

How to make the most of Work Integrated Learning: for Workplace Supervisors



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Participation in Murdoch University's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Placement Program

Congratulations on your participation in Murdoch University's Work Integrated Learning Placement Program. We trust you will find the experience rewarding.

Work Integrated Learning activities integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace, and provide opportunities for students to further develop their skills, and reflect on practice.

Your willingness to provide Murdoch students with industry experience will help them to improve their employment prospects and bridge the gap between the world of study and work. We hope that you will also find that your placement student brings valuable skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to your organisation.

This handbook is designed to help you make the most of the placement experience. It includes useful tips on preparing for the placement, introducing your student to the workplace and ensuring that all goes smoothly. We would be delighted to hear your feedback or any other information that would be useful to our academic staff.



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Benefits for the Organisation and the Student

WORKPLACE

- Establishing a cooperative working relationship with a tertiary organisation;
- Contributing to your industry and community;
- Increasing your knowledge of current academic preparation;
- Increasing your awareness of new and innovative ideas in your field of operation;
- Developing and/or creating new programmes or projects;
- Gaining assistance and expertise in related projects;
- Surveying and evaluating potential employees;
- Participating in the preparation of future industry professionals by assisting them to develop personal and professional competencies;
- Providing a professional development opportunity for existing staff to gain experience in a supervisory or leadership role.

STUDENT

- Improving their resume and distinguishing them from other graduates in the job market;
- Putting academic work and theoretical understandings into practice in a work environment;
- Learning more about a particular industry and the role of a company before entering the labour market;
- Gaining understanding and experience of a professional organisation and its culture;
- Gaining assistance and expertise in related projects;
- Developing a network of industry contacts;
- Developing specific skills, for example:-
 - Project management skills
 - Teamwork skills
 - Communication skills, oral and non-verbal
 - Customer service skills
 - Knowledge of particular software.

Responsibilities

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- **Supervision:** An academic supervisor will provide academic input and support to the student in relation to their assessment, and will be available to mediate any problems if they arise.
- **Insurance:** Insurance cover is automatic for Murdoch University's students undertaking an activity that forms part of their academic course of study, provided they are currently enrolled. Policies extend to include any Murdoch student whilst they are undertaking an approved or recognised activity of the University, including placements, providing that:
 - the student is not employed or remunerated in any way by the placement organisation for any of the work being done; and
 - the placement has been approved by Murdoch University.
- **Paperwork for placement:**

A formal agreement governing the conditions of the placement is negotiated with the Workplace Partner. The 'Work Placement Agreement' spells out the legal terms and conditions as well as the roles and responsibilities of the University and the Workplace Partner.

STUDENT

- **Conduct:** A student should conduct themselves in a professional manner in all their dealings with you, your staff and your clients; and
 - adhere to the terms and conditions of the Student Agreement as agreed prior to the commencement of the placement;
 - undertake the duties agreed, to your satisfaction;
 - dress appropriately for the workplace;
 - arrive punctually for work and any meetings they need to attend;
 - report any absence from work as early as is reasonably possible;
 - report accidents immediately to the workplace supervisor and also to the academic supervisor. The student is also required to complete and submit a University Online Incident Report.
- **Intellectual Property:** In most instances students personally own intellectual property that they generate in the course of their studies. In relation to work placements, students may be requested to assign or license their intellectual property to meet the University's legal obligations to Workplace Partners. Where this is required, Murdoch University recommends that the workplace partner liaise directly with the student in relation to the student's intellectual property.

WORKPLACE

- **Supervision:** The workplace partner will be required to provide an employee to act in the role of workplace supervisor. This person is to be the student's industry mentor and is to provide all reasonable assistance to the student to enable the student to complete the placement. This person will also act as the main point of contact for the student and the academic supervisor.
- **Academic/Technical Content:** The workplace partner will work with Murdoch University to ensure that the scope of the placement has sufficient learning content and complexity in order to meet the academic learning requirements of the course of study.
- **Induction:** Upon commencement of the placement the workplace partner will undertake an induction process (including occupational safety and health, other workplace policies, internal confidentiality etc) with the student to orient the student to the workplace environment.
- **Awareness of the student's academic requirements:** Students on placement are fulfilling an academic component of their course or unit and workplace supervisors are expected to be aware of the requirements of the student's assessment tasks and to accommodate wherever possible.
- **Performance assessment of the student:** On completion of the placement period the workplace supervisor should assess/evaluate the student's performance based on criteria agreed with the academic supervisor. The workplace supervisor should contact the academic supervisor if clarification is required.

Hints and tips for Workplace Supervisors

PRIOR TO STUDENT PLACEMENT

- Make your written project brief as detailed as possible. The more information your student has about the background, purpose and anticipated outcomes of the project, the more likely you are to be happy with the end result.
- Organise briefing sessions for students at the commencement of a placement to assist the student prepare for the placement, and to help the student make the most of the learning opportunity.
- Let the student know if they require any vaccinations, a police check or a Working with Children check prior to commencement.
- Prepare for your student's arrival (the checklist on pages 10 -11 will help you identify the practical considerations of hosting a student).
- A thorough induction means the student will feel settled more quickly and be well prepared to succeed in your workplace. The activities on the induction checklist should help your student settle in quickly. Alternatively, you may wish to use your organisation's own induction process.
- Students are encouraged to ask lots of questions at the beginning of their placement.

Here is a list of questions that may be asked of your organisation's designated workplace supervisor:-

- *With whom will the student be working in the organisation? Will s/he be working with anyone outside the organisation?*
- *How will the student's progress be monitored? (regular meetings, goal setting, milestone completion etc);*
- *What resources will be made available to the student in the workplace? (computer, desk, telephone, photocopier etc);*
- *Will the student be required to undertake any work away from the workplace? (research, surveying, designing etc);*
- *What is your organisation's dress code?*
- *What will the student's work schedule be? (days and hours);*
- *Does the student need to be aware of any particular security/parking arrangements?*
- *What tasks will the student need to perform in order to achieve the objectives? Is there any assumed knowledge?*
- *Does the student need to complete any background readings or research prior to commencing your project?*
- *Does your organisation expect the student to make a presentation when the project has been completed? If so, when will this presentation take place?*

COMMUNICATION

- Discuss how and when you prefer the student to communicate with you;
- Talk to the student about their comfort level with different methods of communication;
- Challenge the student to stretch their capabilities by providing a variety of communication opportunities;
- Lead by example by communicating with the student in the manner that you would expect them to communicate;
- Explain the culture in your workplace, e.g. typically contact is via email, telephone or in person;
- Help the student understand the tone of communication required by different stakeholders;
- Highlight to the student which styles of communication are effective in different situations;
- Review important documents so that the student knows where improvement is required;
- Demand high standards from the student, particularly around external communication to customers;
- Provide feedback to the student on their development of communication skills.



How to make the experience a positive one

The placement could be your student's first experience of the professional workplace, so there may be a brief period of adjustment while s/he becomes accustomed to your expectations. While your student will make every effort to behave as an employee, it is important to remember that s/he is still a student, and may need a little more supervision than a new staff member.

- Be a role model by presenting yourself as you would expect the student to;
- Ensure goals and expectations are understood correctly from the start;
- Empower the student to add value by assigning them a worthwhile project;
- Try to set tasks that are both challenging and achievable within the given timeframe;
- Explain how the student's project or task fits into your organisation's goals or strategy so s/he understands the 'bigger picture';
- Help the student think through the smaller components of big tasks;
- Build small milestones into the student's plan which will help you both monitor progress;
- Ask the student to demonstrate a task to ensure it has been adequately explained and that s/he fully understands what is required;
- Brief your team to encourage the student to share thoughts and ideas at every opportunity;
- Encourage the student to ask questions and approach you with any problems s/he is experiencing within the workplace. Challenge the student to think about how they could go one step further;
- Expose the student to brainstorming and decision making processes;
- Clarify when you want the student to review things with you and when to seek your approval;
- Encourage the student to look for answers before relying on you;
- Allow the student, where appropriate, to have some leeway to learn from their mistakes;
- Set up a regular time to provide feedback to the student and discuss the progress of the project. The student will appreciate having a designated time in which they can ask questions and review their work;
- Be generous with your praise. Like all of us, students will appreciate being told when they are doing a job well.

Occasionally problems arise during the student's placement. Such problems may include health or behavioural problems associated with the student, or organisational problems associated with the placement. Should such problems arise (which cannot be easily resolved) the workplace supervisor should consult with the academic supervisor at the earliest convenient time. You may also find these tips useful in resolving problems:

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Student is unable to complete the tasks required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that the student understands the task and has the necessary skills and capabilities to execute it; • Ensure the student is equipped with all information and equipment necessary to complete the task; • Check that the student is working on tasks in order of priority; • Ensure the student listens to instructions; • Ascertain whether the student has been allocated extra tasks by other members of staff; • Assess timeframes in accordance with the student's capabilities.
Student appears unwilling to complete the task required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine whether there is a reason the student is unable to complete the work; • Take care not to confuse inhibition with lack of motivation; • Ask the student if they are experiencing any other difficulties in relation to and extraneous from the placement.
Student is late or absent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the student that his/her lateness is unprofessional and that s/he needs to conform to your expectations in future; • If the student is absent without notification, contact the academic supervisor immediately.

Workplace checklists

PRE-PLACEMENT CHECKLIST



TASK		COMPLETED
1.	Discuss the work placement with management and staff and inform them of the student's name, job title and start date. Those staff who will be working closely with the student should be made aware of what he/she can expect from the student and what the student will hope to gain from the placement.	
2.	Identify a supervisor to support the student during the placement and explain his/her role and responsibilities.	
3.	Send the student a letter of offer detailing the start date, the supervisor to whom he/she will report, the organisation's dress code, public transport access and/or parking arrangements.	
4.	Ensure that any other paperwork, such as a confidentiality agreement, has been sent to the student for completion, or is ready for signature on his/her first day.	
5.	Collate information about your business, services, products or industry. This can be sent to the student prior to the placement's commencement or given to him/her on their first day.	
6.	Prepare an induction program and materials for the student. This may follow your organisation's usual induction procedure.	
7.	Arrange for an Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) briefing on the student's first day, including any training or tour that may be necessary.	
8.	Organise a workspace and any necessary equipment, such as a computer, installation of software etc.	
9.	Identify initial tasks and place them in a job list for the student to follow.	

INDUCTION CHECKLIST



TASK		COMPLETED
1.	Talk to the student about your organisation, its history, structure, culture and values. Encourage the student to ask questions.	
2.	Explain your expectations in relation to the start and finish times, lunch breaks, dress code, professional conduct and confidentiality.	
3.	Brief the student of your organisation's Occupational Safety and Health policies and procedures and identify any particular OSH issues for the student's role. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergency procedures - How to raise health and safety issues - First aid arrangements and accident reporting - Fire procedures - Safe handling procedures - Protective clothing arrangements - Instruction on equipment use - Workplace tour, including lunch room and toilets. 	
4.	Introduce the student to key staff members, explain their roles and what interaction, if any, the student is likely to have with them while working on the project.	
5.	Explain internal and external communication facilities (telephone, e-mail, post etc)	
6.	Identify any prohibited areas or activities.	

References:

Martin, A., Hughes, H.; *How to Make the Most of Work Integrated Learning for Workplace Supervisors: Ako Aotearo* (2011). University of South Australia, Careers Services; *Work Placement Scheme; Student Information Kit* (2010).

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