Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

TEQSA

Guidance Note: *Work-Integrated Learning*

What does work-integrated learning encompass?

In the context of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework), work-integrated learning (WIL) encompasses any arrangement where students undertake learning in a workplace outside of their higher education provider as a part of their course of study. Such arrangements may include:

- clinical or other professional placements
- internships, or
- workplace projects.

The nature and scope of WIL may vary considerably, as will the extent of 'integration' of the workplace learning with the activities of the workplace or with the remainder of the student's course work. For example, a workplace experience might involve conduct of a project that is very much part of the core business of the workplace, and colleagues in the workplace may have an active teaching or mentoring role in achieving specified learning outcomes that have been jointly developed with the provider. Alternatively, a workplace experience may be less integrated with the business of the workplace e.g. an early placement that is mostly about observation of and orientation to work practices. While less integrated, this type of WIL may nonetheless provide an important practical foundation that will be built on in the remainder of the course of study.

Relevant Standards in the HES Framework

The Standards that are primarily concerned with quality assurance of work-integrated learning are in Section 5.4 (at Standard 5.4.1). However, the role of work-integrated learning and the extent of its integration are also related to Learning Outcomes and Assessment (Section 1.4), including, for example, learning outcomes for employment (e.g. Standards 1.4.2c & d). The Standards on Course Design (Section 3.1) are also relevant in so far as workplace learning is adopted and integrated as part of a course of study.

Depending on the nature and extent of workplace learning involved, the Standards on Staffing (Section 3.2) may be applicable as well in relation to supervision of students in the workplace. The Standards on Learning Resources and Educational Support (Section 3.3) may equally be applicable, as may those concerned with Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning (Section 1.2) where previous WIL may lead to credit for prior learning.

In some workplaces the wellbeing and safety of students (see Section 2.3) may assume particular significance, such as exposure to potentially stressful circumstances in clinical placements. At a more overarching level, the provider's course approval and monitoring processes (Sections 5.1 and 5.3) would be expected to consider WIL.

Intent of the Standards

The intent of the Standards is to ensure that WIL is an effective and positive learning experience which is a seamless and integral part of a course of study. Ideally, WIL will be of benefit to all parties involved and assist students in their appreciation of, and readiness for, employment.

The fundamental requirement of the Standards is that a provider quality assures all WIL activities and, in so doing, assures itself that the requirements of the HES Framework are met by WIL, as for any other type of learning activity. The Standards presuppose that:

- the provider understands how and why WIL is to be part of a course of study, i.e. there is a tenable rationale for including WIL, and

- student experiences and learning outcomes are monitored against defined, expected outcomes.

The Standards do not prescribe any particular type or model of WIL; only that it is well-conceived, educationally sound and its implementation is quality assured and monitored by the provider, irrespective of whether a provider provides WIL through some form of leading-edge practice (through technology) or a more traditional approach.

The Standards also have the same expectations for WIL as apply to any other form of student activities for:

- wellbeing

- safety

- access to support, and

- related matters.

It is unacceptable under the HES Framework if arrangements for WIL are *ad hoc* with ill-defined or undefined purposes and placements in which students largely fend for themselves without guidance and support.

Risks to Quality

There is a myriad of potential risks in WIL. The risks are highly contextual depending on the:

- circumstances of the provider

- workplace

- students

- expected learning outcomes, and

- field of education.

A hypothetical case is outlined in Appendix A that illustrates some of the risks.

Developing good practice in WIL is also a dynamic field of educational research and practice. Below are examples of some typical risks.

- The role and integration of workplace learning is inadequately considered by the provider in designing a course of study and/or specifying and assessing the expected learning outcomes.

- WIL is not explicitly quality assured and/or monitored by the provider.

- The outcomes and effectiveness of WIL vary markedly from site to site, or from time to time.

- The roles and expectations of all parties involved are not agreed, e.g. through a formal agreement, or are poorly specified.

- The provider's expectations of the role and outcomes of WIL are unrealistic, unreasonable, impractical and/or uninformed by input from the relevant industry or sector.

- The provider is not adequately involved in organising WIL and student placements.

- The expectations of some or all parties in relation to student experiences and learning outcomes of WIL are unclear and/or poorly communicated to those who need to know.

- Workplace supervisors are poorly informed about the expected outcomes of WIL and/or are ill-equipped to undertake their roles, e.g. as a supervisor, teacher, mentor or assessor.

- The workplace does not have the capacity needed to deliver the desired learning outcomes or student experiences.

- Student feedback is not obtained and/or not used to guide improvements.

- Students:
    - are isolated (or feel isolated) from their essential learning resources (e.g. ICT, LMS)
    - have unreasonable difficulty in interacting with fellow students while on placements, or
    - do not have sufficient access to support services.

- Students involved in WIL are left largely to fend for themselves by the provider and/or are not contacted by the provider.

- Mechanisms to identify responsibilities for and manage critical incidents are not in place.

- Students struggle with unresolved dissonances, e.g. reconciliation of workplace pragmatism and theoretical ideals.

- Potential or actual lapses in academic integrity are not identified and monitored.

What TEQSA will look for

This part of the guidance note covers the full extent of the Standards, and corresponding evidence that TEQSA may require, in relation to work-integrated learning.

For new applicants seeking initial registration and course accreditation, TEQSA will require evidence to be provided in relation to all relevant Standards.

For existing providers, the scope of Standards to be assessed and the evidence required may vary. This is consistent with the regulatory principles in the TEQSA Act, under which TEQSA has discretion to vary the scope of its assessments and the related evidence required. In exercising this discretion, TEQSA will be guided by the provider's regulatory history, its risk profile and its track record in delivering high quality higher education.

TEQSA's case managers will discuss with providers the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website.

Where students need to complete a WIL placement in order to qualify for professional accreditation, and professional accreditation is required in order to practice the profession in Australia, then this must be made clear to prospective students in the representations made by the provider or its agents. It must be possible for all students (including overseas students) recruited into the course to access WIL or alternative arrangements that will meet the requirements of the professional accrediting body.

TEQSA will expect a provider to be able to demonstrate a well-founded approach to the use of WIL and the type of WIL involved in a course. This will need to be evident in the design and rationale of the course as well as in the specification and methods for assessment of learning outcomes that link to WIL and employment. The provider's rationale and approach may be backed by authoritative educational research. TEQSA will expect to see an effective quality assurance system for WIL and be confident that the provider's quality assurance mechanisms demonstrate that any WIL meets the requirements of the relevant Standards in the HES Framework (as applicable to the particular context).

Arrangements for WIL will be expected to be formalised in an agreement setting out the expectations for the parties involved and the outcomes sought for students. The provider's monitoring processes will be expected to demonstrate compliance with the agreement. Any staff involved in workplace learning will need to meet the HES Framework Standards on Staffing or otherwise be supervised by those who do (see Standard 3.2.4). TEQSA will want to see that feedback on student experiences has been obtained and that it has been (or will be) used to improve the provider's approach to WIL.

Course design should ensure that WIL contributes to student success in achieving the overall course outcomes. On a student's return to study, the provider should have a process in place to ascertain whether the objectives of the placement have been achieved.

A provider will need to demonstrate that it has taken effective steps to monitor the wellbeing of students who are engaged in WIL, to provide educational and other support if needed, and to manage critical incidents should they eventuate. TEQSA will also expect a provider to show how it identifies and manages risks to academic integrity that may be inherent in particular arrangements for WIL. If WIL is used as a means of granting credit for prior learning, a provider will need to show that it is meeting the requirements of the relevant Standards (see Section 1.2).

WIL arrangements must be consistent with the guidance available from Fair Work Australia on work experience and internships.

Resources and references

Fair Work Australia, Guidance on *Work Experience and Internships,* <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/unpaid-work/work-experience-and-internships

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2016), *Work-based learning and work-integrated learning: fostering engagement with employers,* <https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/work-based-learning-and-work-integrated-learning-fostering-engagement-with-employers#>.

Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) Resource Library[1], <http://www.olt.gov.au/resources/good-practice>.

TEQSA (2016), *Explanations of terms in Part A of the HES Framework 2015,* <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/explanations-hes-framework-terms>.

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	19 August 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation.

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[1] The Resource Library contains many items on WIL, traversing several disciplines.

Appendix A

Example of a WIL program at risk of non-compliance with the HES Framework:

▶ A 12-week placement is offered as part of a credit-bearing subject, and is described as an employability skills development unit. The student is asked to find and arrange the placement and is given a form for the host company to fill-in.

   ▶ The provider is unlikely to have enough information about the host company environment to assure the suitability of the placement and potentially the safety of the student.

▶ At the 6-week point the student is asked to get the host company to fill in a status report form, and no feedback is provided to student or host.

   ▶ A single mid-point status check over a 12-week program may not be enough to support and assure the student's learning.

   ▶ There is no mechanism to ensure the integrity of the host evaluation, or to provide feedback to the student.

▶ At the end of the program the student is asked to submit a 1200 word reflective assessment which is assessed against a critical thinking rubric

   ▶ The single assessment does not appear to be aligned to the stated learning outcomes of employability skills development; there is no other method of ensuring that outcome has been achieved.