

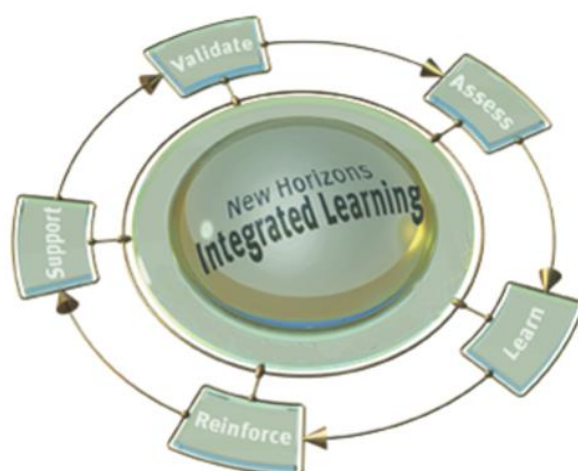
## Assessing learners' preparedness for work-integrated learning (WIL) at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

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### Abstract

The purpose of the article was to assess the effectiveness of the work-preparedness program (WPP) in higher education, using the case of Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in South Africa. Higher education institutions in South Africa and abroad are under increasing pressure to balance the theory base learning for degree programmes with the practical skills desired by the industry. One of the strategies used to achieve this is making work-integrated learning (WIL) a compulsory component of their academic programmes. Work-integrated learning integrates the theory students learn in the classroom with practical experience. Students registered for the National Diploma in Hospitality Management at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) have to undergo two (2) compulsory six-month periods of experiential learning during which they are placed in hotels throughout South Africa. Before students leave the university to join the industry for WIL purposes, they have to go through the WPP also known as "orientation programme". The purpose of the WPP is educating students about the workplace expectations on them and what they in return can expect from the workplace. This research collected data using self-completion questionnaires about the views of both the hospitality management students (who went through the WPP and who have completed their first WIL programme) and academic WIL coordinators about the extent to which the students are prepared for the WIL programme. The majority of respondents perceived their level of preparedness as a result of attending the WPP as relatively high across all areas. The academic WIL coordinators concur with students in terms of students' preparedness for WIL. It is hoped that the findings of this evaluation will contribute in improving the WPP for hospitality management.

**Keywords:** Work-integrated learning, hospitality management, workplace-preparedness programme, graduates, WIL coordinators.



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## Introduction

This research sought to determine the extent to which hospitality management students at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa are adequately prepared before they start work-integrated learning (WIL) for the first time. WIL refers to the period students spend in the industry to integrate the theory they learnt in the classroom with practice. The terms 'work-integrated learning', 'experiential learning' and 'in-service learning' are used interchangeably in this article. This research is not about WIL itself but it is about the work-preparedness programme (WPP) also termed 'orientation', which is an integral part of WIL. It is believed that students' preparation and the process through which they go prior to undertaking the WIL programme greatly influence the quality of the WIL programme. Consequently efforts must be made to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme that prepares students for WIL. Also, there is a dearth of research on the preparedness of students for WIL. A lot of studies have been conducted on readiness of graduates to join the workplace after completion of their studies and on the effectiveness of WIL to prepare students for the workplace.

The usual approach to an internal evaluation of an education programme is to obtain feedback from the trainees in terms of the programme achieving its objectives; however the stakeholders of a programme involve more than just the trainees and the developer of that particular programme. Before hospitality management students at Walter Sisulu University leave the university in order to undertake WIL at different hotels throughout South Africa, they go through a preparatory programme called workplace-preparedness programme (WPP) or "orientation". The WPP is meant to prepare the students so they know what to expect and what is expected of them in the workplace. Grace and O'Neil (2014) note that adequate preparation for

placement can contribute to positive and rewarding experiences that assist students' progress towards the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for professional practice. Rayner and Papakonstantinou (2015) concur with Grace and O'Neil (2014) by arguing that WIL programs that place students over an entire semester, or year, upon approaching completion of their degrees have an obligation to better prepare such students for WIL. This article reports on the first phase of a bigger study that investigates stakeholder (students, academic WIL coordinators and workplace supervisors) perceptions of WPP at Walter Sisulu University. The second phase which will be reported in the next paper will deal with the workplace supervisors' perspectives of hospitality management students' preparedness for WIL. The determination of these important stakeholders' perceptions of the students' preparation programme is useful for revising the WPP. Also, if employability is one of the key aspirations of university education, employers should have a voice.

Academic WIL coordinators are in a better position to evaluate because they can interpret both sides of the coin: the theory and the practical. Thus, curriculum assessment should involve the perspectives of both the learners, and the knowledge providers who are experts in both theory and practice. Students on the other hand can best judge their own level of preparedness because they are the ones who are going through the process of learning. Patrick, Peach, Pocknee, Webb, Fletcher & Pretto (2009) contend that the quality of the engagement between WIL stakeholders is an important issue that arises and that a stakeholder integrated approach is required to improve programme implementation.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the next session deals with research context, followed by literature review, the research methodology, results and discussion. The final section concludes the paper and provides

recommendations and potential for future research.

### **Context of the study**

The context of the study is WPP which is an integral part of the WIL programme at WSU. The WIL coordinator who is charged with the responsibility of preparing students for WIL throughout WSU runs the WPP. The WPP is designed to prepare all students whose programmes have a compulsory WIL component before they start their WIL training. The WPP runs for two three hour sessions prior to students leaving the university to do WIL in industry. All students who are due to undergo WIL in the next semester must go through WPP. The academic WIL coordinators based at the hospitality management department sit down in the classroom with students throughout the WPP presentations. It is believed WPP reduces a lot of problems that could have been experienced had students not been prepared for the workplace. It is also believed WPP cultivates in students a positive attitude towards work which is what employers are looking for in potential employees.

The WPP at Walter Sisulu University has been developed to explicitly prepare students for WIL placements and to enable them to articulate the learning from that placement. The purpose of WPP is to develop skills and attitudes that would result in better workplace practices. The orientation equips students with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed in the workplace. It allows students to gain confidence in dealing with industry representatives. The WPP is designed to enhance students' generic skills. Generic skills are "employability skills used in the application of knowledge. These skills are not job specific, but are skills which cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer. Frequently students, even those with a strong technical background and a high academic record, can battle in obtaining work placement as they stumble at the interview stage due to a lack of social or professional skills. WPP is offered to

enable students to enhance their employability and to prepare for transition to WIL through interview preparation. According to Engel-Hills, Garraway, Jacobs, Volbrecht & Winberg (2010) students, particularly if they are full-time students at the university, need to be adequately prepared in order to learn in a work environment. They further contend that students need to understand the expectations on them as employees (even if unpaid).

The main focus of the WPP is to assist students to:

- know the importance of doing WIL as part of the hospitality management program
- understand workplace expectations on them and what in turn they can expect from the workplace
- understand the importance of generic attributes for the workplace; and
- gain greater understanding of their professional responsibilities while in the workplace

Students are reminded that in thinking about professional practice there are three types of skills: broad-base or personal skills, work-related or professional skills and job-specific or technical skills. By the end of the WPP students will have created a resume, clearly stating their strengths, previous experience and their goals for placement. Students are each presented with a WIL student handbook which contains all the information students may need with regard to WIL and preparing themselves for interviews after graduation.

The WPP at WSU covers the following components:

- What WIL entails
- How the logbook is completed
- Benefits of WIL (for students, employers and the university)
- Roles and responsibilities of students, employers and the university

- Labour relations as it applies to trainees
- Abuse of students (including sexual harassment) in the workplace
- CV writing
- Interview skills
- Professional conduct
- Effective communication
- Conflict resolution
- Teamwork
- Problem solving skills
- Learning on the job
- Time management
- Telephone use

The intention of giving students this orientation prior to starting their WIL programme is so that they are of value to the employer from the beginning of the training period. The WPP has been designed to ensure students are not lost in a professional environment. No empirical study had been conducted to find out whether the WPP objectives were achieved or not. It is deemed significant knowing what is happening to the programme and how it is perceived by major stakeholders. Accordingly an evaluation of the WPP is deemed timely and appropriate to examine issues relating to the attainment of objectives, adequacy of skills acquired by students, attitudes of students towards the programme.

### **Literature review**

A thorough search of literature reveals that there is a dearth of research on the preparedness of students for WIL. This study aims to fill that gap. Spowart (2006) undertook research to determine whether the preparation students received in the classroom at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa was the best possible. This study looked at how students were introduced, received and oriented in the workplace; what human resource aspects affected them; whether the experience was rewarding and why;

and what could be done by educators to assist in preparing students better for work-integrated learning. The majority of students felt they were ready at the start of their WIL programme due to the lessons they received from academic instructors. Keating (2013) investigated whether the preparation given to students registered for diplomas in Public Relations, Marketing Management and Advertising Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) before engaging in WIL was enough. It is reported that the majority of respondents indicated that the preparation they were given prior to WIL placement was appropriate and adequate. Findings of a study by Nel and Shutte (2013) in South Africa highlights the importance of students preparedness. Graduates who participated in the study voiced a demand for more practical experience and preparation for work before graduating as they felt this would significantly enhance their employability. The respondents further expressed a desire that NMMU would assist them with preparation for the world of work, by developing 'employability competencies' such as compiling curriculum vitae, conducting oneself in a job interview, etc. A lot of studies have been conducted assessing perceptions of WIL either by students, academics, employers or by all three. Dwesini and Nomnga (2013) assessed Walter Sisulu University hospitality management students' experiences of WIL while placed in hotels throughout South Africa. This study revealed that students had both positive and negative experiences of WIL. Dwesini and Nomnga (2013) further note that WIL improved students' skills generally. Some evidence was found that students were able to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in the classroom in their job practices in the workplace. Furthermore, a number of studies have been undertaken in South Africa and abroad on the readiness of graduates to join the workplace after completion of their studies. Griesel and Parker (2009) undertook a baseline study the purpose of which was to take stock of the views and expectations of employers and their evaluation of quality of graduates

produced by South African higher education institutions. The report signified a disparity between the expectations of employers and the readiness of graduates, and while expectations exceeded readiness, there was an indication that some tertiary institutions were focused towards producing graduates fully prepared for the workplace. In Australia Rayner & Papakonstantinou (2015) investigated perspectives of a work-integrated learning placement programme, firstly in relation to its longer-term worth since they had completed it, and secondly, with respect to its value regarding course relatedness and in enhancing their employability and/or workplace readiness. Students felt that the WIL experience better prepared them for a professional work environment, and that they had gained excellent insights into their chosen WIL industry through working alongside professionals in their field Rayner & Papakonstantinou (2015). The present study investigates whether the WPP hospitality management students at WSU receive before embarking on WIL prepares them adequately for their experiential learning. This study will complement the studies on students' preparedness already undertaken as mentioned above.

### **Why work-integrated learning?**

According to (Tomlison, 2008) as cited in Rayner and Papakonstantinou (2015) over the past decade, the traditional model of a university education, namely the inculcation of discipline-specific knowledge and skills, has been called into question in terms of university marketing and feedback from employers. They further posit that business and industry have increasingly called for universities to generate better prepared, perhaps even work-ready graduates (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004; Peach & Gamble, 2011), and the list of must-have graduate attributes has become ever more lengthy. Griesel and Parker in South Africa reported a disparity between employer expectations and readiness of graduates (Barrie, 2006;

Kember & Leung, 2005) as summarised in Nicolaides (2015) notes that many employers in the hospitality industry state that students are generally not sufficiently prepared for the hospitality workplace and they appeal to universities to produce more employable graduates. Smith, Clegg, Lawrence & Todd, (2007) in Nicolaides (2015) further posit this should be done by providing students with useful and transferable skills that can be applied in the workplace whether it be an hotel, motel or guesthouse or any other related enterprise. One important technique that higher education institutions can use to provide work-ready graduates is WIL. WIL broadly refers to on-campus and workplace learning activities and experiences which integrate theory with practice in academic learning programmes. WIL programmes are typically described as "educational programmes which combine and integrate learning and its workplace application, regardless of whether integration occurs in industry or whether it is real or simulated". Atchison, Pollock, Reeder and Rizzetti (2002) assert that WIL gives learners an opportunity to relate the theory they learn in the classroom to practice and to be well prepared upon completion of their studies. It is incorporated into academic programmes in an attempt to make students work-ready. WIL could thus be described as an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces. It is based on the principle that learning should be demonstrated to be appropriate for a qualification and should be assessed wherever it takes place or is provided Engel-Hills et al.,(2010). According to Jackson (2013) WIL has attracted considerable attention as an instrument for enhancing professional practice and developing work-readiness in new graduates. He goes on to say WIL is widely considered as a point of difference in developing graduate employability by enhancing skill outcomes, such as team-work, communication, self-management and problem solving, employment prospects and student understanding of the world of work.

Martin and Hughes (2009) note that WIL experiences provide a bridge for the student between the academic present, and their professional future – an opportunity to apply and merge theoretical knowledge gained in academic studies to “real world” workplace practical experiences, and to prepare the student for a career by providing an opportunity to develop relevant professional skills. WIL is essentially a three way partnership between the student, the workplace organisation, and the university. The WIL partnership requires all parties in the relationship to assume definite responsibilities, perform specific functions, and achieve benefits as a result of the involvement. A report on graduate recruitment in the leisure industry in Australia highlighted that a strong knowledge base alone does not guarantee a new graduate employment and that personal attributes and capabilities of the graduate are considered to have a greater influence on success in the workplace (Bell, Crebert, Patrick, Bates & Cragnolini, 2003 in Martin & Hughes, 2009).

Spowart (2009), suggests that the vocational nature of hospitality management is ideal to utilize WIL as a method of transferring classroom activities to the workplace. She further quotes Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick and Cragnolini (2004) and Fleming and Eames (2005) as saying these technical skills are then transferred to the real work environment by the students having a compulsory semester of WIL. Groenewald (2008) notes that WIL is not an add-on to the curriculum, but an integral part of the educational process. McGlothlin Jr (2003) concurs with Spowart (2006) by agreeing that the importance of WIL being a part of curriculum in a field such as hospitality management cannot be over-emphasized. He further notes students gain valuable experience by way of applying practical learning in the workplace, develop their skills in interacting with fellow workers, customers and management and discover in which direction they would like to steer their careers.

Benefits of WIL for students are: gaining practical experience by applying lecture room learning in a “real world” work environment. This involves observing theory in action and the opportunity to integrate theory as well as receiving feedback on the ability to apply it. They also get an opportunity to refine and develop new professional skills. Students on experiential learning obtain feedback on interpersonal skills. They also develop a relationship with employees and mentors that provide an opportunity to start developing a network of professional contacts within one’s field hence obtaining referees and references: an opportunity to identify professional role models in the business environment

According to the literature, employers also benefit from WIL in the following ways:

- Students undergoing WIL provide employers with a pool of prospective employees;
- Students are a source of low-cost temporary, motivated employees who are able to productively contribute to the organization and are available to meet fluctuating workloads;
- Employers and students are provided with an opportunity to determine, in a non-threatening situation, whether there is a suitable “match” for permanent employment, a cost-effective method of staff recruitment;
- Experiential learning offers an ideal opportunity to assess the potential of employees for further development and advancement; and
- WIL strengthens the relationship between employers and educational institutions.

It is always prudent to monitor the degree to which education for a profession prepares students for that profession. For that reason WPP seems to warrant particular attention to discern the degree

to which the educational training continues to be appropriate preparation for practice.

### **Research objectives**

The objectives of this article are to:

- Determine the perceptions of hospitality management students and those of academic WIL coordinators on whether the WPP adequately prepares hospitality management students for their first experiential learning;
- Examine whether there were differences in the perceptions of the two stakeholders (i.e. hospitality management students and academic WIL coordinators) and what these differences are if there are any; and
- Seek recommendations for closing the gap between the expectations of the two stakeholders and what the WPP addresses.

### **Research questions**

The main research question for this study was: is the WPP adequately preparing hospitality management students for first time WIL?

### **Significance of the study**

The findings of this study will help the researcher to revisit the WPP content and identify shortcomings. Walter Sisulu University will use this study as a framework to evaluate the WPP continuously. In addition other WIL programmes should be able to evaluate their programmes by replicating this study.

### **Research methodology**

The present study sought to find out whether the WPP at Walter Sisulu University adequately prepares hospitality management students before they start their first WIL experience. This was achieved by soliciting views of students and those of the WIL academic coordinators with regards to the adequacy of the WPP. This study is important in that it evaluates whether a gap exists between stakeholders' expectations of what students should be prepared on and what the WPP actually addresses.

### **Research design**

Two types of self-completion questionnaires with open and closed-ended questions were used to collect data; from four (4) academic WIL coordinators and from sixty (60) hospitality management students returning from their first experiential learning. Data from the two stakeholders were triangulated to ascertain diversity in perceptions. The self-completion questionnaire was deemed most appropriate for the study. Questionnaires are easy to administer, friendly to complete and fast to score and therefore take relatively very little time of researchers and respondents Donkor, Nsoh, & Mitchual (2009).

The questionnaire comprises questions which required responses on a 5 point Likert scale where respondents were asked to rate the levels of agreement to various issues being investigated. The five response alternatives were; (1) strongly agree; (2) agree; (3) undecided; (4) disagree; and (5) strongly disagree. Respondents were required to elaborate on their responses by giving further comments on each question. Recommendations were also sought for future improvement of the WPP. The students' questionnaire was first piloted to five students and the academics' one was piloted to two academics to ensure validity and reliability. Thereafter minor changes were made to both questionnaires.

This survey was administered at the beginning of the semester to students returning from their first experiential learning to allow students time to reflect on WPP and their first experiences of WIL.

### **Population and sample**

The population for the study comprised of 154 hospitality management students returning from their first experiential learning in all WSU campuses (Buffalo City Campus – 54; Ibika Campus – 45; and Zamukulungisa Site – 45), and 4 academic WIL coordinators. Sixty (60) students were randomly selected from the 154 hospitality students returning from their first experiential learning and all four

(4) hospitality WIL coordinators participated in the study.

## Results and discussion

This section highlights key findings of this study by referring to the study's objectives, identifies limitation of the study and provides suggestions for future research in this area. The survey results are interpreted and discussed in two separate sections: the academic WIL coordinators' survey and the students' survey. Verbatim responses are used where necessary to reflect respondents' perceptions as honestly and accurately as possible. Data highlights that perceptions of adequacy are consistent for both stakeholders (students and academics).

### Demographics of the sample

There was a total of 154 students returning from their first WIL module in all WSU campuses (Buffalo City Campus-54; Ibika Campus – 45; and Zamukulungisa Site - 45). The sample for the study consisted of 64 respondents, 60 students randomly selected from the student population and four (4) academic WIL coordinators. The gender distribution of students was 66.7% (40) females and 33.3% (20) male and that of academic WIL coordinators was 50% (2) males and 50% (2) females.

### Students' perceptions of the WPP

The majority of respondents perceived their level of preparedness as a result of attending the WPP as relatively high across all areas. The responses are grouped in the following four themes:

- Usefulness of the WPP
- Alignment of WPP to workplace requirements
- Enhancement of students' generic skills
- Sufficiency of WPP content

### Usefulness of WPP

When asked to rate the usefulness of the WPP received before their first experiential learning 70% (42) of respondents felt the preparation they received was excellent, 20% (12) said the

preparation was good and 10% (6) regard the preparation as being above average. When asked to provide reasons for their responses respondents gave different reasons, such as:

*"After the completion of the WPP I felt empowered because I got information I did not have before attending the programme. We got information on how to prepare ourselves for the training and on how to conduct ourselves during the training period. We were made aware that if we conduct ourselves well the employer would see potential employees in us but if we behaved badly they would say 'good riddance' when the training period comes to an end."*

Another respondent commented: *"Attending WPP sessions before start of our training has increased our motivation and helped us understand the importance of effective communication, teamwork, punctuality and conducting ourselves in a professional way throughout our training."*

Another comment: *"Making information about the workplace available to us even before we got there. By the time we got there we knew our rights, responsibilities as trainees and the expectations on us. We were made aware we should not think that after finishing our diploma we would walk into the hotel and become supervisors as most of us initially thought."*

The majority of respondents 65% (42) mentioned after receiving WPP lessons they understood the importance and purpose of doing WIL in the first place. They reported that the orientation raised their awareness of the importance of professionalism in the workplace, time management, confidence, assertiveness, effective communication with colleagues and supervisors, positive attitude towards work and being open-minded. All respondents said they believed without the WPP they would not have handled their first training the way they did. They say they got to know a lot of things they did not know before about the workplace. They mentioned that they got information on the nature of the industry they have chosen the hospitality industry especially



the fact that it requires someone who can work under pressure.

### Alignment of WPP to workplace requirements

On the question on whether what is covered in the WPP is relevant to what was required of them during their placement the following responses were received:

*“What we were told at the WPP became real when we got to the workplace.”*

*“We were told about handling difficult guests. If it was not for the WPP I attended I would have cried the day I came across an impossible woman.”*

*“Time management was emphasised in the WPP sessions and in the workplace everything has a schedule.”*

*“We were also required to clean toilets which without having gone through the WPP we would have regarded as abuse but during orientation we were told if everyone else cleans the toilets then we should not call it abuse.”*

The majority of respondents 65% (42) felt what was addressed at the orientation is exactly what happens in the workplace. However 15% (9) felt some of the things did not go as were explained during the WPP. Students who were working at the front office complained that they were required to clean their work areas themselves. Their feeling is there should be someone employed as a cleaner, not them.

### The extent to which generic skills are or not enhanced

On the question regarding enhancement of generic skills the following responses were received

GENERIC SKILLS	1. STRONGLY AGREE	2. AGREE	3. NOT SURE	4. DISAGREE	5. STRONGLY DISAGREE
Interpersonal communication	50%	30%	5%	5%	0
Time management	70%	20%	0	10%	0
Self confidence	63%	30%	0	7%	0
Assertiveness	60%	30%	0	10%	0
Professionalism	70%	20%	3%	7%	0
Positive attitude towards work	55%	35%	10%	0	0
Interview skills	62%	35%	3%	0	0
CV Writing	80%	40%	0	0	0

Responses on this question confirm that the WPP enhanced students' generic skills to a certain extent although the above list is not exhaustive of generic skills required in the workplace. There were comments relating to improvement of time management after attending the programme. They appear to have developed considerable confidence due to the attendance of the WPP. The majority

of students strongly agree their CV writing skills, time management and professionalism were enhanced by the preparatory program. One student mentioned he was very bad at keeping time but she was punctual at work throughout the training period. Another student mentioned she never thought she would work away from home but after the orientation she felt encouraged to be

independent hence she did her training in Kimberley which is very far from her home. Again the majority said they used to have all sorts of things in their CVs, pictures of someone in graduating attire and even bright colours but now their CVs are very simple. Interpersonal communication is one attribute where 50% strongly agree to improvement. Comments were that the problem is the English language. One respondent commented:

*“You know what to say but you not sure of your English. That is what makes it difficult to communicate”*

### **Sufficiency of the contents of the WPP**

Regarding the question on whether the contents of WPP were sufficient the majority of students responded in the affirmative. However two respondents suggested ‘discrimination in the workplace should be added as a topic in WPP.

Comment: *“You should include discrimination in the workplace as part of the WPP because some of us experience discrimination during training. There was a lot of discrimination against me because I was a Xhosa amongst Tswanas. They would speak badly about me to the manager but I would stand up and defend myself. I was not afraid to speak out and I attribute all of that to the WPP because it was emphasized that we should be assertive.”*

The majority of respondents felt that the hospitality management department should inform them early about the places where they have been allocated to do their training. They cited that accommodation is a big problem so they need more time to go there before the start date to organise accommodation.

Under any other comments the general feeling of the respondents is that the number of the WPP contact sessions should be increased. It is also a general feeling of students that the orientation sessions should start early so students can have time to internalise the information.

### **Academic WIL coordinators’ views**

Academic coordinators were required to rate the quality of WPP. They all perceived the quality as excellent. It was found that academic WIL coordinators appreciated the WPP programme. All four (4) coordinators felt the WPP is making a big difference in the performance of students in the workplace during their experiential learning. WIL coordinators pointed out they receive very positive comments from industry regarding performance of their students. It was reported there are isolated cases where the institution has to intervene because of bad behaviour from students but such situations are very rare. Regarding the contents of the WPP programme WIL coordinators felt the programme was very inclusive and therefore had nothing to add or subtract from it. They concur with students that the number of contact sessions should be increased.

Overall hospitality management students and their coordinators at WSU view the WPP as adequate. The study did not reveal any differences in the perceptions of students and those of WIL coordinators with regard to adequacy of the WPP. Both groups view the contents of the programme as adequate except that they advocated for an increase in contact sessions of the WPP. Students highlighted the need for the orientation to start early.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Adequate preparation for WIL placement can contribute to positive and rewarding experiences that assist students’ progress towards the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for professional practice. This article explored perceptions of hospitality management students and those of WIL coordinators on whether the WPP students receive before starting their WIL programme adequately prepares them. Students and academic WIL coordinators were surveyed to gain insight into their perspectives on the WPP. According to the literature students often struggle to make the transition from the lecture room to the workplace. In contrast this article demonstrates that hospitality

management students at Walter Sisulu University felt adequately prepared for their first time WIL placement. The level of preparedness was not affected by which workplace (hotel) students did their training. Some students were placed in big hotels while others were placed in small ones in different towns across South Africa. Data highlights that perceptions of adequacy are consistent for both stakeholders; hospitality management students and academic coordinators. Students feel that WPP is empowering them. However they suggest that the number of WPP contact sessions should be increased. Presently students receive two (2) three hour sessions of orientation before they leave the university for training. The academic WIL coordinators concur with students in terms of the adequacy of their preparation before they leave for experiential learning for the first time. Academics further reported that they get positive comments from workplace supervisors regarding performance of their students whilst on training. They reported that there have been isolated cases of bad behaviour by students which were received from employers but those were rare. It is clear that some generic skills and abilities (notably interpersonal communication, time management, self-confidence, assertiveness, professionalism positive attitude towards work, interview skills, and CV writing skills) lend themselves to development at university provided students are made aware of their importance. For the WIL coordinator this study shows the value of obtaining feedback from students and educators to identify successes and problem areas of a program.

Discrimination in the workplace seems to be a problem for hospitality management students during training. This requires the hospitality management department to approach the affected hotels and discuss this problem with the hotel authorities. The WIL coordinators can suggest diversity management training for hotel employees to be aware and sensitive to diversity. Employees must learn to acknowledge differences and not to ignore them. Awareness training and skill-

building training would educate employees on specific cultural differences and how to respond to these. Everyone including trainees needs an environment free of discrimination to be productive. This suggestion is in line with the recommendation made by Westhuizen and Kesa (2014) that the task at hand is for all WIL coordinators to work close with industry on the outcomes that we all desire for our students. Lister (2003) as cited in Nicolaides (2015) posits that if we are to prepare students to be educated to be good future employees and model citizens, we cannot ignore the issue of cultural diversity. Mok (2002) in Nicolaides (2015) contends diversity management should typically include the following: "The explicit recognition of the strategic importance of employee and customer diversity by top management, ensuring that all human resource management systems (e.g. recruitment, selection, orientation, training and development, rewards systems, communication strategies) are supportive of employee diversity and consistent with applicable legislation (e.g. local labour laws, human rights)".

Given the importance of employers in work-integrated learning, it is difficult to imagine how any successful programme can function without the support of employers (Coll et al., 2002) in Donkor et al.,(2009). Therefore it is recommended that views of workplace supervisors regarding preparedness of hospitality management students before starting their first WIL placement should be solicited and compared with results of the present study. It is also recommended that a study like this should be undertaken in other academic programmes with a compulsory WIL component for improvement purposes.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the need to rely on self-reporting which may produce bias.

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