

# From Training to Employment

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## The Work-Integrated Learning Programme Builder's Toolkit

Everything you need to design and implement a work-integrated learning programme that transforms digital graduates into job-ready professionals while delivering real value to your organisation.

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Collective X and  
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# Table of Contents

Welcome	3
The South African Digital Skills Crisis	4
The Solution is Work-Integrated Learning	5
DigiLink Explained	8
Phase 1: Find & Partner with Employers - Securing Demand	10
Phase 2: Find & Prepare Your Interns - The Candidate Journey	12
Phase 3: Run a World-Class Internship - The Programme	14
Phase 4: Secure Permanent Jobs - Transition & Placement	16
The Cost of Implementing Work-Integrated Learning	18
Your Implementation Roadmap - All The Checklists You Need	20
Foundation & Planning	
Infrastructure & Systems	
Business Development	
Candidate Pipeline	
Programme Delivery	
Transition & Scaling	
Monthly Operations Checklist	
Critical Success Milestones	
Risk Management and Contingency Planning	
Legal and Compliance Considerations	
Self-Assessment - Is Your Organisation Ready?	31
Measuring Success - Key Performance Indicators	32

## Welcome Changemaker

**You're reading this toolkit because you're as aware of the digital skills crisis as we are:** thousands of talented young South Africans have qualifications in a range of digital skills but lack workplace experience and therefore work opportunities, whilst countless digital jobs remain unfilled. This isn't just a skills gap; it's an experience gap.

This toolkit contains a proven solution in the outsourced digital internship model. It's a blueprint developed from the real-world success of the DigiLink programme, created and delivered by Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, which achieved a 90% employment rate for its graduates.

Whether you're a non-profit, a training academy or a business, this guide will show you how to build your own programme designed to create work-ready digital talent and change the lives of young people, while at the same time solving your organisation's digital transformation challenges and contributing to South Africa's economy.



# The South African Digital Skills Crisis

Let's start with the big picture. The latest 2025 research by Collective X on digital job demand reveals that South Africa has approximately 318,000 ICT jobs with a vacancy rate of 27.2% meaning that over 86,000 digital positions remain unfilled. What's promising for young job-seekers is that 35% of these vacancies are at the junior level, translating to nearly 41,500 entry-level opportunities.

The most in-demand roles are software developers, web developers and IT support technicians, with software development showing particularly strong demand for junior positions, accounting for 20% of all junior vacancies compared to just 13% of the broader job market.

The economic opportunity is significant. Junior ICT professionals can expect to earn around R25,000 per month on average. This kind of salary can be truly economically transformative for young South Africans entering the workforce.

However, a critical challenge persists: the gap between having technical qualifications and being truly job-ready. While young graduates have strong theoretical foundations, they often lack the practical experience and workplace skills that employers need. This creates a paradox where thousands of digital jobs remain unfilled while qualified young people struggle to secure their first opportunities.

The challenge isn't just about technical skills, it's about bridging the experience gap. Employers need candidates who can hit the ground running, while graduates need that crucial first opportunity to prove themselves and develop real-world competencies.

That's where work-integrated learning (WIL) becomes critical. Providing young talent with structured, supported work experience that develops both technical proficiency and essential workplace skills like problem-solving, communication and adaptability that employers value most.

# The Solution Is Work-Integrated Learning

## Work-integrated learning (WIL) offers a soft landing.

A supported, structured work-integrated learning environment gives young people the space to build skills and confidence, while offering businesses a sustainable way to build a digital talent pipeline that is:

- 1 Faster to deploy, adapting quickly to evolving business needs
- 2 More cost-effective and flexible than traditional training approaches
- 3 Purpose-built to bridge the experience gap for first-time workers

To unlock the full value of digital skills investment, a quality-driven, collaborative ecosystem is essential; one that includes work-integrated learning as a core component in building job-ready talent.

## What is work-integrated learning?

WIL is an **educational** approach that integrates **academic learning** with **real, work-focused** experiences. It involves active collaboration between learners, educational institutions, and employers to create structured opportunities for real-world professional development.

WIL enables learners to apply, critique, and deepen their theoretical knowledge through meaningful engagement in professional environments, to enhance their employability and work readiness.

## Why work-integrated learning matters

### FOR LEARNERS

**Access and evaluate emerging talent while contributing to national skills development.**

- Trial potential employees in real work settings
- Influence training to meet your needs
- Fulfil CSI objectives through youth development

### FOR EMPLOYERS

**WIL offers a structured pathway from classroom to career, providing real-world experience with mentorship support.**

- Apply theoretical knowledge through meaningful work
- Build confidence and employability skills
- Gain a competitive edge in the job market

### FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS

**Enhance programme relevance and graduate success through industry partnerships.**

- Improve employment rates and institutional credibility
- Integrate real-world assessment with academic learning

### FOR THE ECONOMY

**Address critical digital skills shortages that constrain economic growth.**

- Reduce offshore outsourcing by building local capacity
- Create coordinated pathways for youth employment



## Who Can Implement A Work-Integrated Learning Programme?

This model works for different types of organisations, each with their own motivations:

	<b>Why This Works For You</b>	<b>What You Bring</b>
<b>Non-Profit Organisation</b>	Aligns with your mission whilst creating a sustainable funding stream through service fees, allowing you to scale your impact on youth employment.	Social impact focus, community connections, often existing relationships with young people.
<b>Training Company or Academy</b>	Dramatically increases graduate employment rates, making your academy more attractive and creating a new revenue stream.	Educational expertise, established training infrastructure, candidate pipelines.
<b>For-Profit Business</b>	Build a new business that supplies high-quality, vetted digital talent to the market, meeting clear market needs whilst generating revenue.	Business acumen, operational efficiency, commercial sustainability.

## DigiLink Explained

DigiLink was established by Harambee as a not-for-profit, tech-focused work-integrated learning programme. Its purpose was to provide a solution that connects employers with supervised, entry-level digital talent to augment and support their digital delivery teams while bridging the skills gap and bringing young people into the economy.

DigiLink opened two outsourced digital intern centres in Johannesburg and Cape Town, served several enterprise-sized employer partners and produced 160 work-ready candidates for absorption into the workplace.

This 12-month outsourced internship model of work-integrated learning proved to be incredibly successful with a 90% absorption rate post the completion of the internship year.

The success of the DigiLink model was a pivotal factor in the creation of Collective X, demonstrating that work-integrated learning could effectively bridge the gap between digital skills training and employment.

This proven approach became a cornerstone of Collective X's change strategy, embedded within the National Digital Skills Plan as a key pillar for transforming how digital skills development and job placement occur in South Africa.

Building on DigiLink's foundation, Collective X now promotes WIL implementation across its entire ecosystem, recognising that combining academic learning with practical, paid work experience significantly increases graduate success rates when transitioning into the digital workforce.

## How DigiLink Worked

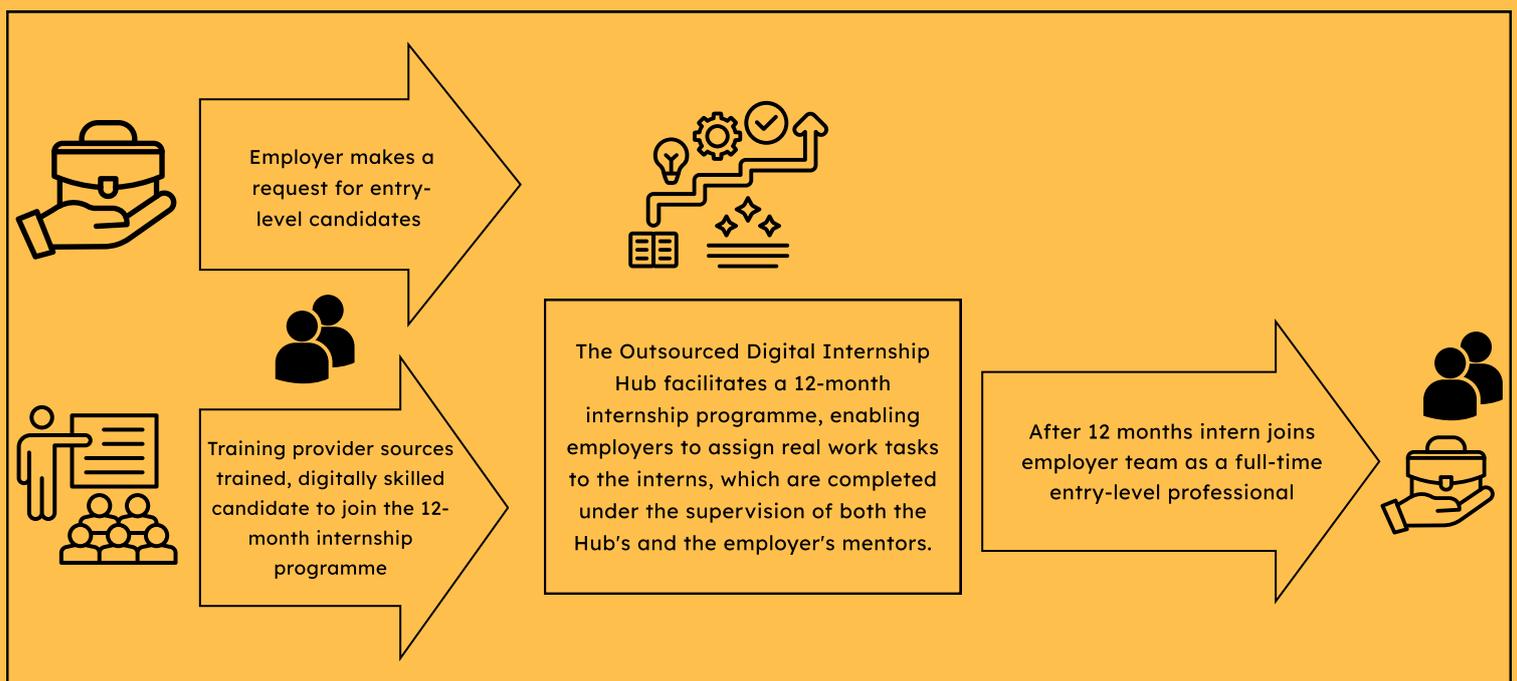
The DigiLink model provided a managed service to help businesses recruit and select young, qualified digital talent, primarily in software testing, development, data analytics and software support functions and then support and manage them to work-readiness and technical work delivery through an outsourced work-integrated learning internship before absorbing them into their own workforce.

After building a detailed understanding of the technical role of the client, through a diagnostic session, DigiLink sourced graduates from universities, private institutions, and skill accelerator programmes, selecting those who already possess strong digital skills and potential.

DigiLink then placed these candidates in a real-world, in-person office space where they are onboarded into the employer's digital environment. Interns were placed in client feature teams where they worked on actual business deliverables.

**The DigiLink model covered any one of the following five job functions or services provided to the market:**

- QA and software testing
- Software development
- Data Preparation, Analysis and Modelling
- Vendor SaaS, PaaS and IaaS configuration and SLA support services for all major cloud providers
- Infrastructure support



## Phase 1: Find & Partner with Employers

### - *Securing Demand*

Your WIL programme won't work without employer partners. Your objective is to show businesses that you will solve a real problem for them.



#### Target the right sectors:

Start with industries that have huge demand for entry-level tech talent, like financial services, telecommunications, retail with digital operations including e-commerce, and government departments with digital transformation needs.



#### Build a compelling pitch:

Your value proposition is clear; you reduce their risk and cost. You handle the recruiting, management, and HR overhead of junior talent. They get a managed service that delivers real work on their projects.



#### Be flexible:

Offer different programme lengths (6, 9, or 12 months) to suit different employer needs and budgets.

### Lessons From The Field

- **Find like-minded partners.** Look for businesses that care about social impact and transforming South Africa's employment landscape. It makes the partnership smoother.
- **Dedicate a business development lead.** This is not a part-time job. You need someone focused solely on building these client relationships.
- **Manage multiple stakeholders.** You may have to persuade several business units within one company. This requires patience and excellent stakeholder engagement skills.

## DigiLink in Action

DigiLink focused on major banks and financial institutions and worked within the motor industry too, which had clear, quantifiable demand for entry-level roles in software testing, development, and data analytics.

They learned that getting through bank procurement processes is difficult and can take months. Their pro-tip? Aim for long-term agreements to avoid going through this process every single year.

### Employer engagement and contracting

Employer must present a real business need for hiring young people

Employer agrees to pay a cost recovery fee per person per month

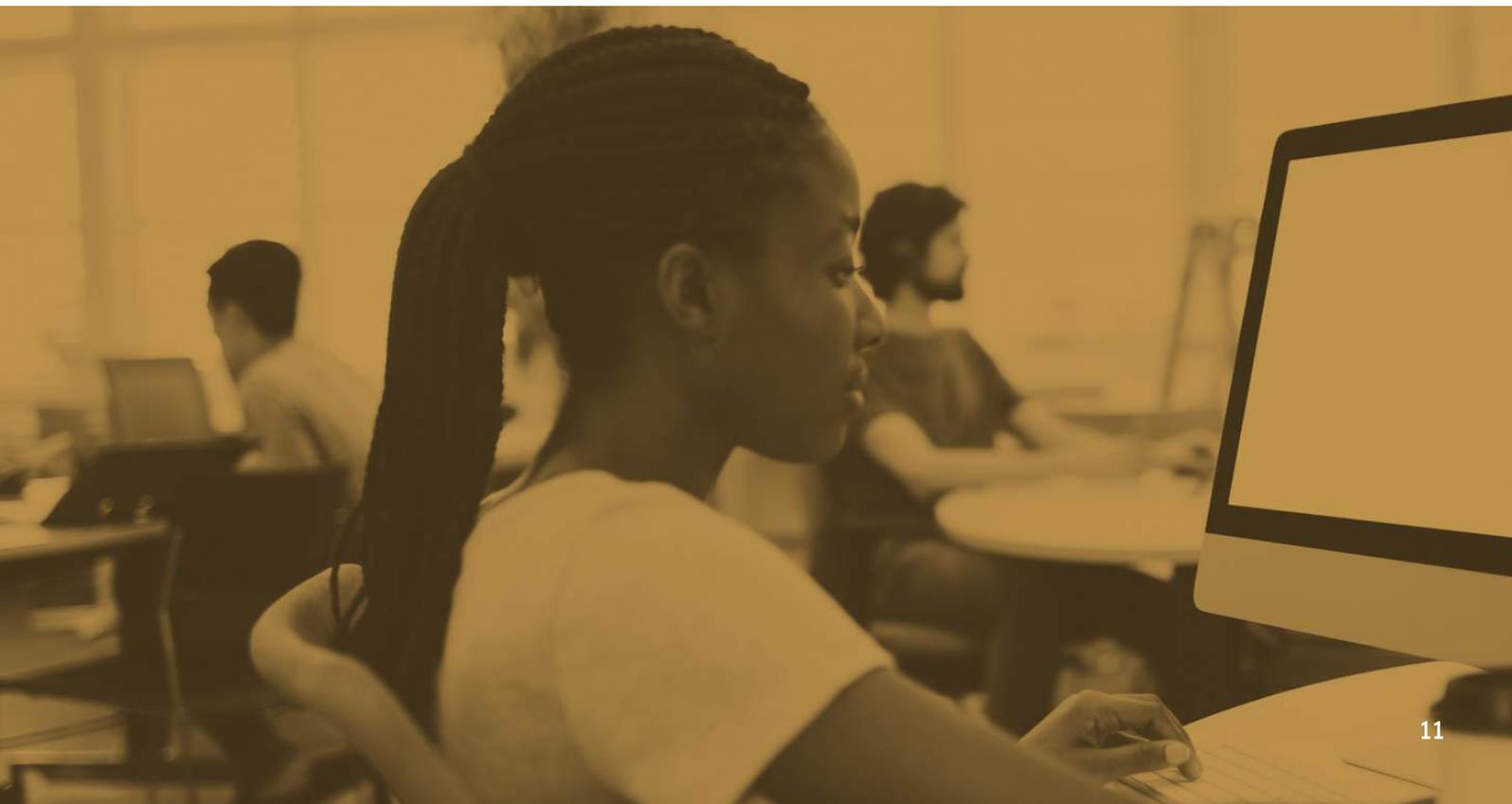
Employer is ready to have young people work on real business tasks in their area of expertise/learning (10-month delivery)

The business requirements for the role must be very clearly described to ensure effective matchmaking between available candidates and internships

Employer is ready to sign a contract for 12 months

DigiLink required a minimum of 5 and max of 50

Business tasks can vary in difficulty and duration



## Phase 2: Find & Prepare Your Interns

### - The Candidate Journey

Once you have employer demand, you need to find the right young people to fill those roles.



#### Source smartly:

Look for candidates with a strong foundation—an NQF diploma (Level 6 or higher) in a relevant field is an ideal start. There are thousands of such graduates. Consider the SA Youth platform as your first place to look for your learners.



#### Select rigorously:

Use a robust process: online applications, cognitive and technical assessments, and interviews. Don't just test for tech skills; assess for attitude, problem-solving and cultural fit.



#### Prioritise diversity:

Actively create a strategy to include underrepresented groups, like women and people with disabilities.



#### Onboard thoroughly:

The first few weeks are critical. Set clear expectations on day one. Use a detailed work-readiness syllabus covering soft skills like professional etiquette, communication and time management.

### Lessons From The Field

- **Spend time on the contract.** Make sure every candidate understands the agreement, the stipend, the expectations, and the goal: a permanent job.
- **Check employment status.** Some applicants may already have jobs. Verify this to ensure you are truly supporting unemployed youth.

## DigiLink in Action

DigiLink found that only 10% of applicants were successful, setting a realistic benchmark for recruitment efforts.

They involved employers in the final interview stages. This improved assessment quality and made the employers feel invested in the candidates' success from the very beginning. Their work-readiness syllabus was intensive but was a key differentiator, creating very high quality output that employers valued.

### Candidate sourcing

Candidates are sourced through any appropriate channel and aggregated on an appropriate aggregation channel

Full cycle of candidate selection to meet required number of candidates for different job types

The selection process:  
Application -> technical and cognitive screening tests -> interview

Open recruitment  
/ CX supplier base  
/ etc

Employers may  
need to run their  
own check  
depending on risk  
profile



## Phase 3: Run a World-Class Internship

### - The Programme

This is where the magic happens. Your role is to manage, mentor and support the interns as they deliver real work for your clients.



#### Start slow, then ramp up:

Begin with client onboarding and small tasks during the first 8 weeks. Over the next 10 months of work-integrated learning, gradually increase their workload as their confidence and skills grow.



#### Provide constant mentorship:

This is the most important success factor. Your team leads must be both technically skilled and capable of providing coaching and psychosocial support.



#### Create a professional environment:

Your hub should simulate a real office; quiet, focused, and equipped with reliable internet and hardware.



#### Pay fortnightly:

This helps interns, who are often new to a regular income, manage their cash flow more effectively.

### Lessons From The Field

- **Finding and affording great mentors is your biggest challenge.** A viable long-term strategy is to develop your best interns into future mentors.
- **Keep equipment on-site.** For security and to manage expectations, don't allow interns to take laptops home, even if the client culture supports after-hours work.

## DigiLink in Action

DigiLink found a hybrid model (3 days at client site, 2 days in the hub) was the best combination for learning and integration.

They emphasised that psychosocial support is non-negotiable. It significantly influences whether a candidate completes the programme and secures employment.

They managed the challenge of "expectation bleed": interns on learnership contracts (without benefits like leave) working alongside client employees (with full benefits). This requires careful expectation management.

### Internship Programme

Interns sign a 12 month fixed term internship contract

Interns are provided with hardware, necessary software and any access to systems that the employer requires to carry out the tasks

2 months onboarding:  
Week 1 - admin onboarding (rhythm, meetings, team, office)

Week 2 to 8 - technical and systems preparation. Soft skills / work readiness training, continues through the internship.

How onboarding is delivered is flexible

Internship happens in pods of 5 interns

Each team lead should manage up to 15 interns, in no more than 3 pods (customer/employer).

Additional training for domain- required certifications if necessary

Throughout the 12 month programme, interns receive a stipend sufficient to cover the expenses of potentially excluded youth.

The work-integrated learning happens over 10 months; the intern works on real business tasks of the employer, but under the supervision and development of the outsourced internship team.

Interns work a 9 - 5 schedule in a traditional office based working environment to foster soft skills, team work etc

Intern performance is monitored and tracked by the success management team.

The work-integrated learning is complemented by soft-skills training (happening throughout the whole 12 month process)

Interns can be dismissed from the programme for continuous unprofessional behaviour e.g.:

- Missing meetings
- Continued absenteeism
- Client misconduct
- Regular performance issues (adaptability on personal circumstances)

3 warnings -> recruitment support, performance management process - >termination

In the final three months (9 - 12), interns are prepared for work, including development in professional excellence, financial planning skills, interviewing skills.

Wellness programme / mental health support

E.g Time management, working systems and organisation

## Phase 4: Secure Permanent Jobs - *Transition & Placement*

The final and most important objective of this programme is to secure permanent absorption. Your job is to manage this transition seamlessly for both the intern and the employer.



### **Start early:**

Begin placement conversations with the employer around month 6-7 of the internship. This gives them time to secure headcount and budget for the following year.



### **Prepare interns financially:**

Provide financial literacy training. Moving from a stipend to a salary is a significant shift. Teach them about budgeting, banking, saving, and understanding employment benefits.



### **Be flexible on duration:**

The goal is employment. If an employer wants to absorb a candidate early, see it as a success and factor this possibility into your contracts and financial model.



### **Celebrate success:**

Hold a graduation ceremony. It recognises the interns' hard work and reinforces your partnership with the employer.

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## DigiLink in Action

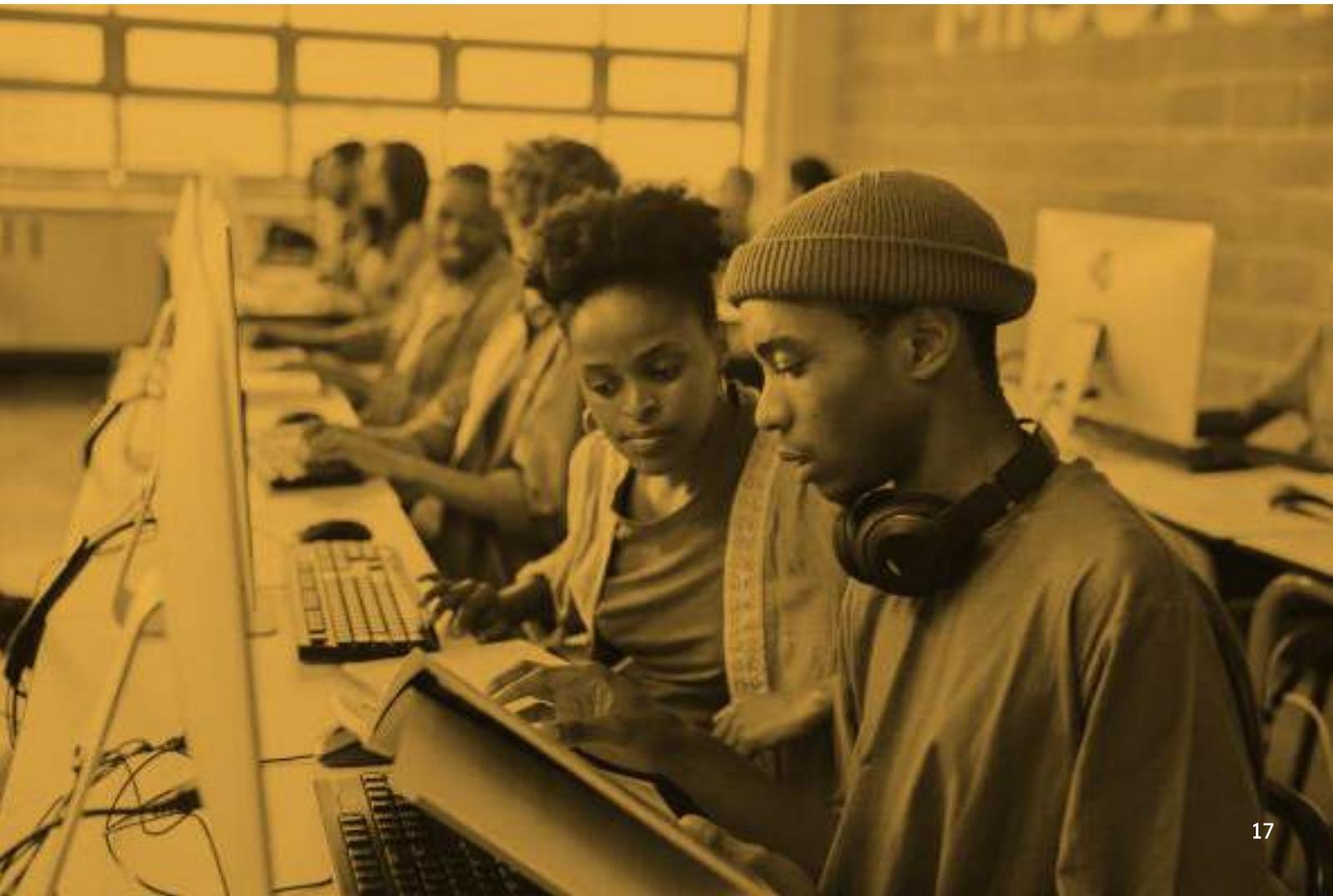
With a 90% absorption rate, DigiLink's model is proven to work.

They learned to check in with placed interns after absorption, as the shift to permanent employment can be overwhelming and a little support goes a long way.

### Candidate absorption

Businesses commit to absorb young people according to its job functions into entry-level positions after the completion of 12 month internship programme. This commitment to absorb / right to refuse should be included in the contract. Business will interview candidates prior to absorption

Non absorbed candidates will need direction to other placement services



# The Cost Of Implementing Work-Integrated Learning

Implementation costs will vary significantly based on your organisation's type, size and operational model. Non-profits, training academies and commercial enterprises each face different cost structures and economies of scale.

For example, DigiLink's proven model charged employers, based on not-for-profit rates, R22,500 per intern per month and reached break-even with approximately 80 interns.

This is DigiLink's financial framework, dated 2023, based on 100 interns per year.

## Monthly Cost Per Intern

Cost Category	Description	Monthly Cost
<b>Staffing</b>	Team leaders, mentors, administrative staff (salaries & benefits)	R6,500
<b>Office Costs</b>	Rent, utilities, internet, equipment	R6,500
<b>Intern Stipends</b>	Monthly payments to interns	R7,000
<b>Total Monthly Cost</b>		<b>R20,000</b>

### One-Time Costs Per Intern

Item	Description	Cost
<b>Technical Certifications</b>	Professional certifications (e.g., ISTQB for software testing)	R2,500
<b>Assessment Tools</b>	Cognitive and technical testing licenses	R700-R1,000

### Optional Support Services (Annual Costs)

Service	Description	Cost
<b>Mental Health Support</b>	Counselling services for 50 candidates	R50,000
<b>Team Building Activities</b>	Group activities and culture building	R500 per candidate
<b>Graduation Events</b>	Celebration of programme completion	R300 per person

## Your Implementation Roadmap

### - *All The Checklists You Need*

Now that you understand the outsourced digital internship model and its proven success factors, it's time to turn knowledge into action.

The following checklists provide step-by-step guides to help you successfully implement a WIL programme tailored to your organisation's needs and context.

Use these practical tools to navigate each phase of programme development, from initial planning through to sustainable operations.

#### **Notes for Using These Checklists:**

- Adapt timelines based on your organisation's capacity and market conditions
- Some actions can run in parallel to accelerate implementation
- Regular review meetings should assess progress against this checklist
- Update the responsible persons based on your actual organisational structure



# Getting Started

## -Your Next Steps



### Immediate Actions (This Month)

- Assess your readiness using the self-assessment tool on page 32
- Research your local market to understand employer demand
- Connect with potential partners who might support your launch
- Begin financial planning using the cost estimates provided



### Short-term Goals (Next 3 Months)

- Develop your business plan including financial projections
- Secure initial funding for startup costs
- Begin employer engagement to validate demand
- Start building your team with key leadership roles



### Medium-term Goals (Next 6 Months)

- Finalise legal structure and compliance requirements
- Secure office space and set up operations
- Launch pilot programme with first employer and cohort
- Refine processes based on initial experience

## Foundation & Planning

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
<b>Conduct organisational readiness assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate current capacity, resources, and expertise</li> <li>Assess financial capability for 12-18 month investment</li> <li>Review alignment with organisational mission</li> </ul>	Executive Director/CEO	Month 1	
<b>Develop comprehensive business plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create 3-year financial projections with different scenarios</li> <li>Define service offerings and pricing strategy</li> <li>Outline scaling plan from pilot to full operations</li> </ul>	Programme Director	Month 2	
<b>Secure startup funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calculate total capital requirements for first 18 months</li> <li>Identify funding sources (grants, loans, investors)</li> <li>Prepare investor presentations and grant applications</li> </ul>	Finance Manager/CEO	Month 3	
<b>Establish legal structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register business entity and obtain necessary licences</li> <li>Develop employment law compliance framework</li> <li>Create data protection and security policies</li> </ul>	Legal Advisor/HR Manager	Month 3	
<b>Recruit core leadership team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint Programme Director, Technical Manager, Candidate Manager</li> <li>Define clear roles, responsibilities and reporting lines</li> <li>Establish compensation and performance management systems</li> </ul>	CEO/HR Manager	Month 4	

## Infrastructure & Systems

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
<b>Secure and setup physical workspace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location accessible to target candidates and employers</li> <li>• Professional environment with quiet work areas</li> <li>• Capacity for 50-100 interns with room for growth</li> </ul>	Operations Manager	Month 5	
<b>Implement IT infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-speed internet and backup connectivity</li> <li>• Secure equipment storage and access controls</li> <li>• Client-specific security requirements compliance</li> </ul>	IT Manager/ Technical Manager	Month 5	
<b>Develop programme curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create month-by-month training schedules for each service area</li> <li>• Design assessment tools and performance rubrics</li> <li>• Prepare onboarding materials and handbooks</li> </ul>	Technical Manager/ Training Coordinator	Month 6	
<b>Create legal contract templates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer service agreements with flexible terms</li> <li>• Intern learning contracts and NDAs</li> <li>• Equipment usage and security policies</li> </ul>	Legal Advisor	Month 6	
<b>Secure and setup physical workspace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location accessible to target candidates and employers</li> <li>• Professional environment with quiet work areas</li> <li>• Capacity for 50-100 interns with room for growth</li> </ul>	Operations Manager	Month 5	

## Business Development

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
<b>Build recruitment channels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Register on SA Youth, partner with universities, training colleges, and bootcamps</li> <li>• Create application process and assessment criteria</li> <li>• Develop diversity and inclusion recruitment strategy</li> </ul>	Candidate Manager	Month 7	
<b>Recruit and select first cohort</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target 15-25 candidates for pilot programme</li> <li>• Involve employer partners in final selection process</li> <li>• Ensure diverse representation and strong technical foundation</li> </ul>	Candidate Manager	Month 8	
<b>Complete intern onboarding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign 12-month learning contracts with clear expectations</li> <li>• Deliver comprehensive orientation programme</li> <li>• Establish individual development plans and goals</li> </ul>	Candidate Manager	Month 9	

## Candidate Pipeline

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
<b>Complete market research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey potential employer partners in target sectors</li> <li>• Analyse local competition and pricing</li> <li>• Identify 3-5 anchor clients for initial partnerships</li> </ul>	Business Development Manager	Month 2	
<b>Develop employer value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create compelling presentations highlighting ROI and risk reduction</li> <li>• Prepare case studies and success metrics</li> <li>• Design flexible service packages for different needs</li> </ul>	Business Development Manager	Month 5	
<b>Launch employer engagement campaign</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target 10-15 potential partners in high-demand sectors</li> <li>• Schedule face-to-face meetings with decision makers</li> <li>• Present pilot programme options with limited risk</li> </ul>	Business Development Manager	Month 6	
<b>Secure anchor employer partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign contracts with 2-3 committed employers</li> <li>• Negotiate favourable payment terms and project scope</li> <li>• Establish communication protocols and expectations</li> </ul>	Programme Director	Month 7	

## Programme Delivery

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
<b>Launch technical training programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with foundational workplace skills</li> <li>• Introduce client-specific tools and processes</li> <li>• Implement weekly progress assessments</li> </ul>	Technical Manager	Month 9	
<b>Integrate interns with employer partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate introductions and workplace orientation</li> <li>• Establish 3-day client site, 2-day hub schedule</li> <li>• Assign client mentors and define their roles</li> </ul>	Programme Director	Month 10	
<b>Implement ongoing support systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly one-on-one check-ins with each intern</li> <li>• Monthly group sessions for peer learning</li> <li>• Psychosocial support and financial literacy training</li> </ul>	Candidate Manager	Ongoing	
<b>Monitor and adjust operations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect weekly feedback from interns and employers</li> <li>• Track KPIs and financial performance</li> <li>• Make rapid adjustments to improve effectiveness</li> </ul>	Programme Director	Ongoing	

## Transition & Scaling

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Timeline	Status
Begin absorption discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate conversations with employers about permanent headcount</li> <li>Prepare candidates for transition to salary employment</li> <li>Provide job search support for non-absorbed candidates</li> </ul>	Programme Lead/Business Development	Month 11	
Deliver financial literacy training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare interns for shift from stipend to salary</li> <li>Cover budgeting, banking, tax implications</li> <li>Provide ongoing support during transition</li> </ul>	Team Leads/HR	Month 11	
Evaluate pilot programme results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse placement rates, client satisfaction, financial performance</li> <li>Document lessons learned and process improvements</li> <li>Prepare case studies for future business development</li> </ul>	Programme Director	Month 14	
Plan expansion and scaling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use pilot success to secure additional clients</li> <li>Develop longer-term contracts and multi-cohort agreements</li> <li>Explore new service areas based on market demand</li> </ul>	Business Development Manager	Month 15	

# Monthly Operations Checklist

Action	Key Considerations	Responsible Person	Status
<b>Conduct intern performance reviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess technical and professional skill development</li> <li>Provide feedback and adjust individual development plans</li> <li>Document progress for employer reporting</li> </ul>	Technical Manager	
<b>Review client satisfaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect formal feedback from employer partners</li> <li>Assess project completion rates and quality</li> <li>Address any service delivery issues immediately</li> </ul>	Programme Director	
<b>Monitor financial performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Track revenue, costs, and profitability per intern</li> <li>Review cash flow and payment collections</li> <li>Adjust pricing or operations if needed</li> </ul>	Finance Manager	
<b>Evaluate recruitment effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse candidate success rates and attrition</li> <li>Adjust recruitment criteria and selection processes</li> <li>Maintain candidate pipeline for future cohorts</li> </ul>	Candidate Manager	
<b>Provide team development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing training for mentors and staff</li> <li>Share best practices and lessons learned</li> <li>Address any performance or capacity issues</li> </ul>	Programme Director	

## Critical Success Milestones

Milestone	Target Timeline	Success Metric	Review Point
<b>First employer contracts signed</b>	Month 7	2-3 committed partners with 6+ month agreements	Month 8 review
<b>Pilot cohort fully onboarded</b>	Month 9	15-25 candidates successfully integrated	Month 10 review
<b>Client work delivery begins</b>	Month 10	Interns producing billable work for employers	Month 11 review
<b>Financial break-even achieved</b>	Month 15	Monthly revenue covers all operational costs	Month 16 review
<b>First cohort job placements</b>	Month 20	90%+ placement rate for graduating interns	Month 21 review
<b>Scale to target capacity</b>	Month 24	80-100 interns annually with sustainable operations	Month 25 review

## Risk Management and Contingency Planning

Risk Scenario	Early Warning Signs	Immediate Actions	Responsible Person
<b>Major client cancellation</b>	Delayed payments, reduced project scope, negative feedback	Activate backup client pipeline, reduce cohort size, renegotiate terms	Programme Director
<b>High intern attrition</b>	Multiple resignations, low engagement scores, performance issues	Increase support services, review selection criteria, adjust programme intensity	Candidate Manager
<b>Cash flow crisis</b>	Late client payments, unexpected costs, reduced revenue	Implement emergency cost cuts, accelerate collections, secure bridge funding	Finance Manager/ CEO
<b>Quality control failure</b>	Client complaints, project delays, technical errors	Immediate mentor intervention, additional training, client relationship repair	Technical Manager

## Legal and Compliance Considerations

### Essential contract elements:

- Clear service level agreements
- Intellectual property protections
- Confidentiality requirements
- Performance standards
- Payment terms and conditions
- Early termination clauses

## Self-Assessment

### - *Is Your Organisation Ready?*

**Before starting, honestly assess your organisation's readiness:**

#### **Essential Requirements**

- Access to 50+ qualified candidates per year?
- Ability to secure office space for 20-100 interns?
- Capital to cover 6-12 months of startup costs before revenue?
- Experienced technical mentors and team leaders?
- Business development capability to secure employer clients?

#### **Helpful Assets**

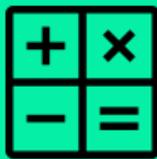
- Existing relationships with employers in target sectors?
- Experience in training or skills development?
- Understanding of South African employment legislation?
- Strong project management capabilities?



# Measuring Success

## - Key Performance Indicators

### For Your Organisation

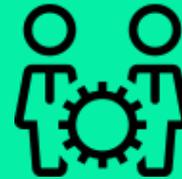


#### Financial Health

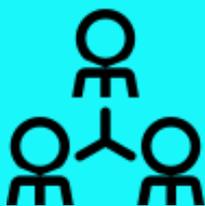
- Monthly revenue per intern
- Cost per intern per month
- Break-even timeline
- Profit margins

#### Operational Excellence

- Intern retention rate (target: 90%+)
- Client satisfaction scores (target: 8/10+)
- Project delivery success rate
- Mentor-to-intern ratios



### For Social Impact



#### Employment Outcomes

- Job placement rate (target: 90%+)
- Average salary of placed candidates
- Job retention after 6 months
- Career progression tracking

#### Skills Development

- Technical certification pass rates
- Professional skills improvement scores
- Client feedback on work quality



## A Final Word of Encouragement

This model is challenging but immensely rewarding.

You will be building a new ecosystem for talent in South Africa.

### You are not alone!

Collective X, Harambee and a growing network of organisations are here to change the story of youth employment together.

# LET'S GET TO WORK.

### Interactive Digital WIL Toolkit — coming soon

A fully interactive digital version of this toolkit will launch in early 2026.

**Scan the QR code to register and be notified when it's live**

