

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) at UNSW Student Supervision and Support Guidelines for Partners

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What is Supervision?

‘Quality supervision and support is central to a positive WIL experience for students’

(Ferns et al. 2015, p. 171).

‘Supervision of students ... plays a critical role in WIL programs and is a key factor underpinning their success’ (Winchester-Seeto et al. 2016, p. 101).

These quotations highlight the vital and integral role of student supervision in Work Integrated Learning (WIL). Supervisors are referred to differently in different disciplines and professions e.g. mentor, advisor, preceptor, course convenor etc., and their functions and purposes may also differ, but their essential role is similar. There is no doubt that without supervisors, both in the university and at the workplace, few students in WIL activities would accomplish the complex learning that needs to occur, nor would most successfully navigate the many emotional challenges. In an extensive, nationwide study of WIL, [Ferns et al. \(2015\)](#) further conclude that ‘access to and quality of supervision throughout a WIL activity (both from the host organisation and institution)’ (p. 170) was one of six dimensions of a quality WIL curriculum, and a major factor

in the work readiness of students. To survive and thrive in WIL, especially in placements, students need the support and guidance of a dedicated supervisor (or supervision team).

There is a complex range of activities and factors that underpin the creation of a positive WIL learning experience. Learning in WIL is very different to learning in a classroom and requires different skills of the student and the way in which their work is supervised. Goodyear (2014) contends that 'supervision facilitates supervisee learning' (p. 83). Hays & Clements (2011) expand on this in suggesting that 'supervision is the guidance and support students need while on placement to ensure the learning experience is optimised and that they have the overall most positive experience possible' (p. 3). Simply put 'the purpose of supervision is to guide and manage work, support students to develop their skills, and formally recognize professional practice and learning' (ACEN 2017, p. 1).

Roles of Supervisors

The actual roles and duties of supervisors varies according to discipline, profession, and the model of WIL undertaken. Both university and workplace supervisors play an important part in ensuring duty of care for the student, including safety and well-being, as well as responsibility for fostering student learning. Workplace and university supervisors play different, but complementary roles (Winchester-Seeto et al. 2106) and usually work collaboratively in administering, managing, educating, supporting and supervising the student's progress throughout the WIL activity.

For more detail on the roles and responsibilities undertaken by supervisors in WIL see Appendix A. It is important to note that these roles vary enormously depending on discipline and design of curriculum.

Supervision: Good Practice

Ellis (2010) asserts that 'good supervision is about the relationship between supervisor and supervisee (p. 106) and almost every aspect of supervision depends on a positive, open and supportive relationship between the two (Adams, 2013). This applies particularly to encouraging 'learners to be active participants in learning/workplaces' (ACEN 2017). Obviously, the degree of autonomy students can be given depends on a huge number of factors, but being an active participant in learning is vital, as far as training, safety, and ability allows. Observation without any follow-up activity is unlikely to yield positive learning results.

Goodyear (2014) identifies four main strategies used in supervision (both academic and in the workplace): 'modelling, direct instruction, feedback and self-directed learning'(p. 83). Giddings et al. (2003) also includes monitored practice. Self-directed learning involves quality reflective practice and reflection is important to the life-long learning we expect of professionals. Feedback features strongly in any discussion of supervision, and the importance of constructive and meaningful feedback for learning should not be underestimated. To foster maximum progress, feedback should not only be about performance, but also address any concerns students have, and ideally be a two-way process (ACEN 2017).

Supervision by Workplace Supervisors

Workplace supervisors play a significant role in enabling students to learn and flourish in WIL activities. The function of workplace supervisors is much more than merely providing a place and an activity. Without direct input and guidance, students will not be able to reach their full potential and partner organisations may not reach their own goals for engaging with the university.

Below are some of the major responsibilities of a workplace supervisor, particularly those related to student learning and well-being. For other information about partner and workplace supervisor responsibilities see *Preparing for WIL: Partner Checklist* and the [UNSW Work Integrated Learning Procedure](#).

Collaborative design of WIL activities

For all WIL activities there is an expectation that students will undertake tasks or projects specifically designed to foster their professional and other learning. These may be specified by an accrediting or other professional body, or they may be negotiated directly with WIL staff. For all WIL activities it is important for the workplace supervisor to understand the learning needs and goals of the student. These may be outlined in documents provided by WIL staff and/or in discussion with the student. It is often helpful to have some understanding of the student's background and to keep in mind that the main point of the WIL activity is to promote student learning.

Setting a welcoming work environment

Creating a welcoming environment is an important first step for supervision and support. This may entail introducing the student to all key personnel and members of relevant work teams and making sure they know who to approach for questions or assistance. Involving students in work functions and activities (as appropriate) will also help ease them into the workplace. Where appropriate and possible, students should have an allocated workspace and all the tools they need to undertake the WIL activity.

Providing opportunities to learn

A positive and constructive learning environment is important to maximise student learning and ensure that students can complete tasks and deliver quality outcomes. Students should be assigned duties or projects that provide a variety of experiences and opportunities to apply professional knowledge and skills. Such experiences should be intentionally sequenced to guide the

professional development and learning of the student.

Regular and effective meetings

One-on-one or small group meetings yield important teaching and learning opportunities. Although informal, unscheduled, brief meetings can be effective, it is also important that students have some scheduled, dedicated time with their workplace supervisor. These meetings can be used for:

clarifying expectations (from both student and supervisor); asking questions and seeking guidance; providing feedback; supporting students facing difficult situations; looking ahead and planning next steps; encouraging students to reflect on their experiences; and evaluate their own performance and progress.

Some supervisors set up daily or weekly meetings with their students, others touch base informally or via email for the most part. but schedule formal meetings at the beginning, mid-point and end of the WIL activity. Whatever approach is used it can be useful to have students develop an agenda and keep a record of the outcomes and action points from any meeting. The first meeting with the student is an ideal opportunity to welcome the student and share their excitement and enthusiasm, clarify expectations, make sure the student understands what has to be done and to discuss any learning goals. Meeting at the mid-point of the WIL activity will allow time to review progress and determine what has already been achieved, plan for what still has to be done and discuss any concerns. The final, wrap-up meeting is another opportunity to review and evaluate goals and progress and to reflect on what has been learnt. If there is a formal evaluation of student performance, this should be discussed with the student. It is important that the student should be made aware of any problems or concerns with their progress well before this final evaluation so that they can take steps to remedy any issues or improve their performance.

Feedback

Students expect feedback on their performance and progress, and this can greatly enhance their reflection and learning. Feedback should be constructive, encouraging, and aim to facilitate learning. Feedback needs to identify the gap between what students are doing and what is required of them, but it is also important to discuss exactly what changes are needed to reach desired outcomes, and how to actually improve performance.

Liaise with WIL staff

WIL is a collaborative endeavor between the university, the workplace, and the student. Having university and workplace supervisors working in isolation undermines the learning of the student and can lead to misunderstandings and problems. Workplace supervisors may be asked to provide an assessment or evaluation of student performance/progress. There are also several other areas where it may be necessary for workplace supervisors to contact WIL staff and liaise with them to resolve issues and provide support to the student where appropriate. These include:

- changes to the agreed WIL activity or supervision arrangements;
- concerns about student progress or behavior e.g. attendance, lateness, non-completion of tasks/projects etc.;
- concerns about student well-being and welfare e.g. illness, mental health issues etc.;
- any workplace incidents that impact student safety or well-being.

Student safety and well-being

Ensuring a safe working environment for the student is a vital part of a workplace supervisor's role. Physical safety is important and the [UNSW Work Integrated Learning Procedure](#) and the *Preparing*

for WIL: Partner Checklist outline the legal and contractual requirements e.g. arranging an induction for the student. The same applies to workplace bullying and harassment.

Any concerns about student progress, welfare and/or safety should be brought to the attention of WIL Staff as soon as possible. This allows many issues and misunderstandings to be resolved quickly to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders. Where a swift resolution is not possible it is expected that workplace supervisors and WIL staff will work together to determine the best course of action within the guidance provided in the [UNSW Work Integrated Learning Procedure](#), course outline and any applicable accreditation requirements.

References

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APPENDIX A: Roles and Responsibilities of Host and Academic Supervisors

(From Winchester-Seeto et al. 2016)

Host supervisor	Academic supervisor
Administrative/management role	
<i>Communication</i> Inform university of student issues Ongoing feedback to university Regular communication and feedback with student Prevention of problems	<i>Communication</i> Provide information to students/hosts on expectations Provide feedback to hosts on student progress Check in on students Be available to host/student to deal with issues
<i>Recruitment and selection</i> Advise university of requirements and opportunities for student interns Selection process, e.g. interviews	<i>Recruitment and selection</i> Matching student (interests, skills) to host organisation Ensure project meaningful for student and beneficial for host
<i>Duty of care</i> Orientation/induction to organisation/specific context, e.g. health/safety Key people in organisation	<i>Student preparation</i> Pre-placement meetings, e.g. code of conduct, CV writing Setting and managing expectations
<i>Managing the experience</i> Setting expectations/roles, e.g. learning contract Managing deadlines, timely completion Problem students	<i>Managing problems and trouble shooting</i> Trouble shooting problems and intervening when needed (host/student) Undertake at-risk assessment/visit
<i>Logistics of placement</i> Work requirements, workspace and requisites Paperwork	<i>Monitoring</i> Monitor student/host during placement Site visits, phone calls, Skype etc.
<i>Project design and logistics</i> Provide a meaningful experience to students Scoping and negotiating projects	<i>Sourcing project, activity and partners</i> Negotiate contract, deadlines Ensure project/activity aligns with learning outcomes Connect students with range of options for partners
	<i>Maintaining relationships</i> Review placement to identify concerns/future opportunities Provide feedback to partners for quality assurance/enhancement Organise partner events

Support role	
<i>Emotional support</i> Mentoring students Being flexible	<i>Emotional support</i> Pastoral care of students, e.g. first point of call for students with issues Advise partners of potentially sensitive activities for particular students
<i>Special issues</i> Support students with particular issues, e.g. mental illness	<i>Special issues</i> Support students at risk
<i>Availability and accessibility</i> Ongoing supervision of student, e.g. regular meetings Being available and accessible to students	<i>Partner support</i> Support partners
<i>Make comfortable</i> Make student feel comfortable in workplace Ease students negative emotions, e.g. anxiety	<i>Problem solving</i> Support students experiencing difficulties, e.g. making deadlines
<i>Personal and professional development</i> Mentor students, e.g. career advice Introduce students to expectations of the profession	
Educational role	
<i>Assessment and evaluation</i> Input to university on student performance for assessment Complete evaluation/assessment form for university Provide formal feedback to student on performance	<i>Assessment and evaluation</i> Setting assessment tasks/criteria Allocating final grade Provision of academic feedback to student
<i>Designing project or activity</i> Ensure activity meets required learning outcomes Negotiate project in negotiation with students/ academics	<i>Curriculum design</i> Curriculum design and development
<i>Educational input</i> Teach specific skills Provide additional training/materials to link course Answer student questions	<i>Teaching</i> Facilitate pre-activity workshops/tutorials re: transition to professional life/job-readiness Teach generic skills (e.g. team work), link theory to practice

Ensuring a quality learning experience

Act as role model/mentor to students and guide learning
Identify specific skills students need to develop
Provide meaningful work

Feedback

Provide regular feedback on student progress/performance

Overseeing student progress

Ensure students are on track
Provide students with a variety of work

Education related to specific project

Provide academic assistance to students on specific aspects of activity

Debriefing

Facilitating student reflection on their experience/learning
Integrating theory and practice

Reference: Winchester-Seeto, T., Rowe, A., and Mackaway, J. 2016, 'Sharing the load: Understanding the roles of academics and host supervisors in work-integrated learning', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, Vol. 17, No. 20, pp. 107-118.