, institution, and beyond the institution levels. Below, we summarize the main points for each stage.

Stage 1, Awareness/Information.

Limited awareness, reluctance to disclose disabilities, gaps in initial contact with officers, and inadequate accessibility measures are the main barriers identified at this stage.

- WIL officers are encouraged to identify barriers through feedback, while maintaining updated internal resources and advocating for improvements.

- PSIs should involve SwDs in WIL design, implement consistent accessible practices across services, and ensure all digital content complies with standards while integrating accessibility support into pre-WIL programs.

- PSIs should establish partnerships with employers for universally accessible workplaces. Updating policies, streamlining and increasing available funding, and supporting employers are also vital aspects to consider.

Stage 2, Access/Assessment of student needs.

Challenges at this stage include discrepancies in disability support language and policies between high school and post-secondary education, students potentially opting out of WIL due to

delays in graduation, and hardship in accessing support without adequate documentation. Most notably, PSIs provide WIL through both program-specific offices and centralized offices, requiring improved collaboration across PSI offices to tailor support for SwDs.

- WIL officers should prioritize student preferences when meeting, avoid assumptions based on presumed disabilities, allow students to self assess their needs, and educate students on self advocacy and accommodation procedures.

- PSIs should ensure physical and digital accessibility for any space, use self reporting tools tailored to SwDs to enhance engagement, make eligibility requirements and assessment criteria for WIL more inclusive, and enhance coordination between accessibility and WIL offices to avoid siloing.

- The system needs to target funding for WIL programs for SwDs, especially in underrepresented fields, and foster strong relationships between WIL offices and employers to raise awareness about resources for providing accessible WIL opportunities.

Stage 3, Application.

SwDs find some application requirements and processes too challenging to finalize. For instance, navigating multiple digital platforms and systems is overwhelming, resulting in self-exclusion due to systemic barriers. SwDs face prejudice and stigmatization from recruiters and employers, and many do not feel safe in disclosing.

- PSI officers can help students articulate their skills and experiences on resumes and during interviews. Officers should be aware of funding opportunities for SwDs

and be in dialogue with employers to assess their readiness to accommodate.

- PSIs should also facilitate a dialogue with employers about workload and accommodations.

- Employers should be supported in implementing sensitivity and offering formal and informal accommodations, disseminating transparent information on their accessibility policies, and showing flexibility in hiring processes.

Stage 4, Recruitment/Onboarding.

Exploitation, lack of accessibility standards, and misconceptions and prejudice from employers are concerns at this stage.

- WIL officers should help students understand accessibility-related rights and responsibilities, educate students on self advocacy, and build an action plan to communicate their functional limitations, needs, strengths, skills, and expertise to employers.

- PSIs should offer workplace training to SwDs covering self advocacy, communication, conflict resolution, and professionalism; they should also facilitate electronic forms to monitor the WIL experience.

- Employers should provide internal training to staff, ask students how they can support them, and use the time between recruitment and start date to implement accommodations.

Stage 5, The Experience.

Challenges at this stage include the absence of an organizational culture that supports and allows open conversations about disabilities and

accommodations, SwDs' assumption that the arrangements provided during their studies will automatically transfer into the WIL experience, and lack of policies and procedures already in place.

- WIL officers should identify SwDs' individual needs and proper supports. They should also communicate such information to the employer.

- PSIs should implement "digital check-ins" to track SwDs during the experience, create comprehensive online resource hubs, offer internal WIL opportunities to their students, and implement thorough evaluation plans after WIL experiences are concluded.

- Employers should allow creative ways of working like team-based projects, provide mentorship, collaborate with third-party organizations, and implement peer support groups or employee resource groups.

Finally, the findings and reflections in this document represent a starting point for the conversation on digital accessibility in WIL. Due to the ambiguities and gaps that still exist in the relationships among PSIs, employers, community organizations, and SwDs, there is still much discussion needed about prevailing regulations and who is responsible for what when it comes to digital accessibility in WIL.

Introduction:
A complex scenario

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) has set a goal of making the province of Ontario fully accessible for persons with disabilities by the year 2025.

eCampusOntario asked us to investigate what barriers students with disabilities (SwDs) still face when seeking work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and what role digital transformation (Dx) can play in making WIL experiences accessible. To serve this purpose, we have created this resource for faculty and staff at postsecondary education institutions, with a particular focus on WIL and accessibility officers. We also consider the role of employers and provide some suggestions on what PSIs could do to support relationships with them.

The main goal of this resource is to encourage and support conversations among PSIs, community organizations, accessibility experts, and employers as WIL hosting organizations around what the system is doing when it comes to SwDs interested in WIL. What still needs to be done for SwDs to have equitable, meaningful, and beneficial experiences along the WIL path, from learning about WIL to applying for opportunities, being recruited, and completing WIL?

The topics highlighted in this document are intrinsically complex. Their definitions and implementations vary across people, organizations and sectors, and institutions, sometimes with contradictory outcomes. Groups and categories are affected in heterogeneous ways, providing a variety of perspectives and perceptions, as well as needs and expectations. Knowledge and experience about these topics are also heterogeneous across the sector, with

significant consequences for approaches and strategies. Finally, the lack of standardization and common practices leaves space for a level of individual and institutional discretion that deeply affects decisions and outcomes.

Therefore, we have adopted a multi-method approach to conducting our investigation. We ran environmental scans of resources and information available from PSIs across Ontario as well as legal, governmental, and employer-related sources. We added a literature review as a chapter in this document, from which we extracted suggestions that are included throughout the document where appropriate. We also executed statistical analyses of public datasets (e.g., StatsCanada) to provide a general overview of disability-related topics in Canada and Ontario, and we added analyses from the BHER Student Survey Report Dashboard by Blueprint ADE of pre- and post-WIL experiences to share the most up-to-date data currently available on WIL and accessibility. Finally, we conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with accessibility officers and managers, career advisors, disability learning support officers, WIL/experiential learning offices and managers, e-learning and digital products developers, community engagement and business development officers, and representatives of community organizations.

In focusing on WIL, disabilities, and digital accessibility, we adopted an intersectional approach to make officers aware of the multiplicity of

intervening factors that make each experience unique and the subsequent need to tailor interventions while pursuing a shared goal. We base this framework on the concept of targeted universalism, which suggests that the strategies developed to achieve universal goals (e.g. accessibility) should be as targeted as possible based on how different groups are situated within structures, cultures, and across geographies.

To reflect the complexity of the situations in which WIL and accessibility officers find themselves while serving SwDs, our framework is divided into stages that trace a general path throughout a WIL experience. After illustrating the current issues common at each stage, our framework offers good practices and suggestions through an ecological approach[1] that considers actions and implications at the levels of the individual, institution, and beyond. This way, the reader can easily identify issues and recommendations for each stage and assess at which level they are located. To help practitioners and PSIs gauge themselves, we compiled a list of questions regarding each stage and collected them in an Assessment Tool at the end of the document. Through this tool, PSI officers can assess their current situation, prioritize major gaps that need solutions, and integrate additional improvements into their current operational models.

A few additional considerations

While all the current AODA Standards are critical for accessibility,[2] and aspects of digital transformation are present in all of them, this roadmap is focused on helping those working in PSIs navigate the Information and Communications Standards concerning WIL in particular, given that our project is centred around Digital Accessibility in WIL.

We embrace a broad **definition of digital accessibility,** which encompasses strategies and actions related to designing websites, mobile applications, electronic documents, and assistive technologies in ways that afford people with disabilities the opportunity to acquire information, engage in interactions, and use services in an equally effective, integrated, and enjoyable manner. We also consider **digital transformation (Dx)** the primary strategy to achieve digital accessibility. To that end, we investigated which current services, activities, and products might need digital transformation (and to what extent) in order to become more accessible.

Therefore, analyzing digital accessibility in WIL results in the observation of the ways in which students use digital tools to learn about and access WIL services and also fulfill their requirements once in a WIL program.

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1   The ecological approach (developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the '70s and '80s) offers a framework to deconstruct overlapping barriers to access WIL opportunities systematically. The approach focuses on understanding how the interaction of micro, meso, and macro factors affects an individual's behaviours and development. We adopt this approach to analyze factors contributing to accessibility in WIL at various levels and examine how the actions of individual PSI officers, high-education institutions, and the general system surrounding PSIs can contribute to dismantling barriers.

2   **Information and Communications Standards**, **Employment Standards**, **Transportation Standards**, **Design of Public Spaces Standards**, and **Customer Service Standards**

Of course, digital accessibility through digital transformation can't solve everything. In many cases, experiences are related to on-site situations, and, sometimes, Dx can be an additional barrier instead of a solution (for instance, those with ADHD who do not want to be in front of a screen for lengthy periods).

For these reasons Dx might be approached from three perspectives:

a. Activities can be organized in a traditional, in-person way, with no digitalization. For instance, for some people with ADHD, the prolonged use of screens, including meetings and following presentations, may be exhausting, while an in-person meeting can be easier to manage.

b. Traditional activities can be recorded and digitized for later consultation. This might be a good solution for those who prefer to avoid in-person contexts and are comfortable with using technologies.

c. Activities can be designed as digital products and provided accordingly so that the entire experience happens through digital tools and multiple channels of communication. This might be the perfect solution for students with specific disabilities who need assistive devices.

It is each PSI's and office's responsibility to identify issues and tailor solutions, in constant dialogue with all stakeholders, including students, specialized community organizations, and employers.

Finally, this document is not legal advice. It is only intended to provide information and support on becoming more accessible with reference to relevant laws/legislations/standards/codes such as the AODA, the Ontario Code, and others mentioned herein. BHER developed this roadmap as a first step towards supporting organizations and institutions to enhance accessibility. If there is ever any conflict between this roadmap and a relevant law/legislation/standard/code/etc., the latter is always the final authority.

Methodology

Environmental Scan

We conducted a comprehensive environmental scan of 51 websites belonging to all member institutions of the eCampus consortium. Our primary objective was to gather insights into the availability and accessibility of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) resources within these institutions. Initially, our scan encompassed a broad examination of WIL resources offered by these institutions, ranging from general information about WIL programs to specific support services tailored for students with disabilities.

Subsequently, we narrowed our focus to delve deeper into the specific resources for supporting SwDs throughout the WIL process. This entailed scrutinizing the accessibility features embedded within WIL programs, both universal and those designed explicitly for SwDs. Based on our literature and legislation review, which found elements of digital accessibility and digital transformation in various components of accessibility services, we expanded our search to include all services offered on the websites of PSIs and in their Accessibility and WIL offices. We then examined how the digital component is incorporated into their design framework and implemented across the organization. We paid particular attention to the accessibility provisions provided before beginning WIL experiences, during the placements, and post-placement, ensuring a holistic perspective on support mechanisms.

Furthermore, our environmental scan extended beyond WIL resources to explore other online accessibility-related materials on institutional websites. Here, we concentrated on institutional

policies about accessibility and the various support services and resources offered to promote accessibility within the campus community.

Our objective was to gather comprehensive insights into the landscape of WIL resources and accessibility provisions across eCampusOntario member institutions. This enabled us to identify trends, gaps, and best practices in accessibility support for students with disabilities engaging in WIL experiences.

We also conducted a supplementary environmental scan that explored two other sectors: government and non-governmental organizations. Starting with the government, we scanned the provincial level (Government of Ontario and Ontario's Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility) and federal level (Government of Canada). The scan aimed to collect and review publicly available content about accessibility, the AODA, people with disabilities, and youth with disabilities from these sources. Content identified through the web scan ranged from legislations, laws, and standards to tools, resources, and services. We also conducted a high-level scan of similar content at the international level to get a holistic understanding of the current landscape. Second, we conducted a web scan of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ontario, across Canada, and internationally to identify organizations working to create accessibility for youth or other job-seekers with disabilities or working on digital accessibility. We identified websites and contact information for these NGOs and some of their key publicly available tools, resources, and services (A chart compiling this information is available on page 87). This helped to explain the backdrop against which PSIs, WIL

practitioners, students with disabilities, and other key actors operate on the journey toward accessibility.

By integrating insights from both educational and non-education perspectives, we aimed to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the current state and potential avenues for enriching the accessibility and quality of WIL programs.

Literature Review

We thoroughly reviewed key literature at the intersection of our themes of accessibility, WIL, and digital transformation (Dx). Our review's main target was literature at the nexus of all three topics; however, those intersecting at only two topics were also considered.

Literature from Ontario, followed by the rest of Canada, was prioritized given this project's Ontario focus. Literature from the US, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand were also included to supplement Canadian literature and for comparative analysis. We considered academic literature as well as grey literature. Using these inclusion criteria, we conducted keyword searches on EBSCO, Google/Google Scholar, and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Using boolean operators, our primary keyword search terms included combinations of the following:

- **Variations of WIL** ["WIL" OR "work integrated learning" OR "work integrated-learning" OR "experiential learning" OR internship OR "co-operative education"]
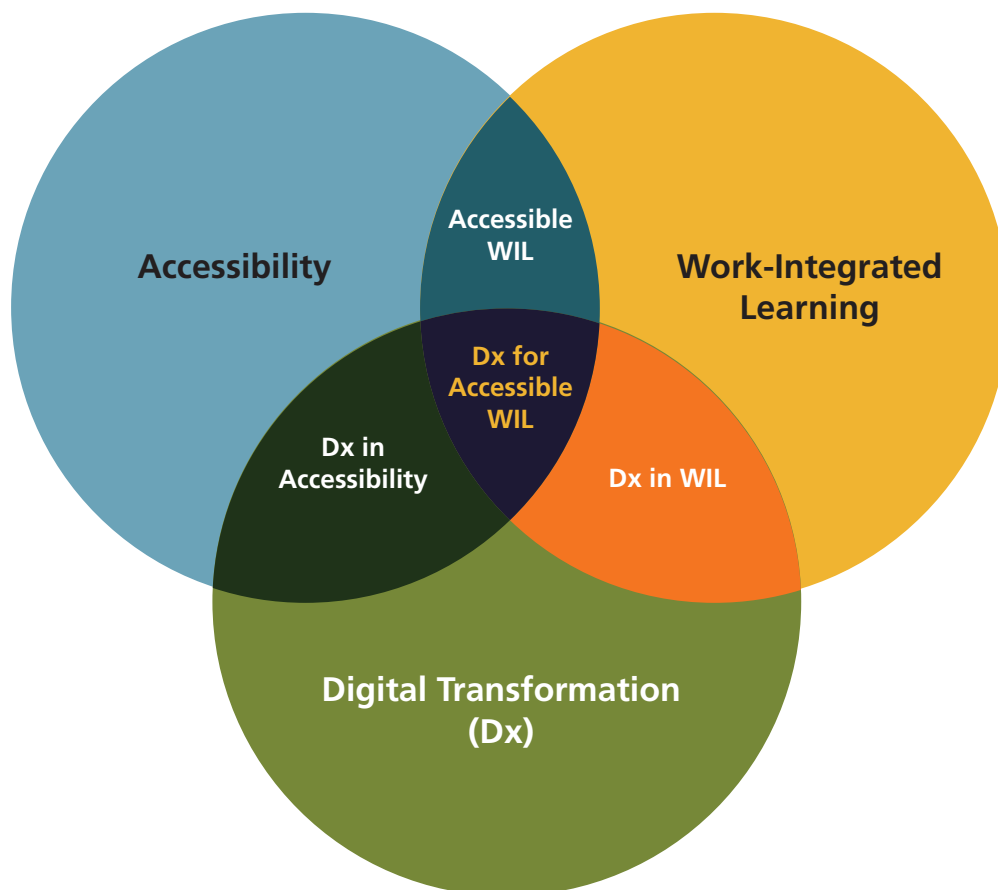
- **Accessibility-/disability-related terminology** [accessib* OR disab* OR "people with disabilities" OR "students with disabilities" OR "Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act" OR AODA]

- **Terms related to digital transformation** ["digital transformation" OR "digital accessibility" OR "digital" OR "digitization" OR "digitalization"]

- **Geographical identifiers** [Ontario OR Canada]

Broad use of these search terms resulted in hundreds of search results, most of which were irrelevant to this literature review. A more granular search using a combination of select terms (namely, "work integrated learning," "experiential learning," accessib*, disab*, "students with disabilities," AODA, digital, Ontario and Canada) was then conducted. This resulted in dozens of relevant search results, and ultimately, around 20 pieces of literature primarily informed the final literature review for this project.

The main journal identified throughout the review was the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL)*, followed by the *International Journal of Inclusive Education; Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning; Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management; Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education; and Studies in Higher Education.* eCampusOntario, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), and Toronto Metropolitan University were the key sources for grey literature.

Interviews

We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews investigating the current difficulties and barriers faced by SwDs seeking WIL experiences; the tools and strategies interviewees use to support SwDs, including digital tools; what solutions can be adopted, and what the role of Dx may be; what resources they would need from internal (PSIs) and external (community organizations, employers) sources to move forward; and which actions should be prioritized.

We interviewed accessibility officers and managers, career advisors, disability learning support officers, WIL/experiential learning offices and managers, e-learning and digital products developers, community engagement and business development officers, and representatives of community organizations. To help ensure anonymity, the exact job titles and respective universities/organizations have not been identified here.

The recruitment was conducted by advertising the project across eCampusOntario and BHER memberships and through LinkedIn. Once interviews started, we also adopted a snowball sample method by asking each interviewee for contacts in their professional networks.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and then transcribed through otter AI, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. Finally, we conducted a thematic analysis following the stage structure of the present report—from awareness to the execution of WIL experiences. To support that, we shared the stage structure, the interview questions, and the consent form with the interviewees prior to the interviews. Then, we extracted pertinent information and assigned it to the related stage. We also considered topics that spontaneously emerged during the interviews.

Data Analysis

For context on the current profile of students with disabilities accessing WIL opportunities, we consulted the **BHER Student Survey Report Dashboard by Blueprint ADE** of pre- and post-WIL experience data. As part of BHER's WIL program, surveys are sent to students at the beginning (pre) and at the end of their WIL (post). The data used in our analysis is retrieved from survey results between October 2022 and March 2024.

The pre-WIL survey data offers valuable insights into the backgrounds and demographic identities of students with disabilities (SwDs) engaging in WIL opportunities. Subsequently, the post-WIL survey data reports outcomes after students have undergone their most recent WIL experiences. Our assessment approach involves analyzing matched pre- and post-WIL survey responses. The analysis includes frequency tables showing response rates by relevant questions about outcomes such as social and emotional improvement, satisfaction with WIL, and more. It is important to note that a lack of post-WIL survey responses from those with disabilities posed a challenge in conducting more in-depth analysis for meaningful comparisons between SwDs and those without disabilities. However, this simple analysis provides a general overview of the profile of students completing WIL opportunities.

Definitions: Disability

Context on the Concept of Disability and Modern-Day Definitions

The concept of disability has undergone a profound transformation in Canada since the mid-20th century, shaped by changing societal attitudes, advocacy efforts and the development of inclusive policies and legislation. Before the 20th century, there were essentially no solutions or assistance widely available to persons with disabilities. Given a lack of information on this group, many of these individuals were highly discriminated against in multiple ways (Medjuck, 2015).

Until the mid-20th century, the most common perspective on disability was the Charitable Model, a concept defined by religious authorities. This model depicted disabled individuals as objects to be pitied, framing them as passive recipients of charity and benevolence. This definition stripped disabled people of agency, leaving them dependent on the goodwill of others and lacking control over their own lives (McColl, 2020).

By the middle of the 20th century, the emergence of rehabilitation fostered a new perspective on life for those with disabilities. The Economic Model followed, which defined their worth in terms of productivity and economic self-sufficiency. This era introduced vocational rehabilitation, sheltered workshops, and disability pensions. However, it did not recognize the full potential of disabled individuals, often degrading them to being simply welfare recipients rather than actual contributors to society.

The Sociological Model came about in the 1950s and 60s, segregating people with disabilities from mainstream society, leaving them on the margins of society. The most prevalent 20th-century definition, the Biomedical Model, defined disability based on an inherent flaw or impairment that can be fixed. This approach assumes that simply overcoming the disability medically will solve everything (McColl, 2020).

Modern definitions of disability began to spring from the social movements that arose later in the 20th century (Galer, 2015). In the 1970s, a shift occurred in the perception of and advocacy for disability in Canada. Individuals with disabilities began creating their own groups, partly fueled by protest culture and civil rights movements. This eventually led to formal groups being established and later unified under the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. The 1980s included a surge in interest in disability rights, and efforts to include disability into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms succeeded, including them in the Federal Employment Equity Act in 1986.

After setbacks in progress brought upon by the economic recession in the 1990s, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was passed in the 21st century. AODA marked a significant legislative expansion towards creating a "barrier-free" society for people with disabilities in Ontario. The revival of public interest and political commitment led Canada to uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010 (Galer, 2015). This cemented Canada's commitment to advancing rights for people with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2023).

When we consider the term disability now, we must also consider international, federal, and provincial definitions of disability. At the **international level**, Canada is aligned with global standards such as the UN CRPD, which requires the promotion and ensuring of full human rights for persons with disabilities in addition to full equality under the law ([Government of Canada, 2022](#)). The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) provides a framework that considers the multidimensional nature of disability, defining disability as an "umbrella term" for limitations and impairments as well as participation restrictions. It signifies the adverse effects arising from the interplay of an individual's health conditions with contextual factors such as their environment as well as personal elements (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Moreover, the **Government of Canada's** Federal Disability Reference Guide defines disability as "a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and mind and features of the society in which they live" ([Government of Canada, 2022](#)). Notably, given the complexity of the term, there is no single definition of disability used across all federal programs. Rather, the federal government advises consultation of international definitions such as the WHO and the UN CRPD. Finally, at the **provincial level** in Ontario, the AODA follows the definition of disability as described in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Formal Definitions of "Disability"

International:

UNCRPD, Article 1 – Purpose: "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." ([source](#))

Federal:

Accessible Canada Act: Disability "means any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society." ([source](#))

Employment Equity Act: A person with a disability is "any person who has a long-term, reoccurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric, or learning impairment and who considers themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment." ([source](#))

Canadian Human Rights Act: A disability is "any previous or existing mental or physical disability and includes disfigurement and previous or existing dependence of alcohol or a drug." ([source](#))

Provincial:

Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code): Section 10 of the Code defines "disability" as:

1. "Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,

2. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,

3. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,

4. A mental disorder, or

5. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997" (source).

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA): Same definition as the Ontario Code.
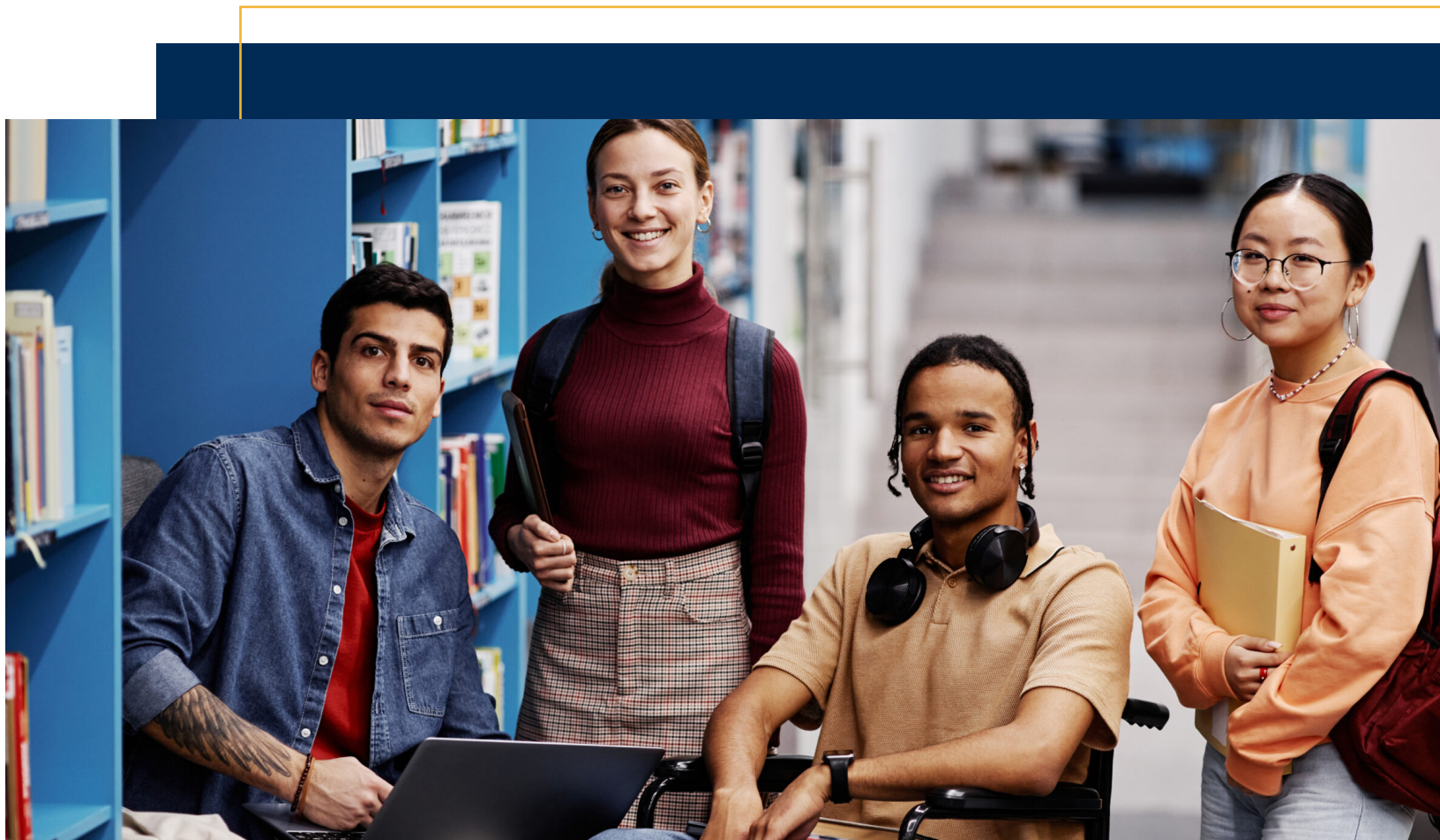
Definitions: Accessibility

When talking about accessibility, the focus is often on how to accommodate physical disabilities and impediments. While that is an important area of accessibility, it is not the only one. Accessibility is a much larger concept. **Internationally**, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international, comprehensive human rights treaty that affirms the human rights of persons with all types of disabilities. It considers the accessibility of information and communication technology as a human right. Canada ratified the UNCRPD in 2010.

Nationally, **Canada** adopted the Accessible Canada Act in 2019, which aims to identify and remove existing barriers and prevent new barriers in the public sector, Crown corporations, and all federally-regulated organizations in the following priority areas: employment, built environment, information and communication technologies, communication, technologies other than information and communication,

procurement, design and delivery of programs and services, and transportation. This Act defines accessibility as "creating communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society without barriers."

The Province of Ontario has two main pieces of accessibility legislation. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) has been law in Ontario since 2005. The purpose of the AODA is to create an accessible province for all Ontarians by setting accessibility standards that organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors must follow. The AODA aims to achieve full accessibility in the province by 2025. It defines accessibility as designing products, electronics, and environments to be useable by people with disabilities. This definition is narrower than the ACA one as it specifically focuses on people with disabilities. As per the AODA's website:

"The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards or rules so that all Ontarians will benefit from accessible services, programs, spaces, and employment. The standards help organizations to prevent or remove barriers that limit the things people with disabilities can do, the places they can go, and the attitudes of service providers toward them."

It aims to do so through five standards, combined under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). These five standards are:

1. Information and Communications Standards

2. Employment Standards

3. Transportation Standards

4. Design of Public Spaces Standards

5. Customer Service Standards

The second piece of legislation is Ontario's Human Rights Code. The Code, established by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), prohibits actions that discriminate against people based on protected grounds in a protected social area. Disability is a protected ground on the basis of past, present, or perceived disability. The Code was enacted in Ontario in 1962, the first in Canada.

While not legally binding, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are another crucial accessibility resource. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) publish the WCAG international standard, which guides web content accessibility, primarily for people with disabilities. **The AODA currently requires that public websites meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA.**
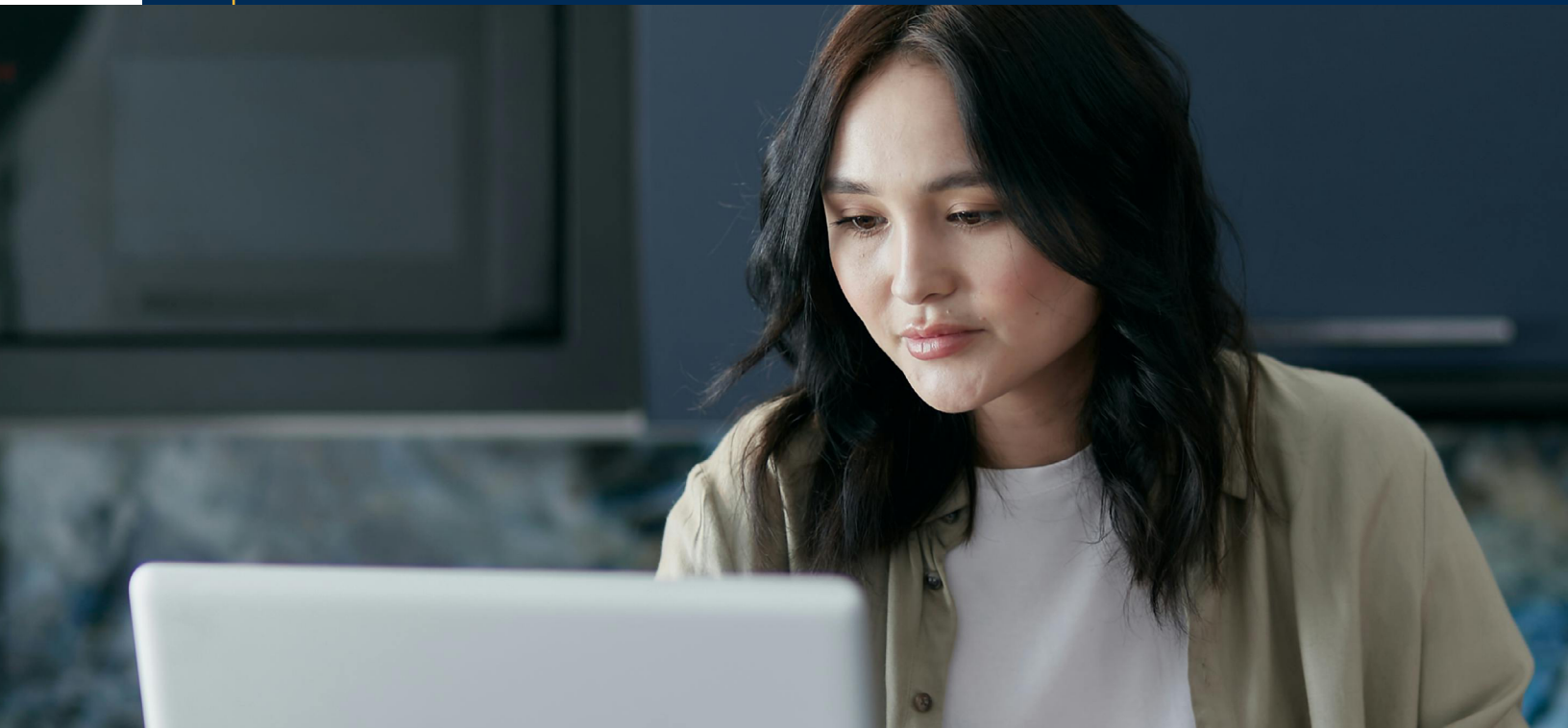
AODA Information and Communications Standards

As mentioned above, one of the five standards included in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) is Information and Communications Standards, which is the primary reference for our project on Digital Accessibility.

The AODA Information and Communications Standards list mandatory rules for organizations to create, provide, and receive information and communications that people with disabilities can access. The standards give all people an equal chance to learn and participate in their communities.

Organizations must provide or arrange accessible formats and communication supports upon request when giving information to people with disabilities. Accessible formats, sometimes called alternate formats, present printed, written, or visual material in a way that people with visual disabilities can access (e.g., braille, large print, etc.). Communication supports allow people to access audio information visually (e.g., sign language interpretation, captions, audio description, etc.).

Organizations should work with the person asking for the information to determine the format or support the person needs. If conversion to a particular accessible format or communication support is impossible, the organization must explain why and summarize the information. These rules also apply to processes for receiving and responding to feedback and to publicly available emergency procedures, plans, or public safety information.

Websites must also be fully accessible, including web-based apps. Organizations must make their websites compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA, which makes websites more accessible for people who use computers or mobile devices differently because of their disabilities. People must be able to navigate websites using technologies that make browsing possible without specific actions, such as looking at the screen or clicking a mouse. For example, these technologies include speech recognition, screen reader, and screen magnification software.

Some examples of accessible information that employers must provide through accessible formats or communication supports upon request include:

- Documents or announcements available to every worker in an organization include company newsletters, health and safety information, announcements of policy updates, and memos or word-of-mouth details about workplace social activities.

- What a worker needs to do their job, such as presentations or videos, handouts or discussions at meetings, manuals or guidelines.

Employers must consult with each worker to determine which format(s) or support(s) is most helpful (AODA lists types of accessible formats and communication supports).

Digital Transformation/ Digital Accessibility

Digital transformation (Dx) is "a broad term that captures the changes that are taking place as technology permeates our day-to-day lives" and describes the current educational landscape (Johnson, 2023). Indicators of this transformation include trends, such as the increased popularity of online course modalities, technology adoption, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in post-secondary education (Johnson, 2023). Some of these trends gained popularity rapidly due to the shifts to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dx can be a key tool in increasing accessibility for people with disabilities and the broader population. When discussing Dx for accessibility, the terms "web accessibility" and "digital accessibility" are closely related.

As outlined by the W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), **web accessibility** means that "websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them." Specifically, it means that all people can perceive, understand, navigate, interact with, and contribute to the Web. Web accessibility considers all disabilities that impact Web access, such as auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, or visual impairments.

W3C also highlights how web accessibility is beneficial for people without disabilities, such as people with changing abilities due to age; people using smartphones, smartwatches, and other devices with small screens; those with "situational limitations" such as being in a location where they cannot listen to audio; and those with a slow or unreliable Internet connection.

There are several **essential components of web accessibility**:

1. **Content -** the information in a web page/ application, such as text or images

2. **User agents** - e.g., web browsers, media players, etc.

3. **Assistive technology** - e.g., screen readers, switches, etc.

4. **Users** - their knowledge, experiences, and adaptive strategies using the Web

5. **Developers** - e.g., designers, coders, etc.

6. **Authoring tools** - software that creates websites

7. **Evaluation tools** - web accessibility evaluation tools, HTML validators, CSS validators, etc.

You can find a more technical explanation of these components here, and refer to the rest of the W3C WAI's comprehensive Accessibility Fundamentals resource here.

Digital accessibility is a term that is adjacent to web accessibility. The term is sometimes abbreviated as **a11y**, where "11" refers to the eleven letters omitted from the word "accessibility." Around the world, some experts use the terms "web accessibility" and "digital accessibility" interchangeably (see, for example, the University of California, Berkeley or AbilityNet). Others, such as the Association on Higher Education and Disability, offer a nuanced definition of digital accessibility: "Digital accessibility involves designing websites, mobile applications and electronic documents in a way that affords disabled people the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as nondisabled people in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use" (Association on Higher Education and Disability).

eCampusOntario's Digital Accessibility Toolkit considers something accessible when it provides equitable access, allowing people with disabilities to complete tasks and make decisions with autonomy and without judgment. From this, digital accessibility "provides equitable access for people who may need Assistive Technology (AT) or personal accommodation to complete digital tasks" (with **accommodations** defined as a change made to enable a person with a disability to participate fully or access information) (Wilkie et al., n.d.).

For this project, we adopt a broad definition of "digital accessibility" that encompasses the accessibility of any digital product (whether that be a website, mobile application, PDF document, video, or more).

One crucial characteristic of WIL is that students are simultaneously under the responsibility of the PSI sending them and the employer hosting them. Therefore, there is ambiguity regarding what regulations and policies prevail – the PSI's or the employer's? – and how to manage students' needs and expectations.

Our comprehensive review of national and local regulations and laws has uncovered a significant gap in clear recommendations or best practices for addressing this issue. This lack of clarity, as echoed by many of our interviewees, places a substantial burden on students. They are often left to navigate and advocate for their rights, and provide justifications to multiple parties. The potential for discrimination and prejudice further complicates this situation, making their journey even more challenging.

Literature Review

Common Terms & Acronyms Used in the Lit Review:

- **WIL** – Work-integrated learning
- **SwDs** – Students with disabilities
- **PwDs** – persons with disabilities
- **EDI** – Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- **PSI** – Post-secondary institution
- **PSE** – Post-secondary education
- **AODA** – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- **The Code** – Ontario's Human Rights Code
- **Dx** – Digital transformation

Background (Context & The Problem)

The Government of Canada, along with many provinces, has been supporting work-integrated learning in postsecondary education to help students develop the career-ready skills needed to improve the school-to-work transition (Gatto et al., 2020; Cukier et al., 2018). WIL has gained wide recognition as a practical solution for the "skills mismatch," contributing to improved labour market outcomes for graduates (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 1). As a result, many PSIs across Canada have made institutional commitments towards ensuring every student has access to a WIL experience, and many receive government funding to expand access to WIL. BHER's own Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report found that in many cases, WIL experiences are built into program

curricula, allowing students to gain skills and experience that help them transition into the workforce after graduation.

Employers also seem keen to collaborate more with PSIs on WIL. The same BHER 2022 Skills Survey Report shows that 94% of surveyed employers have already partnered with post-secondary institutions to participate in WIL, which was an increase from 86% of survey respondents in 2020 and 83% in 2018. One employer explains: "As our need for talent has grown, industry has been working more closely with post-secondary institutions to better shape the curriculum to align with industry needs. Post-secondary institutions as well have doubled down on their efforts to ensure their graduates are ready to enter the workforce as seamlessly as possible" (Business + Higher Education Roundtable, 2022a, p. 14). However, there are increasing concerns that the benefits of WIL are unequally distributed among

the student population and that insufficient efforts are being made to ensure equitable access to WIL. A key research report from Cukier et al. (2018) at Toronto Metropolitan University's Diversity Institute highlights the inequitable access to WIL faced by students who are members of diverse groups, including students with disabilities (SwD), in the province of Ontario.

Persons with disabilities are a designated employment equity group under Canada's *Employment Equity Act*. Job seekers from this group can face conscious and unconscious biases and barriers that cause disproportionate under- and unemployment (Itano-Boase et al., 2021). Studies suggest that university graduates with disabilities have similar employment outcomes to people without disabilities who did not graduate high school (Itano-Boase et al., 2021). All of this suggests that employment equity groups, including students with disabilities, stand to gain the most from the benefits that WIL offers for employability (Itano-Boase et al., 2021).

For this literature review and our project, a broad and inclusive definition of SwD was adopted. It includes students who have learning, intellectual, cognitive, physical, or sensory disabilities, as well as those with mental health, neurological, and chronic medical condition(s) (Dollinger et al., 2023b). Disabilities may be permanent, temporary, or episodic, and a person can have more than one disability (Wilkie et al., n.d.). The specifics of a disability also vary from person to person (Wilkie et al., n.d.).

Over the past decade, the demand for accommodations and accessibility supports in post-secondary education has risen dramatically, especially for disabilities that require ongoing intervention (Lanthier et al., 2023). The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) reports that in the university and college sectors combined, student registrations with Offices for Students with Disabilities grew by nearly 80%

between 2013-14 and 2020-21 (Lanthier et al., 2023). Many of these students have "invisible disabilities," including mental health-related disabilities. HEQCO reports that from 2016 to 2023, registrations for mental health and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder (ADHD) in Ontario's university sector grew by 76% and 107%, respectively (Lanthier et al., 2023). And that only includes students who have registered their disability with their PSI. Statistics Canada data on Canadians 15 to 24 years of age reveals that out of the 13% of students who indicated that they were living with a disability, 77% of them had either a mental health-related disability and/or a learning disability (Gatto et al., 2021).

As such, "[i]t is not surprising that Canadian universities and colleges report that they are managing a mental health crisis on their campuses" (Gatto et al., 2021, pp. 301–302). The supply of accessibility supports in post-secondary education is simply not meeting demand. Additionally, the increasing demand for accessibility supports is paired with greater complexity of the supports required: "Students increasingly present with multiple disabilities at once; seek support to overcome barriers beyond their registered disability (involving social determinants of health); and do so across a wide range of learning environments, such as experiential learning and remote classrooms, which became more common during and after the pandemic" (Lanthier et al., 2023, p. 6).

Clearly, there is a need for urgent action from key actors in PSE to ensure that all students have access and support throughout all facets of their educational experience. Here, our focus is on experiential learning (or work-integrated learning) experiences that often happen outside of the classroom but have just as many – if not more – access barriers as in-class settings.

Unfortunately, there is limited research available on SwDs' perceptions of and participation rates in WIL or on the resources available to SwDs who engage in WIL (Gatto et al., 2020; Gatto et al., 2021). The available research indicates that, generally, post-secondary institutions in Canada are not adequately ensuring equitable access to WIL for SwDs. This poses problems on micro, meso, and macro levels:

- **Micro/individual level (SwDs):** Gaining a WIL experience during post-secondary education offers students many benefits, including hands-on learning opportunities, increased employability skills, and improved labour market outcomes for graduates. As an employment equity group, people with disabilities stand to benefit exponentially from these effects of WIL but cannot gain them if access to WIL is not equitable and accessible in the first place.

- **Meso/institutional level (PSIs, employers/ host organizations):** the inequity of WIL access goes directly against many Canadian PSIs' institutional commitments to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). If SwDs are unable to access all of the aspects of education, including those that occur outside of the classroom, and WIL programs are not reflective of the rest of the institution's commitments to the inclusion of SwDs, then there is a major gap in PSIs' EDI efforts.

- **Macro/beyond the institution level (society, the economy, etc.):** The exclusion of SwDs from WIL leads to economic and workforce problems down the line by negatively impacting the labour market integration of graduates with disabilities who missed out on opportunities to build career skills and gain real work experience like their peers without disabilities. This further exacerbates the problem of PwDs who are capable of and willing to work but are inactive in the workforce due to macro-level issues, thus creating a significantly underutilized talent pool.

Findings

It is well documented that people with disabilities face numerous barriers and challenges in accessing and participating in the workforce. Recent, yet-to-be-published research conducted by BHER on employer perspectives towards people with disabilities indicates that despite good-faith efforts from Canadian employers, many employers still hold conscious and unconscious biases towards PwDs that contribute to their inequitable treatment and marginalization in hiring/ recruitment processes and within the workplace.

Many youth (including those with disabilities) consider postsecondary education, including WIL programs, as a pathway into the workforce. However, research points to the existence of "sorting mechanisms" that "unintentionally, but systematically, exclude students of certain social groups" (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 1). From the literature, it is evident that Ontario's WIL landscape has many barriers and challenges that impede access to WIL for students with disabilities. These barriers come from both the PSI and employer sides.

PSI-Side Barriers

Many Canadian PSIs have dedicated offices for WIL or other career-related practices (e.g. Office for WIL, Experiential Learning, Career Exploration, etc.). WIL offices alone often lack formalized processes to address the unique needs of SwDs and often rely on various informal mechanisms or other campus offices (such as Accessibility Services) to provide support (Cukier et al., 2018).

Most PSIs also have dedicated offices for accessibility services (e.g. Student Accessibility Services, Accommodations Office, Services for Students with Disabilities, etc.). However, a 2018 report by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students found that although Canada's PSE system as a whole has made many efforts to improve accessibility and inclusion for SwDs, such efforts have nonetheless fallen short of students' needs, especially when it comes to WIL. Among their key messages is that "[a]ccessibility and inclusion efforts in the post-secondary environment have lagged behind the evolution of the student experience, and are limited to the academic (classroom and online learning) environment; in particular, accessibility in the co-curricular, professional development and work-integrated learning spaces needs to be developed" (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2018, p. 2). Other evaluations of the Ontario PSE system concur that WIL accessibility efforts are "nascent at best, with most programs only recently starting to involve relevant stakeholders on process improvements" (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 30).

Despite advancements in their respective areas, WIL offices and accessibility offices remain heavily siloed. Both offices may be operating on campus and students may even be in contact with both, but the two offices operate largely independently without frequent collaboration. This non-intersectional and siloed approach to accessibility and WIL proves problematic because it means that PSIs are not adequately supporting SwDs to become career-ready (Gatto et al., 2020). One study scanning Canadian PSIs found that 40% of institutions had no reference to any disability support for career-related activities, and only 18% referred to supports available for engaging in WIL on their websites (Gatto et al., 2020). This may be attributable to a broader trend observable in the Canadian PSE system, where institutional policies around accommodations and accessibility are often unclear or are "variably and inconsistently implemented nationwide"

(National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2018, p. 40). NEADS recommends that PSIs offering WIL through government funding should be required to establish formal policies on accommodation that articulate and communicate to students their legal right to request and receive reasonable accommodations (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2018).

In addition to demands for formal policies, there is a need for formal procedures and training for staff. One study that interviewed staff at Ontario universities reports that staff at WIL offices "are generally unaware of any sort of inequities/discrimination faced by traditionally marginalized students in their programs" and lacked formal procedures to address diversity and inclusion issues raised by WIL students, relying on reactive, informal mechanisms rather than proactive efforts to address these issues (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 1). This and other Canadian studies also report that many staff who work with students are not required to attend formal EDI training (Cukier et al., 2018) and that WIL practitioners are not generally receiving resources or training regarding the school-to-work transition of SwDs (Gatto et al., 2020). This helps explain why students with disabilities have reported issues with inflexible institutional policies and challenges related to their relationship with placement staff (Dollinger et al., 2023a).

However, it is important not to lay the blame on PSI staff since the literature reports that they face their own challenges in their work towards accessibility on campus. For instance, WIL and academic educators have been reported to engage in unrecognized labour (or what has been called "invisible work") in an effort to create greater accessibility (Bulk et al., 2021; Bulk et al., 2023). Examples of this unrecognized labour include:

- Putting in extra time so that SwDs have fair access to WIL

- Engaging in emotional labour, including managing both the emotional stress of ensuring accessibility and the emotional responses of others (e.g., students, faculty, and host supervisors)

- Building and keeping trusting relationships with students, organizations, and other actors

- Balancing the complexities that occur due to the lack of sufficient information and resources (Bulk et al., 2021; Bulk et al., 2023)

The problem with "invisible work" is that it is most often viewed as optional, extra work, and the efforts of those who champion accessibility often go unrecognized. Therefore, the result of such work is that access to WIL experiences is unequally distributed (Bulk et al., 2023). Researchers encourage PSIs to reevaluate what unrecognized labour should be recognized as valuable and what can be consolidated or forgone altogether (Bulk et al., 2021).

Barriers also exist at the broader institutional level. In their analysis of Ontario universities, Cukier et al. found what they call internal "sorting mechanisms" that systematically exclude students from certain social groups while rewarding others, albeit unintentionally (2018, p. 15). For example, WIL program entrance requirements often include assessment criteria, such as a minimum grade point average (GPA), frequently around a cumulative average of 70% or equivalent (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 15). Although GPA requirements may appear to be an objective measure, they are actually unintentionally exclusionary because they disproportionately exclude students with low socioeconomic status (SES) (Cukier et al., 2018). Many low-SES and marginalized students work one or more part-time

jobs or full-time jobs or have family obligations or other time-consuming responsibilities in addition to their school work that can negatively impact grades. These disadvantaged students would actually benefit the most from WIL, considering its outcomes of social and industry-specific capital and improved post-graduate employment opportunities (Cukier et al., 2018). Such GPA requirements may be paired with interviews as part of the WIL admissions process, aimed at filtering out students who "lacked the "soft" skill-set or professional polish that employers want candidates to have" (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 17). This sort of subjective assessment creates a higher risk for unintentional biases, stereotyping, and misunderstandings of disability to creep into the selection process and result in the exclusion of students with disabilities.

Once admitted into a WIL program, students then must find an employer. Many institutions require their students to find their own WIL placements, which can be problematic for SwDs, considering the already low employment opportunities reported for people with disabilities (Boye, 2022). After the application process, the student may be invited to take part in one or more interviews. Here, employers have their own set of selection criteria that allow them to choose candidates based on who they perceive to be a good "fit," which can be highly subjective (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 17). Although employer recruitment practices can be exclusionary for SwDs, they lie outside of the reach of the PSI's jurisdiction. Even where the PSI can have influence over employers, it is not clear that they exercise it. It has been reported that because WIL staff place a high value on their relationships with employers, they may not feel empowered to challenge employers engaging in biased or discriminatory recruitment practices (Cukier et al., 2018). This can leave students vulnerable to harmful and inaccessible work environments as they undertake WIL (Boye, 2022). In general, although PSIs may focus on accessibility and inclusion in classrooms (e.g.

academic accommodations, disclosure, etc.), students are often left to fend for themselves outside of the classroom, despite both components being equally critical academic needs (Aquino & Plump, 2022).

Employer-Side Barriers

SwDs face a whole other set of barriers when interacting with employers and the work environment. HEQCO reports that compared to students without disabilities, SwDs are less likely to express satisfaction during the application and interview stages of the WIL process (Chatoor and Balata, 2023). Other studies indicate that the interview process specifically is where equity-seeking students tend to experience the most challenges (Cukier et al., 2018). SwDs who already had to navigate complex processes, such as registering with accessibility services at their PSI and getting medical diagnoses then have to disclose their disability all over again with prospective employers if they elect to. The application stage is also when SwDs may need to seek clarity around what workplace accommodations can be made if hired.

However, many SwDs consider not disclosing their disability to their employer at all (Chatoor and Balata, 2023). Numerous global studies have demonstrated that employers are less likely to call back candidates who disclosed a disability and that they viewed those who disclosed mental health disabilities specifically as less fitting candidates than those who disclosed physical ones (Chatoor and Balata, 2023). One Australian study asked students whether they shared details of their disability or condition(s) with placement supervisors and found that half responded "no," 25% responded "to an extent, but not in detail," and 25% responded "yes"; this means that 75% of respondents chose not to fully share the details of their disability (Dollinger et al., 2023a). Those who did not share their disability or condition(s)

cited fear of being treated differently, not being accepted by the organization, being subject to judgment from supervisors, stigmatization, and concerns about how accommodations could be made (Dollinger et al., 2023a).

In Ontario, WIL students refrained from disclosing disability and demonstrated limited self-advocacy, citing fears of stereotyping and discrimination (Cukier et al., 2018). Researchers found that students who did choose to disclose their disability or condition(s) reported positive experiences, such as having the opportunity to take advantage of supports that are unavailable to students who do not disclose (Dollinger et al., 2023a; Cukier et al., 2018). Such findings "stress the importance of building self-advocacy in youth with disabilities and fostering collaboration between stakeholders to ensure that students are comfortable making requests for accommodation" (Cukier et al., 2018, p. 9).

SwDs hired and on-boarded into a WIL experience continue to encounter unique barriers. WIL experiences often take place off campus where support from the student's PSI is minimal to non-existent. Most host organizations take full responsibility for the student's day-to-day work, but expectations are largely unclear and inconsistent (Boye, 2022). This means that WIL experiences can vary drastically between host organizations, leaving students vulnerable to the culture and accessibility of the WIL host (Boye, 2022). When we factor in the already vulnerable status of youth with disabilities, this puts SwDs in particularly precarious situations with minimal support. Even when asked directly, employers indicate that their resources to support students from diverse backgrounds are often either not well-developed or do not exist (Itano-Boase et al., 2021).

SwDs often report both physical and attitudinal barriers in their work environment. Physical barriers include challenges such as inaccessibility

of the built environment in which they work (Dollinger et al., 2023a). For example, a student using a wheelchair may find out that they are unable to even enter their WIL workplace because it is only accessible via stairs. The literature also emphasizes attitudinal barriers faced by SwDs in WIL experiences. There is strong evidence that all employees with disabilities disproportionately face discrimination, biases, stereotypes and other negative attitudinal barriers at work. However, the literature also shows that student employees with disabilities, in particular, were twice as likely to report barriers, including harassment and bullying, than those without disabilities (Itano-Boase et al., 2021).

They also feared disclosing a disability out of fear of discrimination and stereotyping (Itano-Boase et al., 2021). Indeed, "disability" is the most often cited ground of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code in claims made to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Furthermore, SwDs report challenges with understanding which accommodations they can request, treatment from supervisors and colleagues, and having their disability or condition(s) misunderstood or poorly accommodated or, in extreme cases, even exacerbated by an unsupportive, inflexible working environment (Dollinger et al., 2023a).
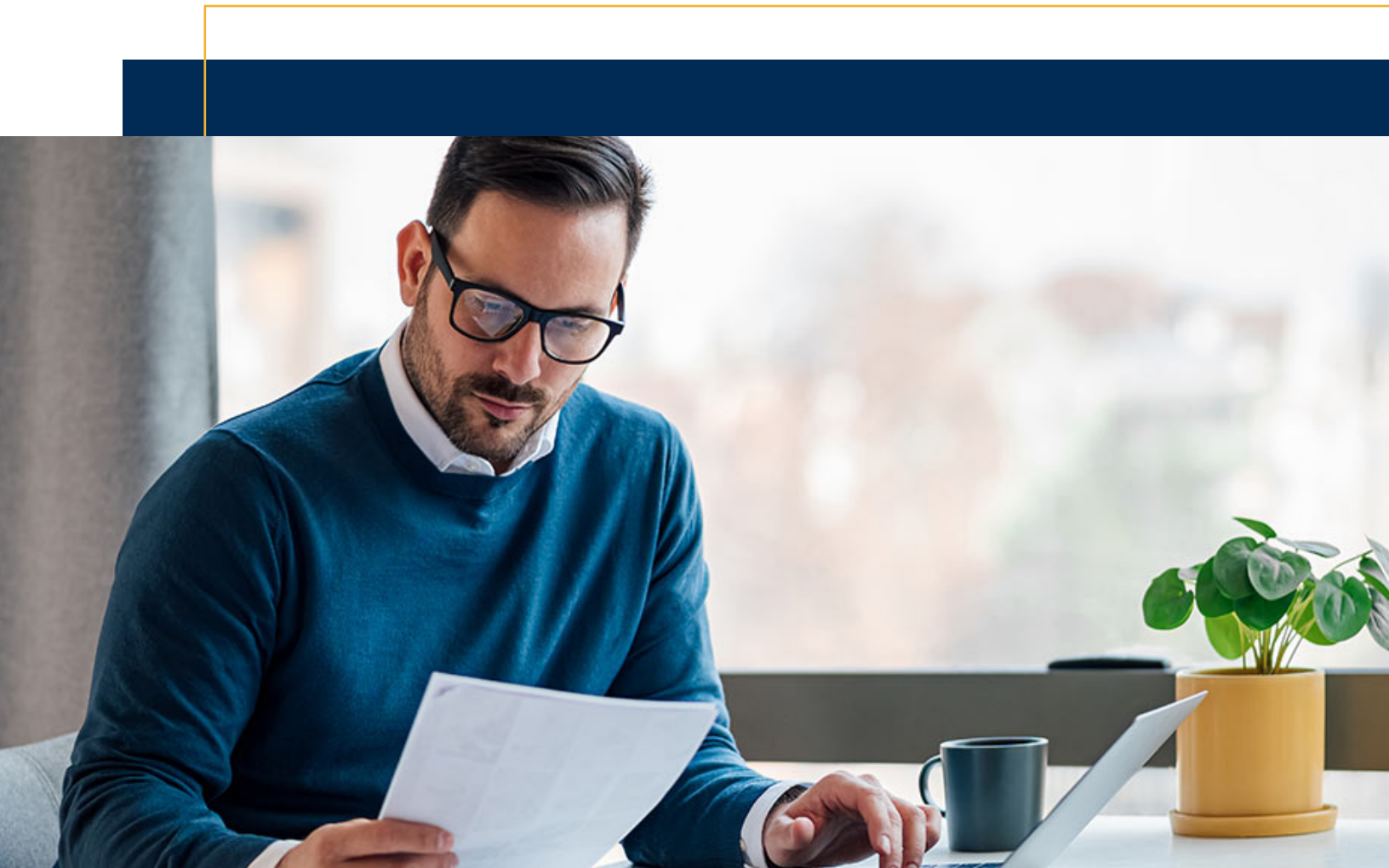
Environmental Scan Results

Ontario PSIs have made concerted efforts to advance accessibility for SwDs. Tailored accommodation plans, assistive technologies, and specialized services designed to facilitate full and equitable engagement in educational environments are some examples of tools implemented by PSIs. These efforts focus on fostering settings where SwDs are empowered to excel while promoting dignity, independence, and equity.

The next pages present a collection of good practices, resources, and tools we found implemented by many PSIs, listed together for reference for any WIL and Accessibility Officers who want to check if they have adequate offerings or add to their current policies, procedures, and documents.

Accessibility Plans

While all the PSIs scanned have accessibility policies, Accessibility Plans are less common. Therefore, we provide some guidance on how to work on a plan.

Accessibility plans serve as roadmaps, outlining the steps institutions are taking to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility. They detail actions and timelines, assign responsibility for specific tasks, and track the progress of each initiative.

The five key areas of AODA standards are being phased in gradually to achieve a fully accessible province by 2025. Over time, the legislation has evolved, creating two secondary laws: the Customer Service Standard in 2007 and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) in 2011. (source)

PSIs vary in their approach to compliance with these standards, and so different institutions formulate their accessibility plans differently.

While some institutions rely solely on the primary AODA legislation, others integrate the AODA and the IASR into their planning framework. Additionally, certain institutions incorporate broader legislative frameworks, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code, alongside the AODA in their planning process. These diverse strategies reflect the complexity and comprehensiveness required to address accessibility challenges effectively within institutional settings.

All accessibility plans in Ontario span a five-year period, and organizations must update them every five years. The majority of institutions have multi-year accessibility plans readily available on their websites. These plans typically adhere to the standard focus areas outlined in the AODA.

Some plans adopt thematic approaches, such as building capacity, physical accessibility improvements, departmental and institutional integration, accountability, and education and training. Regardless of the thematic descriptions

used, all plans share common elements: they identify deliverables or accomplishments, outline the actions or activities necessary for compliance, specify the department or section of the institution responsible for each task, and indicate the status of each activity. This approach ensures institutions have a clear framework for achieving their accessibility goals and enables them to monitor their progress over time.

The Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility has developed a standardized template for crafting accessibility plans, offering a structured framework for institutions to follow. This template serves as a valuable resource for organizations striving to enhance accessibility. It can be accessed through the ministry's website and is a convenient and reliable tool for institutions embarking on developing or revising their accessibility plans.

Accessibility Reports

Accessibility reports are annual publications that offer a general overview of an institution's compliance with accessibility standards and progress toward accessibility-related goals. These reports provide updates on achievements and review outcomes related to established goals and priorities concerning accessibility initiatives within the institutions.

Similar to accessibility plans, these reports may follow the structured focus areas outlined in the AODA, or they may align with the thematic areas used in the institution's accessibility plan.

These reports also outline the goals and objectives for the upcoming period, providing stakeholders with a clear understanding of the institution's vision and direction regarding accessibility. They serve as vital documents for transparency and accountability, allowing stakeholders to track progress and assess the institution's commitment to accessibility over time.
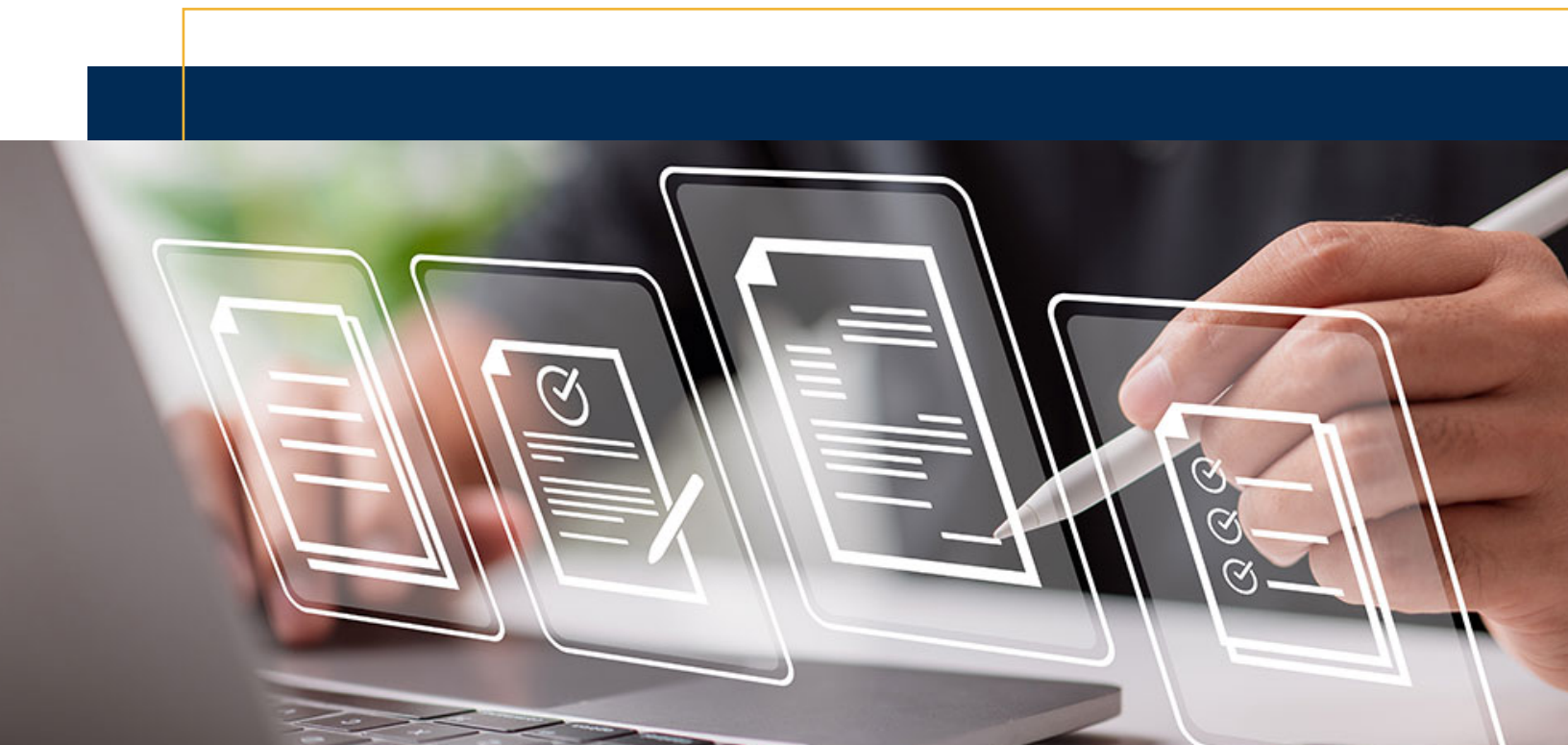
Accessibility Learning Services

Accessibility services at eCampusOntario member institutions are designed in alignment with the AODA and reflect each institution's commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments. These resources aim to support students with disabilities and enhance their educational experiences.

Each institution maintains an accessible learning webpage where students can access resources tailored to their needs. These resources are curated to facilitate access to accommodations, tools, and support services essential for their academic success.

Services include:

1. **Testing accommodations:** Provision of accommodations during exams and assessments to ensure equitable testing conditions

2. **Access to bursaries:** Assistance in accessing financial support and bursaries specifically designated for students with disabilities

3. **Advisor services:** Guidance and support from advisors specializing in disability services to address individual needs and concerns

4. **Classroom supports:** Implementation of strategies and accommodations to facilitate participation and learning in classroom settings

5. **Assistive technology:** Access to specialized software, hardware, and devices aimed at mitigating barriers to learning

6. **Learning strategies:** Provision of tailored learning strategies and techniques to optimize academic performance

7. **Assessment services:** Evaluation and assessment of students' needs to determine appropriate accommodations and support services

Most institutions also provide online accessibility resources, such as:

- **Online forms:** Students can request accommodations and access relevant information through online forms available on the accessibility learning webpage.

- **Appointment scheduling:** Students can schedule appointments with disability advisors conveniently through online platforms.

- **Learning applications:** The institution's online portal facilitates access to downloadable learning applications and software.

WIL/Experiential Learning

All member institutions within the eCampusOntario network have career services websites, with some providing integrated WIL services on these platforms while some maintain separate websites dedicated to WIL-related offerings. These online resources are designed to give students comprehensive career-related information and opportunities.

Key features of career services:

1. **Wide range of WIL opportunities:** Students can explore a diverse range of work-integrated learning opportunities, encompassing internships, co-ops/placements, part-time positions, work-study programs, and summer opportunities. These platforms are tailored to heighten students' awareness of available experiential learning and professional growth avenues.

2. **Career readiness support:** Beyond job postings, students are also provided with resources and tools to enhance their career readiness and employability. This includes access to resume templates, cover letter guidelines, interview preparation, and networking strategies, empowering students to navigate the job market effectively.

3. **Skill enhancement workshops:** Institutions often organize or provide links to skill development workshops and seminars to foster the acquisition of essential professional competencies. These workshops complement academic learning and equip students with communication skills, teamwork abilities, leadership qualities, and problem-solving skills crucial for success in the workplace.

4. **Personalized career counselling:** Professional advisors and career counsellors are readily available to offer customized guidance and support to students. Through one-on-one counselling sessions, students can explore career pathways, set actionable goals, and receive tailored advice.

5. **Industry insights and trends:** Career services websites provide valuable insights into various industries and sectors, offering information on job market trends, employer profiles, salary benchmarks, and networking opportunities within specific fields. This information equips students with the knowledge needed to make informed career decisions.

6. **Employer engagement initiatives:** Institutions facilitate student-employer interactions through networking events, career fairs, and employer panels. These platforms provide students with invaluable opportunities to engage directly with potential employers, learn about job openings, and forge professional connections in their desired industries. Also, institutions offer guidance to employers on crafting accessible job listings and conducting inclusive interviews, with recommendations for accommodations.

7. **Alumni mentorship networks:** Career services websites enable mentorship opportunities, informational interviews, and career advice from alumni who have successfully transitioned into the workforce. This allows students to gain valuable insights and guidance from experienced professionals in their fields of interest.

Challenges identified regarding SwDs looking for WIL opportunities

Despite the availability of these resources, students from marginalized groups are often not fully aware of them, limiting their ability to leverage them. Navigating online resources is not always clear for SwDs or employers eager to support them. This lack of awareness stems from various factors, including limited outreach efforts, insufficient communication channels, and cultural barriers (See Student Stories, Employer Priorities | Business + Higher Education Roundtable).

The availability and accessibility of these resources vary across member institutions' websites. Inconsistencies in the presentation and organization of WIL opportunities may pose challenges for students in navigating and accessing relevant information. Similarly, employers may encounter difficulties in reaching out to students due to the lack of standardized procedures across institutions.

While accessibility services are available to support the learning of SwDs, our investigation revealed a significant gap in dedicated WIL services explicitly tailored to meet the needs of this student demographic. This discrepancy is a critical shortfall in providing equitable career-enhancing opportunities for SwDs.

SwDs enrolled in institutions that lack integrated resources may face significant barriers when seeking WIL opportunities. Their ability to benefit from these resources hinges on their awareness of the existence of WIL programs and the availability of tailored support services. In many cases, we found the need for a more integrated approach that directly connects accessibility support services with work-integrated and experiential learning programs.

Good practices

The move towards digitalization aims to introduce a more inclusive or universally accessible approach, enabling SwDs to access accommodations independently or even create necessary ones rather than persistently seeking specialized assistance. A refined, digital approach could streamline processes, ensuring quicker, more accessible WIL participation.

The environmental scans revealed crucial suggestions for designing and implementing good practices. Below, we share the most significant recommendations and resources related to accessibility in WIL and digital transformation.

Advancing Digital Accessibility in Work-Integrated Learning: Lessons from WILAA and C-UAEL Initiatives

The Work-Integrated Learning Accessibility Accommodation (WILAA) initiative and Carleton University's Accessible Experiential Learning (C-UAEL) Project are our example cases that demonstrate successful collaborative efforts to address the unique challenges SwDs face in WIL settings.

WILAA is a space for practitioners to help each other learn to support students while navigating these complex spaces. The aim is to create spaces for practitioners to share knowledge and tools to help make the process of accessibility and accommodation easier for all involved in WIL, particularly students. WILAA organizes events such as speaker series, newsletters, and "Lunch and Learn" sessions to discuss and advance accessibility and accommodation within WIL,

fostering a community focused on creating accessible WIL environments. This initiative is bolstered by the cooperation of educational and healthcare institutions and directly addresses the hurdles encountered by SwDs.

Similarly, the C-UAEL Project pioneered an approach towards equitable experiential learning opportunities. With a specific focus on enhancing access to co-ops, internships, and field placements for SwDs, this project aimed to bridge the employment gap for SwDs (May 2018 to August 2019). Through creating employment opportunities for 300 SwDs, educating employers on the advantages of hiring these students, and improving employer awareness of disability-related best practices in the workplace, the C-UAEL Project significantly contributed to reducing barriers within experiential learning.

Supported by the Career Ready Fund as part of Ontario's Career Kick-Start Strategy, the C-UAEL Project not only provided invaluable hands-on work experiences for students but also evolved into the ACT to Employ Program, further extending its impact and highlighting the sustained interest and necessity for dedicated employment programs for SwDs.

The 100% WIL program at Sheridan College

To ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to WIL, institutions can adopt a 100% WIL commitment, as exemplified by Sheridan College. This commitment involves raising awareness about WIL programs and offering resources to prepare and support students throughout their WIL experiences, from pre-participation to post-participation. Using digital resources is an effective strategy to equip students with the tools needed to succeed in WIL and foster inclusivity and accessibility in education and the labour market.

Accessible resources

Some institutions have developed online guides on various aspects of accessibility, such as creating accessible documents, creating an accessible education environment, and ensuring online resources are accessible to students with disabilities. These tools promote inclusivity and support the diverse needs of students in educational settings. PSIs can benefit from making similar information available and leveraging existing resources to enhance accessibility across all their services. As an example, see George Brown College's accessibility information.

College Libraries Ontario's Learning Portal provides an excellent Job Seekers Guide for Students and Graduates with Disabilities. It includes:

1. **Disability and the Workplace:** Provides detailed information on types of disabilities and their impacts in the workplace, with insights into physical, sensory, cognitive, and mental health-related disabilities. It empowers students to navigate their own unique circumstances effectively.

2. **Disclosure Strategies:** Provides guidance on the when, why, and how of disclosing a disability to potential employers. This includes strategies for navigating disclosure conversations during the job search process and understanding one's rights and responsibilities in disclosing disabilities in the workplace.

3. **Job Search and Interview Strategies:** Provides practical tips and techniques for conducting an effective job search and preparing for interviews. This encompasses resume writing, cover letter development, interview etiquette, and strategies for highlighting skills and abilities during the interview process.

4. **Accommodation Guidance:** Provides information on the types of accommodations available in the workplace and the respective responsibilities of employees and employers in the accommodation process. This empowers students to advocate for their needs and ensures they have the knowledge to navigate accommodation requests effectively.

5. **Legal Rights and Responsibilities:** Provides an overview of relevant employment legislation regarding individuals with disabilities, including rights and responsibilities under the AODA, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and other applicable legislation. This ensures that students know their legal protections and entitlements in the workplace.

6. **Resource Referrals:** Access to a curated list of additional resources and support services available both within the institution and in the broader community. This includes links to disability support centers, advocacy organizations, mentorship programs, and other relevant resources to facilitate student success.

Potential partners to enhance WIL Accessibility

We learned from different sources, including interviews, that partnering with community organizations and institutions that specialize in accessibility is a key strategy to support the success of SwDs in WIL. Community organizations can provide insightful suggestions and practices to support PSIs and employer hosts in managing SwDs' experiences. Even when PSIs and hosting organizations are aware, prepared, and willing to help, they might deal with a lack of resources and specialized personnel, which can jeopardize the success of the entire initiative. Leaning on the expertise of these organizations can help mitigate that risk.

The following list describes organizations that support students and people with disabilities looking for job opportunities.

Abilities to Work

Abilities to Work offers crucial services in bridging the employment gap for people with disabilities by facilitating their recruitment and selection by employers. Since 1995, it has played a key role in addressing labour shortages by connecting employers with an untapped and highly skilled labour pool.

Partnering Benefit: Their expertise in connecting skilled individuals with disabilities to employment opportunities can enhance WIL by ensuring that these opportunities are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. This collaboration can help create more inclusive work environments that value diversity and inclusivity.

AccessibilityConsulting.ca

AccessibilityConsulting.ca is a collective of digital accessibility experts focused on enhancing accessibility in education and information and communication technology. This group aims to make digital learning environments more inclusive for all learners.

Partnering Benefit: This collective's expertise can greatly improve the digital aspects of WIL programs by ensuring online platforms, learning materials, and communications are accessible. Their involvement can help educational institutions and employers in WIL programs meet or exceed accessibility standards, ensuring an inclusive learning experience for all students.

AccessForward

AccessForward provides comprehensive training modules aimed at meeting the requirements of Ontario's accessibility laws. This includes training on various standards under the AODA, offering a wealth of resources to ensure organizations comply with these legal requirements.

Partnering Benefit: AccessForward's training resources can be leveraged by educational institutions and employers to enhance their understanding of accessibility requirements, thus ensuring that WIL opportunities are designed to be inclusive and accessible to SwDs.

Accessibility Services Canada

Accessibility Services Canada focuses on improving organizational practices to be more inclusive and accessible. Through training and consulting services, they help organizations comply with accessibility legislation like the AODA, enhancing their capacity to welcome individuals of all abilities.

Partnering Benefit: Their services can assist in making the digital aspects of WIL more accessible, ensuring that online platforms, resources, and communications used in WIL initiatives are accessible to SwDs.

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) promotes and supports the employment of persons with disabilities. Through a variety of services, CCRW facilitates meaningful employment opportunities and advocates for equitable employment practices.

Partnering Benefit: CCRW's expertise can benefit WIL programs by offering guidance on best practices for inclusive employment and accommodations. Their work with both job seekers and employers can provide a bridge for WIL programs to connect with inclusive employers and prepare students with disabilities for the workforce.

Canadian Hearing Services (CHS)

Canadian Hearing Services (CHS) provides comprehensive support and resources for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Offering services like counselling, accessibility solutions, and employment support, CHS aims to break down barriers and empower individuals with hearing loss to participate fully in all aspects of life.

Partnering Benefit: CHS's expertise in supporting individuals with hearing loss can greatly benefit WIL programs by ensuring that these initiatives are accessible to students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Through collaboration, WIL programs can incorporate technologies and practices that facilitate communication and learning, making these opportunities more inclusive.

The CNIB Foundation

The CNIB Foundation empowers individuals impacted by blindness, offering innovative programs, advocacy, and community engagement to change perceptions of blindness and promote inclusion.

Partnering Benefit: The CNIB Foundation's resources and expertise in supporting individuals with visual impairments can enhance WIL programs by ensuring that digital and physical learning environments are accessible. Their work can guide the adaptation of WIL materials and environments to include participants with visual impairments.

Community Living Ontario

Community Living Ontario is a non-profit organization that champions the rights and inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Through advocacy, support, and education, it works to create communities where everyone belongs and can participate fully.

Partnering Benefit: Their expertise allows them to provide guidance and support in designing WIL initiatives that are fully inclusive for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The Discover Ability Network

The Discover Ability Network aims to enhance business inclusivity by focusing on hiring and retaining people with disabilities. It provides resources, training, and tools to comply with AODA standards and connect businesses with the talent pool of people with disabilities.

Partnering Benefit: This initiative can support WIL programs by encouraging businesses to adopt inclusive hiring and retention practices. By promoting accessibility and inclusion, the network ensures that SwDs have equitable access to WIL.

The Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN)

The Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN), led by United Way East Ontario, supports integrating people with disabilities into the workforce by facilitating connections between employers and service providers. It aims to increase employment opportunities within the region, including Ottawa and surrounding counties, by addressing myths about workplace accommodations and promoting inclusive employment practices. EARN offers workshops to help employers create accessible recruitment and retention strategies, leveraging the untapped potential of individuals with disabilities.

Partnering Benefit: EARN offers the benefit of becoming part of a network that champions diversity and inclusion in the workplace. It allows organizations to gain access to a wider pool of talent, enhance their reputation as an inclusive employer, and benefit from EARN's expertise in creating accessible work environments. This partnership not only supports the social mission of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce but also contributes to the development of a more diverse and innovative organizational culture.

HandiHelp

HandiHelp specializes in creating accessible living and working environments through their expertise in accessibility assessments and consulting. With a track record of enhancing accessibility in various settings, HandiHelp's services are vital for ensuring spaces are designed to be inclusive from the ground up.

Partnering Benefit: HandiHelp's expertise can directly benefit WIL initiatives by advising on the physical accessibility of workspaces used in such programs. Their guidance can ensure that students with physical disabilities have equal access to WIL environments, promoting inclusivity in both digital and physical spaces.

The Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC)

The Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC) is at the forefront of advocating for inclusive design in digital and physical environments. It engages in research, tool development, and policy influence to ensure that emerging technologies and systems are designed with inclusivity at their core.

Partnering Benefit: The IDRC's expertise in inclusive design practices can significantly enhance the accessibility of digital WIL platforms and tools. By incorporating inclusive design principles into the development and implementation of WIL initiatives, the IDRC can help ensure that these programs are accessible to all students.

Independent Living Canada (ILC)

Independent Living Canada (ILC) advocates for the independence and full participation of persons with disabilities in their communities. By promoting independent living and providing resources and support, ILC plays a crucial role in empowering individuals with disabilities to lead self-directed lives.

Partnering Benefit: ILC's focus on independent living and self-determination can be leveraged to support students with disabilities in WIL. By ensuring that WIL opportunities are designed to promote independence and accommodate individual needs, ILC can help create a more empowering and inclusive educational experience.

Rise

Rise is an organization focused on empowering entrepreneurs with mental health challenges by offering support through business training, mentorship, and financial assistance. Their work underscores the importance of mental health support in professional development and entrepreneurship.

Partnering Benefit: Rise's focus on mental health can enrich WIL programs by providing resources and support mechanisms for students with mental health challenges, especially those interested in entrepreneurship.

Talking Data Equity

Talking Data Equity focuses on embedding equity in data work through discussions and learning sessions on various equity-related topics. By addressing the operationalization of data equity, this series encourages more inclusive and equitable practices in data handling and research.

Partnering Benefit: This initiative can support WIL programs by ensuring that data collection, analysis, and usage within these programs are conducted in an equitable manner. Insights from Talking Data Equity can help inform how WIL programs track participation, outcomes, and the effectiveness of accommodations, leading to more informed and inclusive practices.

WAVE® Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools

WAVE® Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools provide a comprehensive solution for identifying and correcting web content accessibility issues. By offering a suite of tools for web accessibility evaluation, WAVE helps content creators ensure their digital resources are accessible to individuals with disabilities, adhering to WCAG guidelines and promoting a more inclusive digital environment.

Partnering Benefit: WAVE's tools can be instrumental in evaluating and improving the accessibility of digital platforms used in WIL programs. By ensuring that online resources, course materials, and WIL platforms meet accessibility standards, WAVE can help remove barriers for students with disabilities, promoting equal access to educational and work opportunities.

The Youth H.I.R.E (Youth Help in Reaching Employment)

The Youth H.I.R.E (Youth Help in Reaching Employment) program offers comprehensive support for the development of pre-employment and employment skills, focusing on inclusive opportunities for youth with disabilities. This program emphasizes practical training, work placement, and skills development tailored to individual needs.

Partnering Benefit: The Youth H.I.R.E program can enhance WIL initiatives by offering a model for inclusive skill development and employment preparation. Its focus on youth with disabilities can inform best practices for integrating similar support structures into WIL programs.

YuJa Panorama

YuJa Panorama offers a digital accessibility platform designed to enhance the accessibility of digital media and content across learning management systems. By leveraging AI and machine learning, it provides tools for creating accessible content, thereby supporting a more inclusive digital learning environment.

Partnering Benefit: YuJa Panorama can be a key partner in making WIL initiatives more accessible by ensuring that digital content is accessible to students with diverse learning needs. Its integration into WIL programs can help mitigate barriers to accessing digital materials.

Disability Statistics, Nationally and Provincially

According to the most recent data from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022, around **8 million Canadians, or 27% of the population above age 15, have at least one disability.** These values also reflect an increase of approximately 4.7% percentage points from the previous survey cycle in 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). This increase can be attributed in part to an aging population and in part to increasing mental health-related disabilities among youth and work-age people (Statistics Canada, 2023a). In terms of **gender differences, the rate of disability is slightly more prominent among women than men** (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Moreover, there has been a rise in the disability rate among Canadian youth aged 15 to 24 years since 2017: in 2022, **the disability rate was 20% among youth**. Within this group, the prevalent types of disabilities included mental health, learning and pain-related disabilities/conditions (Statistics Canada, 2023a). In terms of labour force participation, the employment rate among individuals with disabilities (25 to 64 years) increased slightly since 2017. However, the **disparity in employment rates remains, with 62% of working-age adults with disabilities being employed compared to 78% of those without disabilities** (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

In **Ontario, the rate of disability is approximately 28%, a slight increase of 3.9% since 2017** (Statistics Canada, 2023b). The current situation in Ontario reflects a **total post-secondary enrolment in Ontario of 920,145 students**, with 502,656 being women and 404,601 being men (Statistics Canada, 2023c). When considering post-secondary SwDs, a report by the HEQCO, which examines data from the National Graduate Survey and the General Social Survey, found that a **notable disparity exists in the participation of Ontarians with disabilities in PSE compared to those without disabilities.** Those with learning or physical disabilities are less likely to attain a PSE credential or one above the bachelor level. Rather, they are more likely to pursue college credentials rather than a university one, according to analysis based on individuals with vision, hearing, mental health learning as well as physical disabilities (Chatoor, 2021).

Profile of SwDs Accessing WIL Opportunities

Narrowing our view further from a national and provincial level, the following information is compiled from the raw dataset of Pre and Post WIL surveys from students seeking and participating in WIL opportunities through their post-secondary institutions. The data we observed are responses solely from students who self-reported as having a disability. The pre-WIL survey includes 1,055 responses from individuals who reported having a disability. This survey included various demographic questions, such as age, gender, disability status and more. It is important to note that many students with disabilities tend to self-select out of opportunities with WIL, therefore impacting participation rates.

Analysis of the pre-WIL survey data demonstrated the following proportions of students belonging to the following categories:

Discipline	• Approximately 16% of individuals with disabilities indicate being in a business management or public administrative domain in school. Following behind are architecture, engineering and/or related technologies, social and behavioural sciences and /or law, math, and the humanities. • The 'Other' component holds an array of responses. Within this, we got a mix of responses. Some notable areas include Trades (e.g., welding, electrical), Communications, HR Management, Hospitality and Culinary Arts, Graphic Design, Environmental Science/Management, and Information Technology.
Province	• Majority in Ontario and Quebec[3].
International Student Status	• A small portion of respondents indicated international student status.
Age	• Most are within the range of 17-24 years of age.
Gender	• About 60% indicate being women, 26% men, and 7% non-binary.
Degree Type	• About 70% are completing a bachelor's and 14% completing a college or CEGEP certificate or diploma.
Identity	• 23% indicate being South Asian, 13% being Black, and 14% being Chinese.
Visible Minority	• 60% indicate not being a visible minority vs 36% who do.

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3   There were a significant amount of missing responses for this question, however, it is safe to assume most would come from Ontario.

The data from the pre-WIL surveys offers some insights into the diverse backgrounds of SwDs. Across disciplines, we see there is a diverse range of academic interests among participants, with a notable emphasis on fields such as business management, engineering, and social sciences. The gender distribution reveals a significant representation of women and non-binary individuals. Recognizing the gender disparity in WIL participation, with a higher proportion of women engaging compared to men, highlights the importance of ensuring accessibility measures are inclusive and sensitive to the unique challenges faced by different genders, whichever the identity. Furthermore, the cultural diversity reflected in the identity data emphasizes the need for culturally responsive approaches to WIL programming to accommodate the unique needs and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Overall, this data provides valuable insights into the demographic profile of students participating in WIL programs, informing the development of targeted strategies to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of WIL opportunities.

Pre- and Post-WIL Matched Data

The following section provides the profile of the respondents with at least one disability who also completed the post-WIL survey, allowing us to observe matched pre- and post-survey responses. The response count, however, is rather low, with a sample size of 141 completed surveys.

Age	• The majority of respondents are within the age range of 17-24.
Gender	• Majority of women (67% women v.s 24% men)
Visible Minority Status	• 56% reported not being a visible minority, while 39% did.

SwD WIL Outcomes

This section demonstrates the post-WIL perceptions and perspectives of SwDs, particularly focusing on skill development and outlook on future career opportunities. By observing the data presented in the following charts, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of WIL programs on students' readiness for the workforce and their aspirations for career advancement.

"To what extent have you improved on the following social and emotional skills as a result of completing the WIL?"

Legend: ■ Sum of Already had the skill ■ Sum of Not at all/A little ■ Sum of Somewhat ■ Sum of A lot

Skill	Already had the skill	Not at all/A little	Somewhat	A lot
Empathy (e.g., sensing others' flings and perspectives, picking up cues to what is being felt and thought)	22%	30%	26%	21%
Emotional self-awareness (e.g., ability to understand emotions and how they influence relationships with colleagues)	18%	33%	29%	20%
Achievement orientation (e.g., working hard to meet goals, setting high standards)	13%	28%	34%	25%
Positive outlook (e.g., sing the positive in people situations, and events)	13%	29%	31%	26%
Teamwork (e.g., working with others toward a shared goal)	13%	21%	27%	39%
Adaptability (e.g., flexibility in handling change, juling multiple demands or tasks)	11%	25%	32%	33%

Figure 1: SwDs' self reported social and emotional skills post WIL:

The data on SwDs post WIL programs showcases notable improvements in adaptability, teamwork, and other social-emotional skills, underscoring the program's effectiveness in preparing them for the workforce.

"To what extent have you improved on the following skills?"

■ Sum of Already had the skill   ■ Sum of Not at all/A little   ■ Sum of Somewhat   ■ Sum of A lot

	Creativity (e.g., curiosity, imagination)	Interpersonal skills (e.g., responsibilty, dependability)	Critical thinking (e.g., analysis, inference, open-minded...)	Professionalism (e.g., accountability, punctuality)	Time management (e.g., prioritization, organization)	Communication skills (e.g., written, verbal, active listening, providing feedback)	Problem solving (e.g., research, decision-making...)	Resiliency (e.g., stress management, self care)	Technical skills (e.g., abilities and knowledge to perform specific tasks)
Sum of A lot	31%	28%	31%	27%	26%	36%	30%	23%	25%
Sum of Somewhat	36%	33%	35%	40%	34%	32%	41%	32%	36%
Sum of Not at all/A little	21%	25%	21%	20%	26%	21%	18%	35%	31%
Sum of Already had the skill	16%	14%	13%	13%	13%	11%	11%	10%	8%

Figure 2: SwDs' self reported improvement of in-demand job skills post WIL:

The findings from this data indicate significant improvements across various skills as a result of participation in WIL. The observed improvements in both critical thinking and communication skills highlight the program's ability to cultivate a diverse skill set essential for success in the workplace.

"Looking forward, to what extent do you:"

■ Sum of Already had the skill ■ Sum of Not at all/A little ■ Sum of Somewhat ■ Sum of A lot

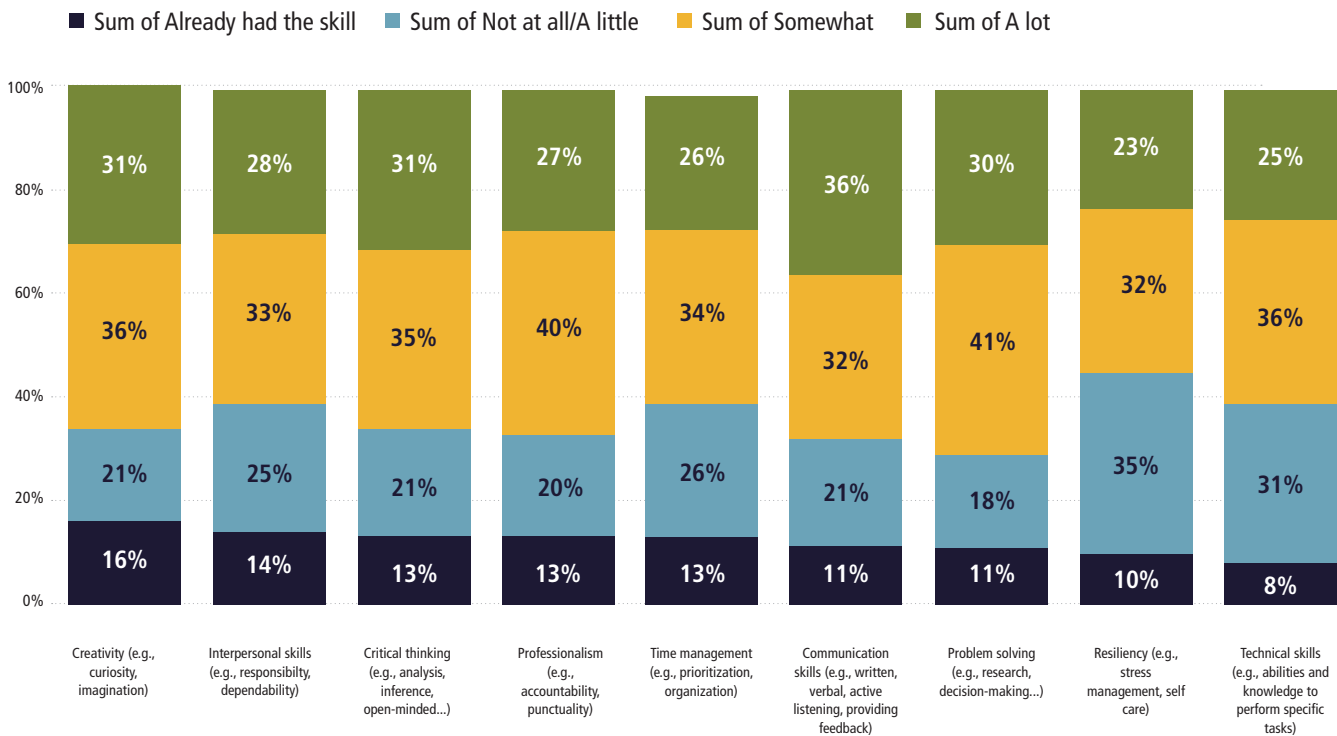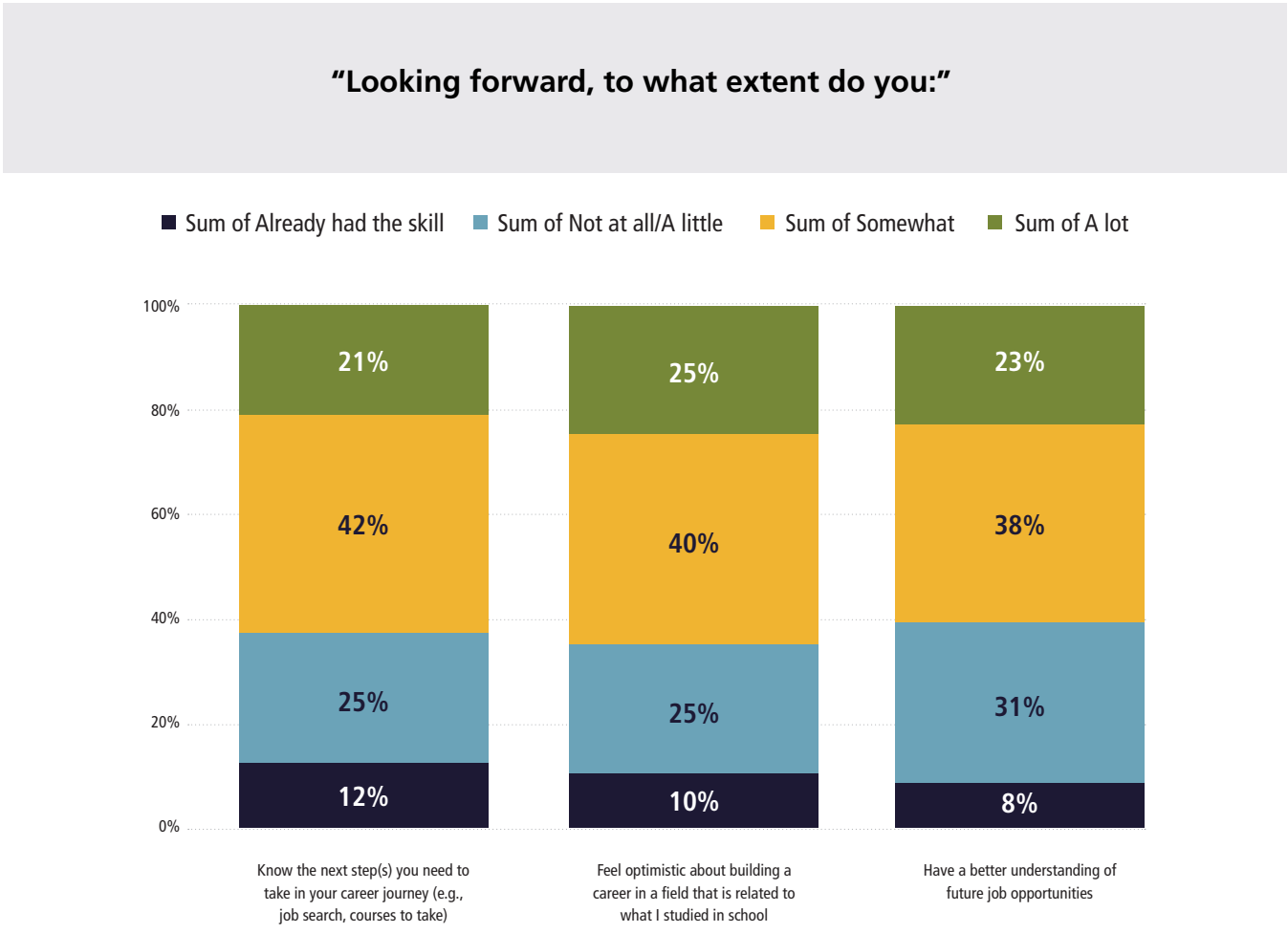**Figure 3: Self reported SwDs' perspective on the future of their career post WIL:**

Overall, the data on SwD's forward looking perspectives following the completion of their WII programs reveals a significant level of optimism and preparedness for their careers.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 above show the self-identified outcomes of students with disabilities who responded to the post-WIL surveys upon completing their most recent WIL experience. For the most part, these charts show us that the majority of students tend to indicate that they improved on the skill in question either somewhat, or a lot.

The limited availability of matched pre- and post-WIL surveys posed a challenge in conducting a more in-depth analysis. While there is a substantial amount of pre-WIL data available, there is a scarcity of post-WIL data. Exploring intersectionalities, such as Indigenous or LGBTQ+ status, was also hindered by low response rates and small sample sizes. These limitations underscore the need for future research to ensure inclusivity in analysis.

The Roadmap

The following section presents the path that WIL students might follow. **We identified five stages:**

1. **WIL Awareness / Information.** Students become aware of WIL services and gain information about them.

2. **Access / Assessment of student needs.** Students access services through various channels, and officers assess their situations and what they need.

3. **Application.** Students are ready to apply for WIL opportunities and need support to do so.

4. **Recruitment / Onboarding.** Students encounter recruiters and potential WIL places. Hosting organizations and PSIs must manage needs, expectations, and outcomes to guarantee equitable opportunities and support.

5. **The WIL Experience.** Students execute their WIL experiences and move from an academic to a professional environment. Different approaches and strategies from employers regarding disabilities may occur and students need support to navigate the new experience.

We present each stage with the issues, practices, and potential solutions analyzed at the **individual, institutional,** and **beyond the institution** levels.

Where possible, we present best practices. In the absence of them, we highlight suggestions and recommendations.

The majority of the materials presented come from interviews and are supported by the results of our environmental scan and literature review.

Stage 1: WIL Awareness / Information

The first stage of the journey towards accessible WIL is when students become aware of WIL services and gain information about them. Officers are not yet in contact with students and cannot customize their support at this stage yet. Therefore, accessibility can be ensured by implementing the universal design principle (see: Centre for Excellence in Universal Design) and meeting the basic Information and Communications Standard requirements.

This starting point should be to **meet students where they are at in their awareness of, knowledge about, and interest in WIL.** This can range from students who are aware of WIL programming and actively seeking an opportunity (e.g., a student who has previously partaken in WIL, a student who is aware that WIL is a requirement for their degree, etc.) to students who may be interested in possibly doing WIL (e.g., a student who has heard of WIL or a student looking for work experience to add to their resume before graduation), to those who have little or no prior knowledge of or interest in WIL at all.

A student's first contact with their WIL office can happen directly or indirectly through multiple channels, such as via website, email, phone, or in person. It might entail communication between the student and a WIL officer to inquire about services, accommodations or general information on WIL. However, in many cases, the initial

contact a student has with WIL occurs without the active involvement of a WIL officer, as students might explore their options independently or seek information in other ways. Students may navigate WIL websites or seek information from peers and social networks. For this reason, **PSIs must ensure that all accessibility, support, and WIL information is readily available and easily accessible, even without engagement with staff. At this stage, institutions must have all publicly-facing materials or events regarding WIL in basic accessible formats and communication channels (such as accessible web pages, social media channels, etc.) and be ready to create additional formats if requested.** Some examples are having closed captioning on for virtual meetings as it can help people with a variety of issues (e.g., permanent or temporary hearing loss, English as an additional language, attention deficits, even technical issues like flawed audio system), producing visually accessible content (e.g., high contrast, sans-serif typeface font, etc.), and documents compatible with assistive technology. Organizations must make their websites compliant with **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines** (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA.

Another aspect to consider at this stage is the ability of faculty and staff members to connect students to services. Timely connections can significantly improve students' experience by tailoring services and support around their needs and expectations. The adequate circulation of information and referrals makes the difference between an isolated student going through a poor academic experience and a student fully connected and able to decide on their educational path, WIL opportunities, and job preferences. Making information available and services known is one of the functions of faculty members and many administrative officers. The employment conditions of instructors and administrative personnel make this harder, as some interviewees highlighted. They pointed to

the precarity of contract work, disconnection between faculty members and decision-making processes, lack of protection under the Employment Standards Act, and, in many cases, the large volume of work that must be done in a short time. Under these circumstances, their capacity to act as connectors is limited.

What can be done to fulfill stage 1?

This first stage's **objective** is to ensure that **SwDs are aware of and receive information about WIL** at their PSI, allowing them to see themselves as possible WIL candidates.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Officers should use i**nclusive and respectful language and vocabulary** and **practice it with every student,** not just those with visible disabilities.

- Officers should proactively work to **identify and address barriers through student feedback** and advocate for internal updates and improvements.

- **Officers' performance evaluations should** include practices, behaviours, and knowledge tests related to accessibility strategies and tools.

- Officers should receive/keep an updated **list of resources** about technologies, equipment, software, and applications they can suggest to students and employers and use for themselves; the list also includes external partners such as community organizations specializing in supporting people with disabilities.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Co-design and feedback

- Scholars advocate for PSIs to **involve SwDs in the early design and development of WIL programming through participatory research and co-design** (Boye, 2022). SwDs have lived experience and expertise, can help to proactively identify potential barriers before they occur, and can provide guidance on how they can be best supported.

- PSIs need clear, accessible, and confidential **paths to share feedback and report any inappropriate behaviours** students encounter from peers, faculty members and admin staff. Several of our interviewees highlighted the importance of listening to SwDs and their feedback.

General best practices

- A primary best practice we gathered from our interviewees is that PSIs should **work to implement accessible practices consistently and universally across the institution** instead of treating them as ad hoc accommodations. In other words, the system should move away from the common reactive approach and **adopt proactive processes** that will allow the design of services and products to be accessible from the start.

- While working toward digital transformation, PSIs must continue to prioritize equity and accessibility. For instance, full digital accessibility is possible only within certain conditions, such as **adequate bandwidth and Internet services, easy access to technologies, and some degree of digital literacy.** PSIs should always check for biases and assumptions when designing digital services for students.

- When it comes to improving physical accessibility to buildings, offices, and campus areas, PSIs can **provide resources such as maps of campus buildings and instructions on how to access them via interactive digital tools in addition to physical copies of maps.** This can ensure SwDs can easily find and access WIL offices in their institutions and have face-to-face interactions should this be their preferred method when seeking WIL opportunities.

Technical Standards

- Any student-facing digital content regarding WIL programming must be created and displayed in **basic accessible formatting** that complies with relevant standards. Here are some resources to help those working at institutions get started:

- **For institutions very early in their accessibility journeys** that want to take a step back and gain some **simplified information on getting started,** this Accessibility Fundamentals resource from W3C is a great place to start: **https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/**

- For practical help with creating accessible formats, the Government of Canada's *Digital Accessibility Toolkit* has a *How-to* page outlining **core steps and tips for making your documents, web content, virtual events, forms, and emails more accessible.** WIL officers can use this resource when creating content such as **job postings, mass emails, virtual WIL info sessions/workshops, sign-up forms, etc.**

- To ensure compliance with the AODA, institutions must refer to the Act's Information and Communications Standards. The AODA webpage called "**What is the Information and Communications Standards?**" provides a brief overview.

- The Information and Communications Standards require that public websites conform to **WCAG 2.0 Level AA.** An overview of WCAG 2 can be found here: **https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/**

- **Need external support to ensure your website meets WCAG 2.0 AA?** The AODA offers a Website Accessibility Audit service. Contact them for a free quote at **https://aoda.ca/aoda-website-accessibility-audit/**

- **Want to build internal capacity for understanding and implementing WCAG 2.0 AA specifications?** The AODA offers on-site training as well. Visit **https://aoda.ca/onsite-training/**

- All the institutions and organizations we investigated have already adopted the basic mandatory AODA training course (available for free from the AODA's website at **https://www.aoda.ca/free-online-training/**) for staff members. However, we strongly recommend providing additional ongoing training opportunities to enhance staff members' knowledge and expertise around accessibility topics, strategies, and tools, as the AODA itself suggests.

Pre-WIL Programming

- While many PSIs offer transition programs for students first entering post- secondary, we have found that existing programs typically do not **integrate WIL awareness or accessibility information/resources for SwDs.** Some interviewees suggested implementing individualized **pre-WIL programs** that integrate WIL and accessibility support from the onset of post-secondary education. This approach ensures that SwDs will receive the necessary skills training to effectively

prepare and advocate for their needs throughout their educational journey, including active participation in WIL opportunities. One remarkable initiative from Queen's University called the **RARC program** offers support to SwDs transitioning into high school, post-secondary, and beyond by addressing topics such as self-understanding and self-esteem, IEPs and accommodations, assistive technology, self-advocacy, stress management, and positive mental health.

Awareness Raising

- We recommend as a baseline that institutions **raise awareness of the inequities and discrimination** faced by SwDs and other traditionally marginalized students among faculty and staff in WIL and accessibility offices across all levels of employees through, for example, professional development, training, or other learning opportunities.

- **Integrating awareness into every conversation** instead of making it an additional service that must be requested is an effective way to demonstrate the availability and accessibility of WIL. Integrative practices would support SwDs and educate students without disabilities, faculty, and community members.

- We advocate for developing **comprehensive and accessible WIL awareness resources** to reach all students, focusing on those with disabilities. These resources should serve as valuable guides to **inform students about the benefits of WIL and how to access it**, the services available, how WIL opportunities work for SwDs, and success stories and good practices. Some possible communications channels include regular WIL e-newsletters, WIL advertisements on the institution's

website, and multimedia resources such as videos or interactive guides. Traditional speaker series and in-class presentations can also be used. All these options must be designed usinguniversal design principles, ensuring they are accessible to students with diverse needs.

- Our environmental scan indicated a lack of websites focused on WIL and accessibility together. Instead, the two are often separate sections of websites or completely non-existent. We suggest that PSIs implement **accessible sites where students can access information on WIL and accessibility together.** It is also important to continuously evaluate where information on websites or in any digital communication with students can be simplified, clarified, and made accessible on different platforms.

Cultivating Engagement Among SwDs

- To engage SwDs in WIL, PSIs are encouraged to facilitate **opportunities to meet with mentors, learning coaches, and role models.** For example, they can establish **mentorship programs or networking events** where SwDs can speak to alumni, working professionals, fellow students, and other members of their local community who can speak to succeeding in school or working with a disability (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, n.d.).

- **Proactively engage** with SwDs through **student groups, associations,** and internal and external partners (e.g., WIL coordinators, program directors, etc.) to **attract them to WIL programs.**

- PSIs can also organize events like **speaker series and information sessions that promote discussions and initiatives to**

enhance accessibility and accommodation in WIL settings. By fostering collaboration and addressing challenges SwDs face, this approach contributes to creating more inclusive WIL spaces.

Accommodations

- The literature indicates that students who have registered their disabilities for academic support with their PSI are significantly more likely to request accommodations in WIL settings (Gatto et al., 2021). This suggests that **PSIs need to play a crucial role in guiding SwDs to ask for academic accommodations since this competency may be transferable to WIL** (Gatto et al., 2021).

- The National Educational Association of Disabled Students suggests that any PSI offering WIL opportunities through government funding should be required to establish formal policies that articulate and communicate to students their legal right to request and receive reasonable accommodations (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2018). This principle of **informing and reminding students of their rights to request and receive accommodation** should be applied to all programming more broadly, regardless of funding source. Such information should also be displayed conspicuously (e.g. at the top of web pages).

- PSIs are encouraged to **have formal institutional policies regarding accommodations and accessibility for all aspects of the educational experience, including WIL programming.** Of course, these policies must follow the AODA and the Ontario Code.

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

- We propose **establishing a robust network of employer partners** equipped with the necessary resources to create universally accessible workplaces to facilitate WIL opportunities for SwDs. To achieve this, we advocate for the adoption of The David C. Onley Initiative [Field Guide](#) practices, which include the following key elements: collaboration between service providers; designing inclusive and accessible events; making employment journeys accessible; developing the functions of the employment pathways facilitator; and nurturing an inclusive and accessible campus.

- Employers can connect with students as potential candidates by hosting information sessions in accessible on-campus spaces or virtually. If online, PSIs should offer assistance in hosting the events in accessible formats and provide all the necessary support to interested SwDs.

- PSIs should **assess government-level policies, regulations, and laws** and ensure their implementation and evaluation while making all this information **public and digitally accessible.**

- The provincial and federal governments are key actors, but our literature review indicates that despite an increased demand for accessibility supports and accommodations in post-secondary education, **government funding** has not grown to reflect the increased accessibility needs (Lanthier et al., 2023). This is especially pressing given that disability offices often rely on institutional funding and grants from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). HEQCO, the

Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee (PSE-SDC), and the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) have **called on MCU to provide adequate and stable funding** while recognizing that this would necessitate significant training and investment. Echoing the PSE-SDC and OHRC, HEQCO also calls for:

» **Increasing funding** to all PSIs to establish a permanent and sustained funding strategy instead of top-ups or add-ons;

» **Streamlining funding** programs and reducing the number of grants to serve SwDs better;

» **Revising annual reporting** to capture more nuanced data on needed supports and program impacts to inform funding allocations that are outcomes-focused (Lanthier et al., 2023).

Stage 2: Access / Assessment of student needs

The second stage, **access/assessment of student needs**, is crucial for SwDs seeking WIL once they have been informed of it in stage 1. In stage 2, students access services through various means: digitally (websites and emails), by phone, or physically. Each service needs a digitally accessible guide on its webpage with instructions on accessing the service, which must be offered in multiple formats upon request. Moreover, officers should identify and address the presence of any barriers (physical, virtual, or relational) along the access process for each channel and promptly act to remove or fix them.

Physical barriers include anything from inaccessible spaces to a lack of proper signage. **Virtual barriers** include texts not formatted for digital accessibility; a lack of alternative text, audio descriptions, captioning, and colour contrast; keyboard navigation; and the use of CAPTCHA tests. **Relational barriers** may occur through staff not being adequately trained or demonstrating bias. Effective communication and information sharing with other campus offices are also essential. For instance, a WIL officer looking for co-op opportunities should know how to access resources from the accessibility office, EDI office, etc. Sharing information, resources, and activities related to supporting SwDs ensures that inclusivity and support are upheld.

Further, the importance of **disclosure** for SwDs informs every part of the process, but disclosure comes with multifaceted considerations. Many interviewees agreed that our society is still far from the ideal world in which services and organizations are ready to adapt their processes to any accommodation required, in which students and employees can thrive and contribute without excluding themselves from applications because they are afraid of being considered "not enough." While we should work together to realize that world, we must consider what can be done now to alleviate these issues. Facilitating the disclosure of conditions, characteristics, gifts, or exceptionalities – as part of the many definitions PSIs are implementing to be inclusive – is a key to allowing the deployment of accommodation policies and procedures.

Greater attention must be devoted to students arriving from high school and starting their first year in post-secondary. **There are significant differences between how disabilities and accommodations are managed, labelled, and supported in high school compared to post-secondary education.** Those differences, if not adequately

communicated to new students when trying to access WIL, may result in misunderstandings, frustration, and difficulties, negatively affecting students' performance and ultimately dragging students into vicious cycles of delays, failures, and missed opportunities. To avoid this, students need clarity about what disability/accessibility support looks like at their institution and in their particular fields.

SwDs may also opt-out from WIL to avoid late graduation. This can occur with those who need breaks throughout the placement term or need any accommodation that could lengthen the period of their term. If their WIL placement goes long into their academic course term, they may be unable to take required courses, forcing them to delay their graduation year to take these mandatory classes when they are available again the following year.

One particularly challenging situation is when **students do not have proper documentation regarding their disability** (e.g., diagnosis, a formal list of requested accommodations, etc.). There are many reasons for this to occur, almost always beyond the control or responsibility of the accessibility or WIL officers. Nonetheless, dealing with these situations requires energy and time to navigate the students through the process of identifying the necessary documentation, contacting their doctor, and waiting for everything needed to allow the PSI officer to intervene. Having a system that encourages early conversations around disabilities and accommodations, making those topics a recurrent discussion item in diverse situations, and showing students that support is available would potentially increase the opportunity to provide proper support early on, with fewer negative consequences on students' careers.

In many PSIs, WIL-related services are provided by **two different entities: centralized offices and program-specific services.** Centralized offices

work in standardized ways to manage high volumes of students and opportunities and have dedicated officers for organizing outreach and partnerships. These offices provide services like soft skills and professionalization training for students, as well as consulting for faculty members and employer hosts. Alongside the central office, PSIs may have administrative personnel and faculty members creating program-specific WIL opportunities for their courses. These services can be formal and standardized, or they can also be very informal and based on community connections. The level and quality of collaboration and communication that program-specific services have with centralized offices vary widely across institutions, from close relationships to working entirely in silos.

From the literature, environmental scans, and interviews, it is difficult to say if one is better than the other, as there are many positive aspects to having both services working to find meaningful WIL experiences for students. In the case of SwDs, these positive aspects are even more apparent, since officers of program-specific services can tailor the entire process, from the selection of employers to the full support provided during the WIL.

As a good practice, some PSIs are working on identifying how to support collaboration and improve efficiency between centralized and program-specific services, as it is clear that both are effective and needed. During this process, it will be vital to consider the AODA 2025 targets and the needs of SwDs.

What can be done to fulfill stage 2?

The objective at this stage is to identify resources for and ways to foster improved experiences for SwDs seeking to access WIL after they have been adequately informed about WIL during stage 1.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

To address the gaps identified through our research, we suggest:

- The WIL officer should make sure to **plan meetings with students** following the students' requests (technology, devices, place, time, etc.).

- Further, we heard from an interviewee about using a centralized platform (e.g., SharePoint site) that was established to provide accessible information on SwDs and available aids. This resource was used by individuals, including WIL officers, to educate themselves about various types of disabilities and the specific considerations associated with each. By accessing this type of central platform, officers can better assist students in seeking work opportunities, thereby fostering a more positive experience for them.

- Since disclosure can be challenging for students due to fear of judgment or exclusion, **disclosure of a disability should be respectfully welcomed** by staff. However, students should never feel forced, pressured, or coerced to disclose, nor should they be asked if they have a disability or assumed to have one if they have not disclosed it. For those students who choose to disclose and also request an accommodation, any reasonable requests for accommodations must be acted upon by the staff member following institutional policies or processes.

- Staff at WIL offices who are informed that a student has a disability must **not make any presumptions about what a student can or cannot do** in a WIL placement due to their disability. Staff should always **defer to the student** to outline their abilities, strengths, and limitations, recognizing that they are experts on their own disability as it affects them.

- A perspective that we heard from an interviewee that we encourage other WIL staff to adopt is to **approach every single student with the mindset that everyone (regardless of whether they have a disability or condition) has limitations as well as strengths and particular needs that they may require to demonstrate their strengths** (e.g., a quiet work environment, flexible hours, specific software or equipment).

- It is good practice to **ask every student seeking a WIL opportunity what they would need to perform well** in WIL and where their strengths lie, regardless of abilities.

- Recognizing that WIL offices will not always have the answers or solutions to all matters of disability, accessibility, or accommodation, staff at these offices are encouraged to **gain awareness of other sources of information or support they can refer students to**. This includes **internal/institutional support** (e.g. how to contact the Disability Services Office, request an academic accommodation, or report complaints/concerns) as well as external support offered through non-governmental organizations and government at municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

- Working with the students **to help them learn how to ask for accommodations and advocate for their needs** (e.g.

workplace strategies for mental health) is another key suggestion that emerged from the interviews. Many Accessibility Offices already do this, and, while we support it, it also calls for a reflection at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels on the responsibility of disclosure resting on the SwD instead of on the institution. Our interviewees expressed a unanimous opinion: the more we talk about these topics, the better, in as many situations as possible, like classes, events, websites, meetings, networking activities, job fairs, awards, etc. Considering the possibility that someone needs accommodation should become an automatic process for all institutional activities rather than waiting for SwDs to bring it up. We recommend an accessible-by-design approach.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

At the institutional level, there are many ways to improve outcomes for students based on the barriers described above:

- PSIs should have offices that are accessible physically and digitally. If not already, these must be integrated into university policies regarding accessible spaces for students and staff.

- WIL offices are encouraged to **embrace digital transformation by digitizing their systems and processes**. For example, student-facing WIL information, placement openings, application processes, and so on should be publicly available online in accessible formatting. The COVID-19 pandemic ignited a shift towards digital transformation, but we must continue to transform and improve post-COVID.

- **Using the period between enrollment confirmation (which usually happens in spring) and the course start date (usually September) to share information with and acquire information from students is considered a good practice by many interviewees.** For instance, PSIs could advertise accessibility and WIL services and encourage students to contact such offices before the start date. As a result, officers would have the opportunity to explain processes and needed documentation, opportunities, timelines, and differences between high school & post-secondary education and PSIs & workplaces. Also, information could be collected about students' expectations of services provided and opportunities available. Based on students' answers, accessibility officers could anticipate the needs of the incoming cohorts more accurately and plan accordingly. The lack of resources that many interviewees reported would still exist, but in the long term, such an information-gathering strategy would allow for more advocacy work and evidence-based requests for improvements.

- One tool to improve the effectiveness of meetings between students and officers that we heard about during our interviews is a **self-report assessment tool** to increase student engagement, which can be tailored to SwDs. This tool, which can be fully digital, **allows students to reflect on their situations before meeting with a WIL officer**. Students can identify their functional limitations, strengths, and suggestions for accommodation. This can make the process more interactive, engaging, and fruitful for students while allowing for their feedback on services and experiences.

- We also suggest designing an **evaluation questionnaire** that asks students if WIL services were easy to access, if the officer used appropriate vocabulary and behaviour, and how they felt about the entire experience of accessing information and receiving initial responses.

- Increased coordination and integration of the operations of accessibility/disability offices and WIL/career offices on campus could provide targeted information and services for SwDs and **overcome siloing**.

- PSIs could offer or mandate more **formal opportunities for professional development and training** as well as **practical tools/resources for staff** on areas of commonly reported knowledge gaps, such as:

  » EDI frameworks and best practices,

  » The experiences of SwDs in WIL, including the unique barriers they commonly face (e.g. discrimination, harassment, bias),

  » How to support the school-to-work transition of SwDs,

  » How to feel equipped to challenge employers who engage in biased or discriminatory recruitment practices.

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

Within the overall beyond the institution level of WIL, we highlight and suggest the following points.

- We found a need for **targeted government funding** to create WIL programs for SwDs and other marginalized communities. WIL opportunities should attract students, rather than put the onus on students to

work to seek them out. It would be especially beneficial if such programs were created in disciplines where SwDs are traditionally underrepresented, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2018).

- WIL officers and employers must make an **intentional effort to build relationships with students**; this can occur through student or community groups (e.g. EDI student associations, community organizations tailored to students, etc.). This is especially valuable for employers and PSIs in rural and remote communities. Contact of this nature can ensure that employers have an understanding of how they can adapt their WILs to the needs of SwDs. Fostering strong relationships between WIL offices and employers can also increase awareness among employers of available financial resources and support available to organizations interested in launching or sustaining WIL (**Student Stories, Employer Priorities | Business + Higher Education Roundtable**).

Stage 3: Application

The third stage is when SwDs have made it through learning information about WIL and accessessing WIL services, and are now ready to apply for WIL opportunities.
Several aspects must be considered at this stage.

The main initial barrier for SwDs is eligibility criteria that impede the starting of the application process if they are not met.

Three main factors influence eligibility for WIL experiences. First, **PSIs define WIL activities** (e.g., co-ops, internships, practicum placements, short

team works for specific organizations and projects) and set different requirements, even within the same institution. Some courses and programs may have unique definitions and criteria, sometimes differing from the institution's general standards. For instance, the requirement for co-ops and internships to be full-time and completed within a set period (for example, 12 to 16 weeks) serves as a restrictive eligibility criterion, effectively excluding many SwDs. Second, **employer hosts have their requirements** for accepting students, which may include specific skill sets and qualifications akin to job postings and particularities such as the student's PSI, course of study, year of enrollment, etc. Lastly, **funders, including government programs and foundations, impact eligibility through their regulations**. These may restrict student selection based on individual traits like age or citizenship and program conditions, such as the requirement to return to school after completing the WIL experience.

Many programs require full course enrollment and a minimum GPA for WIL opportunities. SwDs might have accommodations like reduced course loads, leading to slower progression and inadvertently becoming barriers to WIL opportunities.

Incomplete required courses by the semester's end may mean ineligibility for WIL, forcing students to wait until those courses are offered again, which at small PSIs could mean the following year. Thus, students with reduced loads are eligible for WIL a year later than their peers, affecting their post-secondary education. Consequently, many students with accommodations opt out of WIL to avoid delays, focusing solely on academic achievements. This systemic rigidity results in SwDs finishing their education without WIL experience, which can be a competitive disadvantage with long-term impacts on their careers.

Another barrier is that **recruiters at hosting organizations might not be current on regulations**, causing them to reject applications from students with specific characteristics. This issue is complicated to identify due to the high volume of applications for some opportunities, rendering individual cases negligible and leading to **SwDs' self-exclusion** when they feel there is no chance to have their needs met.

In addition, **employers often lack awareness about disabilities** and how to accommodate them, fearing that accommodation is difficult and costly. However, it is usually much simpler and more affordable than anticipated. Additionally, there is a **pervasive stigma** that people with disabilities will not integrate well, slow down processes, and not perform adequately or quickly enough to meet deadlines. This is a misconception that needs addressing.

From a digital standpoint, **the diversity of platforms and systems employers use for application collection poses a universal barrier that disproportionately impacts SwDs**. Challenges such as creating accounts, navigating AI video interviews, answering paragraph-based screening questions, or being limited to only two attempts for a timed response video represent significant hurdles. These obstacles often lead SwDs to abandon the application process.

Interviews revealed a **prevalent fear among students about disclosing their disabilities or accommodation needs to employers** due to concern that they might not be offered employment or may be perceived as a burden rather than a valuable asset. Additionally, students often bear the significant responsibility of assessing whether opportunities will be accommodating—a time-consuming and challenging task. This difficulty in gauging accessibility can make the job search process more tedious and may lead to disinterest in applying for positions for which they are well-suited.

WILs typically require one or several interviews with potential employers, which is another process identified as a barrier for SwDs. Many students are either unaccustomed to interviews or find the process inaccessible, suggesting a possible role for WIL officers in informing employers and providing background on the students' needs.

Finally, while large PSIs might be able to negotiate or set their own rules for employers that should benefit all students including SwDs, this approach is often rejected by employers due to required adjustments to their standard practices. Smaller institutions, lacking this leverage, attempt to offset it with increased flexibility.

What can be done to fulfill stage 3?

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- The WIL officer should provide supportive tools to assist students in **adequately articulating their skills and experiences on resumes and during interviews.** Web services, AI, apps and software can all help during this phase. Also, they should check that the **application process is accessible**, including all documents, requests, and communications from the employer.

- WIL officers should know that **funding opportunities** like **SWPP** offer financial assistance for hiring students from underrepresented groups, including SwDs, covering up to 70% of student wages. WIL offices are encouraged to be knowledgeable about available financial resources to ensure that employers have access to diverse talent pools while providing necessary support for inclusive hiring practices.

- We suggest that PSI officers have a checklist for **constructive dialogues with employers.** PSIs can advocate using the correct language and tools with employers while looking for WIL partnerships. From here, the officer can decide whether the workplace is adequate, in need of help but open to it, or unwilling/unprepared to welcome SwDs. This information must be collected and organized for future reference and use.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- As a potential **solution to the restraints of eligibility criteria**, some PSIs now consider students eligible for WIL opportunities if they are enrolled in at least 40% of a full-time course load and are registered with any accessibility education program. This adjustment opens more WIL opportunities to SwDs. However, its full implementation also requires employers to be flexible with workload and deliverables. Moreover, the requirement for a full-time WIL experience lasting three to four months poses a significant challenge for SwDs, mirroring concerns previously discussed regarding workplace inclusion.

- The significantly lower employment opportunities for people with disabilities indicate they could benefit greatly from **additional support** (Boye, 2022), and research shows that SwDs are less satisfied during the application and interview stages of the WIL process compared to their peers without disabilities (Chatoor and Balata, 2023). One way to increase support for SwDs at this stage would be for academic programs, employer hosts, and WIL offices to collaborate on pre-WIL programs to prepare students for their WIL experiences. These programs can cover general topics (e.g., interview skills,

professionalism, workplace culture) and also accessibility-specific topics (e.g., disclosure, requesting accommodations, practicing inclusivity, eliminating biases). Such support, already embedded in many PSIs and programs, should be accessible to all students to ensure inclusivity.

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

- It is essential for organizations, whether PSIs or employers, to **demonstrate their commitment to inclusiveness and accessibility in all possible ways**. For example, one commendable practice is **adding statements to job postings** that affirm the organization's dedication to inclusion, its receptiveness to applicants with diverse experiences and backgrounds, and the option for candidates to request accommodations if needed. Additionally, some organizations include a **message encouraging individuals from marginalized groups to apply**, even if they believe they do not fully meet all the job requirements. Such statements are particularly effective in preventing the self-exclusion of talented candidates. These signals of inclusivity should be evident in every public-facing artifact, including websites, brochures, and social media profiles, among others. However, **they cannot be empty words;** they must be backed by consistent actions across the organization and its staff. There are numerous accounts of students embarking on WIL experiences in organizations that appeared to be inclusive and accessible, only to terminate the WIL due to discrimination from supervisors and colleagues or simply because of the inaccessibility of buildings and offices.

- Employers are urged to practice **empathy and cultural sensitivity, especially during**

the application and interview stages, which are considered the most challenging for equity-seeking students (Cukier et al., 2018). Examples include employing best practices such as offering flexibility with the application or interview processes, evaluating "good fit" via multiple or non-standardized methods, and so on.

- **Employers' job portals should feature opportunities with clear accessibility policies and regulations**, easing the burden on students to determine accessibility themselves. Employers can offer guides on available resources, tools, and technologies to support the application process.

- When creating the posting for the WIL opportunity, **employers should practice transparency by clearly and directly outlining the operational requirements of the opportunity**, including any physical requirements, how much standing/lifting is required, etc. Employers are also encouraged to be clear about what they would like from students for the application, such as indicating whether both a cover letter and resume are required.

- **Pre-recording interviews or pitches rather than live meetings are options that offer flexibility**. They empower students to fully engage in the process without the time constraints and pressures associated with live meetings. By giving students enough time to prepare and articulate their ideas, this approach not only fosters accessibility but also ensures that every participant can showcase their abilities effectively.

- We advise employers and PSIs to publicly **welcome and encourage SwDs to apply to WIL opportunities and request accommodations**. This can be done through promotional material or simply by including a statement on the website or posting that indicates organizational commitment to being inclusive and equitable.

- Offering more online **WIL placements** increases accessibility, as they offer benefits such as affordability and increased flexibility for students with physical and mental disabilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online placements also increased safety for students with health risks (Dollinger et al., 2023a).

Stage 4: Recruitment / Onboarding

Employer hosts need to remember that a **WIL opportunity is still fully considered an educational experience**. Therefore, expectations, outcomes, relationships, and feedback should be organized and managed accordingly.

PSIs and hosting organizations should adopt clear agreements, such as learning outcomes or expected deliverables, to protect students from exploitation and remind all the parties involved that the success of a WIL experience is not measurable only through work performances and achievements, but also—and most importantly— through observing and analyzing learning and skills development.

Many PSIs already have agreements like those described. However, our environmental scan and interviews clearly reveal that the entire recruitment process, from the advertisement to the onboarding, is designed for people without disabilities in almost all the available opportunities.

For instance, many postings related to WIL opportunities are still published without considering accessibility standards, such as the presence of a statement that encourages candidates to ask for accommodations during the selection process if needed. Digital accessibility could help fill these gaps by adding default settings for accommodations even if the employer forgets to add it.

The apparent **lack of awareness about disabilities and accommodations among employers** constitutes a significant barrier for SwDs, as we have noted at multiple stages. Another recurring barrier we have noted is **disclosure**. We found multiple examples of SwDs finding themselves in situations in which they have to or want to disclose their conditions, characteristics, and needs with PSI personnel, employers, and supervisors. We found many tools to encourage students to disclose and guide them during recruitment and onboarding. For instance, having an inclusive workplace culture, supporting EDI initiatives, having Employee Resources Groups and peer- support groups, and being able to show teams composed of individuals with disabilities and diverse lived experiences are all elements that can substantially contribute to a safe environment for disclosures and an inclusive environment for WIL.

Still, SwDs will most likely not disclose if they feel unsafe. Therefore, working on disclosure techniques with students is necessary. Hosting organizations must also be helped and supported because many may need to be taught how to provide a safe environment and create a culture where disclosure feels comfortable.

What can be done to fulfill stage 4?

At this stage, students should have access to various resources to aid in their WIL journey through the previous stages. This encompasses funding incentives for employers hiring SwDs, tools to help students articulate their skills and expertise, and resources to enhance their understanding of the workplace environment.

While we continue to offer suggestions for the individual, institution, and beyond, many at this stage overlap and need to be executed with collaboration across multiple levels.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- From our interviews, it is clear that an **individualized approach** is the most appropriate when resources allow. Each student's WIL is unique, which is even more true when working with SwDs. For instance, it is highly beneficial to help the student prepare an action plan about the activities, tasks, communications, and actions they must consider when starting a WIL placement: what to disclose, to whom, and how; what are SwDs' rights and responsibilities; how to manage discriminatory behaviours; how to advocate for changes; and more.

- To adequately prepare students with disabilities for the world of work, **institutions must educate students on how to self-advocate for their needs**. While the PSI is responsible for adequate implementation of this education, we consider it an individual level suggestion because its execution should be as individualized for each SwD as possible. Our interviewees emphasized that in employment settings, it is not enough for employees to say, "I have a disability" or

"I learn differently" because employers will not understand the implications of this. Frequently, employers ask WIL staff for more information on the student's disability, which they are unable to provide due to privacy laws. Therefore, **students must learn to autonomously articulate the functional implications of their disability and precisely what resources they need to do their best work** (whether that is extra time, assistive technology, sequencing of tasks, etc.). The earlier in the WIL process this is done, the fewer issues and miscommunications will arise.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- PSIs should establish a framework or guide to facilitate connections between employers and students and **ensure that recruitment and onboarding processes are fully accessible**. While it is ultimately the employer's responsibility, PSIs should play a role in guiding and facilitating the adoption of strategies and tools to help SwDs. Employer hosts may lack existing or sufficient strategies, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises.

- PSIs should provide **free comprehensive workplace training to SwDs**, covering self-advocacy, communication, conflict resolution, and workplace expectations.

- Some PSIs use **electronic placement accommodation forms designed explicitly for WIL opportunities**, covering areas such as the student's functional limitations and needs, as well as their strengths, skills, and expertise. Through this form, WIL officers and students can decide what to share with the employer to facilitate WIL onboarding. The document could also list informal (e.g. writing notes by hand vs on a computer) and formal accommodations needs (e.g. purchasing specialized

devices). The guide can allow for the timely and tailored implementation of necessary accommodations, faster set-up allowing for the actual work to begin sooner, more autonomy and independence for the student, more effective use of their talents, and an equitable approach to the entire process.

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

- Employers are strongly encouraged to **foster an accessible work environment that is a welcome and safe space for people with disabilities**. This includes ensuring that the workplace's built environment is physically accessible as prescribed by the AODA and cultivating an open and knowledgeable organizational culture.

- Employers are urged to **confront and challenge their conscious and unconscious biases** regarding people with disabilities through education and training opportunities. They should ensure that all employees are educated on working appropriately with PwDs.

- During the onboarding process, **host organizations are encouraged to ask students what they can do as an employer to help the student do the best job possible**. This generalized question can be asked to all students and employees regardless of perceived abilities and disabilities. It is a simple and helpful question that encourages students to self-advocate for their needs and allows employers to gain a deeper understanding of the different ways people learn and work. Many host organizations may not be aware of such best practices, so **we encourage WIL staff to inform and encourage employers to adopt practices like these**.

- Employer hosts could offer a **preliminary seminar to familiarize students with workplace dynamics**. For instance, students may have different interpretations of things taken for granted by more experienced staff, such as expectations around timelines and completion of work, specialized language and terminology, and the general organizational culture.

- Some WIL officers we interviewed commented on the importance of **considering the time between a WIL offer and start date**. Depending on the nature of one's disability, on-site accommodations may need to be created or acquired (e.g. accessible washrooms, devices, etc.). When the period between offer and start date is too short, there may not be sufficient time to complete the accommodation requests, which can severely impact the student's experience.

Stage 5: The WIL Experience

In Stage 2, we described the potential difficulties students meet while transitioning from high school to post-secondary due to the differences in defining and managing disabilities and accommodations.

Stage 5 is a similar period of transition, in which a SwD transitions from an academic to a professional environment and encounter different approaches and strategies from employers regarding disabilities.

The most obvious barrier in this stage is the potential absence of any supports and/or absence of any organizational culture that allows open conversations about disabilities and accommodations, but there are two other barriers to consider.

The first is **SwDs' assumption that the arrangements provided during their studies will automatically transfer into the WIL experience**. While a WIL opportunity is (or should be) considered an educational experience by all parties involved, this assumption is unlikely to prove true. For instance, coursework and hands-on work are different, as well as the relationship between a student and an instructor compared to the relationship between an employee and a supervisor. Therefore, accommodations for an academic course might not apply to a workplace scenario. Some examples include extra time for writing exams, note-taking services, and voice-recording lectures. This kind of "fabricated environment" – as defined by one of our interviewees – cannot necessarily be reproduced during a WIL experience at a host organization. Students must learn how to manage new things like feedback they are not used to and deadlines without extensions. This new scenario calls for varied responses to identify what accommodations might be needed and advocate for them.

Employers should focus on managing the conversation with PSIs, WIL officers, academic supervisors and students in a way that **shows openness and willingness to consider potential needs due to disabilities** in the early stages of the hiring process. **Such conversations must be supported by policies and procedures already in place by the WIL start date**, and all employees must receive adequate information and the necessary training to implement and follow those policies.

What can be done to fulfill stage 5?

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- When working with SwDs, organizations should recognize that **each individual communicates differently and may require different technologies for**

support. Therefore, it is vital to work collaboratively with each student to find solutions that work for them.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- During our interviews, a "**digital check-in**" **between students and WIL or accessibility officers** was suggested as a way to enhance students' experiences in WIL, especially where regular check-ins are not standard practice. This framework would allow timely communications around physical, virtual, and relational barriers students might face. If fully developed in an app or software program, such a tool could also connect users to reliable sources, templates and guides, assessment tools, etc.

- **Providing mentorship is highly beneficial for SwDs**. Establishing connections with mentors, particularly within organizations that employ others with disabilities, can offer guidance and support. This helps students overcome challenges and effectively advocate for themselves in the workplace.

- PSIs can **create comprehensive online resource hubs** to collect common questions and answers, validated recommendations, and other resources students can use at any stage of the WIL path, covering essential topics like disclosure, accommodations, professionalism, and workplace communication. The online platform is not a replacement for in-person meetings but can ensure quicker and more convenient access to resources.

- **Some PSIs have created internal WIL opportunities for SwDs at the PSIs themselves, with remarkably positive**

impacts. Firstly, these internal settings allow WIL and accessibility offices to thoroughly test and evaluate resources, strategies, and tools designed to support SwDs, offering a more detailed and systemic approach than possible with external hosts. Secondly, these opportunities facilitate appropriate learning, enhance awareness, and increase the engagement of faculty and administrative staff in relation to disability. Thirdly, these internal WIL experiences are often safer environments where students can develop foundational skills, which traditional hosts sometimes overlook. It was noted in interviews that SwDs generally have fewer chances to cultivate soft skills and gain work-related experiences compared to their peers without disabilities, placing them at a competitive disadvantage when seeking employment. Lastly, through these experiences, SwDs receive support in building a toolkit of resources crucial for any future employment. This includes understanding their legal rights, accessibility regulations, strategies for disclosing disabilities, requesting accommodations, and comprehending the differences between accessibility and accommodations in educational versus workplace settings.

- **Evaluation after WIL experiences are concluded is a key element with notable benefits for all stakeholders**. However, we did not find significant examples during our investigation. A thorough evaluation plan could provide insights into any aspect of the WIL path and allow the improvement of services offered and actions implemented. **Evaluation tools can be easily developed as digital products and mobile applications, fully connected to other resources, tailored for SwDs, and able to follow the students' careers after graduation.**

- **Institutions are encouraged to collect institutional data on students in WIL programs and run graduate destination surveys** that gather employment data approximately six months after graduation. Surveys should include a question where respondents can self-identify as being part of a marginalized group, including persons with disabilities. Using this data, PSIs can measure the employability of graduates who identify as having a disability who undertook WIL compared to those who did not.

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

- On the employer side, facilitating **team-based projects during WIL opportunities** can significantly benefit SwDs. This approach promotes a collaborative environment where students can contribute collectively instead of individualized tasks. Integrating students into teams allows them to capitalize on their strengths and, where necessary, delegate more challenging tasks to teammates with the appropriate skill sets for those tasks.

- Third parties, like community organizations that use their expertise to identify employers willing to undertake the necessary steps to become fully accessible, can be key players. **Third-party organizations like BHER can vet and collaborate with organizations willing to host students, including SwDs, and perform as a trusted filter**. Of course, using a third-party is not always a perfect solution, as we know that resources are scarce and individual behaviours always carry biases. However, the presence of community organizations and associations able to mediate between PSIs and hosting organizations is a characteristic that was highlighted as tremendously beneficial by those interviewees who were able to use such connections, and identified as a potentially significant improvement by those who do not currently have such connections in their communities.

- **Third-party organizations should be developed and supported**. Given the previous point, these organizations can provide advice and guidance to all stakeholders and be a point of reference regarding laws and regulations, best practices, tools and strategies, and even training and evaluation.

- Many interviewees suggested implementing **peer support groups, employee resource groups, and mentorship programs** in both the PSIs and the workplace to make the entire WIL experience for SwDs more grounded, meaningful, and productive.

50-Item Assessment Tool

This assessment is a tool for PSIs and individual officers to evaluate the level and quality of the implementation of (digital) accessibility principles in their work.

We present a checklist of Yes/No statements and questions to make the assessment easy to use. However, we encourage the user to go deeper and consider that some statements might stimulate further reflection on the item's level of development or quality. Ongoing improvements are welcomed as accessibility scenarios constantly evolve.

This assessment can also help PSIs identify gaps, actions, and priorities to support smooth and equitable development of SwDs.

We present the statements by WIL stages.

Stage 1: WIL Awareness/ Information

1. I am knowledgeable about the inclusive and respectful language I should use when interacting with students, colleagues, and external partners. In addition, I know what resources to consult if I need to refresh my knowledge.

2. I have standardized strategies to ensure I consistently use inclusive language with all students, not just those visibly identifiable as having disabilities.

3. I have an updated list of resources and services for SwDs available at the institution.

4. I have an updated list of resources and services for SwDs available in the local community.

5. I contact community partners and organizations specialized in supporting SwDs at least once a year to update the information I provide to students.

6. In addition to the mandatory AODA training, my organization offers additional in-depth training resources on accessibility.

7. We have strategies to reach out to students to advertise our services proactively. I can easily recall at least three strategies/tools currently in use.

8. In our transition programs for students entering post-secondary from high school, we have content on WIL awareness and WIL for SwDs.

9. All of our public-facing digital content regarding WIL programming is created and displayed in accessible formatting that complies with relevant standards.

10. We have formal strategies to involve SwDs in the early design and development of WIL programming through, for example, participatory research or codesign.

11. We provide ongoing and formally supported opportunities for SwDs to network and engage with mentors, learning coaches, peers, and role models.

12. Our accommodation policies communicate to students their legal right to request and receive reasonable accommodations.

13. Our WIL and accessibility offices and websites operate collaboratively and in an orchestrated manner.

14. We have a robust network of employer hosts equipped with the necessary resources to offer universally accessible workplaces, and keep this network updated.

15. We advocate for improving the accessibility of WIL to provincial and federal authorities.

16. We developed strong relationships with public and private funders to support our accessibility initiatives and programs.

Stage 2: Access/Assessment

17. When I plan meetings with students, I tailor them to their needs and preferences as much as possible.

18. Instead of assuming a student's condition or forcing disclosure, I do my best to provide a safe place and practice active listening so that I can base my decisions on their expressed needs and experiences.

19. I always share information about our accessibility offices and what services they provide. I also talk with students about WIL opportunities and refer them to my WIL colleagues if they are interested.

20. All our offices are fully physically and digitally accessible. We also listen to students' feedback to improve.

21. We administer surveys to our prospective students before the beginning of their first-year courses to collect accessibility-related information and share about our accessibility and WIL services.

22. We use self-reporting assessment tools to increase student engagement and allow them to reflect on their situations before meeting with a WIL officer.

23. We have strategies to identify funding opportunities to support WIL or accessibility work within our organization.

24. We have a well-established list of public and private funders to support access to WIL for SwDs.

25. We conduct regular conversations with potential hosting organizations about flexibility on technical and logistical requirements that would welcome more applications from talented SwDs otherwise excluded by rigid requirement lists.

Stage 3: Application

26. Our office can assist students during their application process with in-person and online services tailored to their needs, such as requesting documentation.

27. We prepare SwDs for WIL experiences, covering topics such as interview skills, professional conduct at the workplace, and how to request accommodations.

28. We check with students about possible accommodations for the application process, such as pre-recorded interviews, the use of assistive technologies, or alternative procedures for submitting the application.

29. We adapt WIL eligibility criteria according to students' needs and capabilities.

30. We have ongoing external communication campaigns to combat stigma and prejudice against people with disabilities, to stimulate employers to provide more WIL opportunities for SwDs.

31. While supporting SwDs in preparing the application, we also assess employers' readiness and accessibility through a standardized checklist.

32. We share informative and concise documents and guides about accessibility in WIL with current and prospective hosting organizations.

Stage 4: Recruitment/Onboarding

33. We teach our SwDs about accessibility-related rights and how to request accommodations from their employer.

34. We are equipped to support employers, making the recruitment process fully accessible.

35. We develop an individualized profile or checklist with each SwD about their needs, requests, and strengths to facilitate the discussion with the employer about formal and informal accommodations.

36. We support SwDs learning how to articulate and communicate the functional implications of their disability to the employer and precisely what they need to do their best work.

37. We advocate adding accessibility and accommodation statements to WIL postings to show flexibility and inclusion.

38. We advocate for the development of peer-support groups, employee resources groups, and mentorship programs focused on accessibility in the workplace.

39. We stimulate conversations across our partnerships and community organizations about the importance of having a coherent accessibility strategy, including plans, policies, training, tools, and strategies.

Stage 5: Experience

40. We provide ongoing support to students and employers during the WIL experience.

41. We have partnerships with third-party organizations that specialize in accessibility to support the relationship among our PSI, the employer, and the student.

42. We track students' feedback on WIL experiences and specific employers to check on the levels of inclusiveness and accessibility provided. We then go back to the employers with suggestions for improvements.

43. We support SwDs and employers in identifying the challenges when moving from the academic environment to a workplace in terms of professional conduct, communication skills, and provision of accommodations to facilitate flexibility and adaptability from both sides.

44. We provide digital tools or platforms to facilitate the conversation among SwDs, the WIL officer, and the employer during the WIL experience.

45. We systematically collect tailored feedback and evaluations from our SwDs about their WIL experiences to investigate each stage of the WIL path. We use the results to improve our services.

46. We systematically collect evaluation surveys from our community partners and WIL hosting organizations to improve our services. Those evaluation forms include tailored sections on accessibility.

47. We run post-graduation surveys six months after graduation to monitor SwDs' employment situation.

48. We manage an alumni database to collect information on their employment and to facilitate mentorship programs for current SwDs.

Final open-ended questions

49. How confident are you in the support provided to SwDs, and in what areas do you see opportunities for enhancement? What tools or policies will assist you in doing so?

50. How is your organization adapting to be better prepared for future opportunities and challenges in the WIL realm, such as the inclusion of AI tools?

List of non-governmental organizations supporting youth, job-seekers with disabilities, and/or digital accessibility

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
ONTARIO	Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN)	"The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) is a province-wide organization that brings together businesses and Employment Service Providers to increase employment opportunities for job seekers who have a disability."	https://www.odenetwork.com/
	Abilities to Work	"We are a not-for-profit organization focused on accessibility and inclusion. We support persons with disabilities in finding their future by connecting them with opportunities in employment, education, or training."	https://www.abilitiestowork.ca/
	WILAA Community of Practice	One of the first communities of practice of its kind in Ontario, "WILAA is a space for practitioners to help each other learn to support students while navigating these complex spaces. We aim to create spaces for practitioners to share knowledge and tools to help make the process of accessibility and accommodation easier for all involved in work-integrated learning (WIL), particularly students."	https://wilaacommp.org/x
	Autism Ontario	A charitable organization representing thousands of people on the autism spectrum and their families across Ontario. "Made up of knowledgeable parents, professionals, and autistic self- advocates who can speak to the key issues that impact autistic individuals and their families, Autism Ontario is the province's leading source of information and referral on autism and one of the largest collective voices representing the autism community"	https://www.autismontario.com/
	ConnectABILITY	ConnectABILITY's website has information and resources for kids, youth, adults, and seniors, including a page on Employment full of resources for both jobseekers with disabilities and their employers.	https://connectability.ca/en/

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
CANADA	Career Edge	Career Edge aims to eliminate barriers to employment by connecting top employers in Canada with job seekers facing a barrier to employment through a paid internship program. "Whether you're a recent graduate, a person with a disability, a skilled newcomer to Canada, or a current or former Canadian Armed Forces member, get valuable Canadian experience that matches your education, skill set, and career choice." Jobseekers can access the Open Internship Opportunities page.	https://www.careeredge.ca/
	Ready, Willing & Able (RWA)	"A national partnership of Inclusion Canada (formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living), Autism Alliance of Canada (formerly Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA)), and their member organizations. Funded by the Government of Canada, RWA is designed to increase the labour force participation of people with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum"	https://readywillingable.ca/
	The Inclusive Workplace	"The Inclusive Workplace is a resource for businesses, job seekers and workers who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability, and employment agencies." The Inclusive Workplace is an initiative of Ready, Willing and Able, a partnership of the Autism Alliance of Canada and Inclusion Canada that strives to create inclusive workplaces.	https://theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/home
	Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)	CCRW is a Canada-wide not-for-profit that seeks to promote and support the meaningful and equitable employment of people with disabilities. "At CCRW, we offer job search assistance, employer incentives, accommodation assessments, consulting services, and a variety of workshops… Whether you are a job seeker living with a disability or an employer looking to tap into a talented pool of candidates, CCRW will partner with you to meet your unique needs and help you succeed."	https://ccrw.org/
	National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)	A consumer-controlled, cross-disability charitable organization with a mandate to "support full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada."	https://www.neads.ca/
	Career Edge	Career Edge aims to eliminate barriers to employment by connecting top employers in Canada with job seekers facing a barrier to employment through a paid internship program. "Whether you're a recent graduate, a person with a disability, a skilled newcomer to Canada, or a current or former Canadian Armed Forces member, get valuable Canadian experience that matches your education, skill set, and career choice." Jobseekers can access the Open Internship Opportunities page.	https://www.careeredge.ca/

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
CANADA	Ready, Willing & Able (RWA)	"A national partnership of Inclusion Canada (formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living), Autism Alliance of Canada (formerly Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA)), and their member organizations. Funded by the Government of Canada, RWA is designed to increase the labour force participation of people with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum"	**https://readywillingable.ca/**
	The Inclusive Workplace	"The Inclusive Workplace is a resource for businesses, job seekers and workers who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability, and employment agencies." The Inclusive Workplace is an initiative of Ready, Willing and Able, a partnership of the Autism Alliance of Canada and Inclusion Canada that strives to create inclusive workplaces.	**https:// theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/ home**
	Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)	CCRW is a Canada-wide not-for-profit that seeks to promote and support the meaningful and equitable employment of people with disabilities. "At CCRW, we offer job search assistance, employer incentives, accommodation assessments, consulting services, and a variety of workshops… Whether you are a job seeker living with a disability or an employer looking to tap into a talented pool of candidates, CCRW will partner with you to meet your unique needs and help you succeed."	**https://ccrw.org/**
	National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)	A consumer-controlled, cross-disability charitable organization with a mandate to "support full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada."	**https://www.neads.ca/**
	Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE)	A national membership-based association for the supported employment sector. "We work with employment service providers, employers, community allies, and stakeholders to promote the employment inclusion of persons experiencing disability. We strive to facilitate full participation in the labour force by offering resources, expertise, and support to service providers. Our organization embraces diversity and believes in opportunities for all. Through workforce participation, we promote full citizenship and social inclusion for Canadians who experience disability."	**https://www. supportedemployment.ca/**
	Adaptech Research Network	A network of researchers with a common goal to " provide empirically based information to assist and inform decision making that ensures that new policies and new information and communication technologies reflect the needs and concerns of a variety of stakeholders," including postsecondary students and recent graduates with various disabilities, the instructors who teach them, and the campus service providers who make technological, adaptive, or other supports available.	**https://adaptech.org/**

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
CANADA	Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP)	A transdisciplinary initiative on the future of work disability policy in Canada. Provide resources and academic reports related to work disability for various general audiences. "Our objective is to identify how people, when disabled, can be better retained and integrated into the Canadian labour market."	**https://www.crwdp.ca/en/home**
	March of Dimes Canada (MODC)	A comprehensive service provider for people with disabilities, offering a wide array of programs and services nationwide, such as ones for accessible technology and employment services.	**https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca**
		MODC's Employment Services website supports people looking for work, employers looking for their next hire, or looking to have an assessment done, and offers the Skills For Work – Youth Employment and Skills Strategy Program to assist employment- seeking youth to "acquire skills and knowledge to overcome employment barriers and to be successful in the job market, today and in the future."	**https://www.modcemploymentservices.ca/**
	Neil Squire Society	"We use technology, knowledge, and passion to empower Canadians with disabilities." The Neil Squire Society's programming centres around innovation, digital literacy, employment, and assistive technology. It serves individuals with employment and Assistive Technology programs and employers with assistive technology services and hiring support.	**https://www.neilsquire.ca/**
	Inclusion Canada	"Inclusion Canada, formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), is the national federation working to advance the full inclusion and human rights of people with an intellectual disability and their families. Inclusion Canada leads the way in building an inclusive Canada by strengthening families, defending rights, and transforming communities into places where everyone belongs." Part of their work centres around employment, such as their collaboration in Ready, Willing & Able.	**https://inclusioncanada.ca/**
	The CNIB Foundation	A national non-profit organization with a mission to "change what it is to be blind through innovative programs and powerful advocacy that enable Canadians impacted by blindness to live the lives they choose." Their "Resources" page includes information and resources about sight loss for individuals and employers (see "Blindness at Work")	**https://www.cnib.ca/**
	Hire for Talent	"This Canada-wide awareness campaign aims to increase employer awareness about how people with disabilities are a talented part of the workforce and provides resources to help employers tap into this talent pool when searching for skilled workers."	**https://hirefortalent.ca/**

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
CANADA	Make A Change Canada	"Our mission is to provide persons with disabilities and those facing other barriers to employment the skills they need to thrive in today's competitive job market. By providing online employment, self-employment, and IT skills training programs across Canada, Make A Change Canada empowers others to realize their full potential."	https://www.makeachangecanada.com/
CANADA	Abilities Centre	"Abilities Centre strives to make communities more accessible and inclusive to increase the quality of life for every individual and enable them to participate fully in community life." Their Skills Development and Employment Services offer virtual and in-person skilling programs for individuals of all abilities.	https://abilitiescentre.org/home
INTERNATIONAL	The DAISY Consortium	"DAISY is an international non-profit membership organization working with over 150 partners all around the world to improve access to reading for people with print disabilities"	https://daisy.org/
INTERNATIONAL	Ability Online	Ability Online is home to online communities comprised primarily of people who share the challenges associated with disabilities and/or chronic illness. Provides forums, games, and messaging channels.	https://newabilityonline.org/
INTERNATIONAL	AccessibleEU	A flagship initiative proposed by the European Commission Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, AccessibleEU is a resource centre for enhancing accessibility in areas such as the built environment, transport, and information and communication technologies. While mostly European-centric, some content, such as good practices and Digital Library resources, can be consulted by interested parties worldwide.	https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/index_en
INTERNATIONAL	Project Aspiro	From the World Blind Union (WBU), Project Aspiro is a career planning and employment resource for people who are blind or partially sighted. "You'll find everything you need to achieve your career goals including career planning advice, information about education, profiles of people enjoying meaningful careers, and much more. There's also a range of valuable information for friends and family, service providers, and employers."	http://www.projectaspiro.com/en/Pages/default.aspx
INTERNATIONAL	Lime Connect	"Through our private online community, we connect high-achieving students and professionals with disabilities - members of our Lime Network - to our broader network of corporate and university partners."	https://limeconnect.com/

List of resources from government or government agencies/departments/ departmental corporations

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
GOVERNMENT OF CANADA	**Digital Accessibility Toolkit**	A comprehensive toolkit aimed at a range of users and offering various resources and learning materials on implementing accessibility into digital products. Includes sections such as "Accessibility Fundamentals," "How to's," "Digital accessibility in the Government of Canada," "Learning and Development," and "Resources and Tools."	**https://a11y.canada.ca/en/**
	Job Bank - Home	This is the home page for the simplified and safe job search tool from the Government of Canada. Over one million new jobs in the private and public sectors are advertised on Job Bank every year, and thousands more every day.	**https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/home**
	Job Bank - Persons with disabilities	Job Bank specifically for persons with disabilities. Also includes relevant information on employment supports, finding an employment centre near you, and resource links.	**https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/pe rsons-with-disabilities**
	Job Bank - Youth	Job Bank is specifically for young people. It includes information on finding a summer job and resources for young Canadians who are looking for work.	**https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/youth**
	Job Bank - Hire persons with disabilities	This section provides information, tools, and resources for employers on how to hire people with disabilities, get help from community partners, and find benefits and programs.	**https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/hiring/persons-with-disabilities**
	Accessibility Resource Centre	The Accessibility Resource Centre from Employment and Social Development Canada is a hub for federal resources and tools that aim to improve accessibility for people with disabilities across six key topic areas: awareness, employment, housing, service providers, technology and workplace.	**https://www.canada.ca/en/em ployment-social-development/programs/disab ility/arc.html**
	Accessibility Standards Canada	Accessibility Standards Canada is a departmental corporation that was created under the Accessible Canada Act with a commitment to creating accessibility standards for federally-regulated entities and federal organizations. Their website is home to current standards (including those still being co-developed and under development) and research.	**https://accessible.canada.ca/**

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO	**Accessibility in Ontario**	Home navigation page for information about accessibility laws, the AODA, information for organizations, accessibility framework, and more. Includes links to web pages such as: • Accessibility rules for businesses and non-profits • Accessibility rules for public sector organizations • Accessibility in Ontario: information for businesses • Accessibility Standards Checklist - Forms • Accessible Recruitment Process - Forms	**https://www.ontario.ca/ page/accessibility-in-ontario**
	How to make information accessible	Learn how to make information easy to use for people with disabilities. Find out what is required under the AODA, how to comply, accessible formats, tools and resources, how to make library materials accessible, and more.	**https://www.ontario.ca/ page/how-make-information-accessible**
	How to make websites accessible	Learn how to make new and existing websites accessible for people with disabilities. Includes information on what is required under the AODA, how to comply, if you can't comply, tips, and more.	**https://www.ontario.ca/ page/how-make-websites-accessible**
	Ontario Accessibility Resources	A catalogue full of free resources on complying with the AODA.	**https://www.publications. gov.on.ca/ store/20170501121/Free_ Download_Files/300111.pdf**
AODA	**Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**	The central AODA website home page.	**https://aoda.ca/**
	AODA Resources	A hub for constantly updated resources on issues of accessibility and the AODA.	**https://aoda.ca/category/ resources-on-issues-of-accessibility-and-the-ontarians-with-disabilities-act-aoda/**
	News Articles	Current news articles on all things related to the AODA.	**https://aoda.ca/category/ articles-regarding-the-accessibility-for-ontarians-with-disabilities-actaoda/**
	Free AODA Online Training	A free online training program is open to anyone that covers basic information about AODA, comprehensive details about its standards, and the benefits they offer Ontarians. A certificate is delivered upon completion.	**https://aoda.ca/free-online-training/**
	AODA Website Accessibility Audit	Regular website audits are crucial to AODA compliance. AODA's experts will scan your site to ensure it meets WCAG 2.0 AA, then generate a detailed report of all deficiencies found, plus recommendations on how to fix them.	**https://aoda.ca/aoda-website-accessibility-audit/**

LOCATION	ORG NAME	ABOUT	LINK
AODA	**On-Site Training**	Want to train your in-house designers and developers on WCAG 2.0 AA specifications? Implementing the specifications properly can be a challenge. AODA offers on-site training to cover the practical aspects of WCAG 2.0 AA and how to stay on the right side of the law.	**https://aoda.ca/onsite-training/**
AODA	**AODA Consulting**	Through their consulting service, AODA experts can help businesses solve the unique roadblocks that occur along their journeys.	**https://aoda.ca/aoda-consulting/**
ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION	**Working Together: The Code and the AODA**	This is a series of five free eLearning modules for anyone in the public, private, or not-for-profit sectors who wants to learn about the rights and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA and how they impact them at work, in services, and in housing. A certificate option is available.	**https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/working-together-code-and-aoda**

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