

# The construction and testing of a framework to assure the institutional quality of work-integrated learning

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There is a growing interest in understanding and evidencing quality WIL practice across higher education institutions. Despite this increasing focus there is limited evidence of shared institutional wide approaches to defining attributes of quality, establishing benchmarks of WIL in practice (i.e. the enacted WIL curriculum), and implementing a shared evidence-based approach to assuring quality in WIL. This paper presents the underpinning rationale for a quality assurance framework for WIL practice developed through a research project which engaged participants from across the Australian higher education context. The project had three phases: review, exploration and benchmarking; to develop a comprehensive framework representing the dynamic and complex practice space of WIL within higher education institutions. This paper highlights key outcomes from each phase and how these have informed the content and usability of the proposed quality assurance framework, thus providing a robust, evidence-based and comprehensive instrument for the quality assurance of WIL across an institution.

Keywords: quality assurance, benchmarking, quality framework

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The quality of work-integrated learning (WIL) is becoming more important within higher education as the space of WIL practices matures (Smith, 2012). Governments and regulators have become more interested in ensuring quality WIL practices as part of a broader agenda for quality assurance of teaching and learning in higher education and to ensure the employability of graduates (Pattison, 2017; Winchester-Seeto, 2019). Whilst there exists significant scholarship and research around quality assurance and evaluation across higher education including considerations of curriculum quality and institutional policies and practices (see for example, Gibbs, 2010; Henard & Roseveare, 2012; Pattison, 2017), extending this work to considerations of WIL is still emerging. There is a need for a shared framework for understanding what constitutes quality WIL practices within a dynamic higher education sector.

There are some notable works which have attempted to describe quality in teaching and learning in WIL (McRae & Johnston, 2016; Orrell, 2011; Sachs et al., 2016; Stirling et al., 2016), however, the consideration and inclusion of elements outside teaching and learning has been quite limited. Higgs (2012) makes an attempt to articulate a set of standards for practice-based education, in which staff support and systems, student support systems, and risk management are identified dimensions. However, whilst offering a comprehensive overview of WIL practice this articulation of standards fails

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to fully explore what practice would actually look like. Therefore, existing frameworks and approaches either are limited in their scope, or fail to extend statements to realization of practice.

Evident in this emerging work though, is validation of the complexity of WIL experiences and the wide variety of models which are employed to support authentic learning opportunities for students. This variety presents challenges for developing a consistent understanding of quality. Further, this complexity is increased where the lens of quality is shifted from a view of learning within the immediate student experience or curriculum, to considerations of program and institutional levels of practice and support. The following paper presents the outcomes of a research project which aimed to undertake a review of existing instruments and approaches to quality assurance of WIL across Australian universities, and to develop and benchmark a shared quality assurance framework to support the institution-wide quality assurance and benchmarking of WIL practice.

## UNDERSTANDING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What quality means and how it is measured within higher education is highly dependent upon the context of the systems, values and interpretations of the leaders, and interests of the various stakeholder groups (Steinhardt et al., 2017). There is no singular definition of what is considered to be 'quality' within higher education. For example, Bertolin (2016) asserts that concepts of quality in higher education derive from particular worldviews of the purpose and function of higher education. He suggests a dichotomy of worldviews of higher education: (1) the ideological right with commercial and economic views of education, and (2) the ideological left with a social view of education serving a public good, both of which present different understandings of what is valued. Alderman (2016) makes the argument that understandings of quality measures in higher education are often derivatives and extensions of government policy frameworks which aim to improve educational outcomes or evaluate investment in the sector. Similarly, Pattison (2017) makes the assertion that renewed focus on quality in higher education is driven by the costs of provision and increased accountability for the expenditure of public monies.

Government policy has, particularly more recently, highlighted a centrality of quality measures and quality assurance in higher education institutions. The emergence of the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), replacing the previous Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), alongside the introduction of the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (2015), highlights the ongoing focus of the Australian government in assuring the quality of universities and teaching and learning practices within (Winchester-Seeto, 2019). The experience of Europe, including the United Kingdom, for example, closely aligns with the practice of the Australian sector. In these systems the fear of an institution being sanctioned has fostered increased the surveillance and policing of academic practice in order to protect the university (Brady & Bates, 2016). That is, the regulation of government agencies has driven a desire within universities to be more vigilant with assuring the quality of their systems and curriculum, where understandings of quality have largely been shaped by government priorities and processes. To a large extent WIL has been subsumed within broader understandings of teaching and learning. However, there is some emerging realization, for example the recent Australian Government initiatives around 'job ready graduates' (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020), of the need to prioritize a focus on WIL activity as being distinctly different to other aspects of teaching and learning.

A quality assurance framework, within the context of the higher education sector, needs to account for key stakeholders across the whole sector: government, higher education providers, the academy,

students and the wider public (Alderman, 2016). Ideally, each stakeholder should be aiming towards a common goal of the betterment of higher education, but their understandings of what this 'betterment' may be can vary significantly (Alderman, 2016). Pattison (2017) offers a construct of education quality where he suggests that at the heart of the notion of educational quality, are measures of the impact that an institution can have relative to its educative purpose. Pattison limits his representation of quality within higher education to an almost linear relationship between the inputs of the institution (what the university does) and the outputs of learning (what students can do). He attempts to simplify the quality equation by placing emphasis on the controllable actions of the institution as the primary focus of improvement. Others (Schindler et al., 2015) assert a position that quality within higher education must be understood as a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept. The subsequent argument can be made that teaching and learning within higher education, and, in particular, in and through WIL, is highly dependent on wider social, economic and political contexts, rather than Pattison's (2017) direct linear relationship. This is not to absolve the university of responsibility for outcomes, but to highlight that there needs to be an appreciation of a complex space in which these outcomes can occur. The research in this present study has tended towards this more multi-dimensional perspective of quality.

#### APPLYING CONSTRUCTS OF QUALITY TO WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Much has been written about what does, and does not, constitute a WIL experience (Cooper et al., 2010; Ferns et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2008). Often these debates are constrained as to whether WIL experiences should be considered to be just placements or internships, or whether the concept is broader. The spaces of WIL and what constitutes a WIL experience are highly contested. This contestation is shaped by political and strategic drivers, and not always an intellectual debate around the definition. Often as universities aim to claim widespread engagement with WIL, their adopted definition tends to be much broader in its conception (e.g., accounting for non-placement WIL approaches, such as simulations, as a mechanism to wider counts of experiences). This, therefore, creates challenges in developing consistent and shared understandings of elements of quality within WIL practices. It is argued here that WIL is too complex an activity to be reduced to simple statements of what is, and is not considered to be WIL. Instead the framework offered should in itself provide for a defining element of what can be considered WIL practice. It is important to have a shared understanding of a concept of WIL which provides the parameters of practice to be considered. As argued by McRae and Johnston (2016):

A better understanding of WIL parameters and attributes is needed to inform discussions between and among key stakeholders including students, institutions, employers, and governments. Without such, the potential for developing and promoting appropriate offerings, conducting meaningful research, collecting data, developing quality standards, and assessing impact is limited (p. 338).

They go further to remark that "the lack of a shared framework also limits the extent to which best practices and effective tools can be shared" (p. 338). This paper attempts to respond to this gap in presenting a framework for quality WIL which has been developed through a research approach which has supported collective and collaborative sharing, and discussion of what constitutes quality WIL experiences.

Constructs of quality of work-integrated learning presents particular considerations with regards the role of the work place and work practice. Reflecting on this distinction, Ferns et al. (2014) claim that

WIL is used to identify a myriad of experiences that engage students in the workplace. Whilst accepting the necessity to account for context, discipline and intent, they identify that WIL experiences can broadly be understood as pedagogical approaches which are:

- Authentically engaged with practices and experiences of the workplace
- Located within an intentional discipline-centered curriculum, and
- Focused towards graduate learning outcomes and career pathways.

In developing the proposed framework within this paper, it was agreed to adopt definitional parameters of WIL in which it is understood as an educational process grounded in pedagogical theory and practice, often drawing from broader conceptions of experiential learning (Ferns et al., 2014). To consider this in the negative, and as Cooper et al. (2010) put it;

work experiences that are not integrated with the academic curriculum, do not promote learning through a process of reflection and analysis, do not provide student support, and in which the learning is not situated, constructed and experiential, are not work-integrated learning. (p. 43)

Therefore, the shared understanding, and parameters adopted in the development of this proposed framework are based on an understanding of WIL in which WIL is understood as student *experiences of work within curriculum*, undertaken in *partnership*, through *engagement* with authentic and genuine activities with and for industry, business or community partners, and which are *assessed*.

#### *Presage, Process and Product*

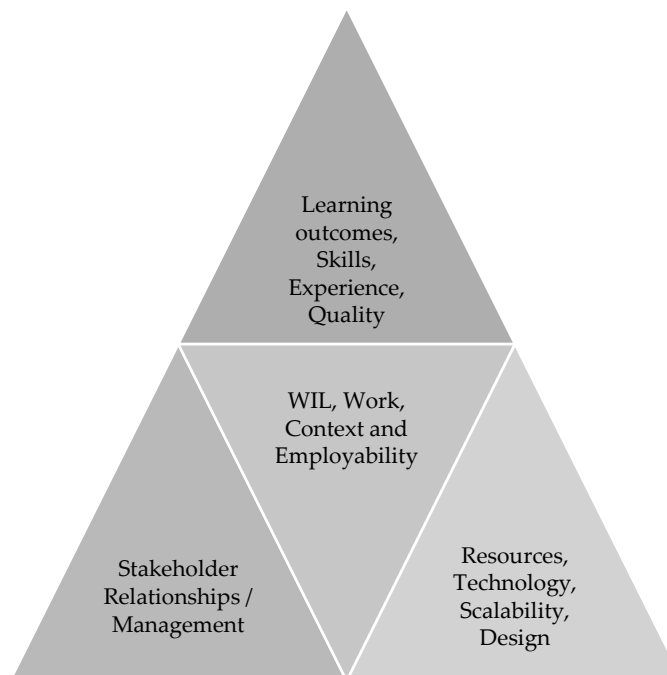
WIL experiences, unlike classroom teaching and learning within higher education, exist in complex spaces of relationships across multiple stakeholders. As highlighted by TEQSA in their recently published *WIL Guidance Note*, the same standards and expectations of teaching within other areas of higher education shall apply to WIL; however, higher education providers have the additional challenge of also assuring this quality amongst business and industry partners supervising students in the workplace (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), 2017). This extends the role of the higher education provider to assurance of activity and learning which occurs away from the physical campus and within workplaces remote to the university. TEQSA asserts that support for students also includes appropriate guidance and support in acquiring and accessing the required WIL experiences. Therefore, within the Australian context, which is not dissimilar to other contexts, understandings of quality in WIL needs to extend from focused understandings of pedagogical quality, towards broader concepts of quality in processes and supports (e.g., stakeholder engagement, administration) beyond learning which enable WIL to occur.

An argument can be made that understandings of quality in WIL should account for both process and product. In his exploration of quality in higher education, Gibbs (2010) adapted the '3P model' of Biggs (1993) of presage, process and product, to suggest that conceptions of quality should consider the context before students learn (presage), what goes on while they learn (process) and the outcomes of that learning (product). Biggs' (1993) 3P-model suggests that presage factors exist before the learning experience and influence the creation, conduct and outcomes of learning experiences. Process factors describe a particular learning and teaching mix, leading to the product, or outcomes of learning. Similarly, Billett (2011) suggests that WIL practices can be conceptualized as occurring before, during and after the WIL experience in which there exists the intended, enacted and experienced curriculum. Learning, and curriculum, particularly with regards to WIL, cannot be seen as occurring at a singular point in time. Instead there is a temporal dimension to learning and curriculum and a necessity to

consider the processes (e.g., curriculum design, risk management) as well as the products of WIL (e.g., learning outcomes, employability) (Rowe et al., 2018; Smith, 2012). A higher education provider needs to assure the quality of the learning which occurs in, and through, the WIL experience, as well as ensuring that the experience is supported by high quality processes and student support (Winchester-Seeto, 2019). That is, consideration must be given to preparation for WIL (the prior learning and experiences), the product of WIL (what the student gets out of it) and the processes which support these outcomes (what the institution does).

The elements of a WIL experience (before, during and after) are not separate ideas but are interconnected and relational. Previous work in attempting to map the dimensions of quality in WIL have generated lists of domains, standards, factors, or elements. Most recently Winchester-Seeto (2019) reviewed a suite of other quality frameworks and concluded that there were nine dimensions of quality which should be considered in any quality framework for WIL. Winchester-Seeto identified these as: authenticity of experience, being embedded in the curriculum, student preparation, supporting learning activities, supervision (including feedback), reflection, debriefing, assessment and an inclusive approach to WIL. Similarly, Sachs et al. (2016) highlight the complex interconnected elements of WIL experiences in proposing a model which frames WIL, as connections across four spaces of outcomes, relationships, resources and context, as presented in Figure 1. In doing so, Sachs, et al. (2016), manage to highlight the product elements of WIL, namely the learning outcomes, student experience and curriculum; alongside the processes necessary to support these outcomes, such as stakeholder engagement and institutional resourcing. It is argued in this paper that quality assurance of WIL needs to account for these spaces and elements, and connections across the temporal phases of WIL experiences.

FIGURE 1: The interconnected elements of work-integrated learning.



Note. From *Good practice report: Work integrated learning (WIL)* (p. 27) by J. Sachs, A. Rowe and M. Wilson, 2016, Department of Education and Training, Australian Government. CC-AS 4.0

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project to develop a quality assurance framework was undertaken across three phases of investigation: (1) review of current understandings and frameworks, (2) exploration of a framework for WIL, and (3) benchmarking of draft framework. The research was approved by the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref. No. 1800000972), and received reciprocal approval by the RMIT University and University of Sydney research committees.

### *Phase 1 – Review*

The first phase of the project employed two methods: (a) a document analysis and review of literature around quality in higher education and WIL, and (b) interviews with key WIL practitioners across multiple Australian universities and at different levels of the university (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Owen, 2014). The aim of this phase of the project was to capture an understanding of the landscape of quality in WIL and current approaches to managing and understanding quality in higher education settings. As argued by Schindler et al. (2015), defining quality is an important prerequisite for defining quality assurance. Therefore, the aim of the first phase was to map the landscape of quality in WIL and clarify parameters of quality. The interviews were semi-structured with the following questions used to guide participants:

1. How does your university define ‘work-integrated learning’?
2. How does your university currently assure the quality of curriculum design, content and student outcomes?
3. How does your university currently support, or manage, curriculum change and transformation?
4. If you were to design an institutional framework of quality for WIL experiences, what elements should be considered?
5. How does your university currently assure the quality of a WIL experience?
6. What barriers do you think exist in your university to the adoption of an institutional wide framework for the quality assurance of WIL?

A total of 17 interviews across 15 higher education institutions were conducted, with participants ranging across all levels of the university including professional and academic staff directly managing and supporting WIL experiences, and senior institutional leadership including Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors. It was not intended for the interviews to be a full representation of the population, but to provide insight and guidance for the future phases of the research, which would aim for a more comprehensive representation of the sector.

The interview responses were analyzed thematically with a focus on the emergent constructs of what constitutes quality WIL. This analysis was undertaken through multiple researchers individually reviewing and coding verbatim transcripts of interviews, and then a collective review and synthesis of these codes and emergent themes as a whole research group. The emergent themes were documented and then used to re-analyze the interviews in a spiralic approach to coding and theme generation. These themes informed the formation of an early draft of a framework of quality in WIL.

### *Phase 2 – Exploration*

The second phase of the project aimed to interrogate and validate the outcomes from the first phase utilizing workshops as a research methodology (Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017). The emergent themes of

quality in WIL were translated into a draft framework which was presented to, and refined by, a series of workshops with WIL practitioners and through feedback with the project reference group (a small group of critical colleagues and leaders of WIL).

Participants worked in small groups of about 4 to 5 and were guided through a series of small group discussions and feedback around three key foci. The protocol of the workshop guided participants in responding to the following prompts:

1. Validating the draft framework.
  - a. What are the strengths of the framework as presented?
  - b. What are the gaps, or additions, with the framework that need consideration?
2. Mapping quality indicators.
  - a. Considering each component / standard, what would successful practice/activity look like for this component?
  - b. How would you measure / evidence success in this practice?
3. Barriers, enablers and benchmarking.
  - a. Where across the university would the various points of evidence be located? How accessible are these points of evidence?
  - b. What time would be required to map against the framework, and how much is this part of common practice?
  - c. How mature are the evidence and data processes at your university to support benchmarking against such a framework?

The first two workshops were hosted in conjunction with local chapters of the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and had participants from a wide range of universities. The final workshop was hosted by the University of Sydney with participants all from the one university but from diverse disciplines and roles within the university. Each workshop was attended by approximately 30 – 40 participants.

### *Phase 3 – Benchmarking*

The final phase of the project engaged members of the project team in undertaking benchmarking of WIL practice, within their area of interest, utilizing the framework. Two benchmarking partnerships were formed with some of the project team undertaking institution-wide benchmarking, and another group focused on benchmarking within specific discipline areas. Each fortnight the teams would meet to discuss the challenges and issues with benchmarking with these meetings recorded for later analysis. Whilst the benchmarking activity proved valuable in guiding quality improvements by the project team around the practice of WIL in their institutions, the focus for the project was on the usability and thoroughness of the framework for describing quality WIL within higher education institutions.

Concurrent to the benchmarking activity illustrations of practice, which exemplified the standards within the framework, were collated from the external reference group and through open calls, including the use of Twitter. This process, whilst enabling the collection of examples of good practice, further validated the framework in its ability to be understood and used in a variety of settings and context. A short survey was also distributed to the project reference group to gather feedback on usability, thoroughness, effectiveness, and clarity of the draft framework. Subsequent to the conclusion of this phase a series of webinars and workshops have been held which have further validated the framework as a fair representation of quality WIL practice.

## MAPPING THE DOMAINS OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PRACTICE

Emerging from the first phase of the project were conceptualizations and understandings of WIL which, alongside the reviewed literature provided the foundation for the proposed framework. At the center of the underlying structure of the framework are four domains of WIL practice, which reflect the elements proposed by Sachs, et al. (2016), as well as myriad of other literature, and input from research participants, around what constitutes a valuable WIL experience. What became most evident from the research of this paper was that quality WIL was best understood within a structure of practice domains, within which standards of quality could be articulated. The proposed framework is shaped around four practice domains: (1) student experience, (2) curriculum design, (3) institutional requirements and (4) stakeholder engagement. This section explores these domains of WIL practice reflecting on the contributions of the interview participants in shaping this understanding.

### *Domains of Work-Integrated Learning Practice*

Student experience considers the connection between the learning of the workplace and the broader experienced curriculum, alongside the personal and professional development afforded to the student in and through the WIL experience. That is, this domain is focused on the scaffolded, connected and supported pedagogical experience. It is suggested in this framework that quality in the student experience is achieved through a focus on the prevailing qualities and connectedness of learning. In describing what constitutes a quality WIL student experience one interviewee commented that: "It's about connecting their [students'] theory and practice of learning, where reflection is in the center of that practice. It's about learning about and through that authentic experience about themselves and then building identity of themselves" (Senior university leader in WIL).

Curriculum design encapsulates the wider and underlying design of the associated curriculum which supports a WIL experience. Drawing on the work of Billett (2011), this domain considers the intended, enacted and experienced WIL curriculum. The intended curriculum maps alignment between the intended learning outcomes, assessment and learning experiences, whilst the enactment of curriculum is modified through the nature of the workplace and capacities of teachers (both within and beyond the university). The experienced curriculum is that which students live and take away. It is often mediated through the lived experience of the learning space, as well as by student's prior experiences and understandings. It is therefore valuable for curriculum design to account for the connection of the immediate WIL experience with other parts of the student learning journey. That is, there should be a clear preference towards whole-of-course design approaches, of which WIL experiences are integral components. As described by one interviewee:

So, it's about the journey of the students through that WIL experience, but not just the WIL experience but how that WIL experience fits within the whole-of-course experience. So, how prepared they are before, and how we're linking that experience to their future experiences. (Senior university leader in WIL)

Alignment between the intended learning and measures of outcomes are important in realizing the quality of the curriculum design. Consideration must be given to the role and purpose of assessment of WIL (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; McNamara, 2013). As one interviewee commented:

... it's got to be focused on a quality curriculum design with aligned assessments and learning outcomes. You can only call it work-integrated learning when it's assessed as well, so there's evidence of the capabilities that arise through the experience. (Curriculum designer)



The third domain of institutional requirements elevates the framework away from a sole focus on the student experience and towards reflections on the quality of institutional policies, practices and professional support (Brown, 2010). Emergent across the Australian higher education sector is a trend towards institution wide strategies for the introduction and expansion of WIL opportunities, with many universities adopting a target as part of a push for improved graduate employability for all students to have a WIL experience prior to graduation (Clarke, 2018). Consequently, universities have introduced central leadership and academic development around this goal. In different universities this has manifested in different ways, from a single strategic leader working in and through dispersed faculty leadership to achieve the strategic objectives, to a well-resourced and centralized management of WIL-based learning experiences. In all approaches there is a consistent and dominant link between institutional structures and policies, and the pedagogic practices evidenced in curriculum. As one interviewee noted: "... some of those elements [of quality] really come to the whole experience of WIL which includes the management of WIL because they can't isolate curriculum from the organization of WIL..." (Senior university leader in teaching and learning).

The practice of WIL needs to align with the broader institutional strategy and expectations. As another interviewee commented: "... it [WIL practice] needs to connect in with a broader set of strategy and policy. Strategy around where we want to go as an institution" (Senior university leader in teaching and learning). Achievement of quality WIL activity is highly dependent on effective stakeholder engagement. The fourth domain adopts a broad understanding of stakeholders to be inclusive of the wider higher education sector, governments and regulators, alongside industry and community partners. As WIL is often conceptualized as a tripartite arrangement between the university, students and industry (including professional bodies and associations), it is, therefore, not unexpected that there emerged a dominant theme of partnership and engagement in considerations of quality in WIL. One interviewee commented, when talking of what quality WIL would look like that: "... our partnerships and building partnerships and quality partnerships which lead to quality learning outcomes for our students need to be included in there ..." (Senior university leader in WIL).

A critical component of stakeholder engagement was considered to be the concept of reciprocity through reward, recognition, feedback and ongoing quality improvement. The domain of stakeholder engagement highlights the importance of ongoing and reflective engagement with all stakeholders.

#### UNPACKING THE STANDARDS OF QUALITY

The introduction of standards within each practice domain is a key element of this framework which responds to Winchester-Seeto (2019) who claimed that few of her identified dimensions of quality have indicators or standards already developed. The standards in the framework were informed by McRae et al. (n.d.) who conclude that across all the experiences of WIL there are four common characteristics: (1) meaningful experience in a workplace setting, (2) integration of academic and workplace learning, (3) student outcomes that lead to employability, and (4) reflection. McRae et. al. reshape these common characteristics to be pedagogy, experience, assessment and reflection, or P.E.A.R. The WIL experience occurs in different settings to that of the normal or traditional classroom. The P.E.A.R. model accounted for the spatial elements of WIL activity and the complex intersections of the workplace setting and higher education context. Alongside this framing, WIL was also argued, as previously explored, to be a temporal experience as well as spatial. Layered across these common characteristics and elements is a common staging of WIL experiences, framed by Billett (2011) as pedagogic practices before, during and after the WIL experience. Those aspects which prepare a student for WIL, connect with previous learning and provide access to the WIL experience, are actions undertaken before the actual experience

in the workplace. These are substantially different to the reflective practices, reconnection of learning, and translation of experience to transferrable skills and knowledge that occur post the WIL experience. Therefore, across the framework we have introduced a temporal consideration of before, during and after to draw out these distinctions.

The standards were developed through the use of a three-dimensional model of WIL practice which accounted for the emergent domains of practice (student experience, curriculum design, institutional requirements, stakeholder engagement), alongside the characteristics of WIL (pedagogy, experience, assessment and reflection) and considered within the temporality of before, during and after a WIL experience.

Responses from workshop participants, in this phase of the project, was largely grounded in the persistent debate about what constitutes a WIL experience. As one respondent commented:

I believe that a clear definition of WIL is required at the beginning so that the user understands the context of WIL as it relates to this framework i.e. is WIL only at an industry partners workplace? (WIL curriculum leader)

Whilst another provided feedback that:

The WIL definition is focused on work placements, however a curriculum integrated model offers a range of work-related learning experiences. [Our university] has developed a set of design principles informed by WIL Pedagogy, therefore some standards would need refining or re-categorizing for us. (WIL academic lead)

These comments highlight the complexity of the WIL practice space and how actors in this context often situate themselves within prescribed understandings of what is (or is not) WIL. It had been a deliberate decision of the project team to employ language which was inclusive of diverse WIL practice (e.g., workplace projects, on-campus industry projects, learning partnerships), but, almost by habit, participants were restricted in their viewpoint to seeing the framework as solely related to placement experiences. The comment that identifies 'WIL Pedagogy' was reflecting on a context in which WIL is used as a term to embrace all activity that may be somewhat work-related, or what would be considered in other contexts as authentic learning. The language of the framework has attempted to be inclusive of the full spectrum of WIL practice and pedagogy, but, as previously discussed, is situated within an understanding of WIL which locates the experience of work as having central importance. Even this idea of work was challenged with one respondent commenting that:

The language of WIL I think needs to be expanded beyond work. It may be the popular language now but it is a bit narrow as to the intent of getting students engaged in the community. Some disciplines don't call their work, work ... and we need to include promoting wellbeing and enhancing humanity. (Academic staff member)

What does emerge in these comments above, and was also reinforced by a number of other respondents, was that WIL is multi-dimensional and complex, and socially and cultural dependent. It is not just about the work or the workplace but how this experience is integrated with broader learning. Therefore, as the standards were refined through the workshops, and input by various stakeholders, it remained a key focus to ensure the predominance of learning, pedagogy and curriculum throughout. The standards presented in the proposed framework in this paper are the final product of this process of refinement, with a summary of standards presented as Appendix A.

*Illustrations of Practice*

To provide context and understanding to each of the identified standards examples of possible practice and the inclusion of illustrations of practice (i.e. short vignettes) have been developed. This model reflects that which was adopted for the Australian National Teaching Standards and provides an approach which ensures that the mapped domains and standards have universal applicability and transferability. These illustrations and examples were collected throughout the workshops and also through open surveys to WIL practitioners. The project established usability as a key measure of success for the framework, and the presentation of illustrations of practice was identified by the external reference group as a key contributor to the usability of the framework. The illustrations of practice have been drawn from a range of existing vignettes and new contributions from WIL practitioners across Australia to provide a comprehensive exploration of high-quality practice in WIL. The inclusion of illustrations provides for this framework a clarity of meaning around the often complex and multi-dimensional practice space of WIL.

The complete framework is available via <https://research.qut.edu.au/wilquality>.

## APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PRACTICE

The third phase of the project undertook to use the framework to review and benchmark WIL practice in multiple settings. Two case studies were established with the first case study using a benchmarking between shared disciplines in the Faculty of Health at Queensland University of Technology and the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Sydney. The second case study focused on benchmarking institutional-wide practices between Queensland University of Technology, RMIT University and the University of Sydney. It was not the intent of this research to review WIL practices within these universities, but to understand how the framework is translated and applied in different contexts. Importantly, the aim was to better understand the usability of the framework for self-evaluation and benchmarking comparisons, because, as argued by Winchester-Seeto (2019), given that WIL is such an expensive and resource-intensive endeavor, it would be a pity if efforts to assure and evaluate quality were not able to be used to drive continued enhancement of WIL.

This benchmarking exercise produced evidence that the framework did provide a comprehensive overview of the quality standards for WIL. Each of the domains and standards interact with others. This reflects the multi-dimensional and complex nature of WIL practice, as well as understandings of quality. However, whilst the original intent of the design of the framework was for it to be able to be modularized allowing focus on one domain, or area of interest, the benchmarking exercise identified that the framework must be considered more holistically. The benchmarking activity further highlighted that, due to the complexity of WIL, to fully use the framework, it was necessary to engage with a wide range of staff. Within the institutional case study, it was evident that broad engagement was necessary with examples of WIL practice and understanding of what was occurring within WIL being dispersed across the university. As one reflection noted:

My attempts [at benchmarking] were a bit of dismal failure. I was looking at the institutional level of evidence ... and I am not aware of any overall institutional level policy or practice. It is all in pockets; health science has a WIL; business school has a WIL.

By considering the benchmarking as a failure, this reflection was more focused on considering the ease at which they were able to gather meaningful evidence, rather than on the use of the framework.

[The framework] is usable, in it was clear and I understood each of the standards, and so on. ... I just wasn't able to complete it as we don't have anything at that institutional level. ... In that sense it is good and is a flag for our university that we need something at that institutional level.

The ability to identify and use evidence as part of the benchmarking process was a consistent challenge because much WIL activity was hidden and not readily documented. Within the faculty/disciplinary case study it was a little more surprising that there was not a singular repository of evidence and knowledge of WIL practice, despite central WIL management units in both contexts. While the reflection from an institutional perspective that each area of the university had its own WIL, and, therefore, the implication that evidence would be easier to identify, in reality, there was still evidence of fragmentation of knowledge and practice of WIL within disciplines and of the necessity to engage with a wider group of practitioners. As was reflected upon within the faculty/discipline case:

One of the big things I am taking away is the way [the framework] helps you to think about your WIL practice. The huge document, the huge framework means that you think about it [your WIL practice] in a different way rather than in the typical fragmented view of within your unit or within your degree. ... The people knowledge, and the people connection makes a big difference. The tool and the framework need that kind of element as well.

The benefit of the framework in supporting access to the people knowledge was that it provided a shared language which enabled communication across the many stakeholders and staff who were engaged in undertaking the benchmarking activity. The framework was valued not only as providing a way in which to identify gaps in current practice and opportunities for future change, but also as a way in which there was a consideration of these gaps as being out of step with the expectations of the wider sector. Therefore, the framework was able to empower users in talking about what good WIL practice should look like, and enable common discussions about what can be changed. However, it was noted that the framework does not exist in isolation, but needs to be part of a wider conversation of quality assurance and improvement across WIL practice.

## FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

The proposed framework provides a comprehensive instrument for the quality assurance of WIL across an institution (considered as either university-wide or faculty/discipline). It has been developed through combining existing understandings of quality and lived experiences of practice. However, these experiences and literature have largely been located within a university-based experience and understanding of WIL. Whilst the language of the framework has aimed to be inclusive of the broader post-secondary education sector, there is an inevitable bias in the framework towards university education contexts. Therefore, there is opportunity to explore the use of the framework within vocational education settings which have a long history of practice-based and experiential learning but are currently also evolving greater engagement with higher education and 'university like' courses.

Importantly, the proposed framework would benefit from further testing, benchmarking and refinement across diverse settings. Whilst the project has engaged with a large group of WIL practitioners across Australia, there remains opportunity for the capturing of benchmarking and evidence across a wider group, and further testing of the framework within global spaces. In developing the framework, understandings of what constitutes quality WIL practice have largely drawn upon the lived experience within Australian higher education. Whilst it is a reasonable assumption that much of these experiences have commonality with those in other countries and settings, it is equally reasonable to claim that different policy and educational contexts can value

different aspects of practice. Therefore, benchmarking of this framework within a global setting would be a valuable undertaking.

In conclusion, the proposed framework provides a comprehensive articulation of quality WIL practice that should provide a useful tool for the ongoing benchmarking, evaluation and improvements of WIL practice. Such a framework should support the ongoing recognition of WIL as a unique, complex and valued component of learning and teaching in higher education. However, assurance of the quality of WIL should occur complementary to wider efforts to assure the quality of teaching and learning across higher education.

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APPENDIX A: Overview of a framework for quality assurance of work-integrated learning.

DOMAINS	Student Experience	Curriculum Design	Institutional Requirements	Stakeholder Engagement
Guiding principle	<i>A quality WIL experience should provide students with a scaffolded, connected and supported pedagogical experience.</i>	<i>A quality WIL curriculum should contain embedded, accessible and transformative learning and assessment within an intended and enacted curriculum.</i>	<i>Quality WIL activity across institutions should be evidenced by the proper management of staff, risk management and reporting around WIL experiences supporting continual improvement.</i>	<i>Quality WIL experiences are supported by engagement, connection and responsiveness to the dynamic expectations of diverse stakeholders (industry, community, government, higher education sector, professional bodies, students).</i>
<b>Before</b>	<p><b>Standard 1.1</b> Ensure student readiness and preparation for learning in the workplace context</p> <p><b>Standard 1.2</b> Student WIL experiences are connected to prior and future learning and work</p> <p><b>Standard 1.3</b> Student WIL experiences align with their learning goals and capabilities</p>	<p><b>Standard 2.1</b> WIL experiences are embedded through a whole-of-qualification curriculum design underpinned by current research and scholarship</p> <p><b>Standard 2.2</b> Students and industry are partners in the design of WIL curriculum</p>	<p><b>Standard 3.1</b> Institutions have shared goals, policies, principles and values about WIL</p> <p><b>Standard 3.2</b> Institutions have identifiable leadership and governance structures for WIL</p> <p><b>Standard 3.3</b> WIL is supported by adequate and effective IT and administrative systems</p>	<p><b>Standard 4.1</b> Diverse stakeholders are active participants across WIL activities</p> <p><b>Standard 4.2</b> Partner sites are reviewed for health and safety, and suitability for WIL activities</p>
<b>During</b>	<p><b>Standard 1.4</b> Student WIL experiences are safe and supportive</p> <p><b>Standard 1.5</b> Student WIL experiences offer scaffolded learning opportunities</p> <p><b>Standard 1.6</b> Support and guidance is provided for students within the WIL experience</p>	<p><b>Standard 2.3</b> WIL curriculum design reflects professional accreditation requirements and ongoing career and employability development</p> <p><b>Standard 2.4</b> WIL curriculum design provides inclusive, equitable and accessible experiences</p> <p><b>Standard 2.5</b> WIL assessment design is supported by authentic tasks, aligned with learning goals and graduate outcomes</p>	<p><b>Standard 3.4</b> Institutions provide targeted professional development for academic and professional staff, and industry and community partners</p> <p><b>Standard 3.5</b> Enacted legal and risk management frameworks, compliance procedures and processes</p>	<p><b>Standard 4.3</b> Institution has effective policies and procedures in place for ongoing quality assurance of stakeholders including partner agreements, financial arrangements, and supervision quality</p> <p><b>Standard 4.4</b> Institutions undertake site contact and stakeholder communication</p> <p><b>Standard 4.5</b> Effective and sustainable relationship management including appropriate communication, reward and recognition</p>
<b>After</b>	<p><b>Standard 1.7</b> Students receive, use, and provide feedback on WIL experience to ensure progress towards learning goals</p>	<p><b>Standard 2.6</b> Student learning gains are measurable against intended outcomes</p> <p><b>Standard 2.7</b> Benchmarking of WIL assessment and identification of areas for improvement</p>	<p><b>Standard 3.6</b> Provision of funding, resourcing, support, and recognition necessary to achieve WIL strategic goals</p> <p><b>Standard 3.7</b> Evaluation and tracking of short to long term WIL outcomes for continuous quality improvement</p>	<p><b>Standard 4.6</b> Partnership arrangements are regularly reviewed</p>







## About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL, in 2018 the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum. Defining elements of this educational approach requires that students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related task, and must involve three stakeholders; the student, the university, and the workplace". Examples of practice include off-campus, workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (Co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, etc. WIL is related to, but not the same as, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is ongoing financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ), [www.nzace.ac.nz](http://www.nzace.ac.nz) and the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and received periodic sponsorship from the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE).

## Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

*Research publications* should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

*Topical discussion articles* should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

*Best practice and program description papers.* On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.



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