Work-integrated Learning (WIL)

What is workplace-based learning?

National legislative requirements

Work-integrated learning in the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework* (HEQSF) (DHET, 2014:17: Paragraph 34-35) is defined as:

> WIL is characteristic of vocational and professionally-oriented qualifications and may be incorporated into programmes at all levels of the HEQSF. In the HEQSF, WIL may take various forms, including simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and **workplace-based learning**. The selection of appropriate forms of work-integrated learning depends on the nature and purpose of the qualification type, programme objectives and outcomes, the NQF level at which the WIL component is pegged, institutional capacity to provide WIL opportunities, and the structures and systems that are in place within professional settings and sites of practice to support student learning. Where WIL is a structured part of a qualification, the volume of learning allocated to WIL should be appropriate to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria contained in the appropriate level descriptors.
>
> Where the entire WIL component or any part of it takes the form of **workplace-based learning**, it is the **responsibility of institutions that offer programmes requiring credits for such learning to place students into appropriate workplaces**. Such workplace-based learning must be appropriately structured, properly supervised and assessed.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is defined in the *CHE Work-integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide* (2011:4) as:

> WIL is used as an umbrella term to describe curricular, pedagogic and assessment practices, across a range of academic disciplines that integrate formal learning and workplace concerns. The integration of theory and practice in student learning can occur through a range of WIL approaches, apart from formal or informal work placements. WIL is primarily intended to enhance student learning, and to this end, several innovative curricular, pedagogical, and assessment forms have developed in response to concerns about graduateness, employability and civic responsibility; examples include action-learning, apprenticeships, cooperative education, experiential learning, inquiry learning, inter-professional learning, practicum placements, problem-based learning, project-based learning, scenario learning, service-learning, team-based learning, virtual or simulated WIL learning, work-based learning, work experience, workplace learning, and so on.

Although the terminology used to describe programmes and practices varies, all are based on a **shared understanding of the importance of enabling students to integrate theoretical knowledge gained through formal study with the practice-based knowledge gained through immersion in a work or professional context**. The term WIL, then, describes an approach to occupationally and professionally-oriented education that includes classroom-based and

workplace-based forms of learning appropriate for the professional qualification. What distinguishes WIL from narrow conceptions of learning-for-work is the emphasis on the integrative aspects of such learning. **WIL could thus be described as an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces; in this regard, WIL should demonstrably be appropriate for the qualification concerned**.

Take note:

For more details on different modalities of work-integrated learning, consult the *Council on Higher Education Work-integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide* (2011), available from this **link**.

WIL in HEQSF qualification types

Although WIL may be incorporated into programmes at all levels of the HEQSF, work-integrated learning is mentioned in the HEQSF (DHET, 2014) in the qualification descriptors of the following qualification types:

- **Higher Certificate**: The Higher Certificate typically includes a simulated work experience or work-integrated learning (WIL) component (DHET, 2014:27).
- **Advanced Certificate**: Advanced Certificate programmes typically include a work integrated learning (WIL) (DHET, 2014:28).
- **Diploma of 240 credits and 360 credits**: Diploma programmes typically include an appropriate work-integrated learning (WIL) component (DHET, 2014:29-30).

  Candidates who complete the 240-credit Diploma may enter an Advanced Diploma upon successful completion of a work-integrated learning component or a combination of work-integrated learning and coursework equivalent to 120 credits that are approved and accredited by an education provider and/or a professional body and a QC (DHET, 2014:30).
- **Bachelor's degree** of 360 credits and 480 credits: The degree programme may contain a component of work-integrated learning (DHET, 2014: 32-33).
- **Professional Master's degree**: In some cases, a professional Master's degree may be designed in consultation with a professional body or fulfil all or part of the requirements for professional registration or recognition and may include appropriate forms of work-integrated learning (DHET, 2014: 38-39).
- **Professional Doctoral degree**: Professional Doctorates may also include appropriate forms of work-integrated learning (DHET, 2014: 41).

What is workplace-based learning (WPL)?

Work-integrated learning as a means of relating theory to practice is regarded by many as a key characteristic of occupationally and professionally oriented programmes offered by universities in South Africa. Although there is often contestation about the various terms associated with various

forms or modalities of work-integrated learning, the significance of learning through doing is not disputed. It is worth emphasising that the alignment between work and education implied in WIL is not restricted to work placement. There are many WIL practices, from more theoretical to more practical forms, such as simulation, project-based learning, problem-based learning, etc.

Workplace-based learning, as **a modality of work-integrated learning** (also referred to as practicum and clinical placement in Education and Health Science, respectively), is **an educational approach to enhance learning through doing in the workplace setting**. The benefits derived from workplace-based learning have been widely documented in the literature. Studies show that the placement of students in the workplace enhances the employability of students through the development of 'generic' and 'soft' skills as well as increases understanding of how theory (obtained in the classroom/laboratory) relates to practice (workplace) which encourage students' engagement in learning. Empirical research indicates that workplace-based learning contributes to the development of 'proactive and agentic' learners (Billett, 2009:838) and that students gain new knowledge, understandings, and 'generic' graduate attributes, capabilities and various skills considered essential to particular workplace practices (e.g. ATLC, 2011; Jacobs, 2014). Anecdotal evidence suggests that workplace-based learning positively contributes to employment opportunities for graduates and the retention of graduates in organisations or enterprises where they have completed a structured workplace-based learning component.

The incorporation of workplace-based learning in a HEQSF-aligned qualification implies that students are placed in work environments for the purposes of **learning,** and it usually 'involves students in planning and implementing an activity, in reflection on and evaluating the activity, and making adjustments for future action' based on Kolb's (1984) learning cycle (CHE, 2011:19). Workplace-based learning is often **a credit-bearing component** of many HE qualifications and curricula. It forms an **integral component** of a qualification whereby students are placed in an **approved** workplace environment for **a specific period of time to learn** through tasks, activities and duties performed in the workplace setting under the **supervision and guidance** of suitably qualified and experienced workplace practitioners and/or academic staff members of the higher education institution. Workplace-based learning arrangements should be in keeping with national policy requirements, standards and good practice principles as defined in the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* (DHET, 2014), the *CHE Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education* (2013) and the *CHE Work-integrated Learning Good Practice Guide* (2011).

Based on the principle of **constructive alignment** (Biggs, 2003), the learning outcomes, pedagogy and assessment of the workplace-learning component in a programme should be closely aligned to enhance learning. The learning outcomes of workplace-learning components in an occupationally or professionally oriented programme should consider the nature of the field of study and labour market requirements.

Many **professional bodies,** such as the Engineering Council of SA (ECSA), the South African Nursing Council (SANC), various professional boards of the Health Professions Council of SA (HPCSA) and others, specify the number of credits assigned to work-integrated learning (including workplace-based learning) in the curricula of these professional qualifications. The learning outcomes of

workplace-based learning should be closely aligned with the nature, purpose and characteristics of the qualification type. These learning outcomes should also align to the blend of learning domains (knowledge, skills, applied competence, attributes) defined as the exit level outcomes of the qualification (DHET, 2014: 20). It is also vital to ensure that the workplace-based learning component is pitched at the appropriate NQF level. Therefore, in defining the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and other pedagogical aspects of the workplace-based learning component, it is necessary to consider the application NQF level descriptor(s).

Details on workplace-based learning in the module specification

If workplace-based learning is **an integral component of a module**, it is necessary to provide the following information in the module specification (Form B):

- Does the module include a workplace-based learning component?

  [Yes/No]

- Are the workplace-based learning requirements prescribed by a professional body?

  [Yes/No]

- What percentage of the notional hours of the module are allocated to workplace-based learning? or How many workplace-based learning hours are incorporated in this particular module?

  Based on the details provided by professional bodies, the notional hours devoted to workplace-based learning can be expressed as a percentage of the total number of notional hours (of the module) or in terms of the actual number of hours.

- What is the purpose of the workplace-based learning component in the module?

  Based on the information provided in these guidelines and other relevant sources, the purpose of the workplace-based learning component should be clearly defined concerning the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria to be achieved by students.

- Where will the workplace-based learning component take place? An on-campus venue or off-campus workplace setting?

  It is the responsibility of the faculty/academic department to ensure that the site where students will do their workplace-based learning will adequately contribute to students' learning experience and the achievement of the required learning outcomes.

- Since it remains the responsibility of SU to ensure that off-campus workplace settings meet the requirements of stakeholders (i.e. CHE and professional bodies), does the off-campus workplace setting selected for this module by the academic department meet the requirements of the relevant professional body and/or institutional quality assurance requirements?

Students should be placed in off-campus workplace settings that have been approved by relevant authorities, and these sites should also meet national, professional and institutional quality assurance requirements.

Sources of information

Australian Learning & Teaching Council (ALTC). 2011. *Good Practice Report: Work-integrated Learning*. Surry Hills, Australia: Australian Learning & Teaching Council.

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