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The role of collaborative policy development in progressing the UTAS WIL agenda

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Abstract: The WIL Project was undertaken in 2010 to develop a new Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Policy *using the staged University Policy Development Cycle. This cycle represents an adaptation of the stepped policy development process depicted in the Australian Policy Cycle (Althaus, Bridgman, & Davis, 2007). This paper examines the process undertaken to examine two key research questions – What is the University of Tasmania's position regarding WIL; and How should these guiding principles be reflected in formal policy documentation? The project involved a number of elements, including a WIL Project Manager, a WIL Working Party, a literature review, data collection, benchmarking as policy learning (Lundvall & Tomlinson, 2002; Paasi, 2005), WIL Discussion Forums, and an extensive series of interviews. The project dovetailed with the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) WIL Provocations Symposium. Consultations and deliberations involved collegial governance structures. This paper reveals the diversity in work-related curriculum offerings and disciplinary approaches at Australian universities, and suggests that establishing clear definitions is an important step towards developing minimum academic standards or obligations. This paper reports tensions between University-wide umbrella policy provisions and requirements by local academic sections for a high degree of specificity. This paper suggests that the process of asking complex academic policy questions is self-perpetuating, as more questions are raised which demand policy responses. Finally, in developing a uniquely University of Tasmania approach to work integrated learning, the project confirmed the importance of ongoing dialogue and collegial governance to guide learning and teaching policy development.*

Keywords: Work Integrated Learning (WIL), policy development, collaboration

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Introduction

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) *Workplace Learning Placements Policy* (2007a) and *Workplace Learning Placements Procedure* (2007b) were approved in 2007. These documents and supporting resources were scheduled for review in accordance with provisions of the *Policy Development and Review Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2010a). This paper explores the implementation of the WIL Project, undertaken in 2010 to develop the *Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2011a) as a framework to support and embed work integrated learning curriculum at the University of Tasmania. Through consideration of a variety of definitional issues, resolution of tensions between umbrella and specific policy requirements, and collegial decision-making the new *WIL Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2011a) articulates a distinctly University of Tasmania approach to work integrated learning. The framework clearly defines WIL at the University of Tasmania as 'a purposeful, organised, supervised and assessed educational activity that integrates theoretical learning with its applications in the workplace' (University of Tasmania, 2011a) including placement, simulation and assessment-related models. The framework explicitly embraces the pedagogy of WIL delivered via professional degree programs, accredited units or courses and other WIL activities. The policy establishes obligations for WIL partners across the preparatory, placement and retrospective WIL components, and is founded on collaboration between the university, industry and community organisations and professional accreditation or regulatory authorities. This paper explores how we reached this point, and recounts some key conversations held along the way.

Literature review

Recent developments in WIL have occurred against the backdrop of the release of the *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), or 'Bradley Review'. This review stimulated discussion regarding the role of Australian universities. The Final Report established ambitious participation and social inclusion targets, and reiterated the importance of the university sector for Australia's social well-being and economic prosperity. The review articulated a vision for year 2020 where the sector "produces graduates with the knowledge, skills and understandings for full participation in society as it anticipates and meets the needs of the Australian and international labour markets" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 7). The Commonwealth's subsequent policy statement, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), established the government's participation targets, and a new regulation regime and academic standards agenda under the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA). The literature suggests that WIL participation is growing in tandem with the massification of the sector (Boud & Solomon, 2001), diversification of the student population, and increasing calls for industry responsiveness. This context has led some Australian universities to strategically establish ambitious WIL participation targets (Universities Australia, 2008), and launch rebranding strategies based on WIL provision (McLennan, 2008).

WIL definitions are many and varied. Central to most definitions is the proposition that WIL as a pedagogy involves purposeful learning which integrates theory and practice (Patrick et al., 2008). WIL may be related or contextualised by a specific industry or discipline, or not (Innovative Research Universities Australia, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). Definitions may primarily focus on workplace based learning, or include other forms of authentic learning such as project-based work, simulation and virtual placement (Patrick et al., 2008). WIL work

placements may be unpaid, or paid. Definitions may encompass accredited university units or courses, or extend to extra-curricula activities and support services such as careers advice. WIL may be assessable and assessed, or not.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the diversity of definitions, the objectives of WIL are many and varied. WIL encourages student reflection (Barraket, Melville, Wright, & Scott, 2009) and supports student retention (Patrick et al., 2008). WIL enhances graduate employment outcomes by developing industry or discipline specific skills (Universities Australia, 2008) or 'employability skills' such as those identified by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Business Council of Australia (DEST, 2002). WIL develops graduate attributes (Precision Consultancy, 2007; Barraket et al., 2009) and supports career planning (Billet, 2009; Patrick et al., 2008). WIL enhances productivity and employability (Universities Australia, 2008), and fosters "professionals responsive to economic, social, cultural, technical and environmental change who can work flexibly and intelligently across business contexts" (Precision Consultancy, 2007, p. 1).

Education and students are becoming increasingly vocationalised. More senior secondary students participate in vocational education and training (Scoullar & CIRM, 2008) and paid employment (Precision Consultancy, 2007) than ever before. More university students are engaged in paid employment (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010; Universities Australia, 2008; Scoullar & CIRM, 2008), for longer hours (Precision Consultancy, 2007). More programs directly aligned to specific industry or occupation requirements are available to more university students (Billet, 2009; Boud & Solomon, 2001). Industry is contributing to collaborative curriculum development, and professional course accreditation. Amendments to the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* have tied work experience Commonwealth funding to compliance with workplacement content, co-ordination, supervision and assessment requirements (Patrick et al., 2008). These factors influence student and Commonwealth expectations regarding university education, and graduate outcomes.

Policy research literature presents various models and theoretical perspectives concerning policy process, including early agreement that the policy process involved a staged, or phased sequence. Lasswell (1951) is recognised as a forerunner of such an approach, followed by Brewer (1974) and Jenkins (1974). More recently, Bridgman and Davis (1998) developed the Australian Policy Cycle as an heuristic to articulate the policy development process and guide public policy practitioners. The Australian Policy Cycle includes the stages of identification of issues, policy analysis, policy instruments, consultation, co-ordination, decision, implementation and evaluation as depicted in Figure 1.
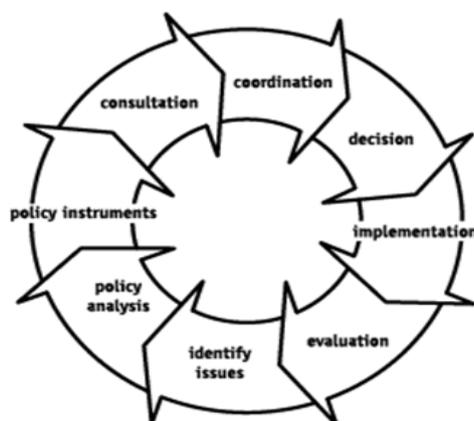

Figure 1: Australian Policy Cycle (Bridgman & Davis, 1998)

The Australian Policy Cycle is particularly pertinent to this research as preliminary investigations suggest Australian university meta-policy embodies a staged developmental approach (Freeman, 2010), and the University of Tasmania (2010a) *Policy Development and Review Policy* establishes the staged University Policy Development Cycle.

Method

In 2010, the then Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education) sponsored the WIL Project to review the compliance-based *Workplace Learning Placements Policy, Procedure* (University of Tasmania, 2007), attendant agreements and *Teaching and Learning Guidelines for Workplace Learning (Practicum)* (University of Tasmania, 2006) and to develop a new *WIL Policy.* This paper examines the process undertaken to examine two key research questions – What is the University of Tasmania's position regarding WIL; and How should these guiding principles be reflected in formal policy documentation?

The Division of Students and Education resourced a 0.6 FTE policy position (Mike Spurr, Manager WIL Project) for a period of 9 months. The project principally employed the University Policy Development Cycle outlined in the *Policy Development and Review Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2010a), which mirrors the stepped approach represented by the Australian Policy Cycle (Althaus, Bridgman, & Davis, 2007). Formal project management techniques were adopted, with objectives, timeframes and deliverables articulated in the *WIL Policy and Procedure Development Project Brief.* The WIL Project was undertaken in tandem with the development of the *Safe to Practise Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2010b).

The project was supported by the WIL Working Party; a group of academic and professional staff engaged to collectively provide direction and practitioner expertise including representatives from the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT), the School of Nursing and Midwifery, the Careers unit, the Faculty of Business, and Governance and Legal. In addition, a WIL Reference Group was established to facilitate targeted academic input on an ad-hoc basis. The WIL Reference Group – whilst not constituted as a formal committee – provided a mechanism to access key academic staff from the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education and UTAS College.

A literature review was undertaken which examined key WIL research identified by WIL Working Party members, including two reports emanating from Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) projects and literature made available for the WIL Provocations symposium. Literature was also identified through online journal database searches. A policy benchmarking exercise was undertaken to facilitate policy learning (Lundvall & Tomlinson, 2002; Paasi, 2005) rather than policy copying (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008). The benchmarking exercise searched all Australian university policy repositories to identify comprehensive work-related policy documentation. WIL (or related) policy documentation was found at ten Australian universities representative of: dual and single sectors; metropolitan and regional institutions; from all other states and territories excepting the Northern Territory. No Group of Eight (GO8) universities were represented in the sample.

Concurrently, CALT convened a WIL Provocations symposium at the Newnham campus on 1st June, 2010. Presenters included Professor Jan Pakulski (School of Sociology and Social Work), Ingrid Apsitis (Faculty of Business), Simon Fishwick (School of Management) and John Vella (Tasmanian School of Art). WIL Discussion Forums were held at the Newnham

(22nd June 2010) and Sandy Bay (24th June 2010) campuses to generate dialogue and inform the policy development process. Presenters included Dr Natalie Brown (CALT), Mike Spurr (WIL Project Manager) and Brigid Freeman (Governance and Legal). The forums were highly structured, involving a series of tasks. Facilitators provided a set of example definitions from three other Australian universities. Participants were invited to identify the locus of responsibility for various 'WIL ingredients' (i.e., School, Faculty, Institute or central University responsibility).

Extensive consultations and informal interviews were undertaken with staff from Schools, Faculties and University Institutes implementing work-related curriculum. An informal form of member-checking for validation purposes occurred with key interviewees confirming the accuracy of content subsequently incorporated into policy documentation. Draft policy documentation was circulated broadly via the UTAS Policy Network in November, 2010, and a briefing was provided to the committee of Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning). Academic governance committees were engaged, including some School and Faculty committees, the (then) University Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Senate. Academic Senate endorsed the documentation in April, 2011 and the *Work Integrated Learning Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2011a) and *Work Integrated Learning Procedure* (University of Tasmania, 2011b) were approved in May, 2011.

Results

The benchmarking exercise revealed that WIL represents a strategic point of differentiation within the higher education sector, with some universities establishing high targets for WIL provision, participation and/or workplace learning assessment. In such instances, WIL represents a whole-of-university learning, teaching and assessment pedagogy. For example, Victoria University (2008) commits to embedding *Learning in the Workplace and Community* (LiWC) assessment as a universal feature of all courses, and Griffith University (2010) aspires to provide students "a signature multidisciplinary learning experience" (p. 1), with 70% of all programs incorporating WIL. Implementation of the Queensland University of Technology's (2008) *Work Integrated Learning Policy* represents a key plank of that university's strategic plan by "strengthen(ing) its 'real-world' positioning in teaching and research".

The benchmarking exercise found a range of definitions and nomenclature for work integrated learning. Victoria University (2008) uses different nomenclature – LiWC – which is defined as "an umbrella term that encompasses the many models and integrated approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that involve learning in and through the workplace and community". The University of the Sunshine Coast's (2009) *Work Integrated Learning Institutional Operating Policy* categorises WIL student learning into the three tiers of industry/professional placement, application of theory to practice, and broadly defined industry/professional interaction. Swinburne University of Technology's (2007) *Co-operative Education Policy* explicitly identifies teaching programs by title which "enable students to integrate theoretical learning at university with applications and experiences in actual work environments". Whilst there is diversity, key characteristics of university WIL provision are consistent in a number of respects including purposive educational activities involving workplacements, or non-workplacement based integration of theory and practice involving industry or community members. There are a small number of policy statements focussed primarily on workplacement-based WIL provision, however the majority extended the

definition of WIL to include simulated, and/or non-workplacement based, authentic learning environments.

A number of benchmarked policy statements explicitly align university WIL definitions with the Commonwealth government's work experience requirements detailed in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Cth): that is, educational content, standards and assessment of learning, placement co-ordination and monitoring, and interactions between the university and host organisation. The policy statements examined articulated obligations and responsibilities of students, the university and host organisations, such as those identified by the University of New England (2007) *WorkReady Policy*. These obligations may be categorised as preparatory, placement and post-placement related.

Scope of WIL activity principally included credit-bearing university units or courses, involving undergraduate, enrolled students. Scope varied in relation to the inclusion or otherwise of graduate research students, students undertaking paid workplacements or optional WIL activities. For example, the *Work integrated learning (WIL) at RMIT policy* explicitly excluded apprenticeships and traineeships, honours and graduate research programs. Whilst WIL policy implementation involves collaboration between academic and professional staff and industry and community organisations, the benchmarked policy statements primarily establish the respective university's pedagogical approach to work integrated learning. They document academic principles governing WIL and are contextualised by the respective university's academic policy framework.

The benchmarked policy documents refer to a range of associated academic and corporate policy statements articulating the respective university's position in relation to assessment, graduate attributes, safe to practice requirements and intellectual property. Administrative issues such as privacy (including confidentiality), police checks and insurance are also referred to in relation to WIL policy implementation. These statements augment provisions of university WIL policy by answering related policy questions.

The WIL Provocations symposium discussed the challenges and opportunities presented to Australian universities implementing WIL. Symposium participants reported industry saturation in relation to workplacement provision, and discussed the tension between equity drivers encouraging universal access, and merit-selection processes founded on principles of excellence. The symposium provided an opportunity to support the emerging WIL community of practice.

In addition to the three presenters, the Discussion Forums involved 36 staff (12 – Newnham campus; 24 - Sandy Bay campus). Participants were representative of the disciplines of education, maritime engineering, nursing, business, aquaculture, fisheries, social work, human life sciences, information science and the conservatorium. The Discussion Forums covered a range of disciplinary offerings spanning: professional experience placement involving immersion learning in the professional workplace (such as nursing/clinical placements and education professional experience), industry practice involving the application of theory in the practice workplace (such as generic skill oriented internships), and industry interaction (such as field trips and guest lectures). Participants identified a number of contemporary issues including: the impact of disability or medical condition(s); the role of simulation as a delivery context for WIL; and assessment of learning outcomes. Participants suggested that WIL could contribute to the achievement of the *Bradley Review's* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008)

ambitious participation targets and the university's growth agenda, while maximising Commonwealth work experience funding.

Discussion Forum participants responded that responsibilities best undertaken at the local level include: management of student and host organisation feedback; WIL placement negotiation; negotiation with professional registration or accreditation bodies; and integration into curriculum. Functions recommended for joint – but primarily local level – responsibility include: resourcing WIL delivery; pre-placement preparation of students and host organisations; and determining student eligibility (including safety to practice). Responses varied as to whether the University (solely), or the University (centrally) in conjunction with local areas should maintain responsibility for quality control and risk management, and alignment of graduate and employability generic attributes. All Discussion Forum groups indicated that the University (centrally) should hold responsibility for establishing the strategic direction for WIL.

The interviews identified current arrangements for the preparatory, placement and post-placement phases of placement-based WIL activities, and participants contributed to the identification of 'good practice principles' to underpin the *WIL Policy* provisions. Given the diversity of established and emerging WIL practice, the interviews revealed essentially minimum academic standards and baseline obligations for local academic units, the University, students, industry and community organisations. The interviews also revealed the extent to which professional accreditation and regulatory authorities drive discipline-specific arrangements. For example, the Health Science Practice Placement Committee must ensure compliance with the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Tasmania) Act 2010*. The interviews also revealed instances where university-wide documentation requires additional local procedural documentation to reflect local requirements or peculiarities (for example, the Health Sciences *Mandatory Reporting Procedure).*

The (then) University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) and Academic Senate deliberations confirmed that whilst some policy provisions reflect current practice – particularly for disciplines with well established programs such as Education and Nursing - for some disciplinary areas, compliance will involve a 'stretch'. These committee consultations also provided an opportunity to discuss the hierarchy of policy instruments, and place of standing contractual agreements. The UTLC and Academic Senate noted WIL implementation required policy responses regarding requirements (for example, police checks, occupational health and safety including immunisation, field work/trips and intellectual property).

Discussion

The WIL Project demonstrated that policy development can contribute to the University's academic agenda and fundamentally shape teaching and learning – pedagogy, practice and partnerships. A key example is the uniquely UTAS definition of work integrated learning embedded in the new *WIL Policy,* which reads as follows:

> a purposeful, organised, supervised and assessed educational activity that integrates theoretical learning with its applications in the workplace … as work practice through placement in an industry, professional or community organisation workplace; as work practice through placement in a simulated workplace practice setting on or off campus; or

through an assessment activity designed to simulate an authentic workplace activity (University of Tasmania, 2010).

Whereas the initial *Workplace Learning Placements Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2007a) was compliance and partner-agreement based, the new *WIL Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2011a) provides an underpinning framework for WIL curriculum, co-ordination, delivery, assessment and evaluation. The leading contribution of academic staff in academic policy development (Shattock, 2010) and collegial governance (Ehrenberg, 2004) are well established. For the University of Tasmania, the WIL Project clearly demonstrated the benefit of exploiting the University's policy consultation mechanisms and collegial decision-making processes to shape policy by defining underpinning academic principles. The most powerful message from the WIL Project is that shaping policy can shape principles of practice; in this instance, teaching and learning.

Concurrently, the WIL Project demonstrated the tensions in reconciling broad, umbrella policy principles and local or disciplinary requirements for specificity. While the *University Policy Development Cycle* can be successfully followed to develop university policy, developing meaningful, university-wide academic policy remains an ambitious and complex task. In a somewhat self-perpetuating way, this task now needs to be turned to policy questions concerning student police checks, immunisation and graduate attributes.

Finally, the WIL Project demonstrated that policy provisions can articulate minimum or academic standards. In some instances, or for some disciplines, policies reflect current good or 'best' practice, whereas for others, provisions are aspirational. The participation of academics in the identification of minimum or academic standards, articulation of diverse practices and development of academic policy is essential to the eventual shape of University teaching and learning. The WIL Project has demonstrated just how much this matters.

Conclusion

This paper explored a policy process case study focussed on the development of the *WIL Policy* (University of Tasmania, 2011a). The model used – formal working party structures, dedicated policy staff, extensive consultation processes, dovetailed academic forums and collegial governance – is resource intensive, inclusive by nature and consensus-oriented. Given the resource requirements of this model, replication may only be feasible for a limited number of strategic policy projects. However, lessons learned can certainly inform implementation of the *University Policy Development Cycle* University of Tasmania (2010a) where elements of this model are adopted. The extent to which the WIL Project resulted in an agreed University of Tasmania policy position, and manageable platform for the implementation of quality work integrated learning will be subject to further consideration in the coming years.

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