

Work integrated learning adds value to business

By [Sean Fenn](#)

30 Jan 2015

In the not-too-distant future, the motor industry is going to have to make room to welcome students from private and public colleges, universities of technology and regular universities, offering them the work experience that they will need to complete their qualifications.



© server - [123RF.com](#)

Motor industry players will have to create positions for them, as well as supply them with the equipment and mentorship that they need to leave their work experience course component ready and able to be employed as fully qualified professionals.

Imperial wanted to research the implications of this future scenario to prepare ourselves, and we partnered in a doctoral thesis research project with Merseta and Resonance Institute of Learning CEO, Rooksana Rajab (the doctoral thesis incumbent), to understand the question of work integrated learning (WIL) readiness.

Of particular interest to us was trainees in the areas of HR practitioners and apprentices, and we decided to build the research around these scarce assets and their interactions. Various businesses within the Imperial Group, such as Imperial Auto, took on one or two HR graduates out of a carefully selected group of 20, who either had a certificate or a diploma in HR. Most of these graduates had spent up to four years at home, unemployed in spite of being qualified.

Workplace experience

We provided these young graduates with workplace experience over a year, on a stipend paid for by the Merseta. They were registered for a qualification through the Resonance Institute of Learning, and by the end of the year we had 15 fully employable - and employed - HR graduates. Five of the candidates pursued other opportunities during that year.

There were many lessons learned during this year. We found that only a few businesses are prepared to take on graduates, and that only a few are adept at managing them well, while others still have much to learn in creating the best environment for a WIL process. We learned that exposure to the workplace might not always fall within the first steps of a new career, but that workplace experience is the critical factor that gives employers the confidence to employ graduates, as they have demonstrated the skills that make them employable.

It is clear that WIL requires dedicated resources and people to manage the learners - they actually need more of a mentor, and there needs to be an internal curriculum of sorts to provide structure to their learnings during the WIL process, because much of what the graduates need to learn falls out of the realm of text books, and more into the realm of soft skills learned from an experienced colleague.

Added costs

These things add to the costs of your business, there is no doubt, but building up young people in this way adds value to your business. Partnering with a recognised training provider may relieve some of the burden, along with deciding on the outcomes expected from the process.

Many businesses don't know where to start with this process. The easiest way is to take on a few youngsters from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) or public college, and slowly sensitise the people already in your business to the presence of inexperienced - but keen to learn - young people, and inspire them to get involved in getting the candidates ready for the world of work. Students or graduates employed on this basis are not paid wages or a salary - they need to be paid a stipend that covers their costs of travelling to and from work, at the very least.

WIL is a certain part of our future, but it really should be seen as an opportunity to grow the limited skills base in our industry, and a way to invest in the future of young people and our country.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Fenn is the divisional general manager in the development and learning at Imperial Group.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>