WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Developing the workforce of the future

Employers participating in work integrated learning programs find the benefits run both ways.

Work integrated learning (WIL) provides opportunities for higher education students to apply the theory and skills they learn at university in a workplace. For students, the experience is invaluable and plays an important role in their preparation for the work force. For employers, the experience goes beyond altruistic outcomes; the student can –and often does– add demonstrable value to workplaces in small, medium and large businesses.

Key benefits of WIL for employers

Recruitment pathway | Flexible options | Partnerships with Universities
Workplace-ready graduate | Return on investment | Fresh ideas and approaches

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Work Integrated Learning

Developing the workforce of the future

Employers want workplace-ready graduates

Employers are increasingly demanding graduates with workplace-ready skills. They want employees with job skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. They need new employees to be ready to learn and to be ready to work. They recognise they can play a vital role in developing the workforce of the future by being a part of the education experience. In partnership with universities, they can have a real impact on graduate employability and workplace-readiness.

Clear gains for employers from WIL

Employers participate in WIL programs for different reasons. For some employers, it is a recruitment pathway; an opportunity to closely examine the skills and suitability of students before they graduate. For others, it may provide an enthusiastic, short term 'employee' who can undertake projects or tasks which might not otherwise get done while providing existing employees opportunities to learn valuable mentoring and management skills. Some employers report that students bring fresh ideas and approaches to the workplace, sharing the latest research and thinking in the field they study. Other employers look at WIL as an opportunity to contribute to their industry, and the communities they serve. Participating in WIL may also bring opportunities for employers to contribute to curriculum design and to develop research or other relationships with a university.

While the motivation for contributing to the development of students' skills and experience may differ between employers, the results are clear; students who have experienced workplace learning graduate from university with workplace-ready skills. And that benefits students, universities, government, employers and industry.

Positive return on investment

Employers participating in WIL programs contribute time and resources to students' workplace learning experiences, supervision and assessment, acknowledging the positive return on investment to their business and industry. Partner universities also make substantial matching investments by working with employers to agree WIL programs tailored to their business needs, preparing students for a productive placements and providing ongoing support to employers.

What is WIL?

WIL stands for work integrated learning, an umbrella term used to describe a range of approaches that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum. The most common form of WIL involves a student placement or project within a workplace. Universities, students and employers work together to design and create a learning experience that benefits all parties. The student's progress and learning outcomes are monitored and assessed by the university, with input from the employer.

Common questions from employers

Which industries are covered by WIL programs?

Most industries can benefit from participating in work integrated learning. While some professional fields such as nursing, teaching and engineering have a long history of structured work integrated learning associated with professional accreditation requirements, WIL is increasingly becoming a feature of higher education courses across all fields of study. Universities can provide more specific information on the industries and professions they support.

What preparation will the student have?

The students who participate in WIL are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their placement. The university provides the student with specific preparation for their work integrated learning experience.

What do I have to provide the student?

You should provide a rewarding workplace experience for the student which includes the tools they need to do their best work. This would include a workspace, suitable equipment and appropriate mentoring and supervision. The university can provide more specific advice.

How will it help my business?

The mentoring you give to a student can help you in many ways. The extra pair of hands will immediately help with resourcing a project, your employees who mentor the student learn valuable management skills and, you are helping to improve the quality of graduates available to your industry

When are students available for WIL?

Most university WIL programs are scheduled at particular times of the year to fit annual course structures and may run from one week to 20 weeks. Student availability can be discussed and agreed with the partner university.

How much work will my staff have to do to support the student?

The university will work with you to create a work plan for the student. The amount of involvement of your staff will vary according to the plan however there will be supervision and reporting requirements.

How much will it cost?

The cost will vary depending on the nature of the program and the resources you need to commit to ensure its success. A WIL student may be paid or unpaid. This can be discussed with the partner university.

What happens if the placement doesn't work out?

If the placement doesn't work out, you will work with the university on an appropriate resolution. Your partner university has a process in place to support the employer and the student through any issues.

WIL: A partnership approach

Productive work integrated learning programs rely on a negotiated three-way partnership between the employer, the university and the student. The three parties work together to agree the tasks and/or project to be undertaken by the student and the associated workplace learning goals. The university prepares the student for their WIL experience and provides advice and support to the employer. As WIL is an important requirement of the university course, the employer and the university assess the student's learning and workplace performance.

"There is a strong need to improve links between the university sector and the business community"

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

"IRU member universities are committed to working in partnership with industry and business to provide high quality work integrated learning experiences for students and employers"

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The National WIL Portal

In early 2011, the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) will launch a national work integrated learning (WIL) portal that connects industry, the professions and the community with the higher education and vocational education and training sectors. The portal aims to streamline communications and systems for participation in WIL initiatives.

ACEN represents tertiary institutions, business and community groups involved in work integrated learning. It has more than 600 members including most Australian universities.

For more information on WIL partnerships for employers please go to: www.iru.edu.au/group-activities/wil or www.acci.asn.au

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Innovative Research Universities (IRU) are working in partnership to assist small, medium and large businesses to participate in work integrated learning programs.

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Participating ACCI members are: ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Business SA, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Northern Territory, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia, NSW Business Chamber, Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Consult Australia.

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Pitching in

WIL student lightens the load at Lovedale Long Lunch

The Lovedale Long Lunch has been a fixture on the calendar of food and wine lovers since its inception in 2002. It now attracts 20,000 guests to the New South Wales Hunter Valley wine region for a weekend of art, music, food and wine. The festival grows in popularity each year, however success can sometimes strain resources and for the 2010 Lovedale Long Lunch, organisers sought assistance from The University of Newcastle's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program.

The University of Newcastle Business School student Sarah Greedy trod the Lovedale trail that links the seven wineries which participate in the event. Her base was Allandale Winery, a small to medium sized vineyard known for its premium quality varietal wines. Sarah worked one day a week for approximately two months in the lead-up to the Lovedale Long Lunch and then during the event.

> "Sarah's survey contributed to our knowledge and thinking around how we promote the event"
>
> Tanya Henzell-Harvey

Tanya Henzell-Harvey is in charge of marketing for the Lovedale Long Lunch. She said 2010 was the first time they had taken a WIL student: "Our numbers have doubled since 2002 and each year we try different things to improve and refine the event."

Tanya said having a student work on the event helped the Lovedale Long Lunch committee to evaluate the success of their marketing expenditure. One of the tasks given to Sarah to complete during her placement was a survey of attendees. Sarah conducted interviews at the event, and made available survey questionnaires which could be completed and left at the various event locations. She then analysed the data and wrote a report for the committee which explained the demographic profile of attendees along with information on how they responded to marketing for Lovedale Long Lunch.

"Sarah's survey contributed to our knowledge and thinking around how we can better promote the event. We wanted to learn how our regulars obtained information about the event," Tanya said.

Sarah offered a fresh perspective, new ideas and an extra pair of hands to a resource-strapped committee. She also assisted with media liaison, logistics and during the event, she pitched in and helped with ticket and wine sales.

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"Sarah was given a rounded experience of what it is like to run an event and a winery. She was exposed to two worlds – that of a small business, for Allandale has five employees – and that of a large event that represents many stakeholders. Students may come into the workforce with a preconceived idea of how to do marketing but until they go out into the real world, you can't know how it works in practice. Food and wine marketing in the Hunter Valley is very tightly targeted and we were pleased to have the opportunity to share our knowledge," Tanya said.

www.allandalewinery.com.au | www.lovedalelonglunch.com.au

Allandale Winery is a member of the Hunter Business Chamber and the NSW Business Chamber.

Genuine workplace experience

Mentoring is an important factor in ensuring WIL students have a rewarding experience. Allandale Winery's General Manager and Chief Winemaker, Bill Sneddon helped to give Sarah Greedy a genuine workplace experience by often challenging the theories she learnt at university and encouraging her to test her learning in a real workplace.

"There is a disconnect between theoretical learning at university and the real world. Learning really begins when you leave uni and the opportunity to gain work place experience while studying makes university more meaningful," Bill said.

Bill noted that a placement student can bring enthusiasm and new ideas. "As you get older you can get a bit stale," Bill said. "Younger people have a different view of the world and know about things like viral marketing. We can learn from them and they can learn from older, experienced workers. They can learn to view the world in a shade of grey – it's not just black and white."

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Building the business

A student placement led to a new business line at Comunet

> "Taking a WIL student is a no-brainer for a company"
>
> Damien Coyle

When Damien Coyle first walked into Adelaide-based IT services firm Comunet seven years ago to commence a work integrated learning (WIL) placement, he couldn't have imagined where it would take him and, Comunet. "While I was keen to impress, more than anything I wanted my project to be useful for the business," Damien explained.

Damien is now a Development Team Manager at Comunet and leads a team of eight software developers who write software for the aviation industry. "Soon after my placement we had a customer ask us to develop a passenger booking system. We rapidly needed more developers to assist with the work and from there our aviation expertise expanded," Damien said.

Their product, called Air Maestro, is a web-based application specifically designed for small to medium aviation companies that records and monitors safety and compliance for their operations.

In 2003 when Damien commenced his WIL placement at Comunet as part of a Bachelor of Innovation and Enterprise degree at Flinders University, he was the only person at the company trained in software development. He was charged with creating a job management tool that brought greater efficiency and accuracy to Comunet's client relationship management. The project took six months to complete and formed part of Damien's final assessment. "The purpose and the name have changed over time but the tool is still very much in use. In fact, it pretty much runs our entire business!" Damien said.

Since then the company, which has 35 employees, has offered several students a workplace experience. Damien was the first of five placement students to join Comunet as permanent employees and there are currently two students from Flinders University there on WIL placements.

One student is developing software that can manage flight schedules and the other is working on a document management automation system that has already reduced Comunet's management time on large documents from 15 hours a week to just two hours.

Damien cited students' youth and curiosity as valued attributes benefiting employers: "Our clients want unique services and our WIL students and our young employees

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provide a fresh perspective and new ideas. At uni they usually learn recent technologies plus they ask a lot of questions. They also pick things up very quickly."

Companies benefit in many ways by working with universities and students, often undertaking projects they may not ordinarily be able to resource.

"WIL is one way of funding projects you might not otherwise be able to do. Plus you usually get to work with the 'cream of the crop' of students and recruit the best early. "Taking a WIL student is a no-brainer for a company," said Damien.

http://www.comunet.com.au

Comunet is a member of Business SA.

The right thing to do for industry

Comunet's Managing Director, Paul Lewin took a calculated risk when he provided workplace experience to Damien Coyle but it was, in his words, a "low risk decision to take a student, made more attractive because students don't have any pre-conceived ways of doing things." Paul wanted to build software development capability at Comunet which didn't then have the ability to customise software for clients. Bringing in a student to test the water got it started. "We are now one of the few companies in South Australia that offers clients network infrastructure, systems development and customised software," Paul said.

Paul also believes that offering students a chance is the right thing to do for industry: "We want to expand the program. Many of the students have become employees and are recognised in the industry for their work. I'm very proud of them."

Comunet is a strong supporter of the industry placement program at Flinders University. The program provides students with valuable experience in their chosen profession, builds stronger networks between the university and business, and ensures students enter the workplace with the skills required.

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Must love water

DHI looks for local water-loving students for work placements

Greg Stuart wasn't joking when he claimed his staff love all water. "Our staff love the work they do and are very passionate about water, beaches, rivers, even sewers!" said Greg, whose job as Gold Coast Office Manager for DHI Water and Environment exposes him to more H2O than most people see in a lifetime.

It is therefore not surprising that DHI looks for water-loving engineering students when offering work integrated learning (WIL) placements. The firm's Gold Coast office has formed a close relationship with Griffith University that includes research partnerships, providing teaching and research licences for their software and, providing workplace experience for students.

"We've been part of Griffith University's Industrial Affiliates Program (IAP) for many years and have recruited several staff through it. WIL is one of the ways we identify potential employees. We have had a number of staff working here who started as WIL placements," Greg said.

> "Our connection to universities is an important part of our business model"
>
> Greg Stuart

DHI consultants often lecture at the engineering school at Griffith University. "We get to know some of the students and when the work placements are available we ask the professors to identify students who have potential. We want people with strong technical ability; students who have shown promise in hydraulic modelling, the ability to program and a love for their hydraulics subjects.

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Providing opportunities for local people

The recruiting guidelines at DHI go further than a standard skills and experience assessment. According to Greg Stuart, finding staff with community ties to the local area is also important.

"On the Gold Coast there are not a lot of engineering opportunities and our graduate recruiting focus is usually on the Coastal Engineering Program at Griffith University. We feel we have a responsibility to provide opportunities for local people and if we can find someone with ties to the Gold Coast – family and so on – they are more likely to stay."

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They must be very strong technically, for that's what sets us apart from our competitors.

We take on difficult problems and find creative solutions."
Greg explained.

Students learn a lot during their placement. "There is a big difference between working full time in an office and going to university. We teach students how to behave in an office and how to make that transition from student to employee. Along with learning about our models, they get real practical experience," he added.

The students can encourage DHI to look at things differently. "Any organisation can get stuck in their standard processes so having a fresh set of eyes is useful. Students are inquisitive and question the way we do things; they identify things out of the ordinary. When we have to explain our methods, it assists us to really think them through," Greg said.

DHI is a research based company which provides an important bridge between knowledge partners such as universities and the commercial and industrial sectors which are solving real world problems. DHI and Griffith University partner on a number of research and consulting projects including the AllConnex Water SmartRelease study which Griffith University students contributed to.

"A lot of our work relates to consulting and software development and we want to stay at the cutting edge of that. Our connection to universities is an important part of our business model. Along with supporting WIL student placements we support research through Griffith University as this connection forms part of the research and development arm of our business. Finding highly qualified potential employees along the way is a big plus," Greg said.

www.dhigroup.com

DHI is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Queensland.

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Access all areas

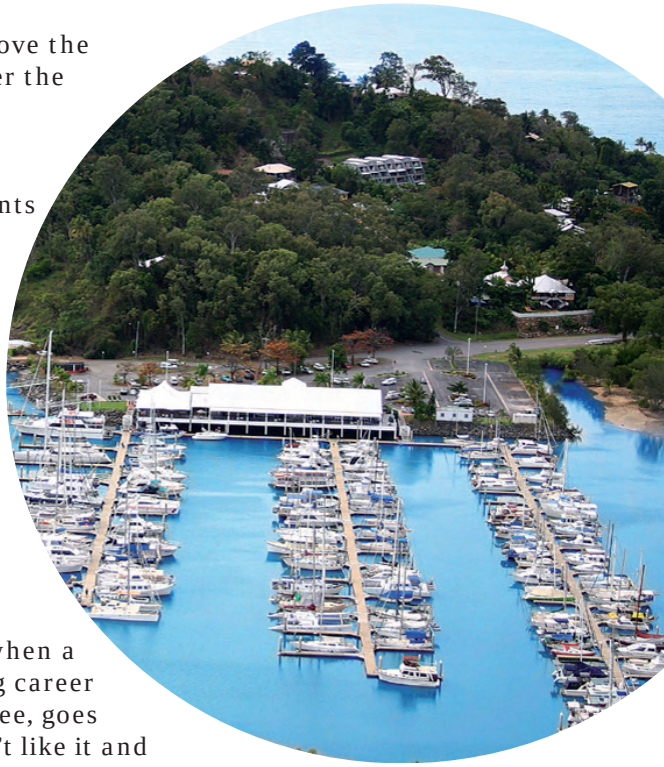
Student learns all aspects of Yorkeys Knob Boating Club

At Yorkeys Knob Boating Club at Half Moon Bay, 18kms northwest of Cairns, a student from James Cook University recently had, by most people's measure, a work integrated learning (WIL) placement that others could only dream of. However the General Manager of the club, Stuart Vella, is quick to dispel any romantic notions that glamorise the hospitality and tourism sectors – even when the work is set against the sparkling backdrop of an endlessly beautiful Coral Sea.

"It's a tough industry and we need graduates who know what they are getting into and have had some workplace experience while they are studying. If someone was coming in to the industry without workplace experience I wouldn't touch them," Stuart said.

> "You are actually really helping improve the quality of graduates for the future by giving students real world experience"
>
> Stuart Vella

WIL placements help to improve the quality of graduates that enter the workforce and can also help the student to be sure that their degree is the right one. According to Stuart, placements can help to "weed out" the people who aren't suited to the industry: "You are really helping improve the quality of graduates for the future by giving students real world experience. One of the most important things about WIL is that it gives the students a chance to make sure this is the industry they want to go into."



Stuart has seen the fall-out when a graduate has made the wrong career choice. "A student gets a degree, goes into industry and then doesn't like it and there is nothing worse than a student realising *hang on this isn't what I thought it would be like*," said Stuart who has employed and sponsored university graduates at the club and values the integration of theory and practice-based learning.

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Stuart's student, Elia Van Den Brink, was studying a Bachelor of Business at James Cook University and had been working part time at the club while studying. He then completed his subject, *Hospitality Practicum* there which exposed him to the multi-faceted workings at the club. "He has received an overview of how an organisation can't rely on one section to succeed – every section has to run efficiently in order for the whole operation to work," Stuart explained.

Stuart would like to see greater integration of theory and workplace learning and thinks universities and employers can work closely to provide a meaningful experience for students. "Students can learn that it's not a rosy, glamorous, perfect world. In hospitality, you're dealing with people, and people make mistakes.

Workplace learning is so important as it shows students about the real world and helps them to make the right career decisions.
I'd definitely take another student because it's important for industry and the students that they are well matched," Stuart said.

www.ykbc.com.au

Yorkeys Knob Boating Club is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland.

Broad and indepth insight

Many students work part time while they are studying in jobs unrelated to their degree. Elia Van Den Brink's part time work and WIL placement at Yorkeys Knob Boating Club exposed him to work directly related to his studies. Elia's placement involved: working in the kitchen, front office, marina and club administration, functions, restaurant and bar operations, gaming, and membership program.

The experience has given him broad and indepth insight into running a business in the hospitality sector, making him a more employable and workplace ready graduate. Yorkeys Knob Boating Club has approximately 50 staff, 2,000 members and 45 gaming machines. When Elia's placement finished, he continued to work part time at the club.

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No limits

WorleyParsons welcomes WIL students without limitations

One of the more interesting reasons engineering and resources services firm WorleyParsons cited for participating in work integrated learning (WIL), was a student's ability to think freely. "WorleyParsons has a rich entrepreneurial history and from this we encourage a fresh, energetic outlook in the workplace," said Warrick Kent, the firm's Graduate Development Advisor. " As WIL students generally do not have prior work experience they are not inhibited by corporate norms; this enables them to see the potential difference they can make in the workplace," he added.

WorleyParsons is a leading provider of professional services to the energy, resource and complex process industries in Australia. It is one of Australia's largest employers of professional engineers and, with employee growth recently rising by 50 percent, is firmly focussed on ensuring its Graduate Development Program attracts the best and brightest engineering students. WIL complements other recruiting pathways, and for the past three years, the firm has offered employment to each of its WIL students. The current WIL student will join WorleyParsons when he completes university.

> "The best WIL placements benefit the organisation and the student"
>
> Warrick Kent

Warrick Kent said the best WIL placements are those where the work performed by the students is beneficial to the organisation and to the student: "From our point of view we need to see value out of the placement. The role needs to be well planned to ensure both parties realise benefits. A placement at a client site is usually the best way of achieving that aim."

Worley Parsons' most recent WIL student, Brad Phillips, is studying Instrumentation and Control Engineering as part of a four year Bachelor of Engineering degree at Murdoch University and is spending his 16-week placement working at WorleyParsons' client site at BP Kwinana in Perth. The placement makes up 12.5% of the student's mark for the course.

"A site placement is one of the best you can offer because of the invaluable experience students receive. They can work on an actual client project and experience the process that leads to the output. To a large extent they are treated as professional engineers so they need to hit the ground running," Warrick said.

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Site placements involve working within a project team and reporting to the Senior Engineer at the client site and the Chief Engineer in the Perth CBD.

"Our WIL students get real life client experience and learn how to prioritise and manage challenging work loads. It is extremely important for students to experience how theory converts into practice. That's how it starts to make sense," Warrick said.

With three employees recruited from three WIL placements Warrick is optimistic about next year. "We will definitely look at another WIL student," he said.

www.worleyparsons.com

WorleyParsons is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia.

Working in partnership key to successful placement

The process WorleyParsons and Murdoch University shared to ensure the WIL placement was successful, offers valuable insight to other employers.

"Murdoch University is one of the best known universities for teaching Instrumentation and we have a close relationship," said Warrick Kent.

Warrick explained communications between the parties in relation to organising the WIL placement was always professional. Before the placement was finalised, the Chief Engineer from WorleyParsons designed and assigned the tasks for the student which were then agreed by the Dean of Murdoch University's School of Engineering and Energy. The process included writing a position description for the WIL role.

"We found the experience extremely rewarding. Murdoch clearly outlined the parameters of the WIL program and identified the skills they expected their student engineers to learn from the program," said Warrick.

Warrick Kent was also impressed by Murdoch's University's assistance through the process. "They were very responsive and quickly answered our queries.

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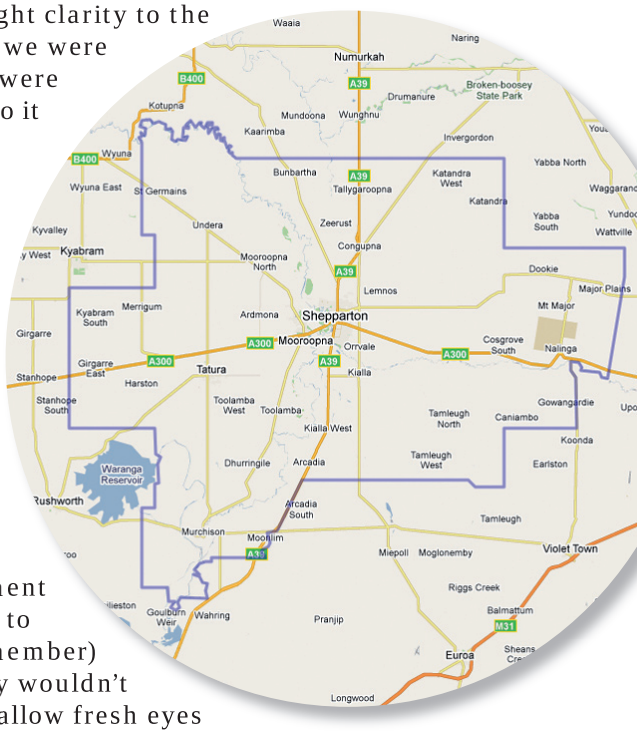
Win-win

Careful planning leads to great outcomes for Shepparton employer and student

> "We all knew what we were getting into, we knew what we were doing and we knew we would do it justice"
>
> Dean Rochfort

When the Greater Shepparton City Council trialled a new workplace integrated learning (WIL) initiative from La Trobe University, it first worked closely with the university to develop the project and set boundaries and methodologies that the student would work with. The project they agreed was one where the student, Geraldine Christou (who is completing a Bachelor of Business at La Trobe University's Shepparton campus and is also an employee of the Council), would conduct a 12-week review of the decision-making processes around annual budgeting. It involved observing and working with the most senior executives of the Council, sitting in meetings with councillors and discussing strategically important matters such as rate rises and debt levels. The review also examined how the information then cascaded through the organisation to other levels.

General Manager – Sustainable Development of Greater Shepparton City Council, Dean Rochfort, who mentored the student, said the process of working with her lecturer brought clarity to the placement. "We all knew what we were getting into, we knew what we were doing and we knew we would do it justice," said Dean.



Part of that process involved discussions around the Council's willingness to be open in its dealings with the student. "We had to allow Geraldine to have insight into the inner workings of Council, plus we had to commit to making the time available for mentor/mentee meetings."

The Greater Shepparton City Council viewed the WIL placement as a great opportunity not only to expose the student (and staff member) to areas of Council activity they wouldn't normally get to see but also to allow fresh eyes to look at how Council was doing business. "We saw it as a win-win – a development opportunity for the student and, for us, an (almost) internal consultancy opportunity," said Dean.

The WIL student enjoyed a very open process including attending a number of confidential briefings that staff would not usually be privy to. "Geraldine sat in on the meetings and heard many sensitive and political discussions. She could see things happening within those meetings that reflected a range of management practice frameworks that she was studying as part of her course," Dean said.

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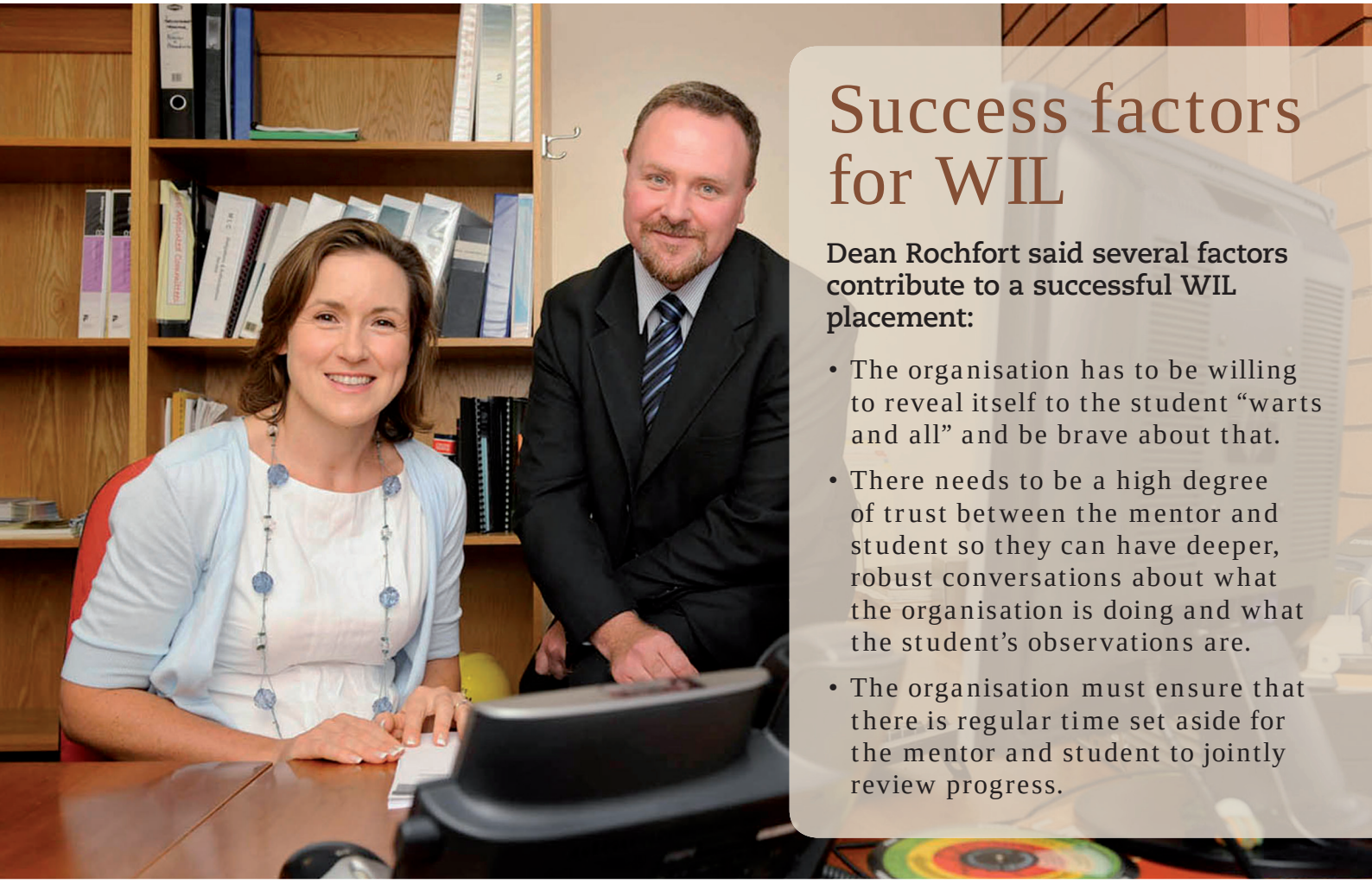
The course work involved examining case studies that students would compare with their workplace learning. This led to Dean and Geraldine having conversations around how the Council's processes compared to the theory. "We discussed our alignment with contemporary best practice in the area of integrated management and we found that there was room for improvement in our processes. As executives we don't always take time to reflect and consider the system so it was a great opportunity for me to remove myself from the day-to-day stuff and look at things differently. Actually, that was quite a luxury," Dean admitted.

Dean said the experience was valuable for the Council, the student and the university: "To date we've focussed on students who are already within the organisation and who we support through professional development but we are certainly open to bringing people fresh into the organisation and establishing WIL as a pathway to employment. It provided benefits for all parties and we would be interested in being involved again."

www.greatershepparton.com.au

Greater Shepparton City Council is a member of the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



Success factors for WIL

Dean Rochfort said several factors contribute to a successful WIL placement:

- The organisation has to be willing to reveal itself to the student "warts and all" and be brave about that.
- There needs to be a high degree of trust between the mentor and student so they can have deeper, robust conversations about what the organisation is doing and what the student's observations are.
- The organisation must ensure that there is regular time set aside for the mentor and student to jointly review progress.

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Innovative Research Universities (IRU) are working in partnership to assist small, medium and large businesses to participate in work integrated learning programs. IRU members are: Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and The University of Newcastle.

Participating ACCI members are: ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Business SA, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Northern Territory, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia, NSW Business Chamber, Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

For more information on WIL partnerships for employers please go to:
www.iru.edu.au/group-activities/wil or www.acci.asn.au

Innovative Research Universities

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Think Local, Act Local

VDM Consulting, EcOz finds local talent through WIL

A commitment to employ locals is a tightly held business philosophy of environmental services firm, VDM Consulting, EcOz.

VDM Consulting, EcOz is based in the Northern Territory and has long recognised the importance of employing experienced local staff with first hand knowledge of the region. The firm has extended this philosophy to its work integrated learning (WIL) student placement experience.

Ray Hall, a Principal Environmental Scientist at VDM Consulting, EcOz said the firm aims to offer jobs to people with local knowledge.

"By employing locals we ensure clients gain the most efficient and effective service from people who straight away know what they are talking about. Sourcing people from the university is a good way to do that, and bringing them in when they are students is also a good way to do that. It also contributes to the community which we work in and are part of," Ray said.

> "It is very important for graduates to have spent some time in a workplace and learn what it is they will be working on"
>
> Ray Hall

Using WIL as a recruitment pathway offers employers and students a chance to have a good look at each other before deciding whether they should offer or accept a job. It is also an effective reality check for students who may have a misguided idea of the sector. Students working at VDM Consulting, EcOz might expect to work offsite conducting fauna and flora checks, but may find they are usually in the office, writing reports.

"It is very important for graduates to spend some time in a workplace and have learnt what it is they will be working on. By bringing them in when they are students we can see if they have the right mindset for our business. Plus they gain understanding of what the business is and what type of roles there are for them," Ray said.

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"People often don't understand what this industry is – they think environmental services are all about the conservation industry but we are assisting corporate clients, developers and the like. This might be different to a student's expectations and philosophical understanding of what environmental science is all about," Ray added.

VDM Consulting, EcOz recently employed a science graduate from Charles Darwin University who they had offered a WIL placement a year earlier. Although the placement didn't eventuate the student has now joined the firm as a graduate employee. The most recent WIL student – who Ray Hall described as 'fantastic' – has gone on to do further study but has an invitation to get in touch with VDM Consulting, EcOz when he finishes.

Ray said a good WIL student is someone who picks things up quickly, understands what is required of them and works hard to get the most out of their placement. "This may mean working on a project and gaining understanding from the start to the finish of the work, providing the student and the university with a great outcome. It's about us giving the student an understanding of what is involved in a real life project."

And next year? "We will certainly have a WIL spot available," Ray said.

www.ecoz.com.au

VDM Consulting, EcOz is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Northern Territory.

WIL offers students a snapshot of working life

When a student does a WIL placement at VDM Consulting, EcOz they will be expected to work across a wide range of projects at a junior level while gaining insight into the type of work they would be expected to do as a graduate employee. "We give students an understanding of what our industry does and, what type of work, and standard of work, would be required of a graduate employee. We learn where the gaps in their knowledge are – for example their writing skills are not where they need to be for our business - but you can't expect a student to come out of a broad ranging environmental science degree with specific skills. They graduate with good general knowledge about lots of issues and then we help them to focus on certain issues as they progress in their careers. We also try to get them to specialise in a particular area of interest that requires us investing time, interest and training into that area of specialisation.

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