



### Queensland University of Technology

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<b>Vignette title and details</b>	<p>Work Integrated Learning (WIL) where students undertake a curriculum based work placement as a formal unit or units in their course</p> <p>Minimum 14 days over a semester to 12 months depending on discipline course requirements and student choice</p> <p>Available for all undergraduate Faculty courses</p>
<b>Discipline</b>	Multiple disciplines in the areas of Design, Urban Development, and Engineering
<b>Employment sector</b>	Industry
<b>Student numbers</b>	Anticipated 1,200 when the program is fully in place
<b>Optional/compulsory</b>	Optional in some areas, compulsory in others, for example, engineering where course accreditation requires a specific period of work experience
<b>Credit bearing</b>	
<b>Assessment</b>	Formal reports/seminars, work log, reflective diary
<b>Payment</b>	The program is a part of the student's academic curriculum with WIL units paid for by students as for other course units. When students undertake a WIL placement, they may or may not be paid by the employer. This is negotiated by the student and the employer
<b>Number of staff involved</b>	The program is directed by a Faculty appointed WIL Director (Academic) who is supported by a WIL Officer (Professional Staff) and WIL Coordinators (Academic) in each of the Schools
<b>Weblink</b>	A dedicated WIL web site is currently under construction as a link from the Faculty web site
<b>Key Words</b>	WIL; built environment; engineering; multi-discipline; curriculum; industry placement

## Overview

The Faculty of Built Environment & Engineering has a long history of students undertaking work experience during their course. In the past, this has been managed on a discipline by discipline basis with the work experience not fully integrated into the students' formal course of study. In 2007, the faculty introduced a new curriculum-driven fully integrated WIL program comprising up to eight WIL units or 25% of a student's course.

The decision to do this reflects the faculty's recognition of the work environment as a legitimate and unique learning environment – and of learning in this environment as having the potential to complement learning in an

academic environment – thereby significantly informing the professional development of the student and their work readiness. In doing this, the faculty is also recognising that most students today have to work while studying. Encouraging them to find paid work in their field as part of their course helps minimise additional demands on their time.

Work integrated learning, as it has been implemented in the faculty, also acknowledges the need for academia and industry to engage more fully and of the reciprocal benefits in doing this. As described further on, the benefits of WIL extend beyond those already mentioned to other areas such as research and application.

## Structure of program

Being a multi-disciplinary faculty, one of the biggest challenges was developing a centralised curriculum-consistent WIL program that acknowledged and respected discipline-specific requirements and idiosyncrasies. The challenge was addressed by developing a curriculum that focuses on the work environment as a context for and facilitator of learning in ways that complement and extend learning at university.

Another challenge was providing flexibility and choice for students while ensuring quality and equity. Where possible, students are given a choice of how many WIL units they can complete. Some students undertake one unit as a core unit in their course; others elect to complete either four or eight WIL units as minors. Students can also elect to undertake their work placement in several blocks over holiday periods or, alternatively, on a regular basis, for example, one day per week throughout the semester. With approval, international students can seek work placements in their home country during vacation periods.

For equity, logistical and educational reasons, the faculty does not undertake to find work placements for students. Applying for work and negotiating the conditions of the work placement are considered important in the professional development of the student. Having said this, the faculty does support students in helping to prepare for work through the provision of information sessions and workshops; and in finding work by advertising vacancies on a centralised university web site. In addition, it is working closely with industry in encouraging them to take on WIL students and to participate more actively and collaboratively in the education of the students for their profession.

The benefits for students and employers are well documented. However, some of the most enduring outcomes for students – which are often not highlighted – are the ways in which work experience builds confidence, facilitates a holistic understanding of learning, and contributes to the development of the student's identity as a professional and socially responsible human being. For employers, WIL students can open up a wide range of opportunities for different types of partnerships particularly in the area of research and development.

## Special features

The Faculty's WIL program has several features some of which have already been highlighted. Of note, is its ability to acknowledge its multidisciplinary nature while delivery a uniform, curriculum consistent, equitable experience for all students. Another strength is its theoretical underpinning based on the scholarship of integration and its implementation using action research methodology. An additional feature is its willingness to regard industry as educational partners and of actively working with them in the continuing evaluation and development of the program.

## Future work

As indicated, the faculty commenced the introduction of WIL in 2007. One of the main problems has been the simultaneous delivery of units, consolidation and building of relationships with industry and the professions, and establishment of communication, management and quality assurance systems. A priority in the next few months is to have this infrastructure fully established and operative. When this is complete we can then focus on working more with industry in establishing different types of learning partnerships including academies in practice. This process will be informed by leading a university wide WIL project as well as being involved in other national and international WIL related forums. In addition, we propose to develop instruments for better evaluating student learning outcomes and their contribution to the workplace. WIL scholarship will also involve studies related to better differentiating between and capitalising on learning in the academy and learning in the work place. It is envisaged that this work will have implications for how we understand and foster authentic learning in other units of the student's course; and possibly for how professional courses are structured and administered given the changing nature of society and practice.