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An analysis of exercise science and exercise physiology work-integrated learning supervision in Australia

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Currently, 33 Universities in Australia offer exercise science (ES) and/or exercise physiology (EP) programs linked to Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA). Within these programs, work-integrated learning (WIL) is a mandated component for all enrolled students. Paramount to successful delivery of WIL is adequate, competent practicum supervision. This, in turn, is essential to evidence-based practice training and development of work-ready ES and EP students. However, while these industry professionals are key leaders in WIL, there is significant variability in supervisory practice, including experience, training and approach to supervision. This research aims to identify characteristics and demographic profile of supervisors in this setting, as well as capture their experience and perceived needs to better support ES and EP students on WIL placement. It builds on previous research, a report published by researchers from four Australian Universities on the state of EP placement supervision across Australia (Sealey et al., 2013). While this research provided a valuable starting point from which to develop evidence-based support, the industry has since changed and grown exponentially. For example, 4,481 students in 2018 alone commencing an ES, EP or combined degree, making collection of such data imperative to forecast industry ability to provide sufficient WIL and areas for expansion. Additionally, earlier studies did not include ES-related WIL, which is a prerequisite and provides foundation clinical WIL for those students progressing to EP. Survey data collected captured both quantitative and qualitative information to gain a broader perspective of the supervision landscape. This information will provide crucial base-line data of the current WIL environment across Australia and enable the development and delivery of targeted support and training for supervisors, and ultimately the students placed under their leadership.