

Study: Work-integrated learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, May 25, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a considerable impact on the activities of schools and academic institutions in Canada, with many students having to continue their learning activities online.

Not all learning and academic activities can be easily transferred online, however, including those that require students to acquire real-time experience in the workplace. Work-integrated learning, which combines postsecondary education with work experience to prepare graduates for their entry into the workforce is one such activity. It includes work placements such as co-op work terms, internships, practicums and residencies.

Work-integrated learning is widespread among Canadian students. According to the 2018 National Graduates Survey, close to one-half of 2015 graduates reported that they took part in work-integrated learning at some point during their studies (among those who did not pursue further education).

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended many of these activities. According to the results of a recent crowdsourcing initiative, which measured the impact of the pandemic on the academic life of postsecondary students, about one-third (35%) of all participants reported that the pandemic resulted in the cancellation or postponement of their work-integrated learning.

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing a series of studies that shed light on the importance of work-integrated learning for Canadian students, both in the context of the pandemic and for future labour market outcomes.

In the first study, titled "[COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts on the work placement of postsecondary students in Canada](#)," crowdsourcing data are used to provide a profile of those who have been most affected by the cancellation or postponement of work placements. Two additional studies, which are based on survey data, underscore the importance of work-integrated learning on the labour market outcomes of new graduates.

Students in health and related programs are most affected by the cancellation or postponement of work-integrated learning

Not all postsecondary students were equally affected by the pandemic, notably because work-integrated learning is more prevalent in certain fields of study than others.

During the pandemic, approximately two-thirds of crowdsourcing participants who studied in health care programs at the master's or professional degree level (which includes medical degrees) had a work placement cancelled or delayed.

These results are due to the fact that participation in work-integrated learning is generally higher in health and related programs, and is often a requirement for graduation. Among those who graduated from health and related programs in 2015, for example, at least 80% of those who graduated at the bachelor's or college level reported that they had completed a work placement.

Participants studying in services programs (such as hairdressing and cooking) were also more likely to report that their work placement had been delayed or cancelled. These programs are often offered via college institutions, which frequently integrate work placements in their programs.



Students who had their work placement delayed or cancelled are more concerned about the quality of their credentials

The cancellation or postponement of work placements is a significant concern for many postsecondary students. Among prospective graduates (who were scheduled to graduate this year), over one-half (52%) of those who had a work placement delayed or cancelled were very or extremely concerned that their credential would be considered less valuable than the credentials of graduates unaffected by COVID-19. This compared with 37% among those who did not have a work placement delayed or cancelled.

Two additional studies published today support the notion that work-integrated learning is associated with better labour market outcomes after graduation.

In the first of these studies, titled "[Work-integrated learning during postsecondary studies, 2015 graduates](#)," the labour market outcomes in 2018 were examined for a cohort of graduates who obtained a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree in 2015. It found that those who participated in work-integrated learning were not necessarily more likely to be employed than those who did not participate, but were less likely to be overqualified (i.e. employed in a job requiring a lower level of education) and more likely to be employed in their field of study.

Specifically, among bachelor's graduates in 2015, 32% of those who participated in work-integrated learning considered themselves to be overqualified in the job they held in 2018, compared with 49% among non-participants. Also, 88% reported that their job was related to their field of study if they had participated in work-integrated learning, compared with 71% if they had not.

Furthermore, among bachelor's graduates, those who participated in work-integrated learning had higher employment earnings (+7%) than those who did not participate, even after accounting for other characteristics such as differences in field of study.

Work experience during student years is linked to better labour market outcomes immediately after graduation

The other study, titled "[An exploration of work, learning, and work-integrated learning in Canada using the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults](#)," found a positive relationship between work experiences during postsecondary education and the probability of finding a full-time job immediately after graduation.

The study examined a cohort of students who graduated from a postsecondary institution between 2012 and 2016, and compared the outcomes of those who had been employed in a job related to their field of study during their postsecondary education with those who did not benefit from such a job. This includes students who worked in formal work-integrated learning activities, as well as those who participated in non-official or informal types of work-integrated learning activities.

Specifically, among those who had a job related to their field of study during their postsecondary education, 75% were employed full time three months after graduation. This compared with 48% among those who did not have any work experience during their postsecondary education, and 61% among those who did work, but not in their field of study.

Note to readers

The first objective of this release is to provide information about the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected work placements of postsecondary students. The findings are based on the results of data provided by over 100,000 postsecondary students who answered a questionnaire on the extent to which the pandemic affected their student lives, via a relatively new method of data collection called "crowdsourcing". The results have been released in a short study published today in the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada*. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a design using probability-based sampling, and cannot be applied to the overall postsecondary student population in Canada.

The second objective of this release is to summarize the findings of two studies released today that shed light on the association between work experiences obtained during postsecondary education and labour market outcomes.

The first study, based on almost 24,000 respondents from the National Graduates Survey, examines the relationship between work-integrated learning and labour market outcomes three years after graduation. Specifically, the study examines the labour market outcomes in 2018 for individuals who graduated from a college or a university three years earlier (in 2015) and who did not pursue further postsecondary education from 2015 to 2018. In that study, work-integrated learning activities include work placements within postsecondary programs, such as a co-op placements, internships, practicums and clinical placements. Work placements or experiences that were not part of their program, such as the Federal Student Work Experience Program, teaching assistantships, research assistantships and thesis preparation, were excluded. The study defines overqualification as the proportion of graduates whose level of education is above the level of qualification they believe was required to get their job.

The second study examines the association between the type of work experience obtained during postsecondary education and the probability of being employed full time three months after graduation. It is based on a sample of about 900 respondents from the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults who graduated from a postsecondary institution from 2012 to 2016. This includes students who worked in formal work-integrated learning activities, as well as those who participated in non-official or informal forms of work-integrated learning activities, whereby students independently find work in their field of study without it being part of their academic program.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [5012](#), [5144](#) and [5320](#).

The analysis "[COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts on the work placement of postsecondary students in Canada](#)" is now available as part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada* ([45280001](#)).

The study "[Work-integrated learning during postsecondary studies, 2015 graduates](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

The study "[An exploration of work, learning, and work-integrated learning in Canada using the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults](#)" is also available in the *Longitudinal and International Study of Adults Research Paper Series* ([89-648-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).