WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PAPER
PREFACE

The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Project was commissioned by Dr Ruth Dunkin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, RMIT University.

The WIL project forms part of the larger RMIT University – Morgan & Banks Career Management Project, which aims to:

- position RMIT as the ‘university for work’, globally recognised and respected as the market leader in the provision of a full range of career management services for prospective and current students and alumni
- strengthen and broaden existing and strategic alliances with employers and industry leaders to ensure the development and integration of market-responsive programs and priority employment skills
- provide relevant and timely work-related opportunities and experiences for students to engender in-course allegiance and encourage life-long connections with the university.

In order to achieve these aims, the first stage of the project was to investigate current WIL programs internationally, nationally and within RMIT and to provide policy makers and faculties with an evaluated menu of work integrated learning activities to fit the RMIT University context.

This was achieved by:

- undertaking a survey of the range and level of work integrated learning activities in TAFE and higher education courses across RMIT
- preparing the WIL Report which identifies and evaluates successful models of WIL, within and outside Australia to assist RMIT to determine future directions for implementing WIL within its courses and programs across the university.

The WIL Project team proposes a shift from the traditional learning model of linear course progression, with attached and sometimes integrated work-based learning, to a molecular model, which is structured to develop knowledge capability and a record of work-relevant practice, and which is learner-managed. The curriculum becomes a work-integrated learning experience as it provides the basis for effective practice in both familiar and unfamiliar settings as well as providing a sense of direction through career development activities.

As a framework for course renewal, WIL complements the capability agenda and shares its stress on preparing graduates for working life. It will help give effect to RMIT’s commitment to being a university for work.

The project team involved the following members of RMIT academic and teaching staff:

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THE RMIT CONTEXT

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is the umbrella term used throughout this paper to describe all educational programs which combine and integrate learning and its workplace application, regardless of whether this integration occurs in industry or in the university and whether it is real or simulated. WIL is proposed here not only as an educational policy for RMIT to be incorporated in all courses but also as a strategy to assist RMIT to position itself within the tertiary education sector and in the communities that it serves. WIL complements the RMIT agenda on capability-driven curriculum, highlighting the importance of a career development framework and graduates having a record of work-relevant practice.

In order to successfully achieve both the policy and the strategy, it is imperative that both are developed and implemented in a manner that acknowledges the diversity of the RMIT context and fulfils its strategic directions. The policy must fit the needs of individual faculties, their industry partners and their professional bodies. The strategy must fit the directions of the University in its internal focus upon EQA, Business Process Re-engineering and the Student Learning System, and its external focus on positioning itself as 'the university of work' and the graduate employment rates, research capacity and industry links that validate this position.

It is believed that WIL has the potential to achieve these aims if developed and implemented with due respect to the development of a sound and flexible infrastructure, quality assurance mechanisms and keeping all stakeholders in mind.

THE NEED FOR AN RMIT WIL POLICY

The scope of WIL activities at RMIT is significant, and it is essential to ensure that those activities fully contribute to the positioning of RMIT as a university for work.

WIL, as a set of values, is the vehicle to meet our commitment to prepare students for a working life or further their career development. The community expects that graduates have developed as people who 'can do' as well as 'know about' (Stephenson and Weil, 1992). Students are strongly vocationally oriented (ANOP 1994). The growth market in education and training is in courses to enable career change or professional development. Industry has stressed the importance of graduates being able to function effectively within the social system of the workplace (ACNielsen, 1998).

This means organising our activities as a university to meet the career needs of our students. This is the acquisition of occupational knowledge and skills and the development of graduate attributes and/or key competencies, but also the skills and dispositions needed for learning and innovating in the workplace, the skills needed for career planning and for managing career transitions, and support for course and career decision making. This is a 'full service' model for the university. The focus is on careers, not courses.

WIL can be pursued in a number of ways and these are detailed in the appendices. They include mentored employment, supervised work experience, undergraduate R&D projects, work-related and work-based learning, enterprise development, simulations, generic employment/study programs, and combinations of these.
OUTCOMES OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Retention of learning is said to be much greater when it occurs in a real-life context, perhaps because such contexts more readily provide or emulate the four conditions for effective learning: a knowledge base, a motivational context, learner activity and interaction (Biggs, 1999: 73, 78). Exposure to actual or simulated workplace tasks and problems allows learners to experience ever-widening variation in knowledge application, and to see the limits to their understanding and how that needs to be addressed; both of these are said to be essential to deep learning and for a capacity to deal with novel situations (Bowden, 1997).

Cooperative Education for Enterprise Development (CEED) programs have been shown to develop most of all students’ personal, communication and learning skills that could be transferred to the workplace (Candy et al., 1994).

Outcomes from cooperative education or work placements have included improved academic achievement (Weisz, 1998; Hughes and Moore, 1999), increases in job knowledge and skills and gains in work readiness-related attitudes and behaviours (Hughes and Moore, 1999); reduced drop-out from courses (Clark and Zuhair 1996); greater success in obtaining employment (ACNielsen, 1998; ACE, 1996, quoted in NCCE n.d.); and higher starting salaries (Gardner et al., 1992). Martin (1996) found that proper design allows the targeting of specific learning including generic skills.

When employers recruit from among their cooperative education students upon graduation, they can make savings of between $5000 and $25000 in recruitment costs. Coop graduates are also immediately productive on appointment leading to significant productivity benefits (estimates from UNSW, 1999). In the case of STEP, (a paid vacation employment scheme in the UK allowing students to undertake a project with an SME), employer satisfaction with the outcomes runs to 96%, with plenty of evidence of undergraduates producing results at consultancy standards (Cunningham, 1997).
WIL however should neither be a habit nor a cargo cult. Not all schemes produce the outcomes above. Criteria for success are detailed in the appendices and summarised in Principles of Good Practice below.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Cooperative Education in Engineering and Business has a history approaching a century (NCCE, 1998). More recently, providing experience in the workplace has spread in response to calls for better preparation of students for employment, careers and lifelong learning. Martin (1998) estimates that 60 per cent of Australian university courses now include some form of learning in the workplace. Foster and Stephenson (1998) calculate that as many as a quarter of a million students in the UK will undergo some kind of placement in any one year. In the US, some 200,000 students undertake Cooperative Education alone each year with most of the top hundred of the Fortune 500 companies participating (NCCE, 1998).

Much of the growth has been of the ‘work experience’ type, loosely organised blocks of time that students spend in the workplace. However, in the 80s it became apparent that the learning returns from this were not great. The trend is now towards structuring the experience so that learning goals are set and achieved (Martin, 1996) as well as towards integrating work-like tasks or projects into on-campus subjects. The World Council of Cooperative Education (WACE) has recently widened its charter from primarily promoting the ‘sandwich’ year model (where the student is an employee of a company as well as a fully enrolled student) to include work-integrated learning. The Australian Co-operative Education Society (ACES) has done the same and has proposed criteria for quality approval of WIL activities.

These moves recognise a diversification of strategies to pursue WIL. There is increasing effort to emulate real work tasks and conditions in the classroom, in case studies, practice firms, project learning, problem-based learning, simulations and gaming. There is increased recognition of the value of, and provision of credit for, learning in the workplace and community settings. Such recognition at Leeds University has led to the design of learner-managed programs in which an employee, in conjunction with their employer and the university, define a program of work and learning around a work project at a standard, which, if met, leads to the award of a degree (Foster, 1996; Foster and Stephenson, 1998).

In summary, trends in provision have run in this way:

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Work experience → work-based learning for students as servicing the campus program → work-based learning for those in work → learner-managed work-based learning
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(Foster and Stephenson, 1998).

Other developments include:

- closer attention to gradation of placement learning types and levels over the course of study for a degree
- provision of enabling skills for WIL, including generic professional skills (such as communication, teamwork, information handling, problem-solving), career planning and career transition skills, and lifelong learning skills and dispositions
- in policy terms, student learning in the workplace seen as a contributor to better economic performance is being superseded by a focus on the development of the learner. A
university culture of control over the time, place and pace of learning is giving way to a culture in which support is provided for the development of the learner in a holistic and flexible way (Foster and Stephenson, 1998)

- accordingly, responsibility for managing learning is passing from the employer or university to the learner (Foster and Stephenson, 1998)

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Studies of effective design and management of WIL activities demonstrate the importance of the following principles.

1. WIL activity is integral to the curriculum.
2. The activity is designed to accommodate the needs of different types of learner.
3. Specific learning is targeted and assessed including learning how to learn and how to deal with unfamiliar problems.
4. The experience is graded to include increasingly varied and novel tasks and problems.
5. High quality supervision and/or mentoring is provided.
6. Learning targets are both technical/professional and generic (including career exploration, key competencies and/or graduate attributes).
7. All parties are prepared for the activity and know and understand their roles.
8. The experience develops learners’ career plans and transition management skills.
9. The activity is evaluated, involving all participants.
10. The activity has high level support.
11. The activity helps to build partnerships with enterprises, the industry and/or profession.


WIL AT RMIT

At least 7000 RMIT students go out to learn in industry during their course. This makes WIL a very public face of the University. Where it is poorly organised and unproductive, employers and students will lower their estimation of the University.

How in fact are we faring?

The Student Union Council (Barrett, 1999) has recently documented two courses whose WIL programs did not add lustre to our reputation. Martin's (1996) study of university workbased learning schemes included several of RMIT's. One of these was rated low on student satisfaction while another rated well on satisfaction and generic skills development. The CEED program in Engineering and the Professional Skills Program in Business are regarded as exemplary.

The WIL Project Team conducted a survey to map the nature and extent of WIL at RMIT. Data for sixty-nine WIL activities across VET and HE but excluding postgraduate programs was gathered. [Findings are presented in Appendix Three pp. 12-18]

In summary, the survey showed the strengths to be:

- a significant level of shared involvement in designing and delivering WIL between administrative, academic and industry staff
- in HE, the range of strategies to achieve WIL
• preparation of students for their WIL role
• significant level of opportunity for students to gain exemptions on the basis of prior learning or experience
• the extent to which graduate attributes and key competencies are targeted

The negatives include:

• low rates of preparation of academic, industry and administrative staff for their roles in WIL
• the relatively small proportion of student hours explicitly devoted to WIL
• the use of student and industry feedback, and of industry information, to drive improvement is by no means universal, and is low in the VET activities surveyed
• a level of resourcing that does not match the demands of placing students into workplaces and supporting their learning; a leftover perhaps of the ‘work experience’ era of WIL in which learning was largely left to chance

With some exceptions, WIL strategies are the Cinderella of the curriculum.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RMIT**

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<td>1.</td>
<td>RMIT must ensure that WIL as an organising conception is adopted so that our graduates get a clear edge in the labour market.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Instead of seeing learning in work settings as servicing our courses, our courses should be reframed to support learning in work, or work-simulated, settings in order to develop knowledge capability, in partnership with employers.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>All learners should graduate with a record of application of knowledge and skills to actual or simulated work tasks and problems and with the skills to undertake further learning when confronted with novel tasks.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Workplace knowledge must be validated as being equal to though different from discipline knowledge; this requires specifying criteria for the awarding of degrees in workplace-relevant terms and devising assessment regimes that allow prior learning to be accredited.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Greater flexibility in WIL strategies must be fostered, recognising that block work placements are not always needed or effective (see the appendices for a menu of strategies).</td>
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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

How should RMIT move forward to ensure that WIL supports its positioning and partnership goals? The Project Team makes the following recommendations.

**For Faculties**

1. As part of course refurbishment, departments/schools adopt WIL and a capability development agenda as an organising conception for course design.
2. Departments review each existing WIL activity to ensure it complies with the generic good practice principles outlined above (and with the good practice principles for the relevant model to be provided in the implementation phase, see Appendix Four p.19 for an example).

Some RMIT programs have been running for over 20 years. Good practice ideas have changed, as has the external environment; are we doing the best we can?

3. Ensure that the way we run WIL activities improves the reputation of the course, Department and University.

The large numbers of students RMIT sends into workplaces and community settings each year is a very public face of the university, and our reputation is shaped by student performance, the quality of organisation of placements, and the relationship employers have with placement coordinators.

4. In reviewing our WIL activities, ensure that existing and potential employer benefits are identified and delivered.

Placements are getting harder to find. Employers therefore need to get the benefits possible from placements, or to become more aware of those that already exist.

5. Design our WIL activities to extend employer links.

Use the existing relationships built up around WIL as a base to extend the partnership to include further cooperative ventures such as R&D projects, joint course delivery etc.

6. Where we do not yet have WIL strategies in a course, review the models and select the one(s) that will do most to improve learning, employability and industry links.

Placements in industry are not possible or necessary in all cases. One study estimated that only 14% of interns’ time was spent learning (reported in Hughes and Moore, 1999: 5).

7. Ensure that the WIL experience so improves the satisfaction and employment outcome that graduates turn first to RMIT for further education and development.

When RMIT sends students out to do busy-work, or where the placement is poorly organised, student dissatisfaction results. On the other hand, challenging work-like experiences, whether on- or off-campus, that yield networks, a record of increased knowledge capability including a capacity to deal with new problems, will improve satisfaction and employability and predispose graduates to return for repeat business.

8. Make the improvement of WIL a priority in Faculty/department resourcing.

Traditional forms of work experience, in laissez faire mode, did not require much support. It was usually arranged by junior, often under-resourced, staff. Ensuring that two- or three-way benefits flow requires appropriate support. It does not work well unless it has a good public profile on campus and the support of Faculty leaders.

9. Establish a WIL policy implementation team to address the objectives below.

Enabling objectives to be addressed in policy implementation

Promoting

A. Promote WIL at RMIT by for example running a conference on WIL, and by publishing in print form and on the Teaching and Learning website:
outlines of exemplary WIL activities at RMIT.
- WIL Guide including the menu of strategies outlined in the appendices.
- principles of good practice for each model in the RMIT context [see Guide to Work Integrated Learning, Appendix Five pp. 22-96]
- examples of innovation in achieving efficiencies in WIL.

**Review and Evaluation**

B. Provide support for department/school review and development of WIL by a WIL network that includes the WIL project team, DoTQs and Faculty WIL champions.
C. Develop evaluation protocols and tools, including adapting the Work Experience Questionnaire (Martin, 1996).
D. Support a comparative evaluation of the success of WIL models in achieving RMIT’s goals.

**Infrastructure**

E. Review funding model for WIL activities
   Co-op is funded at 0.2 WEFTSU which is proving inadequate to cover the inputs required.
F. If there is interest in trialing the Leeds model of fully learner-managed workplace degrees, devise a process to set standards and protocols for such programs.
G. Ensure WIL coordination and teaching have sufficient status in teaching roles by drafting a generic position description for WIL coordinator and by supporting the four scholarships in WIL.

**Skill Development**

H. Ensure that skills for learner-managed learning (including study skills, metacognitive skills, career planning, transition management, and enterprise and innovation skills) are strengthened.
I. Provide professional development to staff to ensure high quality WIL, in (i) consultation and negotiation (ii) experiential and problem-based learning design (iii) supervision and mentoring, and (iv) workplace assessment and assessment of prior learning.
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