

Guidelines to *Monitors* ('tutors') of the Work-integrated Learning (WIL) of the name of programme/qualification (code)

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Introduction

Thank you for making yourself available to serve as extension of the centrally based academic staff. Your geographic proximity to a Unisa student/s undertaking her (his/their) prerequisite learning within a real-life (*in vivo*) context is important. However, more important is your subject matter expertise as practitioner in the field.

The purpose of this document is to serve as a set of guidelines regarding your role as formative assessor of the/each student's learning assigned to you for monitoring. Experience of 'work', or observation thereof, does not necessary result in learning. For learning to occur, the experiences must be intentional, organised and recognised. The on-site monitoring is done with the following specific objectives in mind:

- To gather evidence regarding the learning of the student.
- To detect her (his) progress towards attaining the learning outcomes.
- To obtain the workplace supervisor's evaluation about the performance and conduct of the student.
- To mediate discretely regarding problems identified.
- To aide the student to reflect on experiences, in order to optimise learning.

The imperative context

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council for Higher Education (CHE), states in its publication "Criteria for Programme Accreditation", that "*Work-based [or integrated] learning forms an essential part of many professional and vocational programmes*". The HEQC emphasises a **monitoring system** as an important component of effective coordination. Regular and systematic **monitoring** of the learning experiences of students in the workplace is further emphasised in the HEQC publication "Criteria for Institutional Audits". The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), gazetted (No. 30353) 5 October 2007 by the

Department of Education (Government Notice No 928), further states that is the responsibility of institutions, which offer programmes requiring work-integrated learning (WIL), that the institution must properly supervise and assess the learning.

Resources required

The relevant Unisa staff member at the Regional Hub/Service Centre from where you are coordinated will give you the following:

- The biographical information of each student you are contracted to monitor through on-site visit.
- The synopsis of the *in vivo* learning component of the qualification each student is studying.
- The learning outcomes, learning specifications and the required learning evidence and records that must be submitted for summative evaluation.
- The *in vivo* learning progress assessment instrument.
- The *pro forma* report document for the monitoring visit (WILMonit).
- The log sheet of the monitor as an “independent contractor”

How to conduct the monitoring

Make an appointment, at a mutually convenient time, to visit each student within her (his) *in vivo* learning context at the host organisation:

- Verify the relevant protocols (if any) and/or security arrangements to ‘visit’.
- Ensure availability of the workplace supervisor (learning mentor) of each student concerned; give an indication of the duration of the visit and indicate the need specifically to interview the workplace supervisor/mentor.
- Ask the student to have her (his) completed, as well as work in progress, reports/portfolio of evidence available during the visit for monitoring.
- Request the student to arrange a private venue for the monitoring visit.
- Verify the location, directions and estimated time to travel to the *host* organisation

Upon arrival, introduce yourself both as representative of Unisa, contracted to monitor the work-integrated/*in vivo* learning of the student concerned, and your usual capacity. Put the student and her (his) workplace supervisor/mentor at ease and establish rapport with both, either independently or together. Assess the situation and enquire when it would be best to interview each.

Engage in discussion with the workplace supervisor, against the following background:

Unisa relies on host organisations to be partners in the education process in order to provide students with relevant and progressive real-life/work learning experiences in the field concerned. The workplace supervisor fulfils the crucial function of mentoring (another HEQC imperative) the student. Mentoring is a process whereby knowledge, skills, experience and professional conduct are transmitted to the student (protégé/mentee) who is under the guidance and supervision of an experienced practitioner/professional. The aim is to develop her (his) potential and to encourage her (his) personal growth. The mentor should enable her (him) to recognise her (his) strengths and weaknesses, to develop existing and new abilities

and to gain knowledge in the occupational field. The mentor further assesses and certifies the student's work-integrated/in vivo learning report/portfolio of evidence prior to her (him) submitting it to Unisa.

- Ask the workplace supervisor about the various duties the student has been required to perform and still has to perform — enquire about the quality of her (his) work; to what extent she (he) drawn from and applied her (his) acquired academic knowledge; shown initiative and accepted responsibility; functioned as member of a team and as individual; etc.
- Explore the nature and quality of the mentoring taking place and to what extent the student benefited from mentoring, as well as specific shortcomings she (he) might exhibit.
- Ask how the workplace supervisor perceives the student's *in vivo* learning report/portfolio of evidence that she (he) had to assess and certify.
- Ask the views of the workplace supervisor regarding the attainment of the learning outcomes by the student.
- Make recommendations with regard to exposure the student need and learning structure.

Interview the student about her (his) *in vivo* learning, but ensure that the monitoring results in a positive learning experience for the student. Even if you find the student lacking, because positive feedback from an assessment encourages progress:

- Ask the student to give you an overview of her (his) experiences — what she (he) did, observed and learned; responsibilities she (he) held, etc. Make encouraging remarks and emphasise the student's strengths.
- Peruse the student's reports/portfolio of evidence and observe the student's progress — assess the latter in the light of the period remaining and make appropriate recommendations. Point the pertinent fact out to the student.
- Explore, with reference to the learning outcomes, the actual learning the student acquired — help, where appropriate, the student to reflect on her (his) experiences, in order to derive (or optimise) the relevant learning or add significance. Indicate where specific improvements are necessary.
- Explore what the student derived so far from the mentoring process and how it is experienced — make appropriate recommendations.
- Discuss the student's work experiences at the host organisation in the light of her (his) future career plans — offer discretionary career development advice based on own experiences as practitioner/professional.

Conditions of assessment

Ideally, both the workplace supervisor and the student should be interviewed independently, in privacy; however, this is not always feasible. It is preferable to interview the supervisor first, in order to get a perspective on the student's performance, but occasionally it is better to interview the student first.

Avoid any controversial issues or situations. If confronted as contract employee of Unisa with university matters, acknowledge such and undertake to convey it to the relevant Unisa staff member at the Regional Hub/Service Centre.

Be considerate of the host organisation's realities and pressures, yet be firm regarding the workplace supervisor's mentoring and assessor's roles.

In order to assess actual progress you need to peruse the reports/portfolio of evidence. You further need to carefully assess the nature of the student's exposure to the different areas of required experience in order to ascertain if the exposure has been adequate. Do not merely ask the student if she (he) gained the experience.

The purpose of monitoring is firstly formative assessment—to facilitate learning for the student—and secondly to gather information. Give constructive feedback; be clear, concise, honest, and fair—it will encourage students and motivate them and focus them on achievement.

Listen attentively and make notes during discussions, in order to write a concise yet comprehensive report on the monitoring visit of each student.

If circumstances are such that it is not possible to meet with the workplace supervisor in person, then a telephonic discussion with the workplace supervisor should at least take place. If it is impossible to meet the student on-site, then any suitable of-site venue will have to suffice.

Time constraints and time frame for returning the monitoring report

As result of the current funding specifications of the Department of Education, students are now and in future required to complete their work-integrated/*in vivo* learning during the semester (or appropriate period) for which they are registered.

At least one monitor visit need to take place, not later than two-thirds from registration; however, preferably two monitor visits.

The monitoring report of each student must reach the relevant Unisa coordinating staff member at the Regional Hub/Service Centre not later than three (3) weeks after the visit took place.

Payment for services rendered and travelling costs reimbursements will not be processed if the report is not submitted.

How to use the progress assessment instrument

You need to observe the student's experiential learning evidence, as well as, through open-ended questioning, assess the progress of the student. You are required to make cursory notes, which summarises your findings during the monitoring visit.

Feedback to the student and her (his) workplace supervisor (mentor)

You are not required to assign any marks, but it is essential that you apply your professional discretion and give feedback to both the student and the mentor.

It is important to realise that your on-site monitoring visit is contributing (in whichever small way) to the professional practice in the field and in particular the development of a new entrant into the field. It is therefore important that you verbalise, in a constructive manner, your observations and make recommendations regarding perceived problems, shortcomings, learning opportunities, etc.

Observations about developments in the field that might in future influence the work-integrated/*in vivo* learning of the qualification

Serving as the extension of the centrally based academic staff it is important that you record observations about developments in the field that might in future influence the work-integrated/*in vivo* learning of the qualification. This kind of practitioner feedback is important with regard to keeping the learning outcomes relevant to the field of practice.

Contribute to improving Unisa's monitoring process

Would you please keep record of own experiences during the monitoring process and would you please critically reflect on your experiences of the monitoring process?

By deliberately recording ones experiences provides the material for reflection. We request you to think about reasons and to record these. Finally, we ask you which areas/aspects you feel should be improved; what problems need to be solved; and how do you propose the improvements should be made?

Developed by Dr Thomas Groenewald (of the Work-integrated Learning division of TSDL) July 2008.