

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING



More than ever, the expectations and demands on both the public and private sectors are evident as thousands of youth enter the labour market year on year. Progress is being made surrounding public-private partnerships, as some sectors deploy radical initiatives regarding youth development and employment, the President's Youth Employment Service (YES) is launched and our B-BBEE codes are being amended – but is this enough? What more can be done?

ALIGNING WORK AND PRACTICE

Focus should be placed on work-integrated learning (WIL), which according to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is defined as "an educational approach that aligns occupational learning and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of learners and workplaces". WIL should be appropriate for the learning intervention (qualification) concerned, which implies that a learner should be able to contextually apply their learning within a workplace in a way that demonstrably supports the outcomes of the learning intervention linked to the specific industry.

As industry, we are clear on our expectations regarding the skills a learner should possess when entering the labour market. We need to ask ourselves whether the skills we look for (apart from academic criteria) are sufficiently developed at the foundational schooling level and beyond to ensure a learner is work-ready. Relevant skills such as self-awareness,

team work, communication skills, problem-solving and use of technology are but a few of the skills that build not only learner confidence but the ability to transition into a place of work, resulting ultimately in a greater success rate for both the (potential) employer and learner.

A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

Three stakeholders are required to ensure the effectiveness of WIL: the workplace, the institution/training partner and the learner. At Omni HR Consulting, we agree with this approach and have aligned our WIL model to support learners to be work-ready and employable at the end of their qualification. Our research and experience show that for WIL to be successful:

- It must form part of the learning framework at the onset of engagement and form an integral thread throughout the learning phase to ensure the learner's work-readiness after the qualification.
- It must meet the quality-assurance and compliance requirements for accredited learning to ensure alignment between learner attributes and the skills required within the workplace.
- It must extend beyond the classroom, thereby placing collective ownership on all stakeholders, including government, workplaces and industry bodies, to create work placement opportunities and gainful employment.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT.



WIL is not the sole responsibility of the learning institution but rather a collective effort of all stakeholders. The active engagement and participation of the learner, client and quality partner are required for successful implementation.

Learner engagement pertains to learner placement and recruitment, which is a formal process to match the learner to the employer. Learners undergo formal contracting to participate in the formal training component of their qualification. The WIL practical is supported by a coaching framework. The workplace supports the learner to become operational and apply their skills practically, while the training provider focuses on evidence collection and meeting the formal assessment requirements. Learners are allocated a coach for the duration of the WIL practical who helps them work towards competency in the qualification and achieving work-readiness. On successful completion, learners can apply for gainful employment.

Workplace engagement forms part of Omni HR Consulting's client engagement strategy. Surveys are conducted to secure feedback on the efficacy of WIL programmes implemented. The consensus from respondents who have engaged in WIL is that: the programme added value to their workplace, learners displayed a high level of commitment to the company's goals. Learners met the company's requirements by displaying positive attitudes when dealing with customers and staff, and learners are employable and

could be recruited to fill vacancies. A well-structured WIL programme is evident in the ability to understand a company's environment, support the workplace objectives and benefit both the workplace and learner.

Quality training partners are vital. Omni believes that quality assurance and WIL are interconnected and that, without delivery of quality learning, WIL, coaching and mentoring and assessment, the overall programme cannot be successful. For successful implementation, WIL strategies must: be part of the learning framework/curriculum from the onset, considering both the theoretical and practical components of learning; meet quality-assurance compliance requirements aligning learner attributes and the skills required within the workplace; and ensure that implementation provides sufficient learner support and guidance to the learner, that it is documented and that it forms part of the assessment process.

THE BENEFITS OF WIL

Learners benefit from WIL practices by linking their newly acquired knowledge and skills with practical application in a controlled environment. In the work environment, they are also exposed to the right blend of soft skills required for work-readiness, which provide them an even greater opportunity for gainful employment.

Workplaces benefit from a pool of skilled, talented, young individuals, who bring with them a host of new ideas and innovations and who in time could service their recruitment pipeline and succession planning process.

Learning institutions benefit when meeting the compliance requirements for WIL, as workplaces continuously engage them to provide a continuous flow of skilled learners who meet their human capital requirements.



To discuss and craft your WIL skills development initiatives, contact **Cindy Londt** our Operations Executive on **(021) 685 9160** or **cindy@omnihrc.com**.