



**UNIVERSITIES  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**GUIDELINES FOR UNIVERSITIES TO FOLLOW REGARDING WORK INTEGRATED  
LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

## **FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Work-integrated Learning (WIL) is a compulsory and essential component of many higher education qualifications. If done well, WIL contributes massively to the competences that graduates develop and can deploy as they enter the work environment.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted all spheres of life in South Africa, and has created many challenges, not least in education. It is testimony to the resilience of South Africans that we have been able to collaborate and work together to find novel and innovative ways to address some of the challenges.

The consultation in the higher education sector, under the leadership of Universities South Africa, to develop guidelines for WIL in the context of COVID-19 is one such example of a sector coming together to address a challenge. The consultation involved a range of role-players including USAF, particularly its World of Work Strategy Group, the Council on Higher Education, the Department of Higher Education and Training, and higher education institutions.

These guidelines, in a sense represent a social contract to ensure that meaningful WIL can take place during this period, albeit in additional new, creative and innovative ways.

I request that all parties work together to implement these guidelines successfully in the higher education system, with the ultimate goal that the students graduate with the competences they require to transition successfully into the world of work.

**DR BE NZIMANDE**  
**MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**DATE:**

## **1. STATEMENT**

Universities have been affected in various ways by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown. This has specific bearing on students in programmes containing a work-integrated learning (WIL) component. This document is intended to provide guidelines for universities to follow regarding WIL and related obligations and prescripts in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

As a method of teaching and learning, WIL is a term used to describe a range of approaches, strategies and methods used to meaningfully integrate theory with practices of the workplace within a purposefully designed curriculum. Being an element of the curriculum, WIL is part of the programme like any other module that needs to be successfully completed in order to satisfy the requirements of for a relevant qualification.

The Council on Higher Education, which is responsible for the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF), within the National Qualifications Framework for which the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is responsible, addresses WIL as follows:

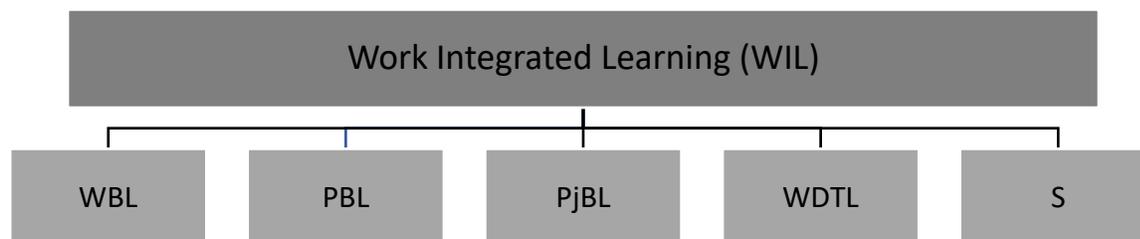
Some qualifications will be designed to integrate theory and practice through the incorporation of work-integrated learning (WIL) into the curriculum. WIL is characteristic of vocational and professionally-oriented qualifications, and may be incorporated into programmes at all levels of the HEQSF. In the HEQSF, WIL may take various forms including simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and workplace-based learning. The selection of appropriate forms of work-integrated learning depends on the nature and purpose of the qualification type, programme objectives and outcomes, the NQF level at which the WIL component is pegged, institutional capacity to provide WIL opportunities, and the structures and systems that are in place within professional settings and sites of practice to support student learning. Where WIL is a structured part of a qualification the volume of learning allocated to WIL should be appropriate to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcome and assessment criteria contained in the appropriate level descriptors.

Where the entire WIL component or any part of it takes the form of workplace-based learning, it is the responsibility of institutions that offer programmes requiring credits for such learning to

place students into appropriate workplaces. Such workplace-based learning must be appropriately structured, properly supervised and assessed.

The modalities of WIL mentioned in the HEQSF, namely workplace or work-based learning (WBL) in the workplace, work-directed theoretical learning (WDTL), problem-based learning (PBL), Project-based learning (PjBL) as well as simulations (S) can be schematically presented as in figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: WIL and WIL Modalities**



These modalities are defined in the Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide of the CHE (2011) as follows:

*Work based learning (WBL):*

has been defined as ‘learning for, at, or through work’ (Brennan and Little, 1996). WBL involves the acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills both in the university and in the workplace, with the formal or non-formal involvement of employers (Boud and Solomon, 2001).

In designing such curricula the first step is the establishment of outcomes which meet something of the needs of both work practice and those of the university. These are typically a mix of the kind of higher order cognitive skills, such as reflection and critical thinking, required in university courses and more content and context specific work outcomes. Assessment is generally performed by the university as it is the accrediting body.

*Problem based learning (PBL):*

is a term used within higher education for a range of pedagogic approaches that encourage students to learn through the structured exploration of a research or practice-based problem (Savin-Baden and Major 2004). In PBL, students work in small self-directed groups to define, carry out and reflect upon a task, which is usually related to, or based on, a ‘real-life’ problem. An interdisciplinary team designs carefully structured and sequenced ‘problems’ that will direct the students’ learning towards the determined outcomes and objectives of the curriculum.

*Project based learning (PjBL):*

combines PBL and WBL in that it brings together intellectual inquiry, real-world problems, and student engagement in relevant and meaningful work. Project work is generally understood to facilitate students' understanding of essential concepts and practical skills. Well-crafted projects should engage students, provide a meaningful and authentic (workplace) context for learning and immerse students in complex, real-world problems that do not have a predetermined solution.

*Work-directed theoretical learning (WDTL):*

involves an attempt to ensure that theoretical forms of knowledge (such as mathematics and physics in engineering programmes) are introduced and sequenced in ways that meet academic criteria, and are applicable and relevant to the career-specific components (Barnett, 2006). An example would be a subject called 'Mathematical Foundations of Engineering' in contrast to the more traditional 'Mathematics I'.

*Simulated Learning (S):*

is learning stimulated through an activity that involves the imitation of the real world in the academy. The act of simulating something entails representing certain key characteristics of the selected workplace and includes such things as laboratories, patient models, mock meetings, flight simulations etc.

### **3. CHALLENGES**

The challenges experienced related to WIL, and in particular WBL, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lock down, can be summarised as follows:

- (i)** The closure and re-opening of various sectors of the economy that resulted in the WBL of students being stopped/postponed at employers where they were or would have been placed to complete the required WBL. A number of employers have had to close their doors while there are others that are operating at a reduced capacity. Several have become casualties of the lockdown through closure. The net result is that fewer employers and WBL opportunities are available, and less time is available to complete the WBL required.
  - a. Lost time and/or time that will be lost need to be made up in such a way that the graduation of students and their registration with professional bodies are not delayed.

- (ii) Occupational health and safety regulations pertaining to COVID-19 implies a decrease in the number of employees, staff and students allowed at the premises of employers. The mentoring, supervision, monitoring and assessment of students in the workplace by both employers and university staff are thus compromised with travel restrictions further exacerbating the challenge.
  - a. Alternative means/methods of monitoring, mentoring and assessment therefore need to be considered.

#### 4. IMPACT

A scan was done of the WIL environment at the 26 public universities in South Africa to determine the impact on students and universities involved with WIL. Responses were received from several universities of which 13 contained sufficient data to be used for analysis.

The analyses are presented in figures 1 – 4 below to demonstrate the magnitude of the impact on WBL in particular per university type.

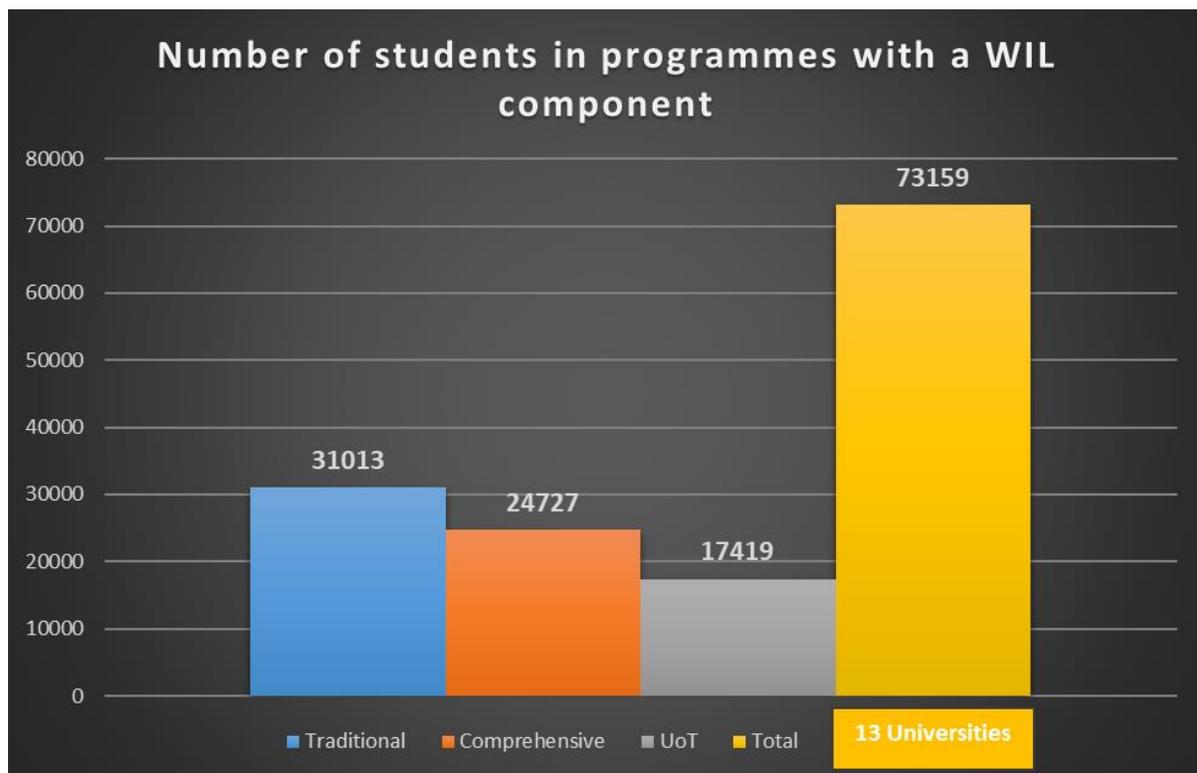


Figure 2: The number of students in programmes with a WIL component per university type.

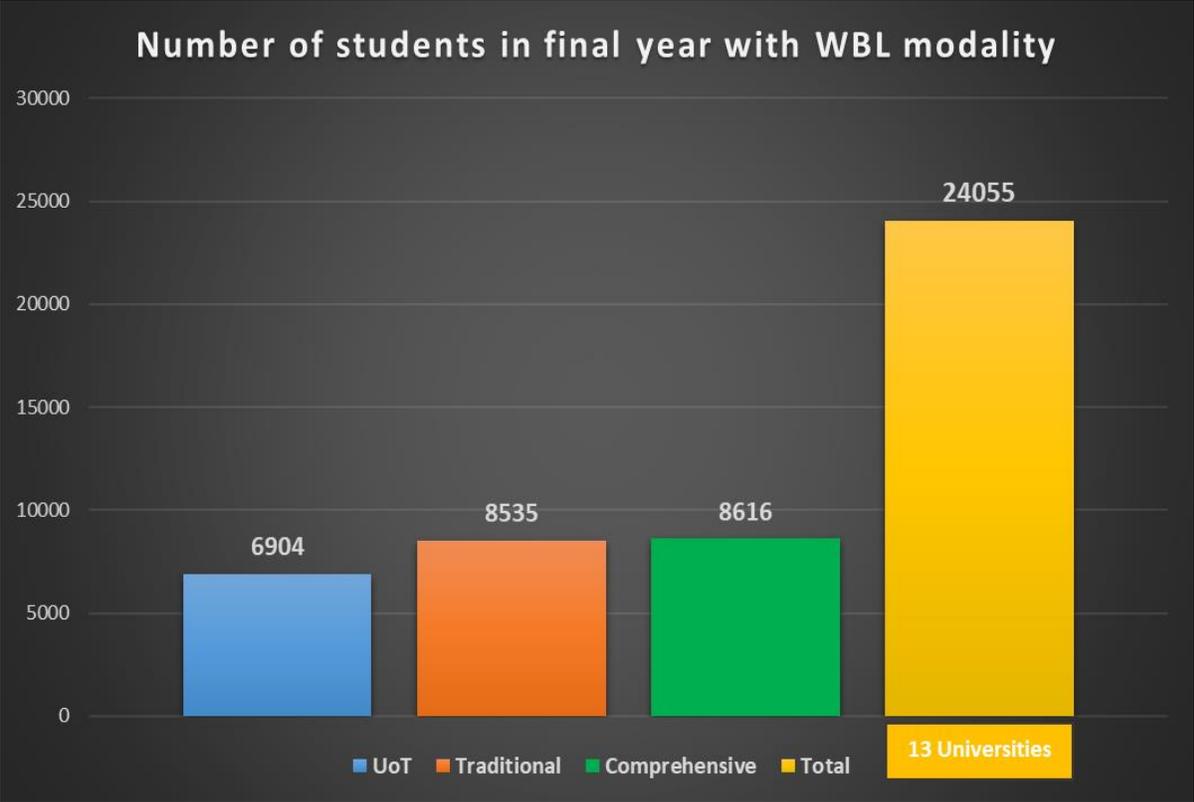


Figure 3: The number of students in final year of study with a WBL modality to complete

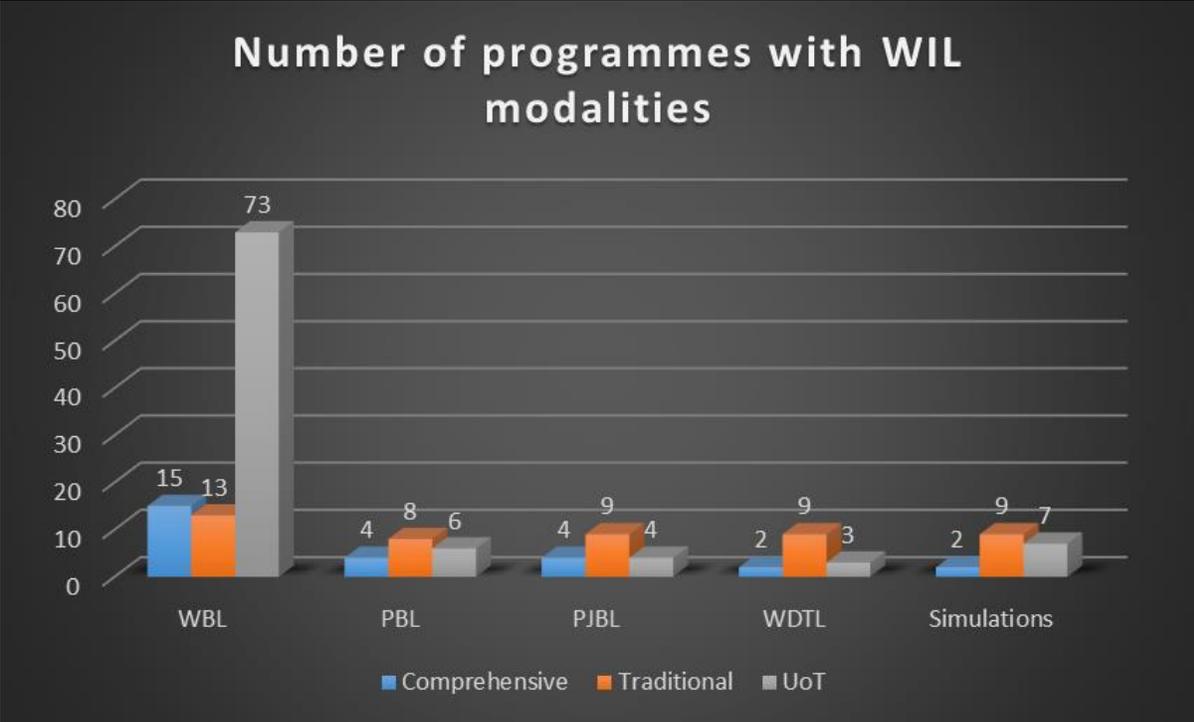


Figure 4: The number of programmes per university type with WIL modalities indicated

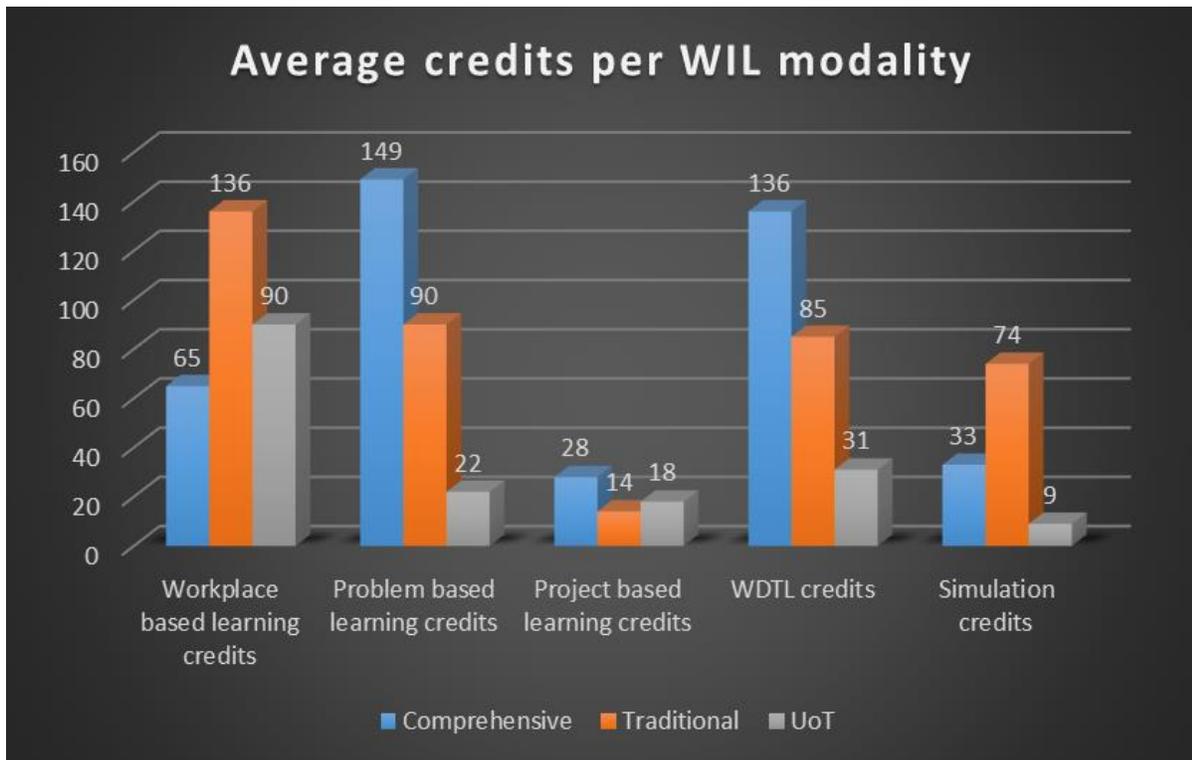


Figure 5: Average number of credits per WIL modality

Conclusions drawn from the analysis and challenges presented are the following:

- (i) There is evidence of at least 24 055 students in their final year of study being affected by fewer employers together with time lost and/or time that will be lost to complete the WBL modality of their qualifications. The monitoring, mentoring and assessment of these students are also compromised.
- (ii) In addition, there are also 49 104 (73 159 – 24 055) students affected by the challenges listed.
  - a. This accentuates the need to find solutions to let the final year students complete their WBL as soon as possible and with the minimum delay. Should this not happen, a bottleneck of students to be placed for their final year during 2021 will be created.
- (iii) The adverse effects on the monitoring, mentoring and assessment of students require that alternative means/methods be considered to complete these integral components of WBL in such a way that quality is not compromised.

- (iv) Even though WBL is mostly used by universities, the presence of the other WIL modalities at all universities is also evident. This creates an opportunity to use the other modalities in an innovative way to achieve the outcomes set for WBL.
- a. Cognizance should be taken of the workplace based nature of the outcomes to be achieved through WBL. The choice of a different modality should therefore be workplace orientated in nature. The use of PBL, PjBL and Simulations are therefore preferred to WDTL.
- (v) There is a fairly wide range of credit allocation per WIL modality. The notional hours associated with each modality must be considered in relation to the credits attached to the relevant modality. This implies, for example, that 60 credits are equal to 600 notional hours that is equal to 15 weeks (15 weeks x 40 hours per week = 600 hours).
- a. An opportunity is therefore presented to shorten the WBL period from 6 months to 4 months. Cognizance should be taken though that all the outcomes set out must still be achieved and to allow for enough repetition where relevant.
- (vi) The role of professional bodies needs to be carefully considered in relation to their requirements for WBL and professional registration.
- a. In some cases consultation with professional bodies has already occurred:
    - i. The following endorsement from the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) was received by the Engineering Deans Forum: **Experiential Training (ET):** (Not relevant for BSc in Engineering, Bachelor of Engineering and Bachelor of Engineering Technology programmes, except where there is a requirement for vacation work and/or industry exposure.) For Diploma students requiring Experiential Learning, the following are proposed to finish P1 & P2 during 2020:
      1. The total hours required should be shortened by 100\*(lockdown weeks/total working weeks in the year) percent.
      2. Allow students whose employers have a longer work week (6 or 7 days) to get credit for working more than the normal five day working week.
      3. Students should be given additional projects to compensate for lost time and achieve outcomes. Each affected programme should archive the submitted and graded projects, prepare and keep a document on file detailing the additional projects and their rationale.
      4. Special arrangements should be made for students who are required to undertake vacation or workshop training based on programme specific requirements.

- ii. Similarly, consultation between the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Higher Education and Training and the South African Council of Educators have already occurred regarding the completion of Teaching Practice, and communiques to the sector have been sent out in this regard.
- iii. The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has received the feedback from professional bodies in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The following are examples that can be noted: **1.** In the Department of Emergency Medical Care, the Professional Board for Emergency Care (PBEC) released amended skills requirement for the 2020 final year students only, **2.** The Department of Health at UJ has discussed the alternative WIL mechanism with the Health Professions Council of South Africa's (HPCSA's) Environmental Health board. The agreement was that institutions offering Environmental Health would find alternative WIL mechanisms to compensate lost WIL days. **3.** The South African Nursing Council (SANC) informed the Department of Nursing at UJ that training must be extended to meet clinical requirements.
  1. It is thus clear that some, but not all, professional bodies are amenable to the use of alternative modalities for WBL.

It can be concluded that all the role players in WBL are confronted with adverse (and unfair) conditions that necessitate innovative and practical solutions to the benefit of all concerned. Due to the varying requirements, especially in the Health Sciences, a one-size-fits-all approach is not advisable. The proposal presented below should thus be regarded as general guidelines that can be followed subject to the approval of the relevant professional bodies and employers.

## **5. GUIDELINES**

It needs to be noted that the guidelines presented below must be regarded as temporary measures to address the current challenges and not as the norm for the future. The conditions linked to each recommendation should also be adhered to.

The guidelines are proposed as five (5) recommendations grouped under the following headings:

1. Exit and programme level outcomes
2. Credit allocation

3. Other WIL modalities
4. Assessment
5. Professional bodies' registration

The guidelines are presented with associated implementation options together with conditions that need to be met regarding the implementation thereof.

#### Recommendation 1

Nr	Guideline	Implementation	Conditions
1	<b>Exit and programme level outcomes</b>	<p>The manner in which WIL is structured in the curriculum related to the outcomes to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should an outcome be specifically related to time spent in industry, it will require different approaches regarding when and how this time will be made up through moving the WIL period later in the programme, work over weekends and extra hours, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Cognisance should also be taken of the impact on the achievement of the Critical Crossfield Outcomes (CCFOs) and graduate attributes to be attained.</p>

#### Recommendation 2

Nr	Guideline	Implementation	Conditions
2	<b>Credit allocation</b>	<p>Credit allocation and notional hours implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One (1) credit implies 10 hours of notional learning. In cases where sixty (60) credits were allocated to WIL it equates to 600 notional hours. 600 hours divided by 40 hours per week = 15 weeks or more or less 4 months.</li> </ul>	<p>Important to note is that the outcomes to be achieved should still be achieved in cases where it was assumed that this period is equal to six (6) months in consultation with relevant WIL employers and</p>

		6 months can therefore be completed in 4 months.	professional bodies where applicable. Provision needs to be made for repetition where relevant.
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### Recommendation 3

Nr	Guideline	Implementation	Conditions
3	<b>Other WIL modalities</b>	<p>These modalities (simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning and project-based learning) can also be used to achieve the required outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some examples could be the identification of real work-based problems that need to be solved in collaboration with employers (the current problems experienced by employers could be relevant to some programmes); the simulation of a work environment on/off campus where possible, on-campus WIL by using the university as a work environment – e.g. using lecture rooms as classrooms after hours and over weekends for education students to assist schools with extra classes and catching up on work lost, events/functions hosted by the university, using employers for guest lectures and seminars/workshops, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Care should be taken that the WPBL outcomes selected to be achieved in this manner should correspond with the curriculated level of complexity and NQF levels.</p> <p>In addition, cognisance should be taken of the workplace based nature of the outcomes to be achieved through WBL. The choice of a different modality should therefore be workplace orientated in nature. The use of PBL, PjBL and Simulations are therefore preferred to WDTL.</p>

#### Recommendation 4

Nr	Guideline	Implementation	Conditions
4	<b>Assessment</b>	<p>The reports/assignments that students need to submit can be adjusted to the WIL modality selected and accordingly assessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video-clips (as individual and/or group assignments), constructive criticism on possible solutions provided to a problem statement(s)/scenarios, reflective journals, patchwork texts, role-plays, presentations, case studies, focus group discussions, seminars/workshops, debriefing sessions, games, e-portfolios of evidence, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>WIL periods on the timetable can be used, where available, for assessment and/or making use of employers to assist with assessment which need to correspond with the curricular level of complexity and NQF levels.</p>

#### Recommendation 5

Nr	Guideline	Implementation	Conditions
5	<b>Professional bodies' registration</b>	<p>Conditional registration of students by professional bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request professional bodies for the conditional registration of students who need to make up working hours missed in 2020 during 2021. These hours can be made up once the students are employed (possibly as part of a probation period) to be followed by full registration once the missing hours of 2020 are completed during 2021.</li> </ul>	<p>Permission from relevant professional bodies will have to be obtained.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaxing of professional requirements for WIL, e.g. number of students to be increased per qualified technologist, engineer, etc.</li> </ul> <p>It is recommended that forums such as the various dean’s forums approach their professional bodies with requests that need to be programme specific due to the different requirements per programme.</p>	
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## REFERENCES

South African Council on Higher Education (CHE). 2011. Work-integrated learning: good practice guide. HE Monitor; 2011; 12. Available from: <https://www.che.ac.za/>

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