Co-operative and Experiential Education (CEE)
2024/25 Annual CEE Performance Report

Introduction

This report is an annual update on CEE's progress towards our mission, strategic plan and the University's long-term strategic framework, the Waterloo at 100 vision. As we reflect on another year of growth and innovation, CEE's commitment to our students and partners remains the heart of our mission, across our campuses and with industry, community and global collaborators. The evolving world of work demands that we continually strengthen our talent ecosystem.

During the 2024-25 academic year, CEE focused on fostering new connections and deepening existing relationships to ensure our students receive the highest-quality co-op and work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences. We expanded research-informed programming, embedded responsible artificial intelligence into career education and launched new tools to improve access to meaningful work opportunities. Together with faculty, industry and community partners, we continued to evolve Waterloo's world-leading WIL ecosystem.

Accomplishments	Why it matters
Experiences **24,254** co-op work terms at **5,731** organizations in **71** countries	Unmatched scale in delivering high-quality experiences to students and much-needed talent to organizations.
Feedback **13,163** student responses **2,337** employer responses	Data collected from student and employer surveys helps us monitor program health and identify opportunities.
Academic **165** grad/undergrad WIL courses (Strategic Mandate Agreement)	Innovation in tracking and supporting course-based WIL across campus, embedding applied learning within academic studies to build students' skills, confidence and career readiness.

CEE AT A GLANCE

CEE's mission is to equip and empower learners for the future of work and lifelong learning by developing talent for a complex future, advancing research and strengthening Waterloo's sustainable and diverse communities. We accomplish this work through a portfolio, which includes:

- Associate Provost Office
- Centre for Career Development (CCD)
- Centre for Work-Integrated Learning (CfWIL)
- Industry Relations (IR)
- Strategic Enablement Team (SET)
- Student & Faculty Relations (SFR)
- Work-Learn Institute (WxL)

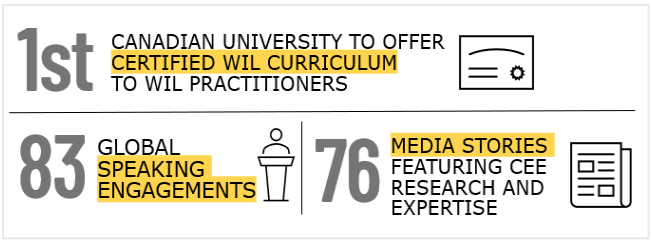
During the 2024-25 academic year, CEE's work was guided by **five forward-looking pillars**:

1. **Demonstrating global leadership**
   We lead the world in co-operative and career education and WIL with future-ready graduates who support communities and organizations.
2. **Advancing research for global impact**
   We evolve and innovate our programming to address the future world of work by researching co-op and WIL and applying research-based insights. We lead the way in sharing WIL research through consulting, speaking engagements and published articles.
3. **Future-proofing students**
   We equip and empower our learners to successfully navigate the ever-changing and complex world of work by focusing on the innovative and intentional integration of academic learning with valuable work experiences.
4. **Future-proofing employers**
   We help industry, community and government partners maximize the benefits of the innovative ideas, skills, knowledge and fresh perspectives Waterloo students bring to the workplace. We engage with employers and industry partners to create quality student learning experiences that positively impact their organizations.
5. **Future-proofing ourselves**
   We foster a connected, supportive and inclusive community that inspires staff to identify and achieve their personal, academic and professional goals while feeling valued and effectively contributing to our mission and vision.

This report highlights how CEE prepares students, not just for their first job, but for lifelong learning, adaptability and leadership in a rapidly changing world. Each pillar includes a high-level overview of our progress.

1. Demonstrating global leadership

As the world of work continues to transform at an unprecedented pace, CEE remains at the forefront, setting new benchmarks for excellence in co-operative education and WIL. Our unwavering commitment to thought leadership and global influence is reflected in a range of impactful initiatives, which have solidified Waterloo's reputation as a leader in work-integrated learning worldwide.



For example, this past year we:

- Developed key partnerships with industry associations, government organizations and key stakeholders to position WIL at the forefront of Ontario/Canada's talent strategy.
- Secured contracts to provide WIL consulting services to multiple organizations in 31 countries.
- Updated our globally recognized AAA quality WIL framework to reflect current research and practice on quality WIL.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Transforming work-integrated learning with AI tools for students

CEE is breaking new ground in AI-driven WIL with an innovative tool developed in partnership with the University's Information and Systems Technology (IST) team, co-op students, Microsoft and global collaborators. The Job Aggregator Digital Assistant (JADA) streamlines co-op job discovery, offers real-time support and integrates multiple job boards to support Waterloo co-op students in their job search process. Students tested the beta tool, demonstrating the University's leadership in shaping future-ready education and best practices for experiential learning and workforce development.

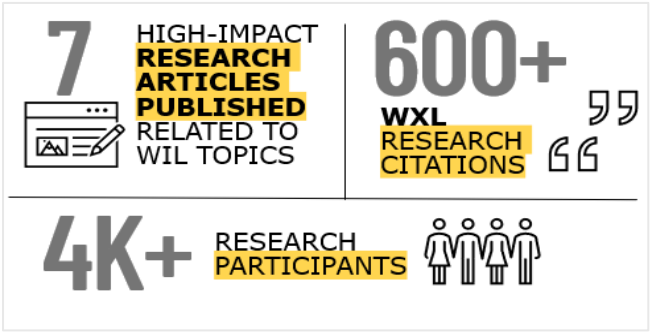
Shaping the future of WIL: Certified programs designed to empower educators and WIL practitioners

Waterloo became the first institution to offer certified WIL curricula with two accredited programs: the Waterloo Institute for Leaders in WIL and the WIL Fundamentals Workshop Series. Offered by CEE and the Work-Learn Institute, the certifications share best practices to help institutions implement, enhance and scale high-quality WIL.

---

2. Advancing research for global impact

This year, the Work-Learn Institute (WxL) continued to generate insights and evidence through research and collaborations that inform the practice of WIL globally. WxL shared research insights with industry-based audiences, governments and educational institutions around the world. The Centre for WIL (CfWIL), in collaboration with the University of Wollongong in Australia, created the Capture, Link, Examine, Assemble and Respond (CLEAR) reflection process to advance student reflection in WIL. The Centre for Career Development (CCD) published a framework for examining how learners integrate self-knowledge, labour market insight and reflection to navigate modern careers.



Published high-impact research related to WIL includes:

- Examining first-year co-operative education students' responses to stressful events during the job search and application process
- How should work-integrated learning supervisors support their students? A concurrent triangulated mixed-method study
- 'I wasn't my authentic self': identity concealment during placement-based work-integrated learning among students from equity-deserving groups
- Enhancing neurodivergent student wellbeing in co-operative education: A theoretical model and research agenda
- Utilizing a fun model: Supporting students' well-being in project-based work-integrated learning
- Work-integrated learning as a landscape of practice
- Learners or workers? Supervisors' views on co-operative education students' roles

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

Understanding how students respond to stressful events during the job search and application process

Researchers from WxL conducted interviews with 25 first-year engineering co-op students who had recently completed their first job search to explore how students respond to early WIL stressors and what helps them cope. The key findings showed that student stress begins long before the first day of work and is often related to the job search process. The report outlines the importance of early-stage supports to help students feel prepared and supported.

Learners or workers? Supervisors' views on co-operative education students' roles

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning published WxL research about co-op supervisors' views on co-op students' roles. By interviewing supervisors, the study found that 25 per cent of respondents view students primarily as learners, leading to a stronger emphasis on skill development. The study highlighted how enhanced supervisor training can foster more supportive, learning-centred WIL environments.

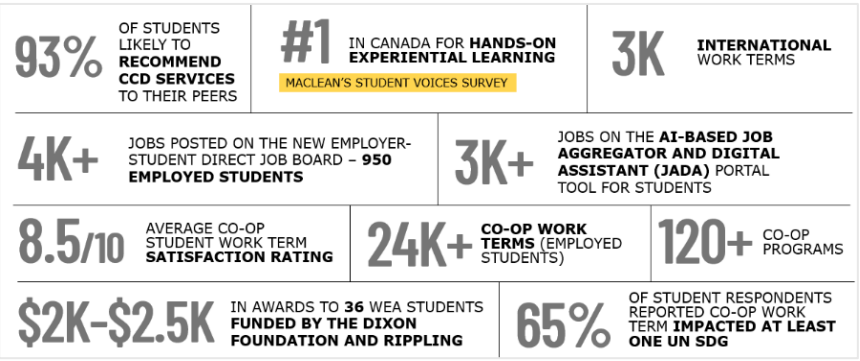
Teach WIL resources on the CLEAR reflection process

Reflection is a key component of WIL as it facilitates knowledge transformation and fosters deeper self-awareness and understanding. It is an evidence-based, integrative, analytical, capacity-building process that generates, extends, critiques, and documents learning. The CfWIL's CLEAR reflection process: Capture, Link, Examine, Assemble and Respond provides a structured, research-informed approach grounded in the CCD's concept of purposeful work. Together, these foundations ensure that career-based reflection moves beyond description to deliberate critical thinking about skills articulation, identity formation and career direction. The CLEAR process helps to equip students to translate experience into demonstrable capabilities and long-term professional momentum.

---

3. Future-proofing students

This past year, CEE implemented the new student-centred service model and renewed focus on strategic job development. Dedicated co-op advisors and career advisors are now aligned by faculty, providing more consistent, integrated support across students' academic and co-op journeys. Together, these structural changes evolve the co-op model to prepare students for a rapidly changing world of work.



Last year, to support this key strategic priority, we:

- Updated the WaterlooWorks user interface for search and apply based on feedback from students.
- Launched the new Employer-Student Direct job board on WaterlooWorks to put more quality job opportunities in front of students.
- Leveraged AI to identify in-demand skills and support students through AI-powered career tools (e.g., JADA, 1Mentor, InStage, etc.).
- Streamlined job processes to best support students, including the centralization of the arrange own job process and offering multiple employment pathways.
- Connected students with alumni for practical career insight and mentorship.
- Developed new career-integrated resources for graduate student WIL.
- Listened to students via a Purposeful Career Readiness framework and self-reflection survey.
- Connected more students than ever with employers at the 30th Partnerships for Employment (P4E) job fair, a partnership with the University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College.
- Launched a reimagined CareerHub — a centralized and user-friendly space for career resources.
- Developed Graduate WIL and TeachWIL resources to support WIL opportunities in courses.

Our International Strategic Initiatives and advancement roles empowered students through funding and awards. Last year, they:

- Supported student global learning through five $5,000 Global Connections awards for outbound mobility.
- Partnered with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) to fund nine work terms in Norway, totalling ~$81,000.
- Distributed two Erasmus grants to students totalling $6,200.
- Provided four change makers in co-op awards at $10,000 each, totalling $40,000.
- Awarded three Global Skills Opportunity awards as part of the Powering Change program, totalling $30,000.
- Secured three Scholarship and Educational Exchanges for Development (SEED) grants for students from member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for incoming Thai students at $10,200 each.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Co-op Student of the Year awards

In honour of two decades of celebrating students for their co-op work terms, previous award-winning alumni joined the ceremony and presented the awards to this year's winners. Past winners shared experiences, advice and the impact co-op had on their careers. "Co-op taught me what I couldn't learn in a textbook," said Diljot Chhina (BSc '13), former co-op student of the year and measurement lead at Google. "I have used those skills in my career to be resilient, no matter what is happening at a macro level."

From pilot to practice: Grad students connect academic studies with real-world impact

The Graduate Work-Integrated Learning (GradWIL) initiative at Waterloo expanded to provide more opportunities to connect students with real-world experiences that complement their academic studies. Through new partnerships and innovative programming, GradWIL empowers students to apply their research, build professional skills and make meaningful impacts in diverse workplaces.

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the P4E Job Fair

The Partnerships for Employment (P4E) Job Fair celebrated its 30th anniversary, marking three decades of connecting students with employers in partnership with the University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College. Since its inception, P4E has engaged more than 170,000 students and alumni, and 10,600 employers. This milestone event featured record attendance and showcased Waterloo's commitment to providing students with valuable networking opportunities and pathways to meaningful careers through strong industry partnerships.

WaterlooWorks updates for improved user experience

CEE introduced key updates to WaterlooWorks to enhance the student job search experience, including a redesigned interface and improved application features. These changes, driven by student feedback, make it easier for students to find and apply for co-op opportunities, supporting their career development and success in the evolving world of work.

Investing in tomorrow's talent through co-op

In 2025, CEE had its most successful Giving Day to date, raising approximately $170,000. Working in partnership with Advancement colleagues across campus, we're building a habit of giving among employers who recognize the tremendous value co-op students bring to their organization and want to invest in the next generation of talent. CEE's Giving Day champion, Murray Gamble (president of the C3 Group of Companies and Chair of the University of Waterloo's Board of Governors), strongly believes that supporting Waterloo's co-op program is a powerful way to make an impact.

Steele Family Foundation funding empowers co-op students to transform refugee education

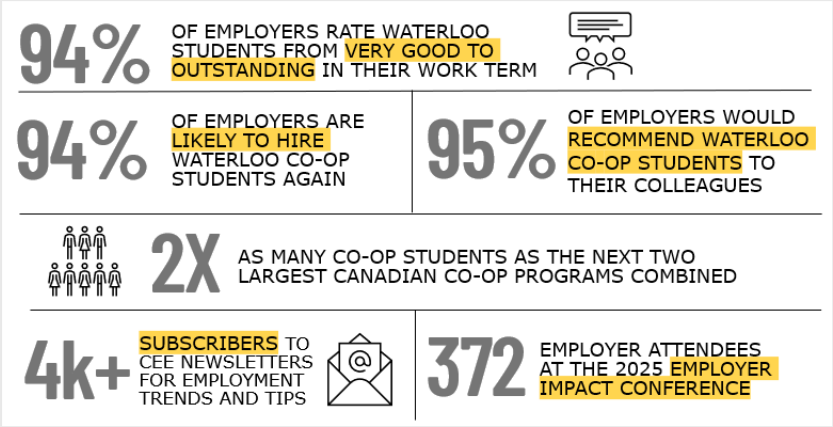
Waterloo co-op students worked on innovative projects where they supported refugee education while gaining hands-on experience in program development and global engagement. Thanks to the funding from the Steele Family Foundation, students were able to broaden their perspectives and contribute to meaningful social change as part of the Change Makers in Co-op program. The program helps to eliminate financial barriers, enabling students to gain hands-on experience at non-profits abroad.

Donor-funded WE Accelerate Awards

Recently, 36 WE Accelerate students received awards valued at $2,000 or $2,500, generously funded by the Dixon Foundation and U.S.-based employer Rippling. Donor support continues to grow, with alumni and employers investing in early talent and helping students on unpaid or underpaid co-op terms.

4. Future-proofing employers

CEE works with employers to create quality learning experiences for students, which also give employers the opportunity to leverage our students' innovation, skills, knowledge and fresh perspectives.



Our newly aligned Industry Relations team is focused on understanding employer needs, providing effective resources and building impactful partnerships. Through initiatives such as enhanced service delivery, portfolio realignment and collaborative campus connections, we're creating more opportunities for employers to engage with Waterloo's future-ready students. Our goal is to drive employer delight and loyalty, ensuring that every partnership is mutually beneficial and sustainable. By adapting to changing industry needs, CEE is building a resilient talent ecosystem – one where employers return year after year, confident in the quality, innovation and impact our students bring to their organizations.

In the past year, to help future-proof employers, we:

- Partnered with industry associations (e.g., BioTalent, ECO Canada, etc.) for greater engagement with employers/industry.
- Realigned our Industry Relations group to activate a new approach to employer experience that includes more competitive service delivery levels.
- Launched an offboarding guide with resources for employers to complement the existing onboarding guide.
- Hosted the 2025 Employer Impact Conference – The Power of Change Makers.
- Streamlined funding to support our employers, including approximately $1.5 million in Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) funding to support employers in hiring Waterloo co-op students.
- Disbursed Mitacs Business Strategy Internship funding of more than $700,000.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Celebrating the 2024/2025 CEE Employer Impact Award Recipients

Each year, CEE celebrates our Employer Impact Award recipients and honourable mentions for the positive impact they have on our students. These outstanding employers empower Waterloo co-op students to shape a better future in everything from AI research to sustainable construction to community health-care solutions.

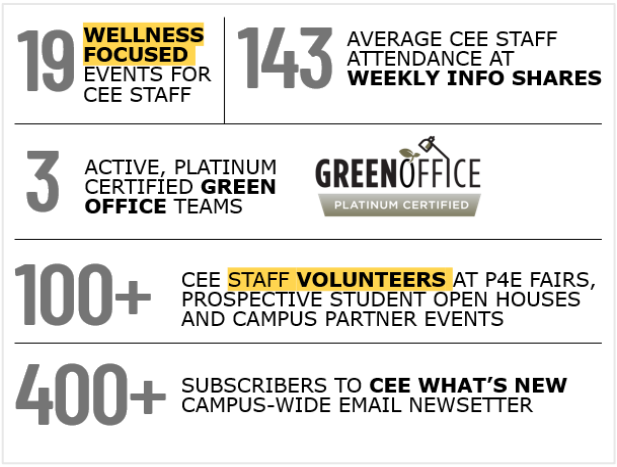
Building the workforce of tomorrow with the power of change makers

At the 2025 Employer Impact Conference, industry leaders and Waterloo co-op experts explored how organizations can nurture a workforce of change makers. The presenters each emphasized the importance of investing in people today to benefit from a stronger workforce in the future. Throughout the conference sessions, presenters shared practical tips ranging from fostering curiosity and mentorship to embracing diverse perspectives and meaningful challenges.

Tips for maximizing student expertise in AI to benefit employers

CEE hosted industry experts in a panel discussion about AI and the future of work. The panel highlighted the need for organizations to adopt emerging AI technologies while recognizing the importance of human skills and the benefits students can bring when implementing AI. "It's an incredible opportunity for students to come into the workplace with some insight and skills as early adopters. If they come in with a great education and some insights, they're going to be able to change culture and processes at organizations that will have huge, positive ripple effects," said panellist Aaron Wilson, vice-president of marketing and sales at ECO Canada.

5. Future-proofing ourselves



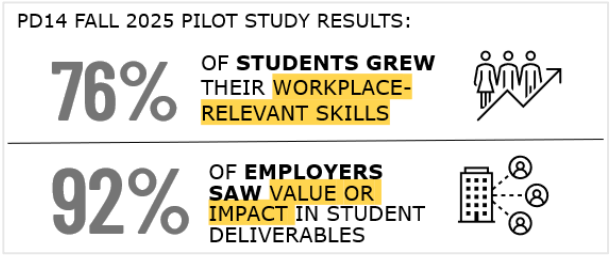
With a One Waterloo approach, CEE continued to strengthen campus collaboration to support shared goals and student success. By investing in our people, systems and practices, we continue to support excellence and resilience.

Last year, we:

- Provided AI tools and training for staff to securely analyze qualitative data and surface insights for students, faculties and employers.
- Established a cross-unit Tech Adoption Group to share use cases and evaluate the use of AI and other technologies to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of CEE services and programming.
- Centralized the existing Arranged Own Job process to streamline work.
- Moved administrative support for the EDGE program into WaterlooWorks to create operational efficiencies and a better user experience.
- Supported sustainability through the Green Office program.
- Established CEE's Inclusion Connection Network and Indigenous Relations committee.
- Launched CEE What's New cross-campus newsletter to connect our work with campus partners.
- Collaborated with campus partners to launch a community of support for administrative professionals.

ACTIONING STRATEGY IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

In Fall 2025, CEE continued to turn strategy into action. We're responding to a fast-paced, evolving world of work by strengthening student support, advancing experiential and career-ready learning, deepening employer and global engagement and reinforcing Waterloo's leadership in WIL.



Central to this work was advancing a **cohesive educational strategy for an AI-enabled future of work**. Students become AI-capable by using technology in real workplaces, with real consequences. Through applied AI projects in PD14: Technological Futures: Responsible Digital Innovation, students create tangible impact in their work environments. A just-in-time micro course focused on AI and work ensures learning is immediately relevant to workplace tools and decisions, while structured reflection assignments (powered by InStage) build judgment and confidence. The responsible use of AI principles, embedded across the curriculum and reinforced through a standalone professional development (PD) module, ensures ethical and effective application.

This practice-based approach has also attracted external validation and investment, with $750,000 in grant funding secured by the end of 2025**.** Funding includes support from the Embark Student Foundation **and Business Higher Education Roundtable** to scale AI-enabled WIL. Together, these efforts move AI education from awareness to application, positioning Waterloo as a global leader in preparing graduates who can confidently, responsibly and effectively use AI — not just understand it in theory.

In both research and practice, CEE is also leveraging AI to analyze job descriptions and student skill data, enabling systematic tracking of emerging workforce trends and employer demand. This work will provide faculty and staff with timely, actionable insight to align curriculum, WIL, advising and program decisions with the future of work.

Together, this work ensures Waterloo remains nimble and responsive — equipping students with the skills, judgment and confidence to thrive amid constant change. At the same time, CEE will continue to evolve at the pace of industry and community needs and help shape the future of work rather than react to it.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CEE

In 2026, CEE is focused on five core priorities that help students succeed, support employers and partners and strengthen Waterloo's leadership in WIL.

1. **Prepare students for a changing world**
   Equip students with the skills, experiences and guidance they need to navigate an evolving labour market.
   - Create the conditions for co-op and WIL students to thrive by strengthening advising, communications and job development.
   - Expand career readiness supports, including purposeful career education and new upskilling opportunities such as applied AI learning.
   - Continue to evolve experiential programs across campus, including a review of the EDGE program.

2. **Be the top choice for industry, employers, and community partners seeking student talent**
   Deliver value, generate delight, build loyalty and create lasting partnerships.
   - Strengthen employer and industry relationships through streamlined communications, impactful branding and more meaningful engagement opportunities.
   - Continuously gather employer feedback to better understand changing talent needs.
   - Support high-quality student supervision through new training and resources for employers.

3. **Strengthen campus collaboration through a One Waterloo approach**
   Work across the institution to support shared goals, impact and student learning.
   - Partner with faculties to align co-op, WIL and career learning with academic programs.
   - Work with campus and external partners to identify meaningful work opportunities.
   - Support and grow capstone and community-engaged learning experiences.

4. **Advance research that shapes the future of work-integrated learning**
   Generate insights and evidence that inform practice and policy, locally and globally.
   - Support priority Future of Work research areas, including the impacts of artificial intelligence, evolving work modes and WIL.
   - Strengthen connections between faculty and CEE through research partnerships, data sharing and collaborative funding opportunities.

5. **Strengthen how we deliver and adapt**
   Invest in people, systems and tools so we can operate effectively and respond to change.
   - Embed high-quality reflection practices across WIL and PD courses.
   - Improve digital and operational systems that support students and employers.
   - Use AI responsibly to improve how we work.
   - Grow external funding to support students, services and infrastructure.