

# Building a framework for improved workplace assessment practice and better outcomes through online platforms

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This paper discusses the development of an online platform used to build upon an existing system for assessing student workplace learning. It includes the background and rationale for the project, an overview of a rubric developed for the purpose of improving the understanding of the assessment criteria for all stakeholders. Our aim was to improve the pedagogical approach to student workplace learning in order to enhance learning outcomes for students as well as providing benefits to the university and workplace supervisors. To do this, we created a streamlined approach to assessment within the LMS at our university (Blackboard) enabling students to upload and submit their WIL portfolios. A more consistent process for academic supervisors to grade and provide timely feedback to the students, greater clarity in assessment requirements for students and workplace supervisors appears to have been well achieved.

**Keywords:** Work Integrated Learning, WIL, assessment, portfolio

## Background and rationale

Work Integrated Learning programs (WIL) in contrast with classroom environments have learning objectives are vastly different to traditional classroom or other forms of learning (Cooper et al. 2010). One aspect that highlights the difference is the addition of a third stakeholder, the workplace organisation. The learning objectives are important as they direct learning in order to increase employability outcomes and provide evidence of what students have learnt on placement. Additionally, workplace evaluation is different to other forms of assessment as one critical element is self-evaluation by the student to demonstrate achievement of the learning objectives and the subsequent value of the placement (Biggs, 2003).

To effectively and consistently assess submitted work, one method is the use of rubrics. These have an educational basis in clearly defining the important criteria along with a grading scheme which serves dual purposes: they allow students to make a pre-submission check of the readiness of their work for submission, and further they provide a clear framework for the assessment of the work by the examiner (Goodrich, 1996).

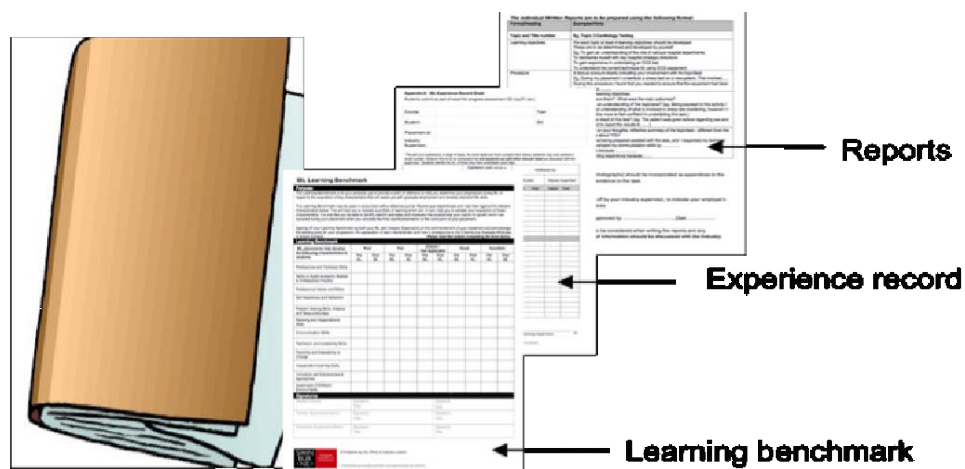
This project built upon an existing framework of good pedagogical interaction with WIL for placements within the Public & Environmental Health and Biomedical Science programs (Author 1, year). This was particularly important, as students while on their placement are often isolated from traditional academic work in their year of practical learning. Others have reported the use of tools for placement activities (Nash et al. 2010; Hay, 2012; Shanahan, 2012).

## Approach

An established portfolio paper-based assessment comprising of a number of components including a submission cover sheet, learning benchmark, experience record sheet and a series of project reports (Author 1, year) was used as the basis to develop the rubric and design the online submission platform. Although this assessment framework has been in operation for several years, the process for submission of the portfolio was identified as inefficient, resource intensive, environmentally poor and generally out-dated. The grading criteria were fairly under-developed, reducing the opportunity for quality and consistent feedback to students. Time pressures to meet deadlines and logistical issues also meant that good assessment practice was largely unshared. Once we had established that the constraints in terms of student access, supervisor requirements, health industry confidentiality and intellectual property issues could be managed via an online platform, we decided to utilise the existing resources of our LMS (Blackboard). The final portfolio was envisaged to be presented as a single

uploaded document with consistent marking criteria applied. Figure 1 illustrates the portfolio with some of the key elements shown.

To plan the changes, a small working party met to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed scheme and define the requirements to meet the constraints. The working party decided that using an electronic document portfolio was the best method of moving from the current paper-based current system. This would maintain the continuity of current portfolio objectives and meet the other constraints, and significantly reduce the administrative burden of managing distribution of portfolios and collection of feedback to return to the students. Additionally, it would allow sharing of current good assessment practice and feedback between academic supervisors through use of rubrics and improved moderation. A final benefit was the continuity of engagement for the students on placement, as they are well skilled in the use of Blackboard before taking their placement, but tend to lose some skills during their year away from the university. We faced the dilemma of creating a rubric with enough detail to capture the variety of the workplaces (hospital placement and public & environmental health) and the range of items in the portfolio, along with the keeping it simple enough to be meaningful and not too arduous for students or academic staff to utilise. The overarching goal of clarity and unambiguous criteria guided the creation of the rubric.



**Figure 1: Some key elements of the portfolio: learning benchmarks, experience record and reports.**

## The outcome

An assessment and feedback rubric was developed incorporating three levels of achievement (insufficient, developing and considerable). It was also designed to enable application to the various assessable components of the portfolio including the learning benchmark, experience record sheet, learning objectives, procedure, outcome, reflective summary, presentation, written expression, and overall. The rubric was also designed to be adjusted to add additional comments via an online drop down menu and facilitate the automatic recording of results in the students grade book, a feature not possible a using paper based system.

Feedback from the student group at a mid-year workshop was enthusiastically positive. We have trialled the new online submission for semester 1 assessment (interim report in late July) and will refine the final submission rubric and submission process based upon student feedback from this semester (for submission in February 2016).

## Conclusions and future direction

Initial indications, based on informal feedback from students and academics have been positive. A more consistent process for academic supervisors to grade and provide timely feedback to the students, greater clarity in assessment requirements for students and workplace supervisors appears to have been achieved.

Once the pilot submission stage is complete later in the year, we plan to carry out a more formal

analysis of the stakeholder responses. Future ideas include the possibility of digital authorisation and electronic verification of workplace skills evidence, and report endorsement from industry supervisors.

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