

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE WORKPLACE SUPERVISOR

WIL workplace supervisors play a critical and invaluable role in equipping students with up-to-date work skills and professional attitudes. They help to mould passionate practitioners in their field who are 'career ready' and eager to contribute. Supervisors mentor students to understand the ethos of a workplace and corresponding professional behaviour.

Workplace supervisors are an indispensable link in the three-link chain of workplace supervisor-student-academic supervisor. They give back to their industry, providing enthusiastic and emerging professionals glimpses into the big work picture, where occupational theory and workplace practice come together.

This resource provides general guidelines for WIL supervision.

## WORKPLACE GUIDELINES FOR WIL SUPERVISION BY WORKPLACE SUPERVISORS:

1. The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor, along with the academic supervisor, is responsible for the **pre-agreed work performed** by the student along with the level of practice.

Prior to the placement, you form an agreement with the university partner around the nature of the work the student is to perform. As the workplace expert, you are aware of the standards the student needs to achieve as a novice in your workplace.

2. The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor **negotiates the work duties and learning goals** with the academic supervisor and in some cases, the student.

You should negotiate these duties and goals clearly and realistically with the academic supervisor and in some cases, the student. Together, you will agree upon the tasks to be undertaken and their associated learning goals, or project, if this takes the form of a specific project. The learning goals will constitute a formal or informal learning contract that will be reviewed periodically throughout the placement. The student will be evaluated against these goals at the end of the placement. There may be some adjustment of the goals over time but normally they should not be radically modified during the placement.

3. The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor **provides the student with a workspace, a computer and/or other necessary workplace tools** to perform the specified work.

It is useful to plan for the student's arrival by allocating a workspace for them. Define which day/s and hours the student will work, in accordance with your needs and those dictated by the theoretical part of the student's course. You should also identify a staff member who will look after the student in the workplace.

4. The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor **arranges a workplace induction** for the student, including an Occupational Health and Safety induction.

It is beneficial to meet with the student early in the placement, briefing them about workplace confidentiality and ethics. Where required, the student should sign intellectual property and non-disclosure agreements. The student will have undergone a generic workplace health and safety orientation on campus but any protocols specific to your workplace should be reviewed, with both you and the student signing any relevant documentation. If it is available, the student should also be issued with a copy of the company handbook (mission statement, organisational chart etc) as appropriate and a full list of relevant contacts.

The student should receive a thorough induction to the organisation and its clients, including an orientation and overview of the organisation, its training and the scope of the student's assigned work tasks. Define reporting responsibilities clearly and create a user-friendly role description of the WIL tasks, spelling out all requirements.

It is also advisable to discuss the student's own expectations about the placement and try to discover what personally interests and motivates them, orienting certain tasks in this direction if possible. Help them to discover the scope of different roles in your organisation and career paths. Assist the student to feel part of the team by including them in relevant meetings and team-building activities.

- 5. The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor provides ongoing supervision of the student, preferably through regular timetabled meetings, with written outcomes forming a documentary record of this journey.**

Ideally and for future reference, these meetings should be accompanied each time by an agreed agenda and brief written notes documenting outcomes. These notes should record actions and key decisions with clearly indicated timescales and responsibilities. In some situations these meetings are less regular than others and may occur through ICT channels in lieu of face-to-face.

In these meetings, the student will view you as a dedicated professional in your field and as an accessible role model. It is usual to provide information about the workplace culture/values/codes of conduct. Explain your company's ethics, dress code, behaviour and what it means to cultivate resilience in workplace exchanges. Define professionalism in your organisation and in your industry.

- 6 The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) workplace supervisor provides constructive and ongoing feedback on the student's performance in the workplace.**

In regularly appraising the student's progress to maximise placement benefits, it is suggested that your feedback conforms to benchmarks for constructive feedback. Feedback is generally:

- individual & pertinent;
- directed towards learning goals;
- timely & expected;
- focused on behaviour that can be modified;
- positive & encouraging;
- collaborative;
- focused on change and free from value judgements;
- easy to understand;
- respectful;
- checking the student's perceptions;
- noted in writing, and
- followed up at a later date.

- 7. Ongoing mentoring from the workplace supervisor provides the student with the opportunity to reconcile workplace theory and practice and the chance to reflect on workplace activities.**

It is helpful to discuss critically any workplace instances where there is a gap between everyday practice and how this is described in discipline theory. Encourage the student to connect theory with its workplace application. Provide opportunities for your student to examine the meaning of practice through questioning their reactions to situations encountered. In this way the work component of the placement as well as the carefully designed curriculum being studied at the same time, combine to show the student the linkages between practice and theory.

In questioning your student, you can promote the development of their reflective workplace thinking about how certain work functions could be more effectively approached. Encourage the kind of thinking that lends itself to the writing of the student journal/reflective blog (generally an assessment requirement for WIL). This includes identifying what occurs, evaluating and analysing the various components, forming a conclusion about the experience and deciding what has been learned for future reference.

- 8. The workplace supervisor takes stock of the learning achieved by the student, verifying whether learning goals have been met and helping to evaluate and report on student outcomes.**

At the halfway point of the placement, it is advisable to check off which learning goals have been already met, in consultation with the student. Plan for dealing with the remaining learning goals and adjust the plan for any changes of emphasis. If you estimate that problems will arise in meeting all learning goals by the end of the placement, it is important to make contact with the student's academic supervisor.

At the placement's conclusion, it is customary to hold a final wrap-up meeting with the student. Review and evaluate the learning goals, summing up what has been learned and what has been of most relevance and interest. Complete the form evaluating the student's workplace performance, discussing this evaluation with them. Finally, record your perceptions about the overall WIL experience for your company's future reference.

