NATIONAL STRATEGY ON WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Australia's future depends on strong partnerships. Enterprises, educators and the community, working together, improve the quality and capacity of our education systems and the innovation, breadth and competitiveness of our economy. These linkages are crucial if we are to succeed in meeting the challenges and opportunities presented by rapidly changing global realities.

Whatever policy and funding arrangements are in place, synergistic partnerships between industry, community, educators and researchers need to be enabled. Ideally, those partnerships will be deep and broad. They will draw on and leverage each partner's expertise and strength, while respecting the different mission and value each brings to the partnership – and to the nation as a whole - shaping our future prospects.

Human capital underpins our future capability and competitiveness. The extent to which Australia is able to adapt and develop, and continue to deliver a quality of life that is among the best in the world, will depend in large part on how well our institutions and business sectors collaborate. Those relationships provide the foundation of a coherent system where viable, innovative enterprise can prosper. They also underpin community support, benefits and commitments that are shared, and where individual aspirations can be pursued and fulfilled.

Partnerships develop, evolve and grow best in a conducive policy environment and where there are clear and practical strategies: strategies that target recognised needs, are flexible and geared to deliver mutual benefit, and encourage and reward persistent effort. One such strategy is to develop a coherent approach to build workforce capability, skills and individual prospects. Work Integrated Learning does that.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is an "umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum".[1] Specifically, WIL is aimed at improving the employability of graduates by giving them valuable practical experience which is directly related to courses being studied at university. WIL also improves the transition from university to work and productivity outcomes for the employer and the economy.[2]

[1] Patrick, C. Peach, D. & Pocknee, C. (2009) *The WIL (Work Integrated Learning) report: A national scoping study*, Australian Teaching and Learning Council
[2] Brimble, M. & Freudenberg, B. (2010) Will WIL'ing Work?, *B-Hert News*, Issue 28, April 2010

This National WIL Strategy is designed to increase opportunities to participate in WIL, recognising the benefits to students, employers, universities and the economy.

WIL facilitates the transition between preparing for and operating in a high skills work environment. It empowers students to understand, adapt to and apply skills in the workplace. It helps ensure they are equipped to plan, instigate and navigate careers in an environment where conceptual, adaptive, personal, technical and vocational skills – their human capital – will be continually drawn on and challenged. As such, WIL helps build capabilities that reduce the personal and community risk of economic downturn and bolsters what we need to weather and recover from those downturns. WIL is about producing the highly skilled workforce to meet industry and community needs. Beyond that, it helps lay the foundation for deep cross-sector engagement.

Many employers already provide these opportunities. The reasons for participating vary, but research shows[3] businesses that participate in WIL see its value in the graduates who enter the workplace. Often they do it to "give back" to the industry or profession; aid future recruitment; access new thinking and ideas; establish links with universities, emerging research and practice; and to refresh the organisation. It is more common for employers with 15 or more staff who have been operating for 20 or more years to engage in WIL. However, good partnerships are evident across most industry sectors, and all sizes of operation. While universities or students often initiate contact, businesses often maintain engagement long-term and inhibiting factors tend to dissipate with exposure and as the relationship matures and benefits are realised. Deeper links between employers and universities can, for instance, lead to employers understanding better how to apply the skills of their workforce, accessing and adopting the best new ideas and technologies from around the world.

For students, WIL experiences such as placements and work-oriented projects, where industry and community partners contextualise education, can make a real difference to their skills and capacity. Students, and subsequently graduates, better apply knowledge, adjust to, integrate with and become resilient in the workplace, engage in challenges and improve outcomes. Unsurprisingly student demand for WIL is high, as many recognise the opportunity it provides to develop, apply and contextualise what they are learning – give life to theory and reinforce teaching practice. Graduates identify WIL as having positive impact in making the transition to work and their competitiveness in the labour market, often identifying the practical experience they gained through WIL as crucial to getting a job. Clearly, the perception of graduates in this regard is also reflected in employer hiring decisions.

For universities, most with decades-long partnerships with employers developing the professional and vocational skills of students, the benefits include ensuring the currency and relevance of the education they provide in an operating environment that has never evolved more rapidly. The higher education sector has never faced greater demand or a more competitive global environment than it does at present. Equally, the choices available to students and the potential to seek out an education that meets their particular interests and ambitions has never been greater. Higher education is now characterised by high demand by people seeking knowledge and skillsets that are more complex and adaptable, that will enable them to compete in a rapidly changing and dynamic environment. Meeting those demands requires strong, quality partnerships of which WIL can be a central part.

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[3] *Engaging Employers in Work Integrated Learning: Current State and Future Priorities* – Report to the Department of Industry, PhillipsKPA, September 2014
http://www.industry.gov.au/skills/Publications/Pages/Engaging-Employers-in-Work-Integrated-Learning-Current-State-and-Future-Priorities.aspx

There are hurdles and this Strategy aims to address them. But there is extensive research about, and many examples of, high quality practice. These have informed the development of the Strategy.
An integrated framework is needed to accelerate growth in WIL, as is a shift in culture. What is needed now is national leadership.

This Strategy is an integrated framework. It aims to target barriers, boost enablers and expand opportunities to partner in WIL from the perspectives of universities, employers and students. It aims to focus effort, and engage government and other stakeholders in developing the knowledge, skills and productive capacity of our workforce; build practical partnerships - between employers and universities; and lay the groundwork for deeper collaboration on research driven innovation and growth. The Strategy has also been developed recognising we face a tight budgetary context.

Importantly, we are not working from a standing start. Good headway is being made across the business and university sectors, nationally and in state and territory spheres, with industry bodies and professional associations, government agencies, individual enterprises and university faculties. Those activities provide impetus to many of the actions identified in this Strategy. These efforts deserve coherent leadership and support.

This Strategy will require persistent effort over several years: it has no end date, any more than increasing knowledge, innovation or competitive advantage have an end date. However demonstrating progress is important and our intentions here are embedded in the Strategy. We will communicate our progress - first in establishing the Strategy. We will continue to inform the community of progress as we work with government and other stakeholders to implement the Strategy. Some actions are well in train, others can and should be acted on quickly. Other elements will take a longer term effort.

The National WIL Strategy proposes action in eight key areas:

1. **Provide national leadership to expand Work Integrated Learning (WIL)**
2. **Clarify government policy and regulatory settings to enable and support growth in WIL**
3. **Build support - among students, universities, employers across all sectors and governments - to increase participation in WIL**
4. **Ensure the investment in WIL is well targeted and enables sustainable, high quality experiences, stakeholder participation and growth**
5. **Develop university resources, processes and systems to grow WIL and engage business and community partners**
6. **Build capacity for more employers to participate in WIL**
7. **Address equity and access issues to enable students to participate in WIL**
8. **Increase WIL opportunities for international students and for domestic students to study off-shore.**

The focus of the Strategy is primarily facilitative. The contributing partners are aware of the resource constraints facing the sectors they represent and on government budgets. Consequently, the Strategy has been designed to promote WIL and partnerships drawing on existing resources and coordinating activity for greater impact. Nonetheless, the extent and speed at which the Strategy is able to be progressed depends on the resources and effort put to that purpose. Given the benefits of WIL to employability, workforce skills and productivity, supporting industry and community based employers and the economy, ensuring a sustainable increase and broadening of WIL opportunities to develop our human capital is crucial.

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

1. Provide national leadership to expand Work Integrated Learning (WIL)	
Enabling approaches	**Actions**
1.1 Collaborate in driving an expansion in WIL opportunities.	**a.** Partners advocate for the implementation of this National Strategy on WIL. **b.** Partners build support for WIL around shared, complementary objectives and interests, engage their membership, identify issues requiring attention and seek resolution. **c.** Agree a common language and interpretation of WIL (what it is and is not) which is readily understood by all participants.
1.2 Ensure mechanisms are in place to enable collaboration, implement the Strategy and strengthen the partnership.	**a.** Partners develop and report publicly on progress in implementing the National Strategy on WIL, and to jointly promote the Strategy. **b.** Partners ensure the work agenda is informed and supported by their executive and relevant advisory bodies and that other key stakeholders – including, for example: the Office of the Chief Scientist; the Business-Higher Education Roundtable (B-HERT); profession or industry-specific bodies – are engaged actively in the agenda.
1.3 Engage the support of political leaders and policy makers.	**a.** Promote the agenda to relevant portfolio Ministers and their agencies, and secure their agreement to participate in developing and implementing the agenda. **b.** Identify WIL champions (or ambassadors) from across sectors and government. **c.** Convene a high level roundtable of business, employer, university and relevant Commonwealth government portfolios to identify and develop a coordinated cross-portfolio approach to progress the National Strategy (*See Item 3.1*). **d.** Ensure developments in WIL complement other government policy and investment priorities - including in Higher Education policy; the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda; the Reform of the Federation White Paper process; VET reform; implications of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs); proposed re-vitalisation of a national Careers Development Strategy; the review of immigration and visa programmes; state and territory policies and programmes where appropriate. **e.** Contribute to national surveys and the development of performance indicators to assess and monitor the extent and satisfaction of student and employer participants in WIL, noting the need to: • agree a common language and interpretation of WIL (Action 1.1c) • complement the Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching (QILT) initiative (announced in the 2014-15 Budget) and related surveys on satisfaction and outcomes and • contain the associated reporting cost and burden.

1.4 Establish a national profile of current WIL activity to inform next steps and future growth opportunities.	**a.** Develop a work program to systematically collect data and establish a baseline of the spread and extent of WIL activity undertaken, student participation and demand as part of a university course in Australia: • Draw on existing research and information, such as base-line data collected by the Office of the Chief Scientist on STEM subjects during 2014. • Identify existing mechanisms and opportunities to collect additional information needed to establish the baseline profile.
2. Clarify government policy and regulatory settings to enable and support growth in WIL	
Enabling approaches	**Actions**
2.1 Align government policy and regulation to support growth in WIL.	**a.** Work with Commonwealth agencies to convene a roundtable of business, employer, university and other relevant stakeholders to identify and develop a cross-portfolio agenda to enable growth in WIL and address regulatory impediments (including unintended impacts associated with unaligned policy): • Scope to include taxation arrangements impacting on employers and universities; income support for students; treatment of 'work experience' under the Higher Education Administrative Guidelines. • Involving (for example) the Department of Education and Training, Department of Industry (including the Office of the Chief Scientist); Department of Employment (including the office of the Fair Work Ombudsman); Australian Taxation Office; Department of Immigration and Border Protection. • Seek government commitment to convene the roundtable during 2015. **b.** Ensure information about the workplace relations status of WIL participants is accurate, clear and readily available to facilitate appropriate placements (continuing work with the Fair Work Ombudsman to clarify distinctions between *vocational work-based placements* and *unpaid work).* Address areas of potential confusion and emerging issues regarding workplace relations and workplace-based WIL – including (as required) employment status and obligations; workplace health and safety; workplace insurance and liability; and issues related to sensitive personal/commercial/other material.
2.2 Ensure reliable information is available to students and employers to support the integrity of interactions involving third party providers arranging internships.	**a.** Noting the increasing presence of third party providers seeking to engage with universities and students to access internships for payment, develop and disseminate resources, including guidelines on the efficacy, risks and benefits, role and operation associated with third party providers. (*Refer 5.2d and 8.1d*)

3. Build support - among students, universities, employers across all sectors and governments - to increase participation in Work Integrated Learning	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
3.1 Ensure clear, concise and accessible information about WIL is available.	**a.** Collate, develop (as needed) and promote access to tailored information resources about: • What WIL is – including examples illustrating the breadth of discipline, settings and approaches employed. • Roles, responsibilities and expected outcomes for i) employers ii) students and iii) universities participating in WIL and what each can expect in terms of the parties engaged.
3.2 Promote the benefits of WIL.	**a.** Articulate the value proposition of WIL for each key WIL target audience (e.g. The practical benefits for employers – such as completion of short term projects, workforce planning and recruitment, industry promotion: For students – the practical application of learning, development of employability skills and cultural awareness, industry connections etc.). **b.** Develop a national communication and engagement strategy – including examples of WIL; who benefits and how; case studies; how to get involved. **c.** *(Subject to resourcing capacity, possibly drawing on existing programmes aimed at promoting business and skills development)* Develop tailored strategies in priority areas – for example: • Promoting STEM, working through the Industry Working Group established by the Office of the Chief Scientist; • SME participation in WIL; • Particular students cohorts e.g. Indigenous students, students with caring responsibilities; • Rural / regional; and • Specific industry/sector participation – such as agribusiness, high end manufacturing, information and communications technology (ICT), financial services, etc.
3.3 Improve the capacity of students and employers to prepare for and engage in WIL.	**a.** Establish good practice guidelines, including pre-participation expectation and outcome guides, support materials, processes and sample templates to support effective WIL practice (noting relevant work is currently being supported by the Commonwealth Office of Learning and Teaching). **b.** Ensure specific learning objectives of the WIL experience, including 'soft skills', are assessed as part of the experience and are understood and agreed by all parties involved prior to commencement (e.g. interpersonal skills, team work, organisational skills, understanding the workplace environment).

	c. Investigate a framework to assist in facilitating partnerships between universities and employers that optimises students' employability skills.
3.4 Draw on available research to improve the quality of WIL experiences and the levels of participation in WIL.	**a.** Collate and promulgate the extensive research and knowledge available on WIL. **b.** *(Subject to resourcing)* Use research findings to develop and implement pilots in sectors and situations where impediments have been identified but which offer strong prospects for benefit and growth (e.g. STEM; SMEs and select industry sectors; remote and regional; international students; multi-disciplinary projects and placements). **c.** Develop a coordinated, prioritised WIL research agenda across government, with an immediate emphasis on expanding and broadening WIL (drawing on work undertaken by the Office of Learning and Teaching, Department of Industry and the Office of the Chief Scientist). **d.** Draw on available research and practice to develop pilots and effective implementation. **e.** Research the effects of WIL participation on student and graduate motivational and attitudinal change and resilience effects. **f.** Develop a national research and evaluation framework for WIL in the medium term to refine effective practice and build the evidence base for targeted future investment (possibly including models to quantify the costs, benefits and maximise the return on investment of WIL practice).
4. Ensure the investment in WIL is well targeted and enables sustainable, high quality experiences, stakeholder participation and growth	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
4.1 Identify the costs and benefits (including return on investment) with WIL for all stakeholders; and promote a sustainable resourcing / investment system.	**a.** Work with government agencies to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the value of WIL in terms of student outcomes; employer benefits; employer/university engagement; professional and workforce development; and the economy; and considering: • An assessment of existing financial and other support mechanisms, and their effectiveness; • Employer/ business incentive structures; • WIL resourcing arrangements in universities; • Student support programs; • Best practice, innovative approaches that ameliorate the costs of WIL; and

	• Opportunities to develop and promote sustainable resourcing systems. **b.** Advocate for coherent policy and investment structures that effectively support WIL activities and partnership. **c.** Work with government to identify existing resources to enable progress of the National Strategy.
5. Develop university resources, processes and systems to grow WIL and engage business and community partners	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
5.1 Strengthen WIL capacity and practice in universities.	**a.** Develop and promote a WIL leadership and guidance framework – a resource to assist universities to develop and tailor WIL activity – including aspects such as policy and resourcing, culture, external engagement, pedagogy, curriculum development, WIL logistics, implementation, assessment, evaluation and quality assurance, staff capability and practitioner professional development. **b.** Identify and profile examples of best and innovative university support for WIL practice and engagement: • To resource and embed WIL as a core function/priority in university operations; and • To facilitate engagement of academic staff in WIL activities, through performance agreements, incentive structures or other mechanisms. **c.** Rewards and recognition: identify and profile examples of effective reward and recognition frameworks that include and promote work integrated learning.
5.2 Promote employer engagement and improve access and support.	**a.** Identify the resource implications associated with effective industry engagement and implementation of quality, sustainable WIL. **b.** Review university access and response processes and strategies to enable external parties to better identify, navigate and contact appropriate staff – considering coordination, referral and brokerage approaches and options; arrangements within universities, across relevant discipline areas nationally; and the university sector as a whole. **c.** Review existing on-line resources to improve useability, currency and comprehensiveness of information, including resourcing requirements. **d.** Review and report on the use and potential of third party intermediaries and brokerage organisations, including charging, quality assurance and regulatory arrangements.
5.3 Increase accredited WIL content in course curricula.	**a.** Review a range of WIL activities undertaken as unit(s) of a university course to: • Assess the relevance to curricula requirements (including authenticity, integration of theory and practice, alignment with learning outcomes and assessment); • Identify whether the activity is mandatory or optional; and

	• Identify whether the activity is a) formally assessed and b) for credit. **b.** Pending the findings in 5.3a) work with stakeholders to promote incorporation of appropriate WIL experience into accredited course curricula. **c.** Identify good practice approaches and examples of industry and community input to curricula development, involving: • A review of course curricula development processes and practices; • Identification of issues that promote or impede assessment of WIL as 'for credit' in curricula; and • Key stakeholders, including senior university academic leaders, academic boards, TEQSA, professional accreditation and employer/industry bodies, graduates and students, in the process.
5.4 Strengthen university collaboration around WIL.	**a.** Identify and promote mechanisms to enhance university collaboration around resource development for WIL.
5.5 Strengthen capacity through increased professional development available to the sector.	**a.** Identify and promote mechanisms to increase professional development and access to development opportunities for WIL practitioners, and academic staff.
6. Build capacity for more employers to participate in Work Integrated Learning	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
6.1 Increase employer participation in WIL.	**a.** Business and employer peak bodies promote WIL and the benefits to members and provide support based on evidenced based research supporting the business case for WIL. *Subject to resourcing:* **b.** Develop WIL communications and resources tailored for employer audiences, including clear expectations and support resources/arrangements for work-based supervisors - such as a 'handbook' including examples of successful models, guidelines, check-lists, templates, pre-placement/project agreements and sign off arrangements, reliable university contact/support mechanisms, feedback mechanisms. **c.** Develop and make available examples of WIL best practice, including innovative and diverse approaches including university based business-identified projects and on-line and virtual WIL options. **d.** Employers and universities collaborate to develop options to:

	• ease administrative loads associated with establishing WIL placements (such as facilitating streamlined student and employer matching); • investigate options to better align placement (or project) scheduling and duration to optimise participation opportunities and learning value for the student; minimise workplace disruption/optimise employer benefit; and • facilitate the input of employers into placement design.
6.2 Increase Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) participation in WIL.	**a.** Draw on available research and stakeholder expertise to develop, trial and increase WIL participation among Australia's large and diverse SME sector: • Develop tailored information and resources, case studies, support and engagement options (e.g. university-based projects, tied to enterprise need, multi-enterprise and/or multi-discipline projects and virtual/on-line options).
6.3 Develop WIL in specific and priority sectors.	**a.** Develop and trial pilots in priority industries/sectors to accelerate WIL growth in: • Enterprises in the five key sectors identified for Industry Growth Centres under the Government's *Industry, Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda* (specifically targeting food and agribusiness; mining equipment, technology and services; oil, gas and energy resources; medical technologies and pharmaceuticals; and advanced manufacturing) – noting the Industry Growth Centres are charged with setting strategies and delivering outcomes, including enhancing workforce skills, and have a goal of forging links between industry and Australian research; and • Areas of prolonged and/or anticipated major skills shortage or mismatch – such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects (e.g. physical sciences); Information and communications technology; Financial and Insurance services. **b.** Work with relevant industry bodies and university Deans groups to develop specific discipline, context and host support material. **c.** Investigate and promote entrepreneurship and innovation skills development through based WIL, such as: • pilots that bring entrepreneurs, start-ups and innovative SMEs together with universities, enabling them to access cross-discipline capacity and to direct WIL activity to meet a specific business need.

6.4 Build and track employer engagement.	**a.** Incorporate employer participation trends in data collection, research and evaluation strategies – *noting it is part of a broader data collection strategy and contains reporting burden (Refer action 1.4).*
7. Address equity and access issues to enable students to participate in WIL	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
7.1 Improve access and equity for students to take-up WIL opportunities.	**a.** Develop and disseminate principles, guidelines and implementation strategies to increase access and participation in WIL – with particular reference to addressing: • the extra costs for students (e.g. housing and transport expenses and foregone earnings) often associated with participation (particularly placements); and • assistance in managing caring responsibilities, health or other personal needs; and considering factors such as location, re-location, age, visa requirements for students, caring responsibilities etc.
8. Increase WIL opportunities for international students and for domestic students to study off-shore	
Enabling Approaches	**Actions**
8.1 Increase opportunities for international students to participate in WIL.	**a.** Develop and disseminate principles, guidelines and implementation strategies to increase access and participation in WIL for international students. **b.** Address issues identified as constraining opportunities for international students to participate in WIL; **c.** Encourage employer preparedness to accept international students, by: • Raising awareness among employers of the benefits of, support for and positive models of engaging international students in WIL (projects and placements); and • Work with government agencies to ensure coherent and clear information is readily available for employers and others about the status of international students regarding placements, post-study work rights, visas, and the reciprocal objectives and benefits of government programmes to promote student mobility and employability *(See Issues 1.3(d) and 7.1).* **d.** Work with ACEN and other key stakeholders to review the role and operation of third party providers to developing guidelines for universities with students paying to intern overseas.

8.2 Improve the capacity for international students to participate in WIL opportunities.	**a.** Develop resources to increase the preparedness of international students to participate in WIL, including: • Preparing students for the specific workplace and cultural aspects of the host or partner industry and employer; • Tailoring support and contact details for employer supervisors and contacts, including language/translation supports if required; • Assessing language proficiency and mechanisms to address these – e.g. Intensive language units; engaging in group or team based WIL where members can facilitate effective communication; • Develop additional tailored student supports; and • Examine possible incentives for employers to take on international students
8.3 Support access to credit bearing off-shore placements for Australian students.	**a.** In the context of Australian government programmes to promote student mobility and associated experience, work with government agencies, relevant accreditation bodies and professional associations to ensure off-shore experiences are embedded in course curricula and accredited where possible.