

## WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

This Fact Sheet will cover the definition of and a description of the different types of work-integrated learning, benefits and opportunities for employers, principles for successful implementation and will highlight important implementation issues and roles for HR/HRD practitioners. The Fact Sheet ends with two case studies.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Professional learning and development practitioners know that both knowledge and practice components are necessary in order to develop a new skill. Classroom training on its own rarely translates, or translates in a very diluted form, into application of the training and therefore to improved performance on the job.

However, the structure of the South African post-school education system has, over recent years, tended to separate the academic/theory component from the practical, workplace-based component to the detriment of the quality of the products of that system: the youth who have to enter the job market with academic qualifications but no practical experience.

A major thrust of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is to remedy that situation through an emphasis on Work-Integrated Learning.

This policy shift cannot achieve the desired results without the active participation of employers, whether in the public, private or NGO/NPO sectors. Thus, the role of HR and HRD practitioners is central to the implementation of this policy. HR/HRD practitioners must therefore be well informed on the policy and policy implementation programmes.

The principles of work-integrated learning (WIL) apply to all learning and development programmes, whether designed and delivered internally by employers or by training providers or by public educational institutions. For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, however, we will concentrate on WIL as it applies to externally provided training by both private sector training providers and public post-school educational institutions.

“Workplace training and work-integrated learning must be a central part of our training system.

Learners exiting universities, TVET colleges and programmes funded by SETA’s are not, in general, finding work easily. They are often described by employers as lacking the skills needed. Sometimes this seems to relate to a lack of practical workplace experience. Workplace learning must be seen as an integral part of qualification and programme design.

Some of the N-programmes include a period of work experience after completion of the formal programme in the collage. Often these work placements are unstructured and do not contribute to the outcomes of the qualification.”

**DHET WHITE PAPER FOR POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2014**

## 2. DEFINITION OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

“Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an umbrella term for any purposefully-designed learning programme that integrates theoretical knowledge with authentic practice in the workplace. The purpose of WIL is to develop competence, i.e. the ability to apply knowledge and skills to the demands of real life.

Internationally, WIL is used as a core strategy for technical, vocational, occupational and professional education and training. It always involves a combination of structured learning (some of which may happen in a classroom) and real work. WIL programmes typically include instruction in trade-theory or professional knowledge, ‘sheltered’ practical training and ‘real-world’ workplace experience. WIL is designed to get the best of both worlds. It uses institution-based training where appropriate and work-lace-based practice where possible.” (Swiss South African Cooperation Initiative Framework for Providing Work-Integrated Learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges, 2013)

Work-integrated learning experiences provide a bridge for students between the academic present and their professional future - an opportunity to apply and merge theoretical knowledge gained in academic studies to “real world” workplace practical experiences, and to prepare students for a career by providing an opportunity to develop relevant professional skills.

## 3. TYPES OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

It is important to realise that WIL can be organised in different ways, depending on factors such as the requirements of the curriculum, the resources of the employer and logistical factors such as distance between employer workplace and college/students’ homes.

There is a transition period where SETAs continue to quality assure the “old” unit-standard based qualifications until their validity expires (latest 2017). QCTO will monitor and evaluate the quality assurance processes of SETAs and professional bodies with QA functions during this transition period.

Types of wil can include:

- Short work exposures (anything from one day to a week) where students, usually in groups, observe work and have presentations from experts in the organisation. These exposures are typically organised by the academic institution with the cooperation of the workplace organisation.

- Workplace based experience, where students actually carry out tasks within their curricula. This could range between short (for example, one week) and longer (for example 3 months) periods. An example of this is the old “sandwich” courses that N and T courses used to require. The key feature of this is that the student is still enrolled for the qualification, that is, the workplace based experience is an integral part of the qualification. It follows therefore that the main party in organising workplace based experience should be the academic institution which needs to find workplaces for the practical component. Due to the imbalance between the number of students needing workplace based experience and the number of workplaces with suitable facilities available, simulated workplace experiences are likely to increase in number – for example, laboratories (including computer laboratories) and test workshops. These, however, are less satisfactory than a normal workplace due to the absence of workplace disciplines and tutoring/mentoring by experienced employees.
- Apprenticeships. These are regulated WIL programmes for trades specified in the National List of Artisan Trades. Apprenticeships are managed by employers.
- Learnerships. These are also regulated WIL programmes, centred around the acquisition of NQF qualifications under the SETA system. Learners are employees and therefore the learnerships are managed by employers in a tri-partite relationship between the learner, employer and training provider.

It should be noted that post-qualification types of work exposure such as internships are not included in our definition of WIL, because the formal learning implied in the qualification has come to an end and the intern has now entered the world of work, even though this is often a temporary arrangement. See also the SABPP Guide to Internships.

“Workplace learning should be an integral part of all vocational programmes. Establishing effective partnerships between education and training systems and employers to provide for workplace training would ensure that skills have real labour market relevance and that young people gain an early appreciation of and exposure to the world of work.”

**NATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY III**

## 4. BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

The National Skills Accord committed its signatories – government, organised business, organised labour and civil society – to greatly expanding the numbers of apprenticeships, internships, workplace-based experience for college students and other opportunities for WIL within industry.

The SSACI Framework document identifies several benefits for employers, namely:

- Building a pipeline of skilled employees;
- Reduced recruitment costs;
- Identification of internal training needs;
- Job enrichment and improved morale for permanent staff assigned to mentor trainees;
- Opportunity to influence TVET college curricula to suit employers' specific needs.

## 5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYERS OFFERED THROUGH THE NEW QCTO SYSTEM

Employers and professional bodies drive the new QCTO system, by specifying their needs in the form of curricula for the various occupations. These curricula can determine the extent and the arrangement of the combination of theory and practice that the employers/professional bodies (through the Community of Expert Practitioners) identify as necessary.

It will then be up to the employers and training providers to implement this.



## 6. PRINCIPLES FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN IMPLEMENTING WIL

SSACI identifies 7 key guiding principles for effective implementation of WIL by TVET colleges. These would apply equally to universities of technology and comprehensive universities for their Certificate and Diploma programmes:

- i. It is part of the core business of colleges to integrate WIL into their curricula;
- ii. Planning and implementation of the workplace component must be done systematically and institutionalised in the college;
- iii. The workplace component of WIL must be located in suitable workplaces that are able to provide the required experience in a safe and healthy environment;
- iv. WIL depends on the continued involvement and support of employers. Colleges must therefore strive to address the skills needs of local employers and accommodate their business objectives, operating procedures, work processes, calendars, timing and managerial systems;
- v. The longer and more frequent the workplace-based components of a WIL programme, the more effective it is likely to be;
- vi. WIL requires good preparation of students and employers: each must know what is required of them and how to meet these requirements;
- vii. Students need to be mentored during WIL placements so that problems are resolved quickly and opportunities for learning fully exploited.

The SABPP is encouraging private training providers to follow exactly the same principles and incorporate WIL into their qualifications. HR/HRD practitioners should work with their training providers in all spheres of training and development to ensure that the principles are applied.

## 7. EMPLOYMENT LAW IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1. Employment Status

If students on workplace based experience periods are performing actual tasks in the workplace, they can be defined as rendering service and should therefore be placed on short, fixed-term contracts of employment.

The employer may wish to open the door to permanent employment should the student(s) prove their potential worth, but this does not have to be an expectation of workplace based experience, and expectations should be carefully managed.

### 7.2. Youth Employment Incentive

Employment of a student for workplace based experience can qualify for the payment of the SARS Youth Employment Incentive for the period of employment. See Fact Sheet 2014/1.

## 8. THE HR/HRD PRACTITIONER'S ROLE IN ENSURING EFFECTIVE WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

- Ensure you understand exactly what knowledge and skills the student needs to attain during the WIL period (this should be in the form of a logbook/portfolio of evidence format agreed between the employer and the college/university) and match this to the opportunities your organisation can offer;
- Ensure that the period of WIL is convenient to the workplace;
- Find appropriate tutors/mentors from among your employees. Ensure they are willing and enthusiastic, brief them and train them in coaching and mentoring skills;
- Ensure that the tutors/mentors have planned tasks and projects for the student(s) beforehand;
- Consider whether there are scheduled training courses that students could benefit from, for example, communication skills, wellness programmes, ethics workshops;
- Implement a structured induction/orientation session, ensuring amongst other things that health and safety rules are covered and other important workplace rules. Have ready a pack of key organisation documents;
- Allocate a workplace coordinator to monitor the students' exposures and achievements and to trouble-shoot where problems arise;
- Gather regular feedback from the student(s) and tutors/mentors and ensure that a good report-back to the college/university takes place at the end of the WIL period.

Typical problems that arise during a WIL period include:

- Lack of support from colleagues of the students;
- Supervisor is not directly involved;
- A general attitude among employees and managers that "it's a waste of time and resources when the learner is only here for short period";
- Monitoring achievement against the log book/portfolio of evidence is time consuming;
- Regarding the students as cheap labour, so the student is exploited in doing various tasks without any real link to the curriculum;
- Poor attitude from the students: not prepared to work long hours, wasting time, too demanding, not punctual;
- Lack of commitment from management.

The preparation of the workplace needs to take these types of potential problems into account.

## 9. WHO INITIATES THE WIL?

According to the new policy for TVET colleges, and probably increasingly so for universities, the college/university will approach employers.

However, employers could also approach colleges and universities, particularly where they have identified an opportunity to build a skills and talent pipeline for the future and/or where they recognise the need to engage with youth unemployment issues.

Sometimes students will approach employers directly, especially where the college/university has not build much capacity to proactively manage WIL partnerships with employers and students are left to their own initiative to find WIL placements. In such cases, if a placement can be offered, the employer should ensure that good interaction with the college/university takes place so that the placement fits the needs of the curriculum.

## 10. CASE STUDY 1 – PROTEA TYRES

Hendrik Janse van Rensburg, proprietor of the Protea Tyres franchise based in Nelspruit, has set up a model of a workplace centre of excellence where higher education and industry players can integrate emotional intelligence training with hard skills to provide broad-based (80%) industry-specific and approved training. On completion, students can undergo specialised training (20%) and mentorship with qualified and certified facilitators. They themselves will then become successful mentors, facilitators and preferably entrepreneurs.


The Centre of Excellence was set up originally through the Retail Motor Industry Association (RMI) which was prepared to be a partner in a Public Private Partnership to pilot the model. RMI therefore identified one of its member companies, Protea Tyres in Nelspruit, for the pilot site. Protea Tyres was already a SAQA accredited training facility so it had the facilities to do the workplace based training.

Learnership training can be given on NQF level 2, 3, 4 or level. The programme is also structured so that the learner can go from level 2 (basic skills i.e. tyre repair and fitment) to level 4 (sales and marketing) after which the learner can then go on to an internship to complete the program with a certificate and industry designation. On completion of the programme and a new venture creation learnership, the learner can acquire a position either in small or corporate business or can, as an entrepreneur, open a franchise with government assistance and pre-sourced funding from relevant funding institutions.

This case study is a unique model of a private training facility expanding its scope to encompass career pathways and small business funding assistance. As such, it is not necessarily a model that other employers might wish to follow, but it does illustrate what can be done in a small business.



# 11. CASE STUDY 2 – NATIONAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE – CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Impact Through Collective Action 

A Tracer Study (2009) by the NBI of FET College graduates found that:

- Access to workplaces significantly improves learners' chances of finding meaningful permanent employment.
- Most learners cannot access workplaces or compete for jobs on an equitable basis partly owing to a lack of access to industry exposure
- Research and consultation with industry illustrates the importance of matching graduates to industry requirements to enhance the likelihood of absorption

The NBI put together a College Industry Partnership model. One of the specific actions was to:

**Action 7: Work-based learning for college learners**

Learners receive contextualised learning and experience the everyday working environment.  
 The relationship between education and training and the workplace is strengthened.  
 A pool of skilled workers is developed.  
 Companies are given an opportunity to screen potential employees.

At the Growth and Development Summit, **business** made a commitment to increase the number of Section 18(2) participants in learnerships. Colleges assist companies in addressing both Section 18(1) and 18(2) targets.

**How? Through these practical activities**

- Commit to meeting agreed learnership targets by **colleges and industry**.
- Meet an agreed target of learners to be placed in work-based learning programmes.
- Establish a college-industry working group to design and implement a work experience programme for college learners.

In the construction industry, the model used was:



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## A foot in the door: Getting South Africa's youth working

- Provide a central point where employers can link their initiatives to those of other companies, identify possible areas for intervention, share best practice and identify areas of cooperation
  - Create platforms for on-going engagement and 'quiet conversations' with government and among employers
  - Promote evidence-based learning through purposeful research and surveys including student tracer studies
  - Develop guidelines and tools on good practice for employers and DHET: student recruitment, selection and matching to employer needs, conduct work-readiness and facilitate gap training, give feedback to TVET Colleges to improve curriculum
- Collate data on workplace learning initiatives and other relevant initiatives: invite companies to 'register' their projects
  - Maintain a database, collate data and compile reports on workplace learning initiatives on a regular basis, with a view to identifying placement patterns and trends
- Help unlock funding to support the implementation of workplace learning activities
- Initiate joint interventions that could be delivered by the participating companies
  - Host Employer Placement Expos in TVET Colleges to promote placement opportunities available in companies



## 12. CONCLUSION

The determination of the DHET to expand the provision of WIL through TVET colleges means that colleges will increasingly be approaching employers to provide one or more of the various types of WIL.

We encourage HR practitioners to make every effort to partner with TVET colleges and accommodate as many students as possible for work integrated learning so that the current imbalance and shortage of workplace based learning experiences can be alleviated, to the good of the skills supply for South Africa.

“Companies will annually make 12 000 placements/internship spaces available for students who complete their certificates at FET Colleges, 5 000 internships for 3rd year students at Universities of Technology who need the work experience as part of their qualifications, and opportunities for training exposure in a work environment for at least 16 000 lecturers at FET Colleges. This will be phased in, with 20% of the target to be achieved in 2011, 50% in 2012 and 100% from 2013.”

### **NATIONAL SKILLS ACCORD 2011**

This fact sheet has been prepared by Naren Vassan, head of Learning and Quality Assurance at the SABPP, and Penny Abbott, head of the HR Research Initiative at the SABPP. The fact sheet draws heavily on the work of the Swiss South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI) and the National Business Initiative.

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