

A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

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1. Introduction, background and purpose of this document

The educational value of work-integrated learning (WIL) in authentic workplace settings is well documented, and has been practiced for many years in technical, vocational, occupational and professional settings. However, in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, there is a renewed focus on WIL, stemming from the often repeated refrain by employers that the products of our education and training systems are not ready for the workplace.

Practitioners all over the world know that WIL programmes can significantly ease the transition of learning to work and that it contributes to the development of the skills and attitudes of new entrants that make them much more attractive to potential employers. Enhancing employability of young people is therefore a top priority. However, 'first and foremost WIL is about *learning*, and not about *working*. Work is the vehicle for learning' (Blom, 2013).

Forbes (2012) therefore states that the philosophy and principles for WIL have always been 'an education partnership between an institution of learning and external stakeholders in industry and communities where the purpose is to give students an enhanced learning experience'.

This does not mean that the different stakeholders do not benefit from an approach which will closer align learning and work. Employers benefit from their participation in WIL 'by being able to identify the best new potential entrants to their workplaces' (Blom, 2013). Young people benefit by gaining experience of, and in the world-of-work whereby they become more employable; and institutions benefit by the dynamic interaction with real-world practices which are then incorporated into curricula, to reduce the mismatch between learning and work.

However, thus far, WIL practices in South Africa have been introduced within a policy vacuum. Whereas institutions, associations and networks have implemented WIL in accordance to their own contexts and policies, a national framework does not yet exist. This document therefore attempts to consolidate the best practice emerging throughout the national system as a contribution towards the development of a standard approach.

The purpose of this document is then, in keeping with the policy thrusts reflected in the Department of Higher Education and Training's White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013), to distil practices into common principles evident from implementation at all levels of the system. The framework will therefore deal with substantive issues and will leave the nuanced implementation procedures to implementing institutions, which will tweak the principles according to their own needs. Context is very important, and implementation will take place in keeping with the most appropriate modalities for the different sectors of the education and training system.

This document therefore responds to the following questions:

Section 2 – Who is the target audience for this document?

Section 3 – What is the policy context for the framework?

Section 4 – What is the conceptual framework for WIL?

Section 5 – What are the principles guiding WIL?

Section 6 – How do we implement WIL?

Section 7 – What are the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in terms of WIL?

Section 8 – Terms and definitions: towards a common understanding of WIL

2. The target audience for this document

The target audience is at different levels. First, it is expected that this document will contribute to debates and discussions about WIL at the level of policy-makers in the national system to assist with the establishment of a single WIL policy for the system. Second, in keeping with the attempt to develop a standard approach, even if standardised implementation cannot be expected, the second level includes managers and academic planners at institutions. While many institutions already have policies in respect of WIL or related practices, it is hoped that institutions will align their institutional policies to an agreed national policy. Third, since WIL should be ‘an integral part of all vocational programmes’ (NSDS III, 2011 – 2016), this framework is an important resource for curriculum developers and/or academic staff in order to ensure that curricula integrate theoretical knowledge with authentic practice (SSACI, 2013). Fourth, still at the level of the institution, support services staff dealing with WIL should be familiar with the framework. Finally, WIL cannot be implemented without partners outside of institutions, so the fifth target group includes Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), funding agencies, employers and labour organisations.

3. The policy context for the framework

A number of government policies introduced over the last few years in South Africa have emphasised the centrality of WIL. The New Growth Path, the National Development Plan, the National Skills Accord, the National Skills Development Strategy III (2011 – 2016) and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, all ‘reflect a growing emphasis on workplace learning as a core and essential component of vocational and occupational education, and the role this type of education and training plays in economic development and job creation’ (SSACI, 2013: 9).

The White Paper (DHET, 2013) for example states:

Ensuring expanded access to training opportunities, with training taking place in both educational institutions and workplaces, is in line with the National Skills Accord signed by representatives of all the NEDLAC partners in July 2011. It commits all the social partners – government, organised business, the labour movement and communities – to making this a

reality... These [initiatives] include increasing access to workplaces for students in vocational and higher education, in the form of various types of work-integrated learning.

Much is expected of WIL, perhaps unfairly so, particularly in relation to job creation and enhancing the economy. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2011: 6) cautions as follows:

WIL does not offer a 'quick fix' solution to national industry's lack of competitiveness; nor can it transform a 'low skills' society into a 'high skills' one overnight. WIL can, however, play a role with regard to the readiness of graduates to enter and contribute to South African society and the world of work.

Blom (2013: viii) agrees and maintains that 'employability [which is enhanced through WIL] is about gaining those attributes that make a young person attractive as an employee, but it does not necessarily equate to employment, nor should it create the expectation that it does'.

Nevertheless, education and training do not take place in a vacuum, and if the large-scale introduction of WIL could contribute to economic development, albeit obliquely, then it is worthwhile pursuing.

Keeping the above caveats in mind, it is clear, as noted in the introduction above, that the benefit of introducing WIL is no small thing. A number of source documents² described the benefits from different perspectives – these are distilled below:

For students -

- WIL greatly enhances learning – including inter-disciplinary thinking; the integration of knowledge, skills and competencies; the retention of learning; and the application of subject knowledge;
- WIL affirms career choices – in developing a better understanding of their chosen career, students can realistically evaluate their interest and aptitude for their future work environment; WIL helps to develop a professional identity and introduces the student to positive work values and ethics;
- WIL enhances employability – the student is able to develop a work experience record, and employers are able to assess potential employees; students are also able to develop a network of future potential employers;
- WIL develops maturity and self-confidence – an understanding of the workplace adds to knowledge of workplace etiquette, interpersonal skills and improved and appropriate communication skills, team work, leadership and co-operation.

For institutions –

- WIL greatly enhances the curriculum – practical experience lead to more responsive curricula and pedagogy; increasing the validity and relevance of learning programmes;

² See Reference list

- WIL results in more motivated learners – improved retention and throughput have been noted when students return to their institutions;
- WIL helps to build mutually beneficial partnerships – including work placements for teaching staff, which result in up-to-date information from industry; curricula are more closely aligned to work requirements;
- WIL enhances the reputation of the institution – responsiveness to industry needs arise from close linkages and partnerships between institutions and employers.

For **employers** –

- WIL helps employers save on training and recruitment costs – a pool of work-ready applicants are prepared through WIL; employers also have low-cost (if not subsidised) labour for the duration of WIL;
- WIL provides a source of potential employees – it also shows up internal training needs, including the need to develop workplace mentors and other job enrichment schemes to enable permanent staff to mentor students;
- WIL provides an opportunity to influence curricula – new, cutting edge technologies, processes and methods become part of the curriculum;
- WIL is essential in improving the skills base of the country to the benefit of education, training and commerce and industry.

The beneficiaries above are well-known and the benefits from WIL in respect of these stakeholders have been documented over time. However, depending on how WIL is viewed, a number of other beneficiaries need to be mentioned³:

For **communities** –

- Some forms of work experience such as ‘Service-learning’ can benefit both students in terms of attaining marketable skills, as well as the communities where students are placed for service.

For **government** –

- Government is one of the largest employers in the country and WIL opportunities are varied and many;
- As in the case of any other employer, government has a pool of work-ready applicant to choose from;
- Moreover, government’s support for WIL can greatly enhance the development of an educated citizenry.

For the **economy** –

- Enhancing the employability of young entrants to the workplace, the economy benefits from more productive and work-ready applicants;

³ With grateful acknowledgement to the Namibian Education Department Working Group on Cooperative Education

4. The conceptual framework for WIL

The simplest definition for WIL is ‘*an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces*’ (CHE, 2011: 78). This framework adopts this definition as the overarching definition for the many different modalities of practice where learning is linked to authentic practice. It is a pedagogical approach adopted and integrated into curricula to enhance student learning and to enrich such learning through the incorporation of the latest practices from commerce and industry.

Moreover, ‘WIL’ has become the accepted term in policy, including the White Paper (DHET, 2013) and is understood to refer to three ways in which this pedagogical approach can be expressed (from Seagraves, et al, 1996 in Forbes, 2008):

Learning for work – referring to vocationally orientated or career focused learning which is intended to induct new entrants to their chosen vocation and/or profession;

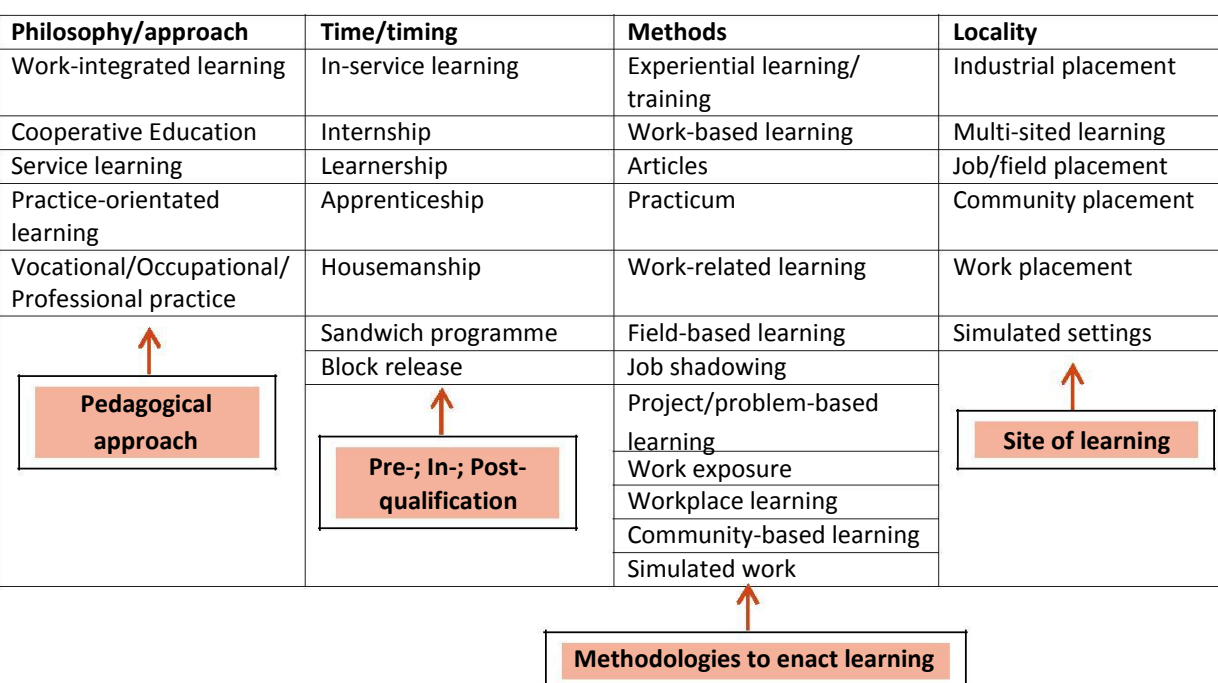
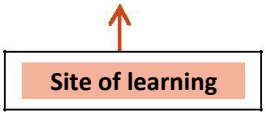
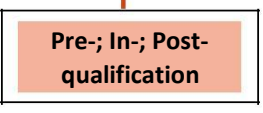
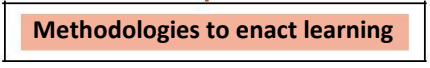
Learning at work – encompassing a range of modalities delivered at workplaces that enhance the integration of knowledge and competencies through workplace experience; and

Learning through work – which engages students in specific work-related tasks as part of the curriculum, to solve real-life work-related problems.

However, learning **for**, **at** or **through** work should not be seen in isolation – indeed, it is the combination of these that encourages the integrative aspects of learning and work.

Furthermore, WIL has evolved over time and can now be expressed in many different modalities (see list of terms and definitions for descriptions of these modalities), which are often confusing. To clarify the understanding of some of the many terms used in relation to WIL, the terms have been grouped under four headings – Philosophy/approach; Time/timing; Methods; and Locality – see below (from Forbes, nd):

Table 1: WIL modalities

Philosophy/approach	Time/timing	Methods	Locality
Work-integrated learning	In-service learning	Experiential learning/ training	Industrial placement
Cooperative Education	Internship	Work-based learning	Multi-sited learning
Service learning	Learnership	Articles	Job/field placement
Practice-orientated learning	Apprenticeship	Practicum	Community placement
Vocational/Occupational/ Professional practice	Housemanship	Work-related learning	Work placement
 <div>Pedagogical approach</div>	Sandwich programme	Field-based learning	Simulated settings
	Block release	Job shadowing	 <div>Site of learning</div>
	 <div>Pre-; In-; Post-qualification</div>	Project/problem-based learning	
		Work exposure	
		Workplace learning	
		Community-based learning	
		Simulated work	
		 <div>Methodologies to enact learning</div>	

More terms will undoubtedly be added as WIL is implemented throughout the system. Importantly, the timing, methods and location of learning will be determined by programmatic requirements. In keeping with these requirements, the work-based component will take on different dimensions. These dimensions can be expressed as intersecting continua (Blom, 2013 in Namibian Working Group for Cooperative Education, 2013): a *time continuum* and a *characteristic continuum*. For example, where a programme requires only a short period of workplace exposure (time continuum), the nature of the workplace experience may be restricted to only observation (characteristic continuum). However, if an extended period of time (time continuum) is to be spent in the workplace (e.g. as an apprentice), then the nature (characteristic continuum) of work-based learning will be focused on authentic work. A third dimension relates to remuneration (dotted line), see below:

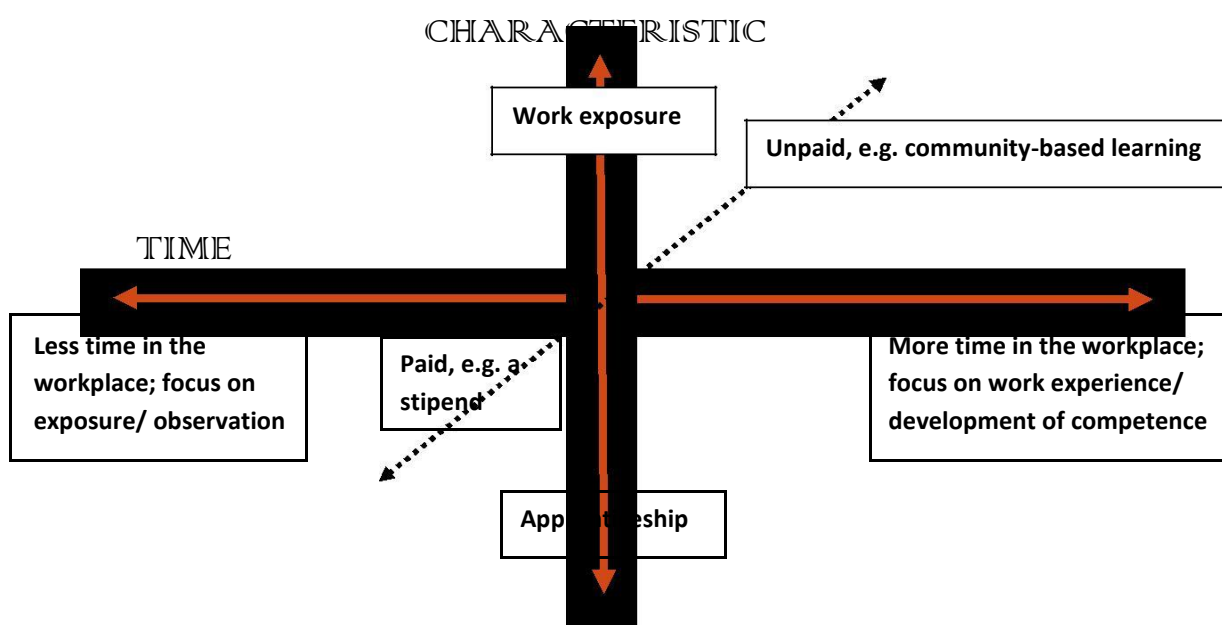


Figure 1: The time and characteristics continua of workplace experience⁴

A fourth dimension is *the timing* of WIL (see Table 1). This is determined by the intentional inclusion of WIL at key points of the curriculum. Thus, in some cases, some workplace experience is needed prior to entering a programme (a Master in Business Administration⁵ (MBA) often requires several years of workplace experience as a prerequisite for entry to the programme); in other cases, WIL is required while a person is already in service; others will require that students spend periods at an institution, interspersed with periods in workplaces; and yet other programmes require WIL only after the qualification has been completed. Many of these requirements are prescribed by professional bodies or occupational guilds, but this does not mean that WIL should not, or cannot be incorporated into many other programmes. The principle remains the same: linking learning with work and work-related scenarios to develop a fully rounded new entrant to the workplace. The CHE

⁴Blom, (2013), with acknowledgement to the SSACI draft Framework for Providing Work-integrated Learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges.

⁵ <http://www.mba.co.za/section.aspx?s=45>

(2011: 4) notes that ‘these capabilities are just as necessary for general education as they are for career-focused education’.

The latter point emphasises the fact that ‘the alignment between work and education implied in WIL is not restricted to work placement. There are many different WIL practices along a continuum from more theoretical to more practical forms’, not all of which has to take place in an actual workplace (CHE, 2011: 4).

5. The principles guiding WIL

- 5.1 WIL should be aligned to the vision and mission of academic institutions (Forbes, 2008);
- 5.2 WIL is based on the understanding of the importance of enabling students to integrate theoretical knowledge gained through formal study, with the practice-based knowledge gained through work or work-related activities (CHE, 2011);
- 5.3 A curriculum incorporating WIL ‘faces both ways’ – the disciplines that form the knowledge base of the vocation/occupation/profession, and the world of vocational/occupational/professional practice (CHE, 2011);
- 5.4 WIL is therefore a matter of curriculum, pedagogy (teaching strategies) and of directed learning (Namibian Working Group, 2013);
- 5.5 WIL is a meaningful and credit-bearing component of the curriculum and therefore requires workplace or work-related tasks that are assessed and quality assured;
- 5.6 Work-related activities are aligned to the learning goals of the qualification;
- 5.7 The longer and more frequent WIL is, the more effective it is likely to be (SSACI, 2013);
- 5.8 WIL requires partnerships between the institution, commerce and industry and the student, which reflects a long-term commitment to jointly plan for, implement and monitor work-based learning (Namibian Working Group, 2013);
- 5.9 Government, apart from being an important employer, is an enabler for WIL through a policy framework and financial and legislative incentives. Government can also, through bodies such as the Sector Education and Training Authorities, broker the relationships and partnerships (Namibian Working Group, 2013);
- 5.10 All partners have clearly defined and agreed roles and responsibilities in respect of WIL; thorough preparation for implementation must clarify these requirements.

6. A WIL implementation framework

Most commentators agree that an implementation framework has at least four stages: planning, preparation, placement and post-placement. However, to take WIL implementation to a systemic level, some pre-implementation steps have to be taken to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers that may bedevil implementation.

The first of these pre-implementation steps involve a review of the existing regulatory framework in respect of the placement of students in the workplace. Apart from the education and training legislation which may or may not be enabling, there may be other legislation that could inhibit the

introduction of young, unqualified people to the workplace. Labour legislation or legislation related to professions governed by statutory professional bodies (e.g. the Engineering Council of South Africa), are examples of where legislation may discourage the presence of WIL students.

The second pre-implementation step relates to the identification and creation of incentives that will support the participation of all stakeholders. Incentives and enabling mechanisms that will encourage commerce and industry to take co-responsibility for the education and training of their future workforce need to be put in place.

Third, an assessment and quality assurance approach to WIL, especially if it is situated in an actual workplace, should be conceptualised alongside an implementation strategy. 'Assessment and quality assurance are integral to the process and ensures the integrity of the learning outcomes' (Namibian Working Group, 2013: 17).

The fourth pre-implementation step is to develop the curriculum that 'looks both ways'. WIL should not be an afterthought, but an integral part of the programme. This may need a re-curriculation process for the qualification⁶.

In such an enabling environment, institutional planning can be initiated. The diagram below reflects the implementation cycle (SSACI, 2013: 19):

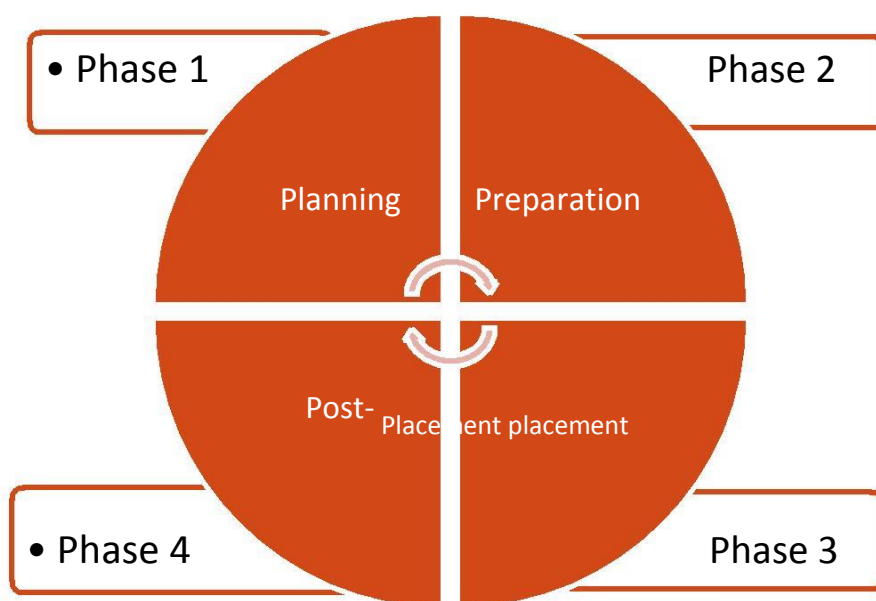


Figure 2: The implementation cycle of WIL

The discussion below brings together good practice from a number of different sources at different levels of the education and training system to accommodate both pre-university and university level

⁶ The CHE's Work-integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (HE Monitor, No. 12, Aug 2011) provides excellent examples of how WIL could be conceived within the curriculum. See www.che.ac.za

implementation⁷. Each institution (or network of institutions) will adapt the implementation cycle to the needs of the particular sector.

6.1 Phase 1: Planning

Planning activities	1	Develop institutional policy, strategy and operational plan and allocate budget
	2	Conceive of a quality assurance framework for WIL, including a monitoring plan
	3	Set up structures for supporting WIL, e.g. a central office, research and capacity building
	4	Develop action plans at different levels: faculty, department, programmatic
	5	Set up a database for tracking of students

Much of the planning activities can be undertaken at a management level, e.g. the development of generic resources which can be adapted to different disciplines, for example a generic student and employer handbook which will prepare the participants for all WIL programmes offered by the institution. Once the planning has been done, an annual review will ensure that lessons learnt during implementation are taken on board.

6.2 Phase 2: Preparation

Preparation activities	1	Brief and prepare/train WIL practitioners and support staff in relation to their responsibilities
	2	Develop/tweak the curriculum with academics, teaching staff and industry partners
	3	Plan the workplace/work-related activities and develop task books/reporting formats
	4	Identify and recruit host employers and prepare them to manage and mentor students
	5	Select and prepare students for WIL, including appropriate behaviour as learner-worker
	6	Match eligible students to host employers and finalise logistics, e.g. accommodation/travel

The buy-in and preparation of workplaces is an important element which may include concluding formal agreements and/or being 'accredited' as a suitable workplace that will undertake the mentoring and supervision of the students. Preparation may also include training of workplace staff. Likewise, the student, as a 'learner-worker' should not only be introduced to the workplace-related tasks (technical skills) that will be expected of him/her, but should also be prepared for being a member of staff, with everything which that may entail ('soft skills'). This may include the development of curricula vitae and suchlike. Some experts recommend that students complete a 'work-preparedness skills programme', (e.g. Taylor and Govender, 2013) prior to entering the workplace.

6.3 Phase 3: Placement⁸

Placement activities	1	Register students on the database developed for this purpose
	2	Students engage in workplace activities as appropriate according to programme requirements
	3	Workplace mentors and supervisors mentor and ensure that tasks are concluded as required
	4	Academic staff monitor, support and assess students and workplace mentors as required
	5	Academic staff and workplace mentors evaluate the programme

⁷ Please refer to the Reference list

⁸ Where WIL is not taking place in actual workplaces, e.g. through simulated work, this step will apply to the academic staff member assigned to oversee such work and should be adjusted if required.

Workplace-related activities should be directed to meet the requirements of the learning outcomes in authentic settings. Students should be protected against exploitation or by being required to undertake tasks not related to their programme. Academic staff will have to monitor that students are utilised appropriately.

6.4 Phase 4: Post-placement

Post- placement + activities	1	Assessment of work-related tasks/activities (task books, logbooks, reports, project outcomes)
	2	Feedback in respect of assessment; experience of the workplace; new insights; lessons learnt
	3	Feedback to and from employers in respect of student performance and/or relevance of tasks
	4	Review and evaluation of programme; analyse data; disseminate findings on practices
	5	Adjustments to work-related tasks/activities; logistics; training of staff and workplace mentors

This phase is primarily about continuous improvement of the WIL programme, including reviewing the relevance of pre-placement academic and preparation activities as well as the tasks/activities to be completed during the placement phase. Employers may also be a valuable source of information in terms of the theoretical preparation of students and of the preparedness of students to enter a workplace.

7. Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

As noted earlier in this framework, in addition to the expected stakeholders in respect of WIL, namely the institution, the industry/the community and the student, to upscale WIL successfully, government has a very important enabling role to play. The roles and responsibilities listed below therefore include all four key stakeholders (SSACI, 2013):

Table 2: Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Government (DHET and SETAs)	To enable WIL implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce policy that supports delivery of WIL • Advocate WIL to other government departments and agencies, and to organised business and labour • Provide incentives to employers for support of WIL • Provide direction on provision of WIL • Fund provision of WIL • Provide the links between institutions and workplaces
Institutions	To implement WIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop WIL programmes, including adjusting curricula • Plan, manage, monitor and report on WIL • Allocate human and financial resources to WIL • Recruit employers for WIL and develop long-term partnerships to enable sustainable delivery • Support employers in planning and implementation • Provide the conceptual basis for WIL through research and capacity building

Table 2 (continued)

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Employers	To provide workplace opportunities for students and lecturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make workplaces available to students and lecturers • Provide a safe environment that is conducive to learning • Provide feedback to institutions regarding student performance, the relevance of tasks/activities and administration of WIL • Develop and maintain partnerships with institutions for sustainable and mutually-beneficial implementation of WIL
Student	To use workplace placements as learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with the requirements of the WIL programme • Prepare for placement through academic work • Adhere to workplace rules and instructions as 'learner-workers' and conduct themselves in a responsible manner • Submit to supervision and mentoring • Complete workplace-related tasks and activities

8. Terms and definitions: towards a common understanding of WIL

There are many terms and definitions used in relation to WIL. Without being prescriptive to allow for tweaking in terms of the specific contexts institutions may find themselves, the following definitions are proposed (see also Table 1: WIL modalities).

Table 3: Terms and definitions commonly used in terms of WIL

Term	Definition
Apprenticeship	A system of training a new generation of practitioners, usually in a vocational/artisanal field. In an apprenticeship model, most of the training is done while working for an employer, interspersed with theoretical education
Articles	An apprentice in a professional firm, generally in accountancy or legal fields – the student is known as an 'articled clerk'
Cooperative education	A system of education which involves a partnership between the institution, the workplace and the student for the purposes of gaining workplace experience
Experiential learning	Learning through doing and the reflection on what was done. In South Africa, this term is often used synonymously with cooperative education
Fieldwork; Field-based learning	Work undertaken outside the institution in order to gain knowledge through direct contact and observation of the 'field'.
Internship	A recent graduate undergoing supervised clinical/practical education/training. A substantial period of authentic work, usually undertaken post-course as a stand-alone component
Learnership	A means of obtaining a qualification while working. Structured, on-the-job training comprising theory and practice and culminating in a qualification in a specific occupation
Practicum	A period of work that provides the student with the opportunity for practical experience in the real world as part of an academic programme
Problem-based learning	A pedagogical approach that encourages students to learn through structured exploration of a practice-based problem
Project-based learning	This approach usually requires drawing on multiple disciplines to solve problems and often results in a measurable product or service
Sandwich course	The alternation of study periods with training periods in industry or professional practice, also sometimes known as integrated course or cooperative course
Service learning	A structured learning experience that combines community service with academic coursework in response to community-identified concerns

Term	Definition
Simulated learning/work	The imitation of the real world at the institution which includes the key characteristics of a real workplace. Work is performed under all the conditions and to all the performance requirements of real-life, but not in a real-life workplace
Work-based experience	A short period of workplace learning and experience undertaking authentic work as part of a formal programme
Work-based learning	Learning for, at, or through work – the acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills either at the institution or in the workplace
Work-directed theoretical learning	Ensures that theoretical forms of knowledge (such as mathematics and physics in engineering programmes) are applicable and relevant to career-specific components
Work exposure	Short periods spent in an industry or particular workplace to observe workplace practice
Work-integrated learning	An educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces
Workplace learning	A practicum which may vary from a few weeks to a few years of practical experience at a site of vocational/occupational/professional practice.

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