

# The Telperion UNISA Conservation Mentorship Project

## a growing success story



G.A. Wilson\* & A. Wilson\*

\*Department of Environmental Science, University of South Africa, Private Bag X 6, Florida, 1710, RSA  
Correspondence may be addressed to: wilsoga@unisa.ac.za



### Abstract:

In 2007, the financial support provided by Ernest Oppenheimer and Son (EOS) for formal basic education activities on Telperion was re-directed towards supporting undergraduate National Diploma in Nature Conservation students from UNISA. This change in focus was to increase the usage and access of Telperion for Tertiary education activities. This enabled the formation of the Telperion UNISA Conservation Mentoring Project (TUCMP) in 2012. This poster reflects the progress and achievements made towards providing quality work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities at Telperion.

### Project Objectives:

To provide dedicated mentoring and supervision to UNISA's National Diploma Nature Conservation students through providing ten specially focused week-long, work-placed based experiential visits per year.

### The Partnership:

The partnership between Telperion and UNISA is in its eighth year and has significantly contributed to the development and graduation of successful UNISA undergraduate students.

### Problem statement:

In 2010 the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA)<sup>1</sup> and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)<sup>2</sup> both published strategic documents which identified and defined the critical and scarce skills shortages currently being experienced in the environmental sector from entry through to top level skills.



### Addressing the skills need:

The University of South Africa<sup>3</sup> is Africa's leading open distance learning institution and prides itself as an African University shaping futures in the service of humanity. This vision is being realised through the provision of qualifications and entering into partnership agreements to ensure that the right to further education is supported to the fullest.



The Telperion UNISA Conservation Mentorship Project is currently focusing on the entry level National Diploma in Nature Conservation, but with scope to expand up the qualifications pyramid.

### Telperion UNISA Partnership:

The National Diploma in Nature Conservation requires each student to spend a third of their academic time gaining industry required experiences. The TUCMP provides placement opportunities to students who have struggled to secure WIL placement opportunities for their studies.



### Industry Required Experiences:

The TUCMP provides experiences linked to wildlife, plants, ecology and management. Wildlife activities such as game monitoring, post mortems, age and sex determination and condition assessment are provided. Plant activities include alien plant control, veld condition assessments and fire break construction.

Other important experiences gained on Telperion include technical maintenance, communication skills, catchment management, law enforcement, first aid, soil erosion as well as soft skills such as work ethics, punctuality, group work and time management.

Students who graduate having gained some or all their experience at Telperion, have claimed that the experiences, "have change them for the better".

### Results:

In the eight years that UNISA students have been hosted on Telperion a total of 52 visits have been conducted (see figure 1). During the first four years of the Telperion UNISA relationship a contracted external WIL provider managed the visits and programmes offered to students. In 2012 UNISA assumed sole responsibility for the management and provision of WIL experiences on Telperion.

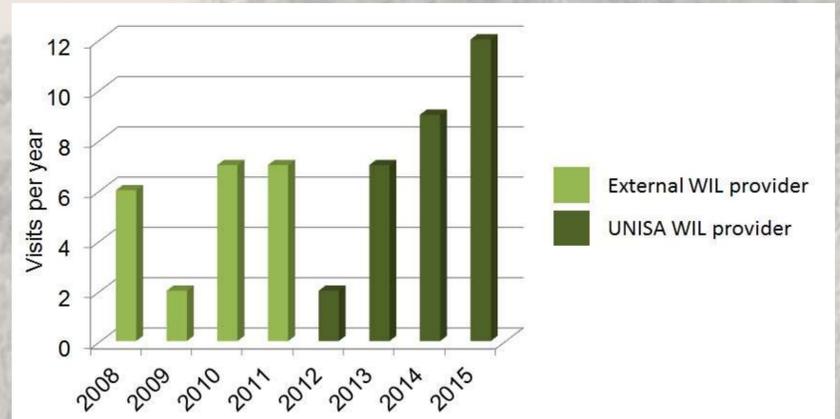


Figure 1: The total visits to Telperion, per year, from 2008 to 2015, with 22 visits undertaken by the external WIL provider and 30 visits undertaken by UNISA, over a four year period. (2015 data needs to be verified once published)

Since UNISA assumed full control of providing WIL experiences on Telperion, the student numbers have been steadily increasing (see Figure 2).

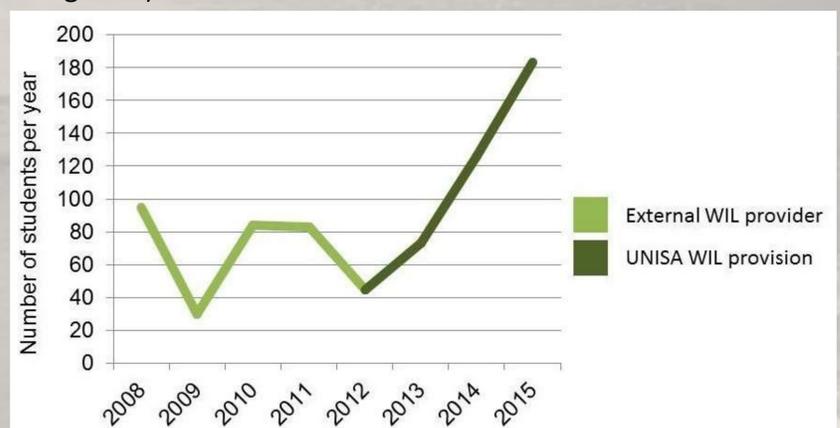


Figure 2: The total numbers of WIL students, per year, from 2008 to 2015, with 292 students provided for by the external WIL provider and 390 students provided for by UNISA, both over a four year period. (2015 Data needs to be verified once published)

Since 2012 UNISA graduated 178 Nature Conservation Diploma students. Of these graduates a total of 54 students gained all or part of their WIL experiences on Telperion (see Figure 3). The percentages represented on the graph represent the percentage student group which experienced one or more Telperion excursions.

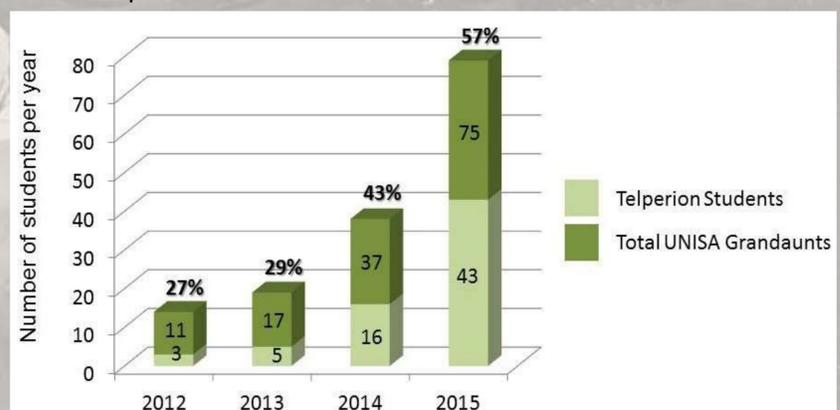


Figure 3: The total number of National Diploma in Nature Conservation graduates per year. (2015 Data needs to be verified after being published.)

### Conclusion:

The TUCMP over the past three years has fulfilled its mandate to increase the usage of, and students visiting Telperion. The project has also had a significant and direct impact on the overall graduation numbers for the National Diploma in Nature Conservation.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Department of Environmental Affairs, *Environmental Sector Skills Plan for South Africa*, May 2010, RSA
- <sup>2</sup> South African National Biodiversity Institute, *Human Capital Development Strategy for the Biodiversity Sector*, July 2010, RSA
- <sup>3</sup> [www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za) accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015