

Setting SA graduates up for success in 4iR world of work

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Sacap's work integrated learning programmes boost work-readiness



South African youth are disproportionately represented amongst the country's unemployed, and even graduates of tertiary education are not immune to this struggle to enter and make their way in the modern world of work. According to the first 2022 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 63.9% of youth aged between 15 and 24 years are unemployed while 42.1% of those between 25 and 34 years suffer the same fate. Amongst these young unemployed people are 32.6% of graduates aged 15 to 24 years, and 22.4% of graduates between 25 and 34 years of age.

At the launch of the WILSA (Work Integrated Learning South Africa) in March this year, vice-chancellor of the Durban University of Technology, Professor Thandwa Mthembu highlighted the role of the country's tertiary institutions in developing students who are 'adaptive' and fit for purpose in the 4iR workplace. WILSA mandates work integrated components across a number of academic programmes in order to expose students to the real world of work.

Kim Starkey, counselling psychologist and head of work integrated learning at Sacap says, "The idea, of course, is not new, but it is a very good one, which [Sacap \(The South African College of Applied Psychology\)](#) has long invested in. Sacap has included WIL through internships, placements and projects as part of our studies over the past 14 years and we see the [difference](#) it makes to our students. WIL programmes empower students to put theory into practice and be exposed to valuable workplace mentoring and supervision. This enables them to gain vital confidence as they develop practical skills that enhance their work readiness."

Sacap has embedded nine different qualifications with [WIL](#) components across its three faculties. The institution has a network of over 60 partner non-profit, corporate and community sites where Sacap students are deployed to integrate their

academic learning with workplace practice. In the Applied Psychology and Social Work & Community Development fields, student registered counsellors, psychosocial support workers and social workers get face-to-face with people with real needs in South African communities. Close supervision from the Sacap WIL co-ordinators and supervisor team ensures that students undergo significant personal development that helps them build the resilience and adaptability they need to thrive in working in communities under threats from poverty, crime and violence. To date, 1399 student psychosocial support workers and 169 student registered counsellors have graduated from Sacap with WIL experience. In Sacap's Management and Leadership faculty, students of Human Resources Management and Coaching also benefit from rewarding WIL programmes through internships, placements and projects that give them hands-on experience and up-to-date insights into the fast-changing world of business in the 4iR context.

"WIL is a hallmark of Sacap's curricula," says Nhlanhla Dlamini, registered counsellor and work integrated learning lead for the Faculty of Applied Psychology. "It greatly enhances a graduate's qualification. In 2021, in the midst of the global pandemic, we still had 460 students completing the WIL module across our Applied Psychology and Management & Leadership faculties. Our 11 WIL co-ordinators and 30-person strong supervisor team which includes Educational, Counselling and Clinical Psychologists, as well as Registered Counsellors, Social Workers, HR practitioners and Coaches collectively spent over 2900 hours in supervising our students completing their WIL journey."

For graduates, a WIL component in their studies is a boost to their nascent Curriculum Vitae. Bona fide, supervised work experience in their chosen field helps them to stand out amidst the sea of graduates with just a certificate in hand. It shows they have already crossed the bridge between academic learning and workplace practice by the time they start seeking employment. Starkey concludes, "The 4iR workplace is demanding different qualities from today's workers. Many of the top attributes prized by employers are characteristics developed from experiences, self-reflection and personal growth. At Sacap we believe in the holistic development of our students. Academic rigour is vital but so are your abilities to put learning into practice, to think critically, to innovate and to adapt. We believe that the launch of the WILSA initiative is an important step forward for South Africa's tertiary education ecosystem. Sacap has shown that educational programmes embedded with well-executed WIL components is an important strategy to develop graduates in South Africa who are work-ready and empowered to make their contribution to a better society."

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