The dilemma of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in South African higher education – the case of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Johannesburg

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Abstract

The South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) gazetted in 2007 sets a revised qualifications framework that necessitates the re-evaluation and redesign of programmes to align with the new framework. For the first time the HEQF introduced the term 'Work-Integrated Learning' (WIL) into a Department of Education document with possible legal consequences for institutions of higher education, as the framework document provides that higher education institutions offering qualifications with a WIL component must place the students. This has led to a dilemma as placements are not always readily available. In addition, there is 'pressure' within institutions and from certain faculty members to eliminate the WIL component from curricula.

This article aims to answer the following questions:

- Is it worth retaining WIL in the Town and Regional Planning academic programme?
- If it is found that WIL should remain part of the qualification, when should the students engage with this component?
- If it is found that WIL should remain part of the qualification, for how long should this component be offered?

This article presents the findings of the qualitative study aimed at finding a solution to the dilemma relating to WIL, with students and partners from industry being surveyed for their input. It, therefore, forms part of what is an ongoing dialogue concerning all aspects relating to appropriate education.

DIE DILEMMA VAN WERKSGEINTERGREERDE LEER BINNE DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE HOËRONDERWYS – DIE GEVALLESTUDIE VAN STAD EN STREEKBEPLANNING BY DIE UNIVERSITEIT VAN JOHANNESBURG

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Hoër Onderwys Kwalifikasie Raamwerk (*Higher Education Qualifications Framework – HEQF*), soos in 2007 gepubliseer, stel 'n gewysigde kwalifikasieraamwerk daar wat die herevalueering en herontwerp van programme vereis om binne die nuwe raamwerk in te pas. Vir die eerste keer gebruik die HEQF die term 'Work-Integrated Learning' (WIL) in 'n dokument van die Departement van Onderwys, met moontlike regsimplikasies vir hoër onderwys, aangesien die raamwerk dokument voorsiening maak dat Hoëronderwysinstellings wat kwalifikasies aanbied met 'n Werksgeïntegreerde Leerkomponent studente moet plaas. Dit het gelei tot 'n dilemma aangesien plasingsmoontlikhede nie altyd geredelik beskikbaar is nie. Daar word druk binne instansies en deur sekere fakulteitslede uitgeoefen om die WIL-module uit die kurrikulum te verwyder.

Die artikel het ten doel om die volgende vrae te beantwoord:

- Is dit die moeite werd om WIL in die Stad en Streekbeplanning akademiese program te behou?
- Indien die bevinding is dat WIL as deel van die kwalifikasie moet bly, wanneer behoort studente die komponent te neem?
- Indien dit bevind word dat WIL deel van die kwalifikasie moet bly, hoe lank moet die komponent wees?

Hierdie artikel gee die bevindinge weer van 'n kwalitatiewe studie wat daarop gerig is om 'n oplossing te vind vir die dilemma met betrekking tot 'WIL'. In die studie is studente en bedryfsvennote vir hulle insette genader. Die studie vorm dus deel van'n voortgesette dialoog oor al die aspekte van toepaslike onderwys.

MATSAPA A LENAANE LA GO KOPANNGWA GA GO DIRA LE GO ITHUTA MO DIKOLONG TSE DIKGOLO MO AFRIKA BORWA: TEBELELO GO SERUTWA SA "TOWN AND REGIONAL PLANNING" KWA UNIVERSITHING YA JOHANNESBURG

Lekgotla la dikolo tsa dithuto tse dikgolo mo Afrika Borwa le le neng le kopane ka 2007 le tlhomile melawana e e tlhokwang go lebelelwa le go ntšhwafadiwa gape go ya ka melawana e mešwa e e tlhomilweng. Lekgotla le, le ne la tsisa la ntlha mo Lefapheng la Thuto, lenaane le le kopantseng go ikatisetsa go dira le go ithuta ka nako e le nngwe. Lenaane le, le na le ditlamorago tsa semolao go dikolo tsa dithuto tse dikgolo tse di sa le diriseng ka tshwanelo. Bao ba le dirisang, ba tshwanetse ke go bona fa baithuti ba bona diphatla tiro tsa go ka ikatisetsa tiro ba ntse ba ithuta. Se, se na le ditlamorago tse di sa itumediseng ka go se bonolo e bile go sena netefaletso ya gore ba tlaa bona diphatlatiro tseo. Se, se tsisa kgatelelo go dikolo tsa dithuto tse di kgolo le mafapha ka bangwe ikgatholosa lenaane le.

Botlhokwa jwa dipatlisiso tse, bo ikaelela go araba dipotso tse di latelang:

- A go botlhokwa go nna le lenaane la go ikatisetsa tiro o ntse o ithuta ka gangwe mo serutweng sa "Town and Regional Planning" mo lenaaneng la thuto?
- Fa go ka fitlhelwa e le gore lenaane le le tshwanelwa ke go dirisiwa, baithuti ba lo simolole leng?
- Gape ba lo dire lobaka lo lo kana kang?

Dipatlisiso tse, di fana ka diphitlhelelo tse di tseneletseng tse di ikaelelang go bona tharabololo ka lenaane, le go baithuti le badirammogo ba ba thusitseng ka dikakanyo. Se, ke karolo ya dingangisano tse di tsweletseng ka dithuto tse di maleba tsa thuto.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the promulgation of the new Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) in South Africa introduced the term 'Work-Integrated Learning' (WIL) into a Department of Education document for the first time. The HEQF (South Africa. Department of Education, 2007) states:

> Where Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a structured part of a qualification, the volume of learning allocated to WIL should be appropriate to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcome and assessment criteria contained in the appropriate level descriptors. 'It is the responsibility of institutions, which offer programmes requiring WIL credits to place students into WIL programmes. Such programmes must be appropriately structured, properly supervised and assessed' (Authors' emphasis).

The introduction of a ten-level qualifications framework by the HEQF is an opportunity for revising and redesigning academic programmes in the higher education sector. Yet it also creates a dilemma in that, for the first time, higher education institutions have a formal requirement to place students into the workplace. In the past, the majority of higher education institutions operated from the premise that they have a joint responsibility for placing their students, while students have the onus to secure a WIL placement. This responsibility has never been taken lightly, as various interventions ensure that students are prepared for the world of work, and that opportunities for placement are both available and facilitated.

The National Diploma in Town and Regional Planning (ND:TRP) is a technology programme currently offered by three institutions in South Africa, namely the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the Durban University of Technology and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The National Diploma courses offered by these three institutions all incorporate a WIL component. At the University of Johannesburg, the ND:TRP is a three-year qualification, which includes 11 months of WIL.

The HEQF statement has put the spotlight on WIL, as it might have legal consequences. This raises the question: Is it worth retaining WIL in academic programmes, especially given that a WIL component will 'add'[1] a year to the qualification without a difference in the HEQF level of the qualification? Consequently, there is 'pressure' within the institution and from certain faculty members to eliminate the WIL component from curricula.

Smigiel & Harris (2007: n.p.) provide the following examples of typical comments regarding problems with work placements: "… (a) pressure to increase the number of graduates but struggle with limited number of practicum places available (b) non-clinical academic staff focus their efforts on research and do not acknowledge the importance of the practicum." Yoyo (2007: 7) reports that the University of Fort Hare has similar problems. He states that "Internally it was – and to a lesser extent still is – extremely difficult to convince academics to embrace co-operative education fully." In a qualitative comment regarding the need for WIL Smigiel & Harris (2007: n.p.) mention that "Universities tend to reward research and not involvement with practicum" (Smigiel & Harris, 2007: n.p.).

Prior to a Higher Education Quality Committee Institutional Audit in 2009, the Department of Town and Regional Planning at UJ underwent a process of programme reviews. The internal programme review panel suggested, *inter alia*, that the department should consult stakeholders on how the curriculum could be adjusted to accommodate a possible change to the WIL component of the ND:TRP (Internal Programme Review, 2007: 2).

The research discussed in this article was prompted by the challenges being faced as a result of the HEQF prescriptions, and to enable the department to make an informed decision that takes into account the end-user of the education product, the newly qualified graduate. Poxon (2001: 563) states that "Since the early 1900s [in England], the development of the planning profession in practice has been inextricably linked to debates about the appropriate education which students of planning should receive" (Authors' inclusion in square brackets).

This article focuses on the WIL component that forms part of the ND:TRP at the University of Johannesburg. It presents the findings of the qualitative study in an effort to find a solution to the dilemma relating to WIL, with students and partners from industry being surveyed for their input. It forms part of what should be an ongoing dialogue concerning all aspects relating to appropriate education referred to by Poxon.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The higher education sector in South Africa underwent a merger process. In some cases technikons merged with technikons (e.g. the merger resulting in the formation of the Tshwane University of Technology) and in some other instances traditional universities merged with technikons to become comprehensive universities (e.g. the mergers resulting in the creation of the University of South Africa and the University of Johannesburg) (Holtzhausen, 2008: 225).

The UJ was founded on 1 January 2005, based on the academic traditions of the former Rand Afrikaans University (a traditional university), Technikon Witwatersrand (a technikon or polytechnic) and two campuses of Vista University (an historically Black South African university). The UJ is one of the largest contact universities in South Africa and offers a comprehensive range of qualifications, from traditional formative, through career-focused to professional programmes. In the case of the UJ, for programmes following the cooperative education model (programmes that include a WIL component), the university assists students to secure structured WIL at approved companies.

The UJ has nine faculties, one of which being the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, which includes the Department of Town and Regional Planning. In 2009, 304 students enrolled for the ND:TRP. A growth in student numbers enrolled in the ND:TRP has been evident for the past five years. A constant growth of approximately 30% was noted from 2004 to 2006, and this has decreased to below 10% since then (see Table 1 for the number of students in the ND:TRP). However, the growth rate of the total number of students is

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1   In terms of the new HEQF, the Higher Certificate (NQF Level 5 [120 Credits equal to one year of study]) and the Advanced Certificate (NQF Level 6 [120 Credits equal to one year of study]) will effectively imply two years of study to reach the NQF level/obtain a qualification at NQF Level 6. To obtain a Diploma (NQF Level 6 [360 Credits]) a student will have to study for three years. This is taken on the basis that 120 credits are equal to one year of study.

now beginning to stabilise. The initial higher growth can be attributed to first-year student intake numbers that increased from approximately 40 students in 2003 to approximately 80 students as from 2004. This increase in student numbers brings its own challenges for students seeking placement. In an effort to address this, the number of new first years has been reduced from 80 in 2009 to 60 in 2010.

The department currently offers the following qualifications: National Diploma: Town and Regional Planning (ND:TRP) and Baccalaureus Technologiae: Town

West, Limpopo and Free State provinces that focuses on the training of town and regional planning technicians, thus serving five of SA's nine provinces. It provides prime entry level staffing at a required level of skills that is important in industry.

3. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROGRAMME REVIEW

In preparation for the institutional audit of 2009, the Department of Town and Regional Planning underwent a process of self-evaluation (Internal Programme Review) in June 2007, followed by an

expected (Internal Programme Review, 2007: 2).

It was found that there is a good balance between the theoretical and the practical parts of the qualification. It was, however, established that WIL is too long and located in the 'wrong year' (Internal Programme Review, 2007: 5). It should be noted that the panel did not suggest that WIL be excluded, in fact the panel indicated that: "Students are very employable and this is primarily due to the WIL" (Internal Programme Review, 2007: 8).

The external review panel specifically emphasised that the teaching and learning load during the year in which the WIL is situated (the second year) exceeds the recommended number of notional hours. They suggested that having WIL during the second year of the programme as well as the length of time allocated for WIL be reconsidered.

Table 1: Students registered for the ND:TRP

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
First-time entering	37	71	72	74	82	79	74
Returning students	64	77	117	172	202	217	230
Total students	101	148	189	246	284	296	304

and Regional Planning (BTech TRP). These qualifications form part of the qualification mix offered by the former Technikon Witwatersrand. The qualification forming the basis for this study is the ND:TRP, which has a curriculated WIL component.

The ND:TRP is a three-year undergraduate qualification, consisting of two years of academic study (first and third year), one year of WIL, and a project work component in the second year. The qualification provides students with specialised town/urban and regional planning knowledge. An appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills is attained by the subjects offered.

First-year modules are designed to provide students with skills for a town/urban and regional planning environment. This foundation is developed in the second year, when students acquire practical skills under the supervision of approved employers by means of the WIL component. In addition, students are required to complete four modules as part of the project work module in support of the WIL and in preparation for the third year of study.

The ND:TRP programme is unique in Gauteng, and no similar programme is offered in the province. The other two institutions of higher education that offer the ND:TRP are situated in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. UJ is the only institution of higher education in the Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North-

External Programme Review in August 2007.

The WIL component received in-depth attention during the internal programme review, and the panel indicated this as an area requiring attention (Internal Review Panel, 2007: 2). Certain proposals/suggestions were put forward regarding the WIL component, based on what the panel found in the departmental records, the discussions with both staff and students, as well as input from a representative from the industry.

These proposals included, *inter alia*, the following suggestion, which prompted this study:

> It is recommended that the structure of the programme be considered, i.e. to minimize and move the WIL to the last 6 months of the semester (second semester in third year). This will allow companies to offer the students work on completion of their qualification. It will encourage companies to have a student for WIL, as it can be considered orientation time. The students will also be more mature and apply themselves more rigorously to the task at hand. The curriculum can be adjusted to make this change. The committee suggests that a meeting with as many stakeholders as possible be held to discuss how the curriculum could be adjusted to accommodate this change, and to facilitate buy-in for the placement and training of students in line with the learning outcomes

4. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

According to Haddara & Skanes (2007: 2), cooperative education programmes were originally established to bridge the gap between theory and practice in engineering education in order to meet the new developments in industrial needs, and to make university education accessible to an increasing number of students. This phase in the development of cooperative education lasted for approximately 50 years. During this phase, cooperative education was viewed as a way to complement theoretical learning in the classroom with practical experience in the place of work. Schneider (in Haddara & Skanes, 2007: 68), who is proclaimed as the father of cooperative education, hoped that a student would obtain certain objectives through cooperative education. Park (1943) describes these objectives as

> A natural method of arriving at a suitable type of work, an opportunity to gain a maximum of educational content from his industrial environment, an understanding of human factor in industry, acquisition of certain disciplinary values as a result of his shop experience, and acquisition of certain economic values (as cited in Dressler & Keeling, 2004: 219).

The Canadian Association for Cooperative Education (cited in Haddara & Skanes, 2007: 68) defines cooperative education as "a program that formally integrates a student's

academic studies with work." This definition can be expanded to include programmes based on either practical experience alternating with academic studies, or internship programmes based on a single work experience.

The United States National Commission for Cooperative Education defines cooperative education as "a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals" (Groenewald, 2004: 17). Groenewald (2004: 68) evaluated existing definitions of the term "cooperative education" and their historical development. He concluded that "cooperative education can be reduced to four core dimensions … namely: (a) an integrated curriculum, (b) learning derived from work experience, (c) cultivation of a support base, and (d) the logistical organization and coordination of the learning experience." These four components refer to developing a curriculum that incorporates both the needs of industry and academic requirements; cautious design of the work component to ensure its contribution to the work-integrated learning process; the promotion of a loyal, supportive industrial base, and establishing a structure that ensures sound practices of monitoring and evaluating students before, during, and after the work experience. Betts, Lewis, Dressler & Svensson (2009: 99) indicate that "Curricula must provide students with more than just knowledge and skills." They argue that students should be afforded the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge to real-life settings by means of learning simulation and WIL. The experience students would acquire by means of WIL is thus crucial for employment (Betts *et al.*, 2009: 99).

The Policy of Community Engagement at the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, defines Curricular Community Engagement (CCE) as:

> teaching, learning, and scholarship, which engage academic staff, students and the community (service sectors) in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address community identified goals or needs, deepen students' civic and academic learning, enhance the well-being of the community, and enrich the scholarship of the institution (University of Pretoria, 2006).

The different types of CCE include academic service learning, Work-Integrated Learning, experiential learning, community-based education, internships, community outreach, community service and clinical practicals.

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has a Work-Integrated Learning policy (2005), which defines a work-integrated learning programme as follows:

> 2.1 focuses on the application of theory in authentic, work-based contexts;
>
> 2.2 addresses specific competencies identified for the acquisition of a qualification;
>
> 2.3 enables the developmental skills that will make the student employable, and provides a real context in which the theoretical, practical, interpersonal and reflexive competencies of Unisa's students are developed in an integrated way;
>
> 2.4 is an umbrella term, used at Unisa, to include experiential education/ teaching strategies such as clinical training/practice, internship, professional practice, experiential training/learning, supervised learning/practice and work-based learning.

McLennan & Tyler (2007: n.p.) indicate that at Australia's Victoria University 'Learning in the Workplace' is defined as "an activity that uses the workplace as a site for teaching and learning and provides students with the experience of the employment context."

The term WIL could thus be regarded as a 'generic' term used by a number of authors as an umbrella concept describing educational models that engage students in professional development as part of their curricula. These include, *inter alia*, cooperative education and internships (Betts *et al.*, 2009: 104). The World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE) identifies WIL as:

> Work Integrated Learning (that) combines professional work experience with classroom studies in many forms, including: research, internships, study abroad, service learning, student teaching, clinical rotations, community service, industry attachments, cooperative education, and professional work placements (WACE, n.d.: 3).

South Africa's criteria for institutional audits and for programme accreditation also contain criteria regarding work-based learning. Both documents relate to the application of theory in a valid work-based context, where competencies are developed and acquired skills will make students more employable. In terms of accreditation, the university programmes must include the promotion of the student's understanding of the occupation, in this case that of a town and regional planner. Students will have to muster specific skills related to the occupation, and work-based learning should thus form an essential part of the curriculum.

The challenge for the Department of Town and Regional Planning at the UJ is not unique to South Africa. In a planning education discussion paper prepared for the Planning Institute of Australia, it is indicated that when there is a shortage of professional planners (this would then also be applicable to planning technicians), there is a need for such planners to be 'job ready' (Gurran, Norman & Gleeson, 2008: 15). Gurran *et al.* (2008: 16) argue:

> … that the strongest learning environment for planning students combines theory and practice, or 'praxis' in a dynamic way. So it is not a question of either practical skills or pure theory, but a model of learning that extends across core knowledge areas through to the application of this knowledge in practice …

5. THE NATIONAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT RELEVANT TO WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Where WIL is part of the curriculum, certain policies and guidelines should be borne in mind when designing these programmes. The next section of this article provides an overview of the applicable legislative framework.

The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, 1996 states that the goals for institutions of higher education should honour the need for cooperation and partnerships between HEIs and "sectors of the wider society" (South Africa, 1996: 7). To adequately incorporate WIL into the curriculum, new ways of teaching and learning, as well as delivery modes will have to be created and implemented (South Africa, 1996: 3). Through various partnerships, departments will, for example, have access to valuable university resources, and students will learn from their experience and have an opportunity to apply

theory in practice. This simultaneously promotes democratic values as well as civic and community responsibility, namely, social responsibility and citizenship.

The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation, 1997 reaffirms the purpose of HEIs with respect to social responsibility. There is still a need for HEIs to review their societal purpose and to develop strategic initiatives to realise these goals (South Africa, 1997b: 10-11).

The Higher Education Act, 1997 (South Africa, 1997a: 11-13) gives effect to the recommendations of the White Paper and makes provision for the establishment of the HEQC as a permanent subcommittee of the CHE. It also provides criteria relating to work-based learning as follows:

*   Learning contracts or agreements by which the student, higher education institution and employer can negotiate, approve and assess the objectives and outcomes of the learning process as well as the roles and responsibilities of the various parties.

*   Regular and efficient communication between the institution, students, mentors and employers.

*   A system (both at the institution and at the place of employment) to record and monitor regularly and systematically the content and progress of the student's learning experience in the workplace.

*   A mentoring system that enables the student to recognise strengths and weaknesses in his/her work, to develop existing and new abilities, and to gain knowledge of work practices (HEQC, 2004: 21).

The Institutional Audit Framework and Institutional Audit Criteria, HEQC, June 2004 (HEQC, 2007) gives effect to the mandate of the HEQC and articulates the HEQC's approach to quality, which "encompasses fitness for purpose, value for money, and individual and social transformation, within an overarching fitness of purpose framework" (HEQC, 2007: 3). Various criteria need to be met for accreditation purposes.

In a media statement on 4 November 2009, the Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, Minister Blade Nzimande, touched on some of the challenges that limit the effectiveness of the policy intentions (Nzimande, 2009). The following are specifically

highlighted, as the authors have experienced them as a challenge affecting the placement of students with suitable mentor employers (in particular small private consulting firms consisting of only a small number of professionally qualified staff members):

*   Improved coordination between the SETA system and education and training institutions.

*   Unblocking of funds in the National Skills Fund.

*   Need to increase the supply of technicians.

*   The effectiveness of the skills development efforts (HEQC, 2004: 21).

The provision of opportunities for work-based learning to accompany formal learning was then also identified as a priority requiring attention.

6.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A process of qualitative research was used to establish the opinion of students currently enrolled for the ND:TRP as well as the opinions of the employers who both 'have' employed and currently employ students for the WIL component. This was done by means of structured questionnaires which were distributed to a total of 170 students. Of these questionnaires, 150 were distributed equally among first-year, second-year and third-year students. Students enrolled for the BTech were also approached, and 20 questionnaires were distributed to them. The questionnaires were randomly distributed.

A total of 60 questionnaires were also distributed to employers of Town and Regional Planning students. While this was a convenience sample, these employers were chosen as they had background knowledge of the programme and the students and were thus deemed able to provide a more informed opinion. Employers who have not taken students on a recurring/repeated basis were also contacted, as there may well be lessons to be learnt from the reasons why they ceased to support the programme or only supported the programme intermittently. Thirty-five of these questionnaires were sent to employers within the private sector, and 25 to employers within the public service. One questionnaire was designed specifically for students and one specifically for employers. However, a number of questions were included in both questionnaires.

Phase 1 formed the data-collection phase, where these questionnaires were distributed to the various student groups and the identified employers. Phase 2 formed the analysis-of-data phase, where the results of the questionnaires were evaluated, and the findings documented and interpreted as part of this article.

The chief aim of this article is to address the following questions:

*   Is it worth retaining WIL in the Town and Regional Planning academic programmes?

*   If it is found that WIL should remain part of the qualification, when should the students engage with this component?

*   If it is found that WIL should remain part of the qualification, for how long should this component be offered?

7.   THE LEGAL IMPLICATION OF WIL TO A DEPARTMENT

As indicated earlier, the HEQF (South Africa. Department of Education, 2007: 7) states that: "It is the responsibility of institutions, which offer programmes requiring WIL credits to place students into WIL programmes." The authors are of the opinion that this statement could lead to universities disregarding the WIL component in future academic programmes. Legal opinion was sought to shed light on the HEQF statement and to offer insight into the rules that govern interpretation of policies/contracts and their applicability in legal scenarios. According to Tamara Bezuidenhout (2010: personal communication) from the CHE, WIL must be a core component of all future programmes at comprehensive higher education institutions and at universities of technology.

Interpretation aims to determine the common intention of the parties as expressed in the document or contract, known as the "general rule" of interpretation. In fact, the determination of the parties' intention is not a rule of interpretation. Where consensus is absent, a party to the contract may be bound by an impression of intention created in the mind of the other party (Wessels, Khan & Taylor, 2008: 618).

The question arises as to whether the failure to comply with the HEQF statement would result in a breach of legal duty, and thus students could

litigate in terms of the above breach. It is the contention of the authors that various factors should be taken into account before such a breach could be impinged upon the institution. The following factors should be considered prior to passing a judgement:

- Has the institution explored all reasonable avenues in order to place students, for instance, maintain industry contacts, host recruitment functions, and invite industry to participate in advisory committee meetings? Did the institution prepare the students for securing a WIL placement?

- Did students hand in CVs, attend scheduled interviews and/or accept a placement offer when one was made?

- Did the students sign the necessary learning contract?

In a paper presented at the September 2009 forum of the Southern African Society for Cooperative Education, Adv. Khan indicated that:

> the best approach would be to approach the Minister's office or the legal department in the Department of Education and ask for a response in regard to liability of institutions. What are the parameters of the institutions' liability as regards placement of students in WIL programmes and so to put the burden of submission of a response on the Minister (Wessels, Khan & Taylor, 2008: 619).

The statement in the HEQF document will have to be discussed further with various role-players such as Higher Education South Africa (HESA).

In order to gain further insight, various case laws were examined to determine what approach the courts adopted regarding placement of students. None was identified as being directly related to non-placement litigation. The thought of possible litigation is a cause for concern. Higher education institutions require clarity and assurance that a common interpretation of the WIL statement be adopted in South Africa, and that this be applied. Investigation into the international legislation in this regard is ongoing.

8.   INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

Of the 170 questionnaires distributed to students, 83.5% were returned. The high percentage return of questionnaires can be attributed to the fact that students were requested to complete the questionnaires during class.

Table 2 indicates the distribution of students who participated in the study. The first-year representation is divided between new first-year students and repeating first-year students. Table 2 indicates that the different categories are well represented in the study.

Of the 60 questionnaires distributed to employers, 35 were sent to employers within the private sector and 25 to employers within the public service. The private sector consisted mainly of private town and regional planning consulting firms. The public service is divided between national government, provincial government and local government, with the local government further divided between metropolitan municipalities, district municipalities and local municipalities.

Of the 60 questionnaires distributed, 30% of the questionnaires were returned, of which 22% from the public service and 78% from the private sector. After the results of the questionnaires were interpreted, approximately five employers who had not responded were followed up telephonically. These follow-ups confirmed the results received from the returned questionnaires.

One of the first questions required employers and students to indicate whether, in their opinion, WIL should continue to form part of the ND:TRP qualification. Seventy-eight per cent of the employers and 87% of students who responded indicated that WIL should continue to form part of the qualification. Employers were further requested to indicate why WIL should or should not continue to be part of the qualification. The responses are indicated in Table 3.

The responses in Table 3 are similar to aspects identified in a study conducted in Australia among students, partners in industry and academics in the urban and regional planning field (Jones, Coiacetto, Jackson, Coote, Steele, Budge & Gall, 2009: 209-211). In an article on student placements the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) indicated that "… these placements have proven to be very beneficial for all involved, and have improved students' employability and professionalism by the point they are seeking full time work" (Lough, 2010: online).

Table 2: Distribution of students participating in the study

Student status	Percentage
First year (first enrolment)	28
First year (repeat)	4
Second year (outstanding first-year subjects, no WIL placement)	7
Second year (outstanding first-year subjects, have WIL placement)	7
Second year (no WIL placement)	4
Second year (have WIL placement)	8
Third year (with first-year subjects)	9
Third year (have not completed WIL component)	21
Third year (WIL component completed)	12
TOTAL STUDENT PARTICIPATION	100

Table 3: Employers' opinion of WIL component as part of the ND:TRP

Employer responses (*quoted verbatim*)
• "Provides practical learning for the student and opportunity for employer to assess student."
• "It links theoretical knowledge with practical."
• "It affords students to gain work experience and allows application of knowledge and skills acquired."
• "Provides opportunity for student to be funded in final year of study and employer to secure staff."
• "It broadens the student's scope of knowledge with respect to the broad nature of town planning and how it links with other disciplines."
• "The student learns responsibility."
• "Better equips the student for the TRP environment."
• "Builds a good base for future development/progress."
• "Provides the student with a better chance of being employed."
• "It prepares students for a permanent work environment and adds value to the student's qualification."
• "Provided the workplace has a range of exposures it will give students a better understanding of the role of town and regional planning and a better idea of the skills required."

Table 4: Students' opinion of WIL component as part of ND:TRP

Student responses (*quoted verbatim*)
• "It's a way for students to get to know the course better."
• "Offers a glimpse of what to expect when/after we graduate."
• "Essential exposure to the field, prepares you for BTech."
• "It prepares you for the real working environment."
• "It should be done after S4[2], then if we are offered a permanent job we can stay at the company or work place."
• "It's a good thing because after doing it you can come back to class with better knowledge."
• "It helps the student to understand his field of study more."
• "It helps you and gives you an idea what the future career is about."
• "WIL offers the opportunity to prepare us for future work experiences and how to handle challenges in an effective and efficient manner."
• "It is essential to get a realistic view of the field but should only be introduced in third year (when the student is slightly more knowledgeable and mature)."
• "It is a good thing as you get to know how things are really done in a workplace environment and get to see if the things you are learning are relevant or how they change."
• "Given a chance to understand and choose to specialise in a certain field."
• "It prepares you for the third year."
• "I would say that the WIL should be done in third year. Now that I'm in third year, all the work I've done makes more sense than when I was working. This is because the lecturer is able to explain things more clearly and accurately. This would have benefited my WIL."
• "It gives you an idea if you want to stay in the field and is an encouragement."
• "Good thing, but would be better if it comes after third year."
• "I believe it plays a major role in preparing the learner for the industry by exposing them to the work prior to their graduation."
• "It is then when you see the core of the course."

The above outcome supports Pearce (2006: 3) in that WIL has a positive impact not only on a student's academic learning, but also on his/her moral development and ability to apply what has been learnt in a real-life scenario. It also improves a student's understanding of complexities, problem analysis and critical thinking, which is in line with the critical cross field outcomes.

Responses as to why WIL should not continue to form part of ND:TRP included, *inter alia*: "It has limited value"; "There ar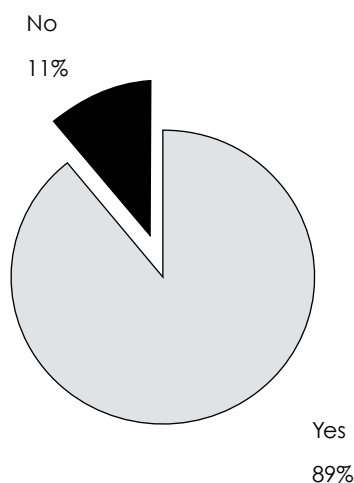e practical difficulties associated with WIL", and "Students could spend more time at university in a structured environment and learn more skills."

Students were requested to indicate their opinion of the WIL component as part of the qualification ND:TRP. Table 4 provides an insight into their response on this issue.

It is clear that two lines of thought emerged: one favouring the WIL component after the theoretical portion of the study, and a second favouring WIL to be in the second year. Having WIL after the theoretical section is mainly based on the student having the theoretical know-how and being able to cope better with the challenges faced in a working environment. The main reason given for having WIL located in the second year is that it prepares the student for the third year of study.

On the question to students as to whether WIL prepared them better for their third year of study, 89% of the students who responded indicated that WIL did prepare them better for their third year of study. Figure 1 depicts this response. It is thus clear that students are of the opinion that WIL prepares them better for the third year of study.

Figure 2 illustrates the opinion of students and Figure 3 the opinion of employers on the question of whether WIL better prepares the student for a permanent work environment.

Ninety-three per cent of the students who responded indicated that the WIL component prepares them better for a permanent work environment, whereas only 7% indicated the contrary. Employers confirmed this, as 87% of the employers who responded indicated that the WIL component of the study prepares students better for a permanent work environment, whereas only 13% indicated differently, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 1: Student response whether WIL prepared them better for their third year of study
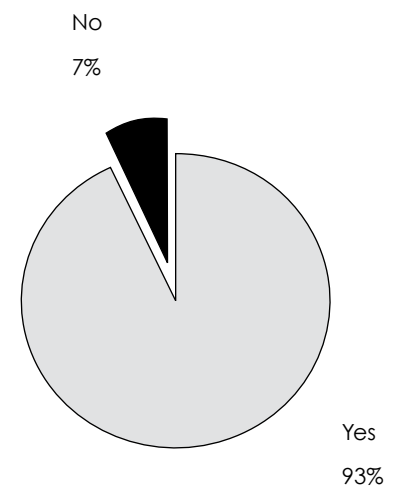

Figure 2: Student opinion on whether WIL prepares the student better for a permanent work environment

Table 5 indicates students' as well as employers' responses rating the effect of WIL on the preparation for permanent work placement, effect on technical skills, interpersonal skills, maturity

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2 S4 refers to the fourth semester, thus suggesting that the WIL component should follow the theoretical portion of the qualification.
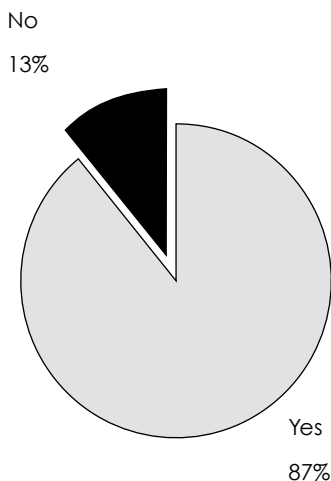
No
13%

Yes
87%

Figure 3: Employer opinion on whether WIL prepares the student better for a permanent work environment

level, the student's self-confidence, on teamwork and on presentation skills.

The students highlighted the following aspects where WIL had the greatest effect: interpersonal skills, maturity level, self-confidence and teamwork. Employers highlighted the preparation for a permanent workplace, the effect on the student's self-confidence, and teamwork as aspects where WIL had the greatest impact.

Employers were also asked to indicate, in their opinion, the advantages and disadvantages of WIL. Table 6 summarises some of the responses received.

Some of the more pertinent advantages listed relate to the practical experience gained by the students and an understanding of how government systems work. It allows employers to assess the strengths of a potential staff member

in a practical work environment. Employers also identified interpersonal skills, the importance of timelines for work, and to work in a team as advantages of WIL. Students also indicated that WIL is not only an opportunity for them to learn about the specific discipline but that there are vast opportunities to learn about the world of work as well as gaining self-knowledge. The time needed by employers to train students and to get them 'operational' was identified as a significant disadvantage. There was also evidence of non-cooperation and unwillingness on the part of some students to participate fully in the learning experience provided by WIL.

The employers were also requested to give their opinion on the value they ascribe to WIL. Typical responses were: very limited; assessment of potential

Table 5: Matrix on student and employer responses to the effect of Work-Integrated Learning

	Preparation for a permanent workplace		Technical skills		Interpersonal skills		Maturity level		Self-confidence		Teamwork		Presentation skills	
	Students	Employers	Students	Employers	Students	Employers	Students	Employers	Students	Employers	Students	Employers	Students	Employers
No effect	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	6	1
Limited effect	5	1	12	2	8	2	6	2	9	2	6	1	12	3
Moderate effect	28	4	25	9	17	8	20	8	18	2	19	6	27	7
Extensive effect	31	**12**	27	6	**40**	7	**39**	7	**38**	**13**	**37**	**10**	20	5

Source: Lewis & Taylor 2008: 336

Table 6: Employers' responses to the advantages and disadvantages of WIL

Advantages (*quoted verbatim*)	Disadvantages (*quoted verbatim*)
• "Practical experience gained. Get in touch with municipalities and can then apply practical experience."	• "Time needed by employer to get student 'operational'."
• "Excellent opportunity for the students to be exposed to the industry and make an informed decision of his/her career path."	• "Some students tend to be uncooperative and unwilling to go the extra mile. It takes a lot of company time and resources to accommodate a student for the WIL programme."
• "Students get practical experience in the private sector. They learn how government systems work e.g. Municipalities. They learn to think on their feet and to deal with difficult situations. They can be effective in a firm from day one, they can do different types of applications."	• "The student leaves and you have to start all over again. Sometimes the student does not fit in and simply wants to be given work while sitting at a desk."
• "Allows employer to assess in practical work environment strengths of potential staff member. Student learns reality of work environment. Demonstrate importance of necessary technical skills."	• "The short time we have to train students and this is as a result of our 6-month internship programme."
• "It prepares a student to apply the theoretical knowledge in a real-world situation. It exposes the student to the real work situation for him/her to be able to work with other professionals in the field of planning."	• "Only disadvantage is to the employer who needs to spend a lot of time and effort to ensure proper and correct training to the student."
• "Utilise skills, knowledge. Learn about interpersonal relations. The importance of time lines for work projects. How to integrate and build on survey. Analysis to create a workable solution(s)."	• "Additional cost, *etc*. for the student."
• "Learns responsibility. Builds a good base for future development/ progress, provides the student with a better chance of being employed."	• "The Institution has little control over quality. It interrupts the academic studies but this is compensated for if the student has a good position."
• "A student that is better equipped to operate independently within the planning profession."	• "Some employers use students not for planning work but for Admin/ Reception work."
• "Discipline of having deadlines to meet. Learning to work in a team."	• "Management aspects and demands on time of already stretched officials."

staff; enabling students to link theoretical knowledge with the practical; it helps the student to identify the gaps and the limitations s/he has in the field of town planning; learns responsibility, and the student can start immediately with employment after qualifying.

Students and employers were requested to indicate their preferred duration of the WIL component. The results are indicated in Figures 4 and 5, respectively. A period of 11 months was the preferred option among students. The second choice was six months. The responses were interrogated to determine whether there is a difference in the responses to the duration of WIL between first-, second- and third-year students. It was found that in all cases the preference was for 11 months, with a 6-month WIL period being the second choice.

The preferred duration among employers was 11 months, with 9 months being the second choice. It is thus clear from the responses that 11 months is the
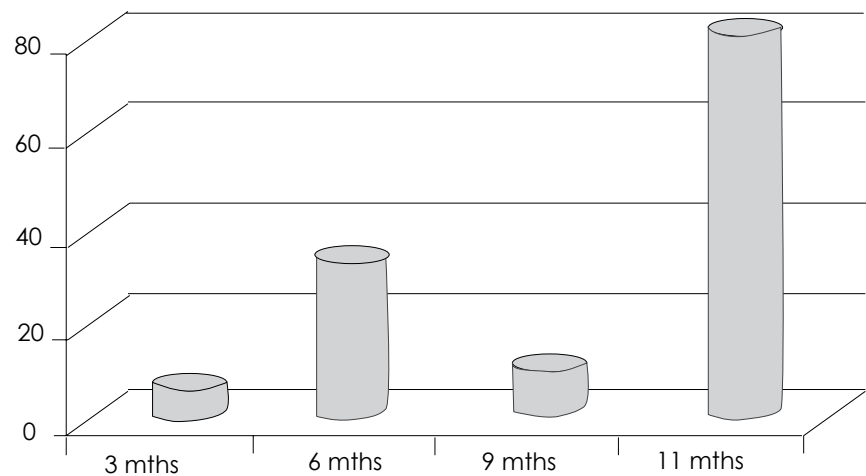

Figure 4: Student response to the duration of WIL

qualification as an internship could suit the requirement of Section 13(4)(b) of the Planning Profession Act 36 of 2002 (quoted under section 10 below), for registration as a technical planner with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN).
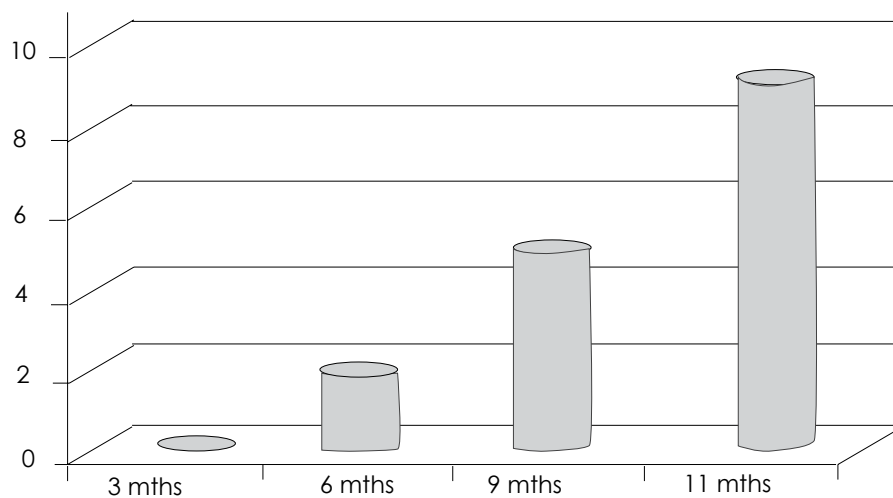

Figure 5: Employer response to the duration of WIL

preferred duration of the WIL component. This is in contrast with the recommendations of the internal and external programme review panels.

On the question to employers as to during which year of study the WIL component should be offered, the majority of responses were for the WIL to be offered during the student's second year of study (as is the situation currently), after the completion of the theoretical portion of the qualification, or after the completion of the qualification (and then taking the form of an internship). Moving WIL after completion of the

The students' and employers' responses were very similar, with 23% indicating that WIL should commence in the first semester of the second year, 25% indicating that it should start after the theoretical portion of the qualification, but still be part of the qualification, and approximately 12% indicating that it should be after the completion of the qualification, as an internship.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH

As indicated, it was evident from the questionnaire responses that the institution has little influence over certain

external factors which determine whether students will have WIL opportunities available to them. These reasons/factors were not part of the research for this article. In addition, such factors would not only be restricted to the town and regional planning field, but could also form part of the general built environment (including the various engineering fields, construction management field, *etc*.). This could serve as basis for future research.

A comparative study between the South African situation in the town and regional planning qualification structure and that elsewhere in the world did not form part of this study. Follow-on research in this area would provide valuable insights and input into the town and regional planning programme development.

10. CONSTRAINTS/LIMITATIONS AND ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

An aspect that needs to be taken into account and that did not form part of this study is the requirement stipulated in the Planning Profession Act 36 of 2002 (South Africa, 2002) for registration as a technical planner with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN). Section 13(4)(b) of this Act states:

> in the case of a person applying for registration as a technical planner –
>
> (i) has completed an accredited planning educational programme at the National Qualification Framework level 6 or higher (the ND

TRP is a qualification on an NQF level 6);

(ii) has undergone practical training of not less than two years or as may be prescribed by the Council; and

(iii) has passed a competency assessment determined by the Council;

Another relates to the pressure on academic departments for through-put. Carter (2008: 60) captures this: "*Regulators* are increasing intervention-ist … in the optimisation of funding and resources required for the delivery of the curriculum and the speed of 'through-put' … ." The placement of students for the WIL component (or students seeking WIL opportunities) is reliant on the availability of WIL opportunities as well as the willingness of employers to accommodate such students.

11. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study interrogated the views of employers in the town and regional planning field who either previously employed students or are currently em-ploying students from the Department of Town and Regional Planning at UJ for WIL. It also interrogated the views of students currently enrolled in the town and regional planning programmes in respect of the WIL component.

The responses support the retention of the WIL component by both partners in industry (employers) and students. It is evident from this study that the WIL component should preferably be of-fered over 11 months. Officials from the City of Johannesburg confirmed this. The media statement by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, Minister Blade Nzimande, on 4 November 2009, has identified work-based learning (or WIL) as a priority requiring attention.

The research outcomes provide the Department of Town and Regional Planning at UJ with a challenge: to find a balance between the opinions obtained from industry and students alike on the one hand, the recom-mendations/proposals received from the internal and external programme review panels, the legislative require-ments of the HEQF regarding the WIL component, and the placement of students, on the other. Another aspect that plays a role is the requirements of the Planning Profession Act 36 of 2002 for registration as a technical planner

with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN).

There are advantages to both options regarding the location of the WIL within the curricula, which were equally supportive of the WIL component being placed after the theoretical portion of the study and in the second year of study. A decision will need to be made in this regard.

Some weight will be attached to the recommendations from the internal and external review panels regarding the duration and location of the WIL component. The possibility that the WIL component has some flexibility within the curriculum, introduced by means of an 'elective' system, may be consid-ered. Students would thus be able to choose when to complete the WIL component, with the project work com-ponents that support and supplement those parts of the WIL curriculum not covered in the workplace. This might, however, prove to be problematic as students might not have the necessary theoretical foundation if, for example, WIL was an elective from the first year. This would also be based on the finding that the current notional hours spent on the WIL component exceed the notional hours recommended by SAQA. With an 'elective' system, the student, with the approval of the Department, may manage his/her notional hours and thus achieve the credit requirement for this part of the qualification. The recom-mendation from the programme review panels who suggested that the WIL component be reduced to six months could thus be addressed.

If the WIL component is located at the end of the qualification, it could be argued that, because the students would have completed the theoretical portion of the study, they would not need a period of 11 months to gain the necessary experience. Due to their (academic) maturity level, they would be able to contribute and be fully productive earlier after completion of the theoretical portion of the study. As indicated by the review panel, the students will be more mature and are thus likely to apply themselves more rigorously to the task at hand. This would also address the concern raised by some employers relating to the time they need to train students and get them 'operational.' Another advantage is that WIL allows companies to offer students permanent employment on completion of their qualification. This could encourage companies to have

a student for WIL, as this may then be considered a pre-employment trail/probation period.

An aspect that needs to be taken into account and that did not form part of this study is the requirement stipulated in the Planning Profession Act 36 of 2002 for registration as a technical planner with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN). If it is an institu-tional decision, or if the legal implication is of such a nature that it makes it impossible or nearly impossible for the department to meet the legal require-ments for the placement of students, excluding the WIL component from the qualification should be seriously considered. The WIL component should then be included as an internship programme, forming part of the require-ments stipulated in Section 13(4)(b) of the Planning Profession Act 36 of 2002 for registration as a technical planner.

The above would then also address the pressure on academic departments for throughput, thus making this an 'indus-trial problem', and essentially placing the onus on the graduate student to fulfil the registration requirements.

As indicated earlier, the placement of students for the WIL component (or students seeking WIL opportunities) is reliant on the availability of WIL op-portunities as well as the willingness of employers to accommodate such students. If WIL does not form part of the qualification, this 'burden' will then not rest on the Department and the institution of higher education.

In conclusion, WIL affects students' interpersonal skills, maturity level, self-confidence and teamwork. The value added and the outcome contribution of WIL is evident from this study. WIL should thus be retained. Systems, such as support of employers (in particular, financial support for smaller employers who do not necessarily contribute via the skills levy) should be put in place to facilitate the placement of students. The Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, Minister Blade Nzimande, touched on this when he indicated that the unblocking of funds in the National Skills Fund should be addressed.

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