

Work-based learning
Workforce development:
Connections, frameworks
and processes

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Preface

This publication is a product of the Higher Education Academy's work in the field of Employer Engagement. Over the course of the last two years, we have been working to help develop the capacity and capability of higher education institutions to provide higher level learning to the workforce, building on existing practice and the general recommendations of the Leitch Report.

The Academy's work has focussed upon the promotion of best practice, the networking of HEIs and stakeholders with an interest in this agenda and research into the possibilities and practicalities of providing work-based learning. We have worked with government departments, funding bodies, subject communities, individual HEIs and other relevant agencies to support this agenda. We have also coordinated network groups to allow discussion at the level of specific roles from Pro Vice-Chancellors through to work-based learning practitioners and staff focussing on research in the field.

By working both extensively throughout the sector and intensively with specific individuals and institutions, the Academy has been able to raise the awareness of workforce development, support those trying to get to grips with it and make some important contributions to research in the field. This publication is one such contribution that we hope will continue to shed light on the possibilities that workforce development offers to employers, HEIs and prospective students.

The Academy Employee Learning Team

8 May 2008

Foreword

Since 2006, there has been a renewed emphasis upon higher level skills and workforce development, as the UK Government responds to the imperatives registered by Sandy Leitch in his report of December 2006, to strengthen the position of the UK in the context of world economies.

However, for many years (decades even, in the case of some institutions), UK universities have been responding to the needs of learners in the workplace, from the perspectives of both their personal and their professional development, and through accredited programmes designed either in conjunction with their employers to cover cohorts of learners, or by negotiation with individuals to address their specific needs.

The drivers for such engagement were originally less about national economic needs, and more about the rights of learners in all contexts to develop themselves to their full potential. Admittedly, there have been a few organisations like the NHS that have contracted systematically with universities for professional development programmes that will keep their workforce up to date with new technologies, capable of achieving the highest standards in their work and able to participate in an ongoing learning organisation. However, these have been the exception rather than the rule. This situation is now changing with the Leitch concept of 'demand-led' emanating from employers in relation to their workforce, rather than from individual employees. Sector Skills Councils have been mapping sectoral skills needs and driving for new curricular frameworks to match. There will be some benefits for universities in this approach, with regard to generating new and potentially high-volume markets, particularly at a time of demographic downturn among young people in the 18 to 20 age bracket. However, there are undeniable tensions too.

In the main, universities have seen their contract as with the individual learner acting autonomously in determining their own life and career goals. Consequently, they have been sensitive to considerations such as when and how learners can study, and who owns learner progress and results, even when employers have supported learners in the payment of fees. These considerations remain equally important in the current economic climate, since it seems unlikely that learners will make a serious commitment

to sustained programmes of development unless they can appreciate how it will enable them to develop their own careers and lives. Many adult learners have to make considerable sacrifices and overcome considerable obstacles regarding domestic and work commitments in order to accommodate study, and this requires significant motivation. Employer-commissioned programmes could raise uncomfortable questions about outcomes for learners if their performance is low or failing.

An employer is likely to benefit from encouraging employees to become serious lifelong learners, capable of identifying their own needs and interests, keen to explore how continuously to improve their performance and find new and better ways to do things, and unafraid of change. This may be more effective than to commission provision akin to mass-focused training programmes in the acquisition of functional skills, which can lead to convergent rather than to divergent thinking (the latter being critically important to creativity and innovation).

However, this does imply a quite different approach to curriculum and pedagogy, which is essentially the difference between professional education and training. In the first, it is preferable to have the learner's engagement in the design of what is to be learned, as well as an appreciation of its relevance and application. There will be an emphasis upon those higher level skills that embody the essence of higher education – for example, reflection, analysis, problem solving, creativity, evaluation, and an open-endedness about what emerges from the learning, rather than those skills that Leitch terms 'economically valuable' and describes simply with regard to occupational specificity. Both professional education and training can involve exciting experiential learning methods, but in the first there will be scope for discovery that is not predetermined, whereas in the second the outcomes tend to be targeted more towards external needs than to those of the learner.

Professional education is likely to pose more of a challenge, both to the learner and the employer. For the first, it is more taxing as regards identifying goals, processes for learning and assessment, resources to support learning and ways to apply findings. There can often be dissonance in the process of such learning whereby the learner wonders why teachers do not simply make it easy and tell them what to do, but generally the levels of satisfaction are ultimately the greater for having achieved an independence in learning that can then be replicated in the future. For employers, it is challenging to have professional learners who will be more critical of the way things are done and may seek to change things, rather than employees who simply absorb how to apply conventional methods. However, it is the more open-ended capabilities that will ultimately enable their workplace to change and keep abreast, or even ahead, of current thinking. Good education is transformative, not simply for learners themselves, but for those who come in contact with them. The present climate offers a real opportunity for partnership between employers and higher education to go beyond the provision of tailored continuing professional development (CPD) and into the arenas of organisational learning and establishing a new culture of continuous exploration and innovation.

The bulk of university business has more conventionally been engaged with those who are preparing to embark upon professional careers, rather than with experienced professionals. Even here, there has been a significant shift over the past two decades, such that it is unusual now to find an institution that is not concerned with the employability of its graduates. More vocational programmes have evolved, and there is greater partnership between academics and employers in their design. The foundation degree is the youngest brand among these, but has quickly become the flagship qualification for a government committed to higher level skills. Growing in esteem and sophistication, the foundation degree is making a refreshing synthesis of academic and vocational development, with work-based learning an essential component. It is, however, important to remember that it is only one, and not yet the most dominant, form of workforce development at higher levels.

Where universities have engaged with employers and employees in designing programmes for those already within the workforce, they have discovered a hitherto relatively untapped resource for updating their own staff on current workplace methods and technologies, and a corresponding resource for their undergraduate learners with regard to placements, projects, simulations and other experiential components of programmes. Moreover, those university staff who oversee continuing professional development activity with learners in the workplace frequently admit to greater personal satisfaction and mutual learning to be acquired in conjunction with such workplace peers. Staff and learners often operate in co-researcher roles, and become part of interesting new communities of practice that breach organisational boundaries.

Many universities have already acknowledged the huge size of the CPD market compared to the undergraduate market, which has largely peaked now, with all learners who desire and are equipped to undertake a higher level programme being able to enter one. Even without the dramatic downturn in the 18-year-old population that is forecast to take place over the next decade, it is likely that many universities would be seeking to expand into the adult market. However, the demographic downturn makes it imperative for many that they urgently seek to re-engineer their processes to accommodate CPD provision.

At the level of equity and diversity, it is essential that higher education supports people who wish to continue their learning to higher levels at whatever time of their lives they arrive at the decision, and in whatever context they then find themselves. Since work dominates adult life as the main form of sustainable existence, many will inevitably make their choice in that context. Moreover, for many it is the source of both greater motivation than earlier academic experiences for which they could see less applicability, and greater support from employers than from parents whose own aspirations were limited. It has already been proven that workforce development activity is more likely to widen participation by those from lower socio-economic groups than almost any other activity.

The Higher Education Academy has been addressing the learning experience for students in the workplace for a number of years, but over the past year and for the foreseeable future is intending to focus specifically upon how to support learners who are already part of the workforce and whose higher level study is integrated with their work.

In the first year of this programme, the Academy has worked intensively with a self-identified group of ten higher education institutions for whom workforce development provision is a priority activity and is likely to become a key part of their future mission and strategy. They have a number of years experience in the field, and have achieved recognition in a variety of forms. Three have Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in related activity. Across the institutions there are four National Teaching Fellows who have been recognised specifically for their contribution to the field of work-based learning. One higher education institution won The Times Higher Award for the most innovative use of e-learning for its work-based learning [WBL] scheme, and another the Queen's Award for Industry for its WBL scheme. Several have received specific commendations within their QAA audits for WBL activity.

The focus of the work of the group has been to engage in a pedagogic discourse that will consolidate excellent practice, and also lead to an articulation of the principles and nature of that practice in such a way as to support other institutions that wish to develop similar provision. The substance of a year's discussions has been captured in this publication, which does not seek to be a conventional guide, nor even to cover all the possible aspects of workforce development. The group has concentrated upon those aspects of practice and experience that have intrigued those who facilitate the learner's experience, and where the greatest challenges have been encountered. As a consequence, this publication offers the reader a set of collaborative essays, which follow a structure that loosely reflects the stages of the learning and engagement process.

The first two chapters have a conceptual emphasis. Chapter 1 reflects inclusively on what we take workforce development activity to embrace (as opposed to offering definitions), and on what distinguishes workforce development from more conventional on-campus learning. Chapter 2 discusses the concept of 'structural capital' in the context of the contribution of higher education to workforce development and provides some examples of practice. The following three chapters address aspects of the relationship between higher education and the organisations for which it is seeking to offer provision. Chapter 3 stresses the importance of having validated frameworks within which curricular developments can be situated, and that have sufficient flexibility to accommodate a variety of needs. This is followed by a discussion of models and issues relating to the accreditation of in-company training provision (Chapter 4), which is supported by a number of examples. The establishment of partnerships between higher education and a variety of organisations forms the theme of Chapter 5, in which three very different examples are presented that illustrate the necessity of taking the particular context into account when designing collaborative engagements. The final three chapters address widely differing aspects of workforce development.

Chapter 6 points to the variety of considerations that need to be taken into account organisationally, if assessment is to be properly integrated into workforce-relevant learning. The voices of learners testify, in Chapter 7, to the ways in which participants can develop through their engagement in workforce-related programmes, and how important such engagement can be at the personal level. Chapter 8, which brings this publication to a conclusion, discusses what staff in higher education may need if they are to contribute optimally to institutional efforts to promote programmes focusing on workforce development.

The various contributions are connected by a primary concern for meeting the needs of the learner, and by a philosophy that, broadly speaking, respects the learner and their capacity to make a significant contribution to the design and management of their own learning. This learner-centred approach can create tension within the contributors' own higher education institutions, as well as with employers, both of which may be more familiar with determining themselves what a learning programme should contain. Positive ways in which the contributors have worked to diminish these tensions are part of the unfolding story.

It has been a privilege and a sheer delight to participate in the group discussion, as a rare opportunity in which facilitating learning has been our preoccupation. The Higher Education Academy would like to thank the University of Chester for convening the meetings and for taking the excellent notes that acted as a prompt for recording the discussion and debate, which in turn formed the nucleus of so many of the chapters contained herein. We would also like to thank Mantz Yorke who undertook the essential task of editing the very different contributions into a publication into which readers can dip at will.

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What is distinctive about work-based knowledge and learning?

Anita Walsh

The current high profile of work-based learning and workforce development in the context of higher education has stimulated considerable debate. Discussions of work-based learning often locate recognition of such learning in the context of the knowledge economy, and of the workforce development that is emphasised as part of an effective response to the needs for more sophisticated skills in the workplace. In addition, reference is sometimes made to the need to broaden participation in higher education through providing opportunities for advancement to those workers who are lacking in the educational qualifications that are usually required at some stage in successful professional progression. Such a reference links academic recognition of work-based learning to widening participation.

The widening participation agenda has emphasised the importance of making higher education more accessible to a broader range of students, and considerable activity has been undertaken to raise aspirations of learners who may not previously have considered entering higher education. However, in the dominant approach currently undertaken to widening participation, most of the potential students are young and are encouraged to enter conventional taught courses straight from school or college. They are invited to enter into the existing model of higher education, which is offered mainly on a full-time basis and, as Biggs points out, is dominated by the perception that learners must be formally taught:

“The view of the university teaching as transmitting information is so widely accepted that delivery and assessment systems the world over are based on it. Teaching rooms and media are specifically designed for one-way delivery. A teacher is the knowledgeable expert who expands the information the students are to absorb and report back accurately.”

— Biggs, 2003, p.127

This model of higher education may be entirely appropriate for learners who are around 18 years old, and who are coming into higher education to undertake learning prior to

entry into the labour market. However, in the broader discussion relating to workforce development it is clear that many of the learners who are in the workplace are not those who could or would consider full-time higher education. For example, there are many learners in the workforce who, due to a wide range of life responsibilities, are not able to take time off for full-time study. Some of these learners have left school as soon as they could, either because their families needed additional income or because they had had negative experiences in education. Others, having left school after completing A-levels or other qualifications that are recognised for entry to higher education, have concentrated for various reasons on development in and through employment, instead of gaining academic qualifications. In addition, there are graduates who have spent a number of years in a particular occupational area and are re-evaluating their career path, wishing to undertake an academic programme to facilitate their change of direction. These are all learners who are not in a position to respond to the dominant mode of widening participation in full-time education, and for whom higher education's engagement with workforce development can offer a valuable avenue of personal development, at the same time as it offers employers the opportunity to have a more skilled workforce.

However, discussions of the extension of higher education opportunities to workplace learners are often dominated both by Biggs' transmission model of higher education (in which learners have to be formally taught subject content to learn) and by blanket assumptions relating to learning in the workplace. It is frequently assumed that involvement in workplace activities (other than those tightly constrained by professional bodies) is inappropriate for the university. Reference is made to the established distinction between 'training' and 'education', with the former being perceived as 'traditionally not ... concerned with the whole person, instead relying on narrow, behaviouristic skills acquisition', which addresses the needs of the employing organisation rather than those of the individual (Beckett and Hager, 2002, p.128). This distinction draws on a higher education tradition in which, as Brennan and Little (1996) point out:

“Conceptions of knowledge ... frequently distinguish between the ‘pure’ and the ‘applied’, entailing two further kinds of distinction: between the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the utilisation of knowledge, and between the creation ... of theory and its application.”

— Brennan and Little, 1996, p.32

The power of this distinction is such that, in discussions concerning the full integration of work-based learning in higher education, any learning in the workplace is often assumed to be 'training', and the category of work-based learning is seen to be homogeneous. The effect of this is to conflate a wide range of different workplace learning experiences and to obscure the distinction between workplace learning that has a long tradition as a component of higher education and that which is 'new'. It is established practice to integrate placement opportunities in areas such as education and nursing, where students are receiving a licence to practise at the same time as

they gain an academic award. In addition, the employment experience in 'sandwich' degrees (for example, in engineering or computing) is a valued part of such awards. However, such workplace opportunities 'usually sit discretely within conventional course structures and understandings about academic knowledge and learning' (Boud and Solomon, 2001, p.24). This means that, even on those courses where workplace experience is valued, often the learning gained is treated differently. For example, it is fairly common practice for learning outside the university to be assessed on a 'Pass/Fail' basis, which means that it cannot contribute to the classification of the overall award. In other cases, such learning is given a minimal weighting in assessment schemes, or not assessed at all. Such an approach reinforces the belief that, while learning outside the academy may be necessary in certain circumstances, 'real' learning takes place in the university. Here, separated from other activities taking place in society, learners are assumed to be 'novices' who need enculturation into one or more academic disciplines. This has very real implications for learners who cannot – or do not wish to – enter a conventional university programme.

There is now a wide range of academic practices that provide for the full recognition of learning in the workplace, and that can therefore respond specifically to the needs of learners who are part of the workforce. The section of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Code of Practice that relates to work-based and placement learning provides an indication of the range of this practice in higher education. In the Code, the QAA states that work-based learning is 'learning that is integral to a higher education programme and is usually achieved and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment, the assessment of reflective practice and the design of appropriate learning outcomes' (QAA, 2007, p.4). This broad definition is intended to be facilitative, as a 'formal definition might even be counter-productive and act as a constraint to the further development of innovative practice in this area' (ibid., p.4).

Current work-based learning practices can be seen as part of the more flexible and responsive approaches in higher education, which have been student-centred and have emphasised the importance of experience for learning. The Assessment/Accreditation of Prior and/or Experiential Learning [APEL] forms part of these more flexible responses, and has been practised since the 1980s. Evans (1993) argues that the wider recognition of experience-based learning is the result of the introduction of an academic credit framework in the UK, something that has been fundamental in establishing a formal 'value' for learning outside the university. He explains, 'In 1986 CNAAC [Council for National Academic Awards] established a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Registry. Before that, work-based learning for academic credit in higher education was off limits, beyond thought even' (Evans, 1993, p.175). The principle on which the credit framework is based is that assessed learning of an appropriate standard, wherever it occurs, should gain academic recognition. This supported and reinforced the establishment of a learning outcomes approach in higher education, and helped the focus of attention move away from what the tutor would do (i.e. what would be taught) towards what would be learned by the students.

Many of the practices involved in recognising a much broader range of learning have developed in post-1992 institutions, and this has frequently led to the conclusion that such recognition was a product of pragmatism (a response to the need for students and/or funding) rather than one of principle. Yet, to make such an assumption is to overlook many of the current theoretical debates relating to knowledge creation and to the nature of learning. Academic colleagues who are engaging with work-based learners often take the pedagogic theories underpinning their own practice for granted, and they therefore do not make them explicit. The result of this is that many in the academic community are unfamiliar with debates relating to the pedagogies of different types of workplace learning. This means there is a lack of understanding of the pedagogical principles that support the academic recognition of experience-based workplace learning.

If we first consider the debates relating to knowledge creation, it is widely accepted that the university's established dominance over the production of knowledge has been considerably diminished. As Gibbons *et al.* (1994) point out, knowledge production now takes place in 'a range of non-university locations, such as industrial laboratories, research centres, think-tanks and consultancies' (p.6). Increasingly, there are considerable numbers of graduates and postgraduates who are involved in the knowledge economy, and, 'as knowledge production moves out of the university ... a whole range of knowledge users outside the university become increasingly involved in determining the nature of knowledge' (*ibid.*, p.5).

They argue that the effect of this new range of knowledge-producing activity has been to produce a new type of knowledge, which cannot be judged by existing criteria. Detailing the mode of knowledge production within the university, they emphasise the importance of peer review, and of the 'control [which] is maintained by careful selection of those competent to act as peers' (*ibid.*, p.8). This is the process of academic knowledge production with which colleagues within academic disciplines are familiar, where the discipline is a fundamental aspect in maintaining academic standards. Gibbons *et al.* define knowledge produced in this way as 'Mode 1 knowledge'.

The 'new' knowledge is defined as 'Mode 2 knowledge', and is knowledge that is produced outside the university in the context in which it will be used. Such knowledge cannot be judged using the criteria applied by the academic disciplines, because integral to such criteria is a distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' knowledge. Arguing that established terms based on this distinction between theory and application are not appropriate for knowledge produced outside the university, Gibbons *et al.* point out that, 'when knowledge is actually produced in the context of application, it is not applied science, because discovery and applications cannot be separated' (1994, p.33). In the process of production, such knowledge has become 'a mixture of theory and practice, abstraction and aggregation, ideas and data. The bounds of the intellectual world and its environment have become blurred' (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994, p.37). In addition, Mode 2 knowledge is transdisciplinary – it does not fit into the disciplinary

categories used by the university – and therefore established higher education structures can have difficulty in accommodating it.

As well as challenges offered by the production of high level knowledge outside the university, the postmodern debate within the academy has weakened the university's claim to be the final arbiter of what counts as knowledge. As Kivinen and Ristela (2002) point out:

“The university has been a site for prizing various forms of contemplative knowledge, by which we also mean knowledge that has sought to ... represent the corresponding reality. Postmodern critique has set the challenge that Knowledge, with a capital K, should be replaced by various knowledges.”

— Kivinen and Ristela, 2002, p.419

This has led to the fragmentation of the concept of knowledge, and a lack of clarity regarding the grounds on which universities recognise knowledge to be valid (Barnett, 2000, p.416).

Moving on from high level knowledge production/evaluation, there is also considerable evidence that high level learning takes place outside the university, and a lively theoretical debate relating to the nature of ‘real’ learning. Perspectives on learning that are based on the constructivist approach present an important challenge to current pedagogic practice in higher education, and provide a sharp contrast to the emphasis on the delivery of subject content. There is a considerable literature that draws on this approach and relates to how students learn formally inside the university and informally outside it.

Writing of teaching and learning inside the university, Biggs (2003) claims:

“What people construct from a learning encounter depends on their motives and intentions, on what they know already, and on how they use their prior knowledge. Meaning is therefore personal.”

— Biggs, 2003, p.13

He argues that it is not what the teacher teaches, but ‘what the learner has to do to create knowledge [that] is the important thing’ and emphasises the importance of active learning (ibid., p.12). In Biggs’ view an emphasis on the breadth of theoretical knowledge (which students often see as irrelevant) can be the enemy of understanding, in that it can encourage surface learning where students accumulate information, compared to the deep learning that will lead to students acting differently. He points out that: ‘to really understand physics, or mathematics, or history, is to *think* like a physicist, a mathematician or a historian, and that shows in how you behave’ (ibid., p.37).

In order for them to act as effective professionals, Biggs argues that students need functioning knowledge, which he defines as a combination of declarative knowledge

(the relevant theoretical knowledge base), procedural knowledge (the skills necessary to apply this) and conditional knowledge (an awareness of appropriate circumstances in which to apply the declarative and procedural knowledge that has been acquired). He claims that, traditionally, universities have taught much declarative knowledge and some procedural knowledge, but that the students have had to develop, on their own after graduation, the conditional knowledge that is necessary to achieve fully functioning knowledge. An approach to learning and teaching focusing on functioning knowledge blurs the established distinction between theory and practice, and challenges the belief that 'real' learning is about theory that is acquired in the university and applied elsewhere.

As mentioned earlier, Biggs writes about learning inside the university. However, Tynjala makes the point that: 'Constructivism, purely as an epistemological view, does not imply any specific environment' (Tynjala, 1999, p.365). This perspective is reinforced by Chaiklin and Lave (1996), who challenge the assumption that learning should be undertaken separately from other activities, and argue that, 'there is no such thing as learning *sui generis*, but only changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life' (Chaiklin and Lave, 1996, p.5). Rejecting the traditional separation made between the 'learning mind' and the social world, they state that 'in a theory of situated activity 'decontextualised learning activity' is a contradiction in terms' (ibid., p.6). This emphasis on learning through activity and engagement with the social world has considerable implications both for the recognition of work-based learning and for the structuring of the learning experience in higher education. If all learning takes place through situated activity, this would apply to learning that takes place through formal programmes in the university as well as to that which occurs in the workplace.

An influential model, which draws on a constructivist approach to consider collective learning, is that of Wenger's communities of practice. In contrast to the learning contained in a taught course, in a community of practice the 'required learning takes place not so much through the reification of a curriculum as through modified forms of participation that are structured to open the practice to non-members' (Wenger, 1998, p.100). A community of practice consists of members with a common interest and/or goal who engage with each other to negotiate a repertoire of behaviour between them. Wenger argues that communities of practice are everywhere in society, and that everyone belongs to a number of communities with the nature of their participation changing over time.

When using the term 'practice' Wenger defines this very specifically. In established usage practice is often contrasted to theory, and the two are seen as completely distinct, an example of this in the curriculum would be when professional programmes integrate practice placements to expose students to the appropriate workplace. In contrast, Wenger states that practice 'does not reflect a dichotomy between the practical and the theoretical, ideals and reality, or talking and doing', but includes all

these aspects of learning that are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated (ibid., p.48). He also claims that the codification of knowledge into 'reified subject matter' can be a barrier between the learner and their activity, thereby providing a hurdle to effective learning. Because this is the case, 'it is more important for students to have experiences that allow them to take charge of their own learning than to cover a lot of material' (ibid., p.264). Here again there is a challenge to the established distinction between theory and practice, and to the emphasis on subject content. In addition, in contrast to the idea of context as physical location, such as the university or the workplace, activity theory claims that 'context is not so much something into which someone is put, but an order of behaviour of which one is part' (Chaiklin and Lave, 1996, p.19). This definition of context – as a system of which the learner is part – offers a much more flexible approach to the learning situation, and does not privilege the context provided by educational institutions.

The view that knowing and doing (sometimes Ryle's (1949) terms of 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' are used) are inseparable has a long tradition, and writers in this area often cite the work of, for example, Dewey, Kolb and Schön. Such writers emphasise the importance of metacognitive skills and of the exercise of reflection on action to achieve effective learning. Barnett argues that it is reflection on activity that facilitates the disaggregation of Ryle's 'knowing how', which takes place outside the university, to 'reveal the multi-layered character of knowing-in-the-world', and therefore the intrinsic sophistication involved in undertaking professional roles (Barnett, 2000, p.415).

The adult learners who are fulfilling these roles have very different requirements of the university than the conventional student. Referring to learner-managed learning in the workplace, Laycock reports Knowles' view that, 'the pedagogical model [which] permits the teacher to take full responsibility for decisions about what is to be learned, how it is to be learned, when it is to be learned and if it has been learned' places the learner into an entirely passive role (Laycock, 1993, p.24). He claims that there needs to be a shift from 'didactic to facilitative teaching from dependent to autonomous study, from transmission to interpretation, from the authoritarian to the democratic' (ibid., p.24). The work-based learners who engage with the university are competent adults who are functioning well in their work life – they have developed a range of skills during the course of their life and work experiences. This is the case even where learners have not engaged with higher level study before. It is important to recognise that workplace learners are effective in their own context – they are not in the same situation as young full-time students who come to the university without broad practical life experience. The concept of self-managed learning and shared responsibility for outcomes can be a more appropriate pedagogy for such learners.

The collaborative approach advocated by Laycock is particularly important in the context of mature adult learners who are joining the university from a background of successful professional practice. They are already operating autonomously in

environments of uncertainty and change, since this is what their professional role requires that they do. Such a background is a strong contrast to that of most 18-year-olds who are entering university straight from school/college, and for whom the academy 'pre-packages' knowledge to make it accessible. Mature professional 'students' who are work-based learners do not wish to become passive recipients of teaching, they often enter the university at the very highest levels (for example, the professional doctorate) and see themselves as expert practitioners rather than novice academics. As Burns and Costley point out: 'these learners already have intellectual capital, what they seek from HEIs is not so much factual knowledge as ways to research and develop knowledge, reflect and evaluate situations and think autonomously' (Burns and Costley, 2003, p.45). Therefore, when engaging with such learners, rather than being involved in pedagogy (i.e. teaching and learning) academic staff are involved in andragogy, which Knowles defines as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (quoted in Jarvis, 2004, p.126). In the case of experience-based learning in the workplace, such 'help' involves supporting the learner in 'translating' their prior and current achievements outside the university into a discourse whereby they can be recognised by the academic community.

Professional expertise in the workplace takes a wide range of forms, some of which are consistent with an academic discipline based on a particular type of professional practice (for example, teaching, medicine etc) and some of which is transdisciplinary, in that it does not fit into academic disciplines at all. Professional practice can also be demonstrated at a number of levels – Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2005) trace the stages of development of expertise from novice, through advanced beginner, competence, proficiency and finally to expert. This concept of level of expertise within the workplace is extremely helpful, and highlights the fact that different levels of achievement exist at work. The higher education credit framework, with its explicit characterisation of different levels of academic achievement, can help identify the different levels of learning that take place in the workplace.

Gosling (2001) claims that explicit consideration of the concept of level of achievement – in contrast to the focus on specific subject content – emerged with the development and establishment of the academic credit framework. Level of achievement is, of course, implicit in higher education, in that a specific level of achievement is required for entry to undergraduate study and students progress through awards and into postgraduate study. However, frequently when level is discussed the conversation relates to the level of performance of the student (i.e. what their grade was), rather than the level of demand of the learning experience (how challenging the module was). As Gosling points out, it is only relatively recently that generic characteristics of levels of learning achievement have been identified, but these have been invaluable in enabling equivalence to be drawn between learning inside and outside the institution. In common with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications [FHEQ], the academic credit framework provides a hierarchy of levels from the equivalent to first-year undergraduate study, through to the equivalent to doctoral study. This framework

is also explicitly educational, as Gosling explains: ‘the concept of level in credit frameworks emphasises the importance of epistemological, curricular and personal development’ (ibid., p.278).

This emphasis on the importance of personal development in an educational experience is a valuable reminder of the role of higher education in employer engagement. As Wedgwood (2007) points out when writing about employer engagement and higher education:

“Higher Education is more than skills training. It is also about education and knowledge. The [employer’s] ‘connect’ with the ‘academy’ provides an intellectual context and environment for thinking and learning in the workplace, and a rigour and objectivity from which new insights, understanding and creativity can arise.”

— Wedgwood, 2007, p.13

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Developing the structural capital of higher education institutions to support work-based learning programmes

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Structural capital

This chapter considers issues related to the provision of work-based learning [WBL] programmes by higher education institutions and discusses these programmes using the concept of structural capital. 'Structural capital' is defined as the organising and structuring capability of the organisation as expressed in formal instruments, policies, regulations, procedures, codes, functional business units, task groups, committees or less formal culture, networks and practices (Stewart, 1997) that influence practices and procedures. Our experiences of operating work-based learning programmes in two very different higher education institutions provide illustrations of structural factors that enable and facilitate work-based learning. The discussion outlines the forms of work-based learning that both universities employ, and considers some key aspects of WBL delivery that are directly impacted upon by the structures and processes within institutions, and contribute to intra-institutional structural capital. A summary of practical examples is given as an appendix to the chapter.

The Middlesex University WBL approach considers that learning at higher education level takes place primarily at and through work in order to meet both individual and organisational development needs. The organisation will usually be an employer, but it could be a voluntary or professional body – or possibly a client – if the learner is self-employed. From its outset in the early 1990s, proponents of WBL at Middlesex University proposed it as a 'field' of study rather than a 'mode', which meant that WBL took the form of a subject discipline in relation to the University's structural and procedural purposes (Garnett, 2007). This meant that actual structural capital assets include:

- specific WBL programme level descriptors
- module learning outcomes

- a subject handbook
- assessment processes and boards.

The ability to recommend specific qualification awards in WBL, ranging from certificate to doctoral level, is also structural capital. The innovative approach of ‘field of study’ allows the learner to respond to the needs of the workplace rather than be controlled by subject discipline constraints. It has provided a foundation upon which to build the structural capital resources for WBL within the University. These structural capital assets have been further enhanced by the work of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in WBL and the recent strategic decision of the University to establish an Institute for Work Based Learning which has the academic and quality responsibilities for WBL and a remit to work on a pan-university basis. Both of these developments are designed to enhance and expand WBL as a mode as well as a field of study, in order to maximise the impact of WBL across the University. The distinction between WBL as a field of study or as a mode of study should be borne in mind during this discussion.

The University of Westminster’s approach to WBL is central to the University’s mission of ‘educating for professional life’. It locates WBL within the broader concept of ‘work-integrated learning’, which encompasses the pedagogic approaches concerned with integrating academic studies and working practices so that students, staff, employees and employers can develop their understanding of the reciprocal relationship between education and the world of work. This means that within the University there are varied approaches to the forms of WBL offered. Some forms and activities have been designed into courses from the start, while others have developed in an ad hoc manner and may have become formalised if considered valuable and sustainable. The main categories include fully embedded WBL courses and modules for employees, practice-based courses, sandwich years, short formal or informal placements with accredited learning, work-based project modules, on-campus businesses and so on. The structural capital assets include university-wide policies that require the development and integration of work-integrated learning in all courses, employer engagement mechanisms and collaborative partnerships, and an academic framework that enables the validation of negotiated awards and titles at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The University’s approach to work-integrated learning was recognised by HEFCE in the award of a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to develop further the approach both within the University and with external partners.

Working in partnership

To be effective in meeting employers’ or customer needs, WBL programmes need to be able to draw upon ways of working that are outside traditional subject disciplines and are transdisciplinary. These include partnerships with other providers of high level education as well as organisations, thereby promoting a collaborative approach to delivering learning. The formal instruments and policies that universities have in

place to facilitate partnerships are, consequently, a form of structural capital. WBL programmes are often negotiated between the partners and individual learners, and emerge from the workplace and the learner/worker's needs rather than a related subject discipline, thus challenging the traditional approach to knowledge creation. This partnership model can be framed within a model of knowledge production labelled by Gibbons *et al.* (1994) as 'Mode 2', which is transdisciplinary, where knowledge is produced at the site of application and with the co-operation of users and stakeholders, and which can contribute to organisational structural capital. Example 1 demonstrates a model of how partnership working can articulate the different knowledge interests of the university and external organisations.

Example 1

The School of Media, Art and Design at the University of Westminster developed a BA Fashion Merchandise Management course, the first of its kind in the UK, in association with Marks and Spencer. The company seconded a member of its organisation to the University for 18 months to devise the programme in collaboration with staff and in partnership with the top fashion companies in order to ensure that generic business approaches were blended with industry-specific skills. The course includes a sandwich year combining work placement with a semester studying abroad in New York or Hong Kong. An industry advisory board, comprising leading fashion retailers in the UK, advises on the course and on new developments, such as a BA Buying Management course, and on short 'bite-sized' courses for business including Tesco, Mothercare and Arcadia, which lead to a partnership WBL degree programme with Nottingham Trent University for Asda employees.

Structures to support learning

There are several distinctive features of WBL that Boud *et al.* (2001) identify and that have specific resonance with structural capital. These include:

- partnerships between a higher education institution and an organisation with infrastructures to support learning
- a curriculum that derives from work and the needs of the learner rather than from subject disciplines
- an individualised programme determined by the learners' personal and professional learning needs, which are ascertained at the outset
- learning activities that are often centred upon work-based projects that contribute to the needs of the organisation and are supported by both the university and the organisation
- the assessment framework, which is, of necessity, transdisciplinary in order to cater for both subject discipline and organisational requirements, to meet quality assurance demands, and to provide educational processes that enable student assessment, progression and higher education awards.

WBL features are in evidence within curriculum frameworks and learning resources that support the WBL programmes and are formalised within the course documentation, thereby contributing, as formal instruments of the institution, to the structural capital of the university. Example 2 demonstrates the design of a WBL course using the flexibility of the structural factors of the University of Westminster learning framework.

Example 2

The MA in Individual and Organisational Development at the University of Westminster has been designed to meet the specific needs of middle and senior managers from business, industry, public services and consultancy. The programme runs as a series of three-day themed modular learning bursts over two years, supported by one-day learning set meetings in between. Working in small groups in learning sets enables individuals to explore their own areas of interest, negotiate their learning contracts and share their learning through participating in peer assessment, while learning bursts provide access to the whole group's community of knowledge and experience. Reflective practice and research methods modules run throughout the two years, underpinning the programme. Learning bursts cover areas such as the dynamics of development, designing for learning, strategy and change management. The course culminates in a work-based project and a dissertation in a chosen area of interest. This structure allows people to maintain their working commitments during the duration of the programme.

Using knowledge and information

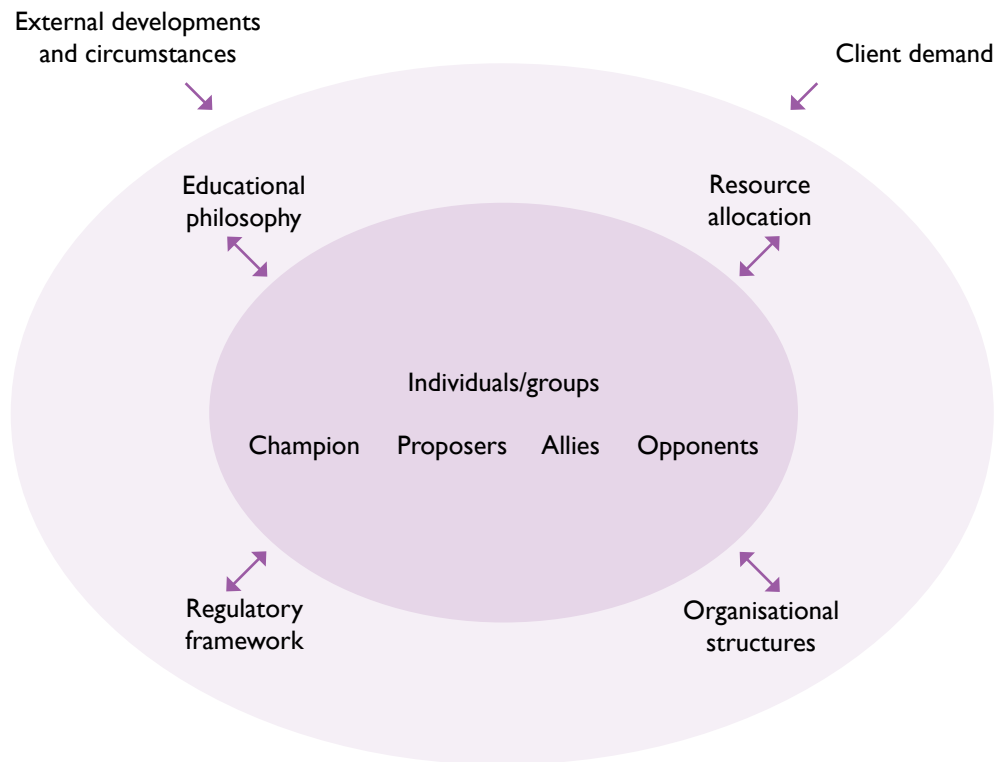
University WBL programmes are often represented by academia as an appropriate response to the needs of the 'knowledge-driven economy' (e.g. Boud and Solomon, 2001) but, as yet, the challenges to, and contribution of, WBL to the structural capital of higher education institutions has rarely been considered. With regard to knowledge management, it is recognised that the ability to understand and attach significance to information has more value than just acquiring more information, especially in the current culture of accessible and prolific information (Choo, 1998). Structural capital should be considered together with intellectual, human and customer capital as part of the institution's resources. The generation and interpretation of information contributes to the intellectual capital of an organisation, as it draws on the combined knowledge, skills and capabilities from individuals and groups, and combines with the customer capital, which is the value of an organisation's relationship with the people with whom it does business. These contribute to the market influence in an organisation and are essential in enabling a provider to meet the needs of the customer, and thereby contribute to structural capital (Stewart, 1997). Consequently, Stewart argues that managing structural capital promotes 'rapid knowledge sharing, collective knowledge growth, shortened lead times and more productive people' (ibid., p.110). Edvinson and Malone (1997) consider structural capital as essential in

representing the needs of the customer as well as enabling internal processes to respond to external demands and, as such, it plays a strategic role in relation to both human and customer capital. For WBL in higher education, the student centredness of WBL is emphasised in the form of focused responses to external organisations and a flexible curriculum that meets programme development needs for external customers, rather than suffering the grinding prevarication of institutional validation processes.

Human and structural capital

Universities have traditionally seen their role as developers of human capital, and little attention has been paid to the potential of higher education to impact upon the structural capital of organisations. While WBL appears to have the potential to impact upon intellectual capital in general, structural capital has a particular contribution to make in organisations as it can help learners develop and communicate their personal knowledge store by accessing and utilising information from others. The strategic role of structural capital is in enabling this new knowledge and information to be communicated to other individuals, be reinterpreted, synthesised and developed further in order to enable others to access, understand and transmit the new knowledge further. Structural capital's value is its contribution to the organisation's purpose, through formulation and dissemination of organisational aims or informing decision making (Garnett, 2007), thus making the context of knowledge creation and use an essential component when manipulating information. For WBL, the context of knowledge production is highly significant as knowledge that is created from work is contextualised, performative, transdisciplinary and often contested (Boud, 2001) as there is rarely an authoritative source to define it, thus reflecting Mode 2 knowledge production. WBL creates new knowledge for use in both an organisation and the higher education institution, so such partnerships can foster mutual learning as well as draw on and extend the structural capital held between the two organisations. The institution can contribute to the organisation by facilitating the transmission and integration of new knowledge through the WBL programme. Consequently, the institution needs regulations and procedures in place to support joint working and provide a vehicle for knowledge transmission through assessment and learning practices. This aspect of the interaction between higher education and the world of work can be the most difficult to initiate, develop and sustain. At the University of Westminster, the tasks of identifying relevant employers, particularly in sectors dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises, and developing and maintaining networking strategies have been found to be lengthy processes requiring industry experience, commitment and communication skills as well as executive level sponsorship. Developing the structural capital of universities to support WBL is a highly 'political' activity as it challenges the status quo across a range of critical areas (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: The political arena for the development of structural capital to support university-level work-based learning



Portwood and Garnett (2000) highlight the significance of high level champions, activists and allies in order to bring about change not only in developing curricula, but also when considering structural factors such as educational philosophical approaches, resource allocation, and academic regulations. The creation and consequent growth of WBL at Middlesex University have been due to a well-established institutional approach to these issues. These in turn have provided the foundations that have gradually enabled each school to begin to make local WBL innovations that have been culturally acceptable. Consequently, the corporate aims and objectives of the institution may need to include a commitment to organisational partnerships that includes management approaches, resources and protocols to support the development of such relationships. This enables the organisation to develop structural capital of its own through the process.

Regulations and procedures

Another practical expression of structural capital is in the form of regulations and procedures to accredit organisational learning external to the university, such as

experiential learning, in-house training courses and competency frameworks. This academic accreditation recognises learning gained from external sources other than academia, by awarding credits that reflect the level and amount of complexity of learning. It differs from accreditation awarded by professional bodies, which recognises professional equivalence and standards in a programme (see Chapter 4). Institutions must be sufficiently versatile to accept this non-traditional knowledge and learning as being equal to, rather than supplanting, their own brand of learning, and provide processes through which learners can benefit from alternative learning experiences. Academics in higher education need staff development in order to be conversant with the university regulations so that educationally sound programmes are developed, and need to be willing to work with the external organisation's counterpart to build programmes that suit their needs, as well as fulfilling requirements for quality assurance processes in higher education and for integration and progression within future potential learning opportunities. Imposing subject discipline traditions or transferring higher education programmes wholesale to a WBL environment cannot and does not work, and should be discouraged, or the academics and institutions will lose credibility when trying to introduce WBL into an organisation.

Example 3

The School of Health and Social Sciences at Middlesex University was awarded a tender to accredit programmes in NHS leadership, to be delivered by three institutions external to the university; two of which were education and consultancy organisations. Two postgraduate diploma leadership programmes were accredited and the School continued in the role of quality assurance monitor and accreditation body until the programmes were complete. Progression for the participants was built into the programme in the form of access to a validated Middlesex University WBL Masters programme, which provided facilitation and support for participants while undertaking a relevant WBL project that had emerged from their leadership programme and work role. This demonstrates that curriculum flexibility within regulations facilitated a partnership between several organisations that benefited all participants and their organisations. Additional validation was not needed as the WBL curriculum is designed to allow access for those with previously accredited learning at the postgraduate diploma stage.

Recognition of external learning

At Middlesex, Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning [AP(E)L] is available for both individuals and organisations in respect of aspects of learning that may include in-house training and staff development (where this has not been officially accredited), but can also form the basis of an individualised and negotiated WBL programme. At the University of Westminster similar AP(E)L regulations operate, including the accreditation of experiential learning that has taken place since students commenced study at the University. The difference lies in the use of such credit for named awards rather than as part of the negotiation of individualised WBL programmes.

Garnett *et al.* (2004) have argued that there is significant scope to rethink the purpose and practice of AP(E)L so that it becomes a tool for learning recognition and development within the context of partnership working, thus making a valuable contribution to the structural capital of both the educational provider and its partner organisations. Additionally, the design of a WBL curriculum that includes negotiated WBL projects, which can be taken as 'stand-alone' modules or integrated within the WBL programme, enables external learning to be incorporated into the institution's currency of credits and academic levels and used towards a range of higher education awards. This meets the quality standards of the institution and the development needs of the learner, and also contributes to the organisation. Supporting and assessing WBL requires flexible academic staff who are able to facilitate adult and work-based learning in both subject and work disciplines while also appreciating the different values that each partner brings to the learning activity (Boud and Costley, 2007). This is a demanding role to undertake as it requires the academic to be familiar with inherent factors in WBL, which are:

- the context of learning
- a curriculum that is work-driven
- epistemological issues related to underlying subject knowledge
- the context of a work-based partnership
- learner centredness
- flexibility within, and responsiveness to, the learning and work environment.

For example, expecting course assignments to be submitted from a retail cohort during December, which is the peak of the trading year, would be, at the least, unrealistic, but could also be detrimental to the partnership between the higher education institution and the organisation. Likewise, an appreciation of ethical and subject discipline codes are also key to smooth partnerships. For example, when work-based learners are working with children or in the health service, there are ethical issues involving access to potentially vulnerable subjects. Consequently, learners in these areas will need informed guidance from their academic facilitators. However, this might challenge current practice in the workplace where the knowledge of ethical practice may be tacit rather than explicit, and such guidance would need to be reconciled within work, academic and professional boundaries. Having clear ethical protocols articulated within institutional structures provides a forum for the scrutiny of project proposals and quality assurance principles in which to frame practice and agree programmes. At Middlesex University, this takes the form of a programme approval board to oversee the coherence and ethical aspects of individual programmes, which is a specific structural capital instrument to enable the student to progress and negotiate a target award.

Assessment of learning from the workplace has inherent dilemmas (Yorke, 2005). In practice-based professions such as teaching and nursing, the concept of being assessed in practice is not new. For other less vocational subjects, the idea of integrating assessment or including awards of credit for learning from a placement experience can seem alien, particularly as credits are not awarded for experience, but for the learning that arises from it, which can be a challenging concept. It is a tension that constantly underpins the range of all forms of WBL. In WBL there can be additional assessment pressures as individuals must function competently in the workplace as well as submitting academic assignments, as many WBL students are primarily workers who are studying part-time, rather than full-time students who are working part-time. The challenge therefore for WBL in higher education is to provide assessment tasks that align assessment requirements with individual learning needs, whether those are intellectual challenges or the achievement of practical competences. The assessment approach includes aspects of assessment that monitor learner performance (such as placement assessment) as well as gauging progress against course performance indicators and quality assurance standards, but also has a formative component that relates to the broadening of academic skills and knowledge, and the engagement of individuals in studying areas of preferred academic interest. The recently updated QAA guidelines (QAA, 2007) on workplace and work-based learning identify the responsibilities of both the higher education institution and the organisation in assessment activities, and making these work in practice is a function of the structural capital of both parties.

Example 4 demonstrates the joint use of structural capital resulting from the meshing of NHS training with the academic approach to WBL projects, which produced work outcomes that were fit for purpose and also blended subject discipline knowledge within the programme, while working across professional disciplines in a specific project context. The accreditation of NHS training (the organisation's structural capital) amalgamated with higher education accreditation and curriculum procedures, enabled both organisations to increase their structural capital.

Example 4

A cohort of six learners completed a Middlesex WBL Masters programme in Cancer Services Improvement within the NHS, where they were working to modernise services in order to speed patients through the waiting lists for diagnosis of and access to treatment for cancer. The learners' backgrounds varied from health care professionals, such as nurses, to administrators who had demonstrated a flair for project management. The programme started by recognising and accrediting the in-house training provided by the NHS in-service training in improvement techniques and processes, for which each learner made an individual accreditation claim by portfolio. It concluded by each student working on a WBL project in their own NHS Trust. These

projects included: reducing waiting times for urological and gastro-intestinal investigations; introduction of patient information for cancer services across an NHS Trust hospital; user involvement in designing cancer services; redesigning radiology and ultrasound services; and evaluation of video conferencing consultations. The WBL partnership with the commissioners, who were the Cancer Services' Collaborative, provided an academic pathway that recognised the unique and influential roles these learners had in their own workplaces, and provided a framework within which they could gain an academic qualification (Workman, in press).

This example also demonstrates that the choice of WBL project can enhance an individual's work activities. These projects were already being undertaken by the students on the programme, and required a three-way learning agreement between the student, their sponsor or organisation and the university. By using a work-based project that met all the stakeholder requirements, the student gained academic skills and a research-focused, critically analytical project, and the organisation invested in the development of critical appraisal skills by members of staff who had also gained confidence in their work role. At the same time, the institution maintained its quality assurance processes and achieved successful graduates by drawing on the intellectual, human and structural capital of both organisations.

Administrative processes

Continuing experience of WBL in both universities has identified that a potential major area of stress and difficulty for both students and academic staff is that of the administration processes that underpin student programmes. University administrative systems are designed for traditional student programmes of full-time study, over a period of three years. WBL students do not fit this pattern. They need to be able to self-defer submission dates to fit in with work commitments, as can occur, for instance, in the retail sector in the Christmas period. Changes in funding of posts and short-term contracts can impact upon student progression, due to work roles being replaced, relocated or redefined, and therefore models of progression should allow stepping-off points, with return to study being permissible without incurring penalties. Most academic record systems tend not to cater for such idiosyncrasies and overriding predetermined programme designs can invite a variety of gremlins to enter such systems, not least in the area of finance and sponsorship: this can undermine successful partnerships between organisations and higher education. Evidence is strong that traditional funding models are unwieldy and inadequate where there are significant numbers of WBL students. This is particularly relevant at undergraduate level where customised provision allowing alternative timescales and ratio of learning workloads is at odds with the university regulations and the economies of scale currently encouraged in mass higher education. If WBL is to make a significant contribution to improving the UK workforce, as identified by Leitch (2006) as well as other drivers

of widening participation and access to higher education, national and institutional target-setting and resource allocation needs to consider a move from the concept of prescribed course standards to supporting learning pathways of variable duration and credit values (Garnett, 2007).

Conclusion

Effective WBL provision within higher education institutions involves a number of structural capital issues that are ongoing and essential to the effective delivery of WBL. These are real issues as they have to be fully integrated into the functioning of the institution and monitored through times of institutional change in order to be refreshed and updated in the light of changing practice. It is anticipated that these issues are likely to have a ripple effect in that, once systems are designed to respond to one group of non-traditional students, principles are generated and transferable to others demonstrating that there is real potential to improve the way an institution functions and responds to the needs of a knowledge-driven economy.

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Appendix: Examples of structural capital

| Types of structural capital (Stewart, 1997) | Practical examples |
|---|---|
| Formal instruments | Curriculum frameworks responsive to external requirements Assessment framework |
| Policies | Learning and teaching e.g. learner-centredness of HEI Recognition of learning from experience/external activity Collaboration with external providers e.g. link tutor role and expectations Explicit management support for WBL across departments |
| Regulations | Academic regulations allowing specific amounts of external accreditation within university programmes Ethical requirements for subject disciplines within WBL projects Academic framework Academic accreditation of external courses Quality assurance and enhancement |
| Procedures | Assessment procedures including assessment boards, moderation processes etc Assignment submission e.g. link to finances to ensure fees collected Accreditation procedures for individuals and organisations Three-way learning agreement between learner, higher education institution and employer Ratification of individual's negotiated programmes Sandwich courses allocations and monitoring Resource allocation to support WBL |
| Codes | Link tutor relationship with organisations Placement/practice requirements and learning support Organisational partnerships |
| Formal structures | Management and delivery of WBL programmes Accreditation and organisational partnership activities Financial contracts and negotiations e.g. for cohorts Contractual agreements when working with external organisations |
| Task groups | Articulation agreements e.g. with other education providers Creation of practice policies/practices Placement developments Quality monitoring and enhancement |
| Committees | Assessment boards Accreditation boards Programme approval boards Developmental work in WBL |
| Networks | Information sharing between internal and external organisations and subject specialists Transdisciplinary groups to support and maintain WBL developments Project supervisors in different disciplines sharing WBL information/practice Practitioners and linked workplaces FE colleges e.g. foundation degree deliverers and purchasers |
| Practices | Level descriptors and module learning outcomes Module resources shared across disciplines Teaching allowances and project supervision Financial processes for non-traditional students Staff development for WBL programmes Programme delivery and education practices Learning activities for non-traditional students Resource allocation per student Variety of assessment approaches suitable for use in WBL |

Frameworks for work-based learning

Karen Willis

Introduction

The fundamental difference between work-based learning [WBL] programmes and more traditional curricula is the emphasis in the former, by definition, on learning that takes place in the workplace rather than in educational institutions. The meaning of 'the workplace' as a general concept seems clear enough, and as such the term features regularly in policy statements and reports, giving an impression of homogeneity. However, it is equally acknowledged (although often overlooked at policy level) that 'workplaces' in particular, together with 'employers' and 'employees', are in reality extremely diverse and often have rapidly changing needs. So, if institutions are to meet the Leitch (2006) challenge of engaging increased numbers of those already in the workplace in higher level learning, key questions concerning how meaningful workplace learning may be designed are raised:

- What processes and mechanisms can academic institutions, whose core business traditionally consists of provider-led programmes, use to develop more customised – even individualised – programmes of study?
- How can these programmes be framed within the academic infrastructure to ensure equivalent value with other higher education programmes?
- What do negotiated, flexible work-based learning programmes look like?

One response to the need for appropriate structures and processes for negotiating studies is for institutions to work through a credit-based academic framework designed specifically for work-based learning. The embedded use of academic credit in higher education, based on notional learning hours and the achievement of stated learning outcomes, enables the award of qualifications to be defined in relation to the learner rather than the course content alone. This principle of outcome-based credit means that learning that takes place outside universities can be recognised, including knowledge that is constructed and expertise that is gained in the workplace. The concept and definition of credit 'level' is also central in representing a freeing-

up of opportunities to recognise a broader spectrum of higher level learning outside the university. A fit for purpose WBL framework is useful, therefore, in providing a means of enabling learners in the workplace both to process and to present ideas and experience in ways that allow their learning to be accredited and thereby lead to qualifications. The framework infrastructure can facilitate institutions in working quickly and responsively with both organisations and individuals to agree appropriate means of meeting workforce development needs.

In the absence of pre-specified course content, the structure of a WBL framework can help learners to shape what they want to do, situate the learning in higher education and fulfil the important role of demonstrating equivalence. Institutions designing a WBL framework have found it useful to map this against aspects of the academic infrastructure. The QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications [FHEQ] provides the overarching qualifications framework that gives WBL, as much as other types of higher level learning, its currency and meaning within the context of higher education, particularly with regard to level. It is important that work-based learners, through assessment, demonstrate how they meet the QAA requirements for an honours degree or other qualification, and thereby receive credit or an award reflecting an equivalence of challenge and rigour. To have parity, the WBL award must also be accommodated within the local assessment regulations and associated procedures that apply across a particular institution.

Notwithstanding the importance of situating work-based learning in the currency and culture of higher education in this way, a WBL framework is more than an administrative convenience for institutions. One of its strengths lies in introducing learners to the underlying principle of identifying and articulating their tacit knowledge learnt through the workplace (Eraut, 2004) by providing a means for both learners and tutors to think and talk together about this knowledge. When the starting point for learning is not subject content provided by a higher education institution or further education college, a WBL framework provides a tool, a way for learners to recognise and structure their learning, through the development of appropriate skills and attitudes, such as reflection (Moon, 1999).

What can a work-based learning framework look like?

While it is not essential, institutions that deliver significant amounts of WBL have generally found the validation of a specialised work-based learning framework to be useful. Such a framework is designed to facilitate the accreditation, within higher education, of work-based and work-related learning and provides for the negotiation of appropriate learning routes either by organisations or individuals, or by a combination of both.

Fundamental to the design of an effective WBL framework is the use of level descriptors to indicate common, generic characteristics of learning, irrespective of

subject content or learning context. Such level descriptors would relate to those in the FHEQ, and can be translated into module learning outcomes. These in turn can usefully be supported by level-related assessment and marking criteria, which may be derived from a generic institution-wide framework, but in this context be expressed in terms relevant to learning in and from the workplace.

The basic structure of a WBL framework will be familiar to the sector, and reflects the structure for many undergraduate frameworks. Modules, as 'chunks' of credit, provide the building blocks that can be shaped into flexible programmes with relevant content, processes and assessment that are given academic recognition according to level:

FHEQ Level 1 (C)/NQF Level 4 – 120 credits

FHEQ Level 2 (D)/NQF Level 5 – 120 credits

FHEQ Level 3 (H)/NQF Level 6 – 120 credits

FHEQ Level 4 (M)/NQF Level 7 – 180 credits

FHEQ Level 5 (D)/NQF Level 8

Modules within a WBL framework might be based around different-sized blocks of credit; for example, all might be based on 20 credits or vary from as high as 60 credits for some modules to as low as five or ten credits in other cases. For an individual institution, the WBL framework might be based upon, or aligned with, their standard modular framework, but will be more finely tuned and fit for purpose with regard to the types of modules that it incorporates. It might also allow for the inclusion of smaller credit blocks than might be feasible within an institution-wide modular scheme.

There are a number of aspects that might be said to characterise the distinctiveness of a work-based learning framework as compared to a standard institutional modular framework (see Table I).

Table I: Common distinctive characteristics of fit-for-purpose work-based learning frameworks

| Characteristic | Purpose |
|--|--|
| Flexibility to negotiate and customise learning programmes and award titles without going through a full validation process for each one | Efficiency and responsiveness of institution to employer and individual learner demand |
| Level descriptors that can be translated into learning outcomes and assessment criteria | Locate WBL within HE through benchmarking against FHEQ qualifications descriptors |
| Pre-validation of modules | Modules used as the basis for negotiating customised programmes specific to work-related needs and interests |
| The nature of pre-validated modules promoting the development of certain key skills and approaches to WBL | Prepare learners to undertake negotiated programmes through, e.g. self-review process, research methods for WBL etc |
| Pre-validated ‘template’ or ‘shell’ modules emphasising experiential learning | Enable learners actively to build into their studies learning and knowledge generated through their own workplace |
| The facility to select from a bank of specific work-related taught modules, within a specified proportion or credit limit | Learners might choose to include these in their programme of study |
| The facility to include a proportion of taught modules selected from other subject disciplines within the institution, within a specified credit limit | Learners might choose to include these in their programme of study to reflect their own interests or specialisms |
| A learning contract or agreement for individually negotiated programmes of study | Formalises the process of negotiating individual programmes and defines the outcome reflected in the agreed award title |
| Flexibility over size of credit-rated modules that can be offered | Enables smaller or larger credit chunks than might otherwise be feasible in a standard institutional modular framework, to reflect employer need |
| Identification of proportion of accreditation of prior experiential learning [AP(E)L] available, where relevant and coherent to the negotiated route | Learners can identify areas where they can claim general or specific credit towards their awards through using clear procedures in the context of their learning programme |

Pre-validation of modules intended to be used as a basis for negotiated experiential learning may be undertaken through the design of ‘template’ or ‘shell’ modules, which are based on the traditional module descriptors model, but outline only generic learning outcomes rather than any specific content. This generality, however, could be seen as a potential problem, in that this approach might appear not to describe or

explain to a busy employer or potential learner exactly what it is that can be studied. This is why a dialogue is both important and necessary, so that tutors can engage in the process of interpreting the rules to learners and learners can explore and analyse their learning needs with reference to their own contexts. Modules and learning outcomes can then be customised, and programmes negotiated. Such programmes might include a proportion, within limits specified in the framework, of taught modules from a work-based learning bank or from a separate subject discipline within the institution in order to build an individual programme, the coherence of which will be reflected in the negotiated title of the award.

A framework is a way of providing the rules within which an institution works to negotiate and map a degree or other qualification. A WBL framework needs to be facilitative, not restrictive – but as with all types of open learning, the more extensive the dimensions of flexibility, the greater the need for a structure clearly defining the scope and limits of that flexibility. The WBL framework is the boundary – within those parameters there is freedom to be imaginative and responsive. There is an important distinction to be made between the negotiable and the non-negotiable elements; level, for example, is non-negotiable and defined nationally in the FHEQ. Other non-negotiable elements may be institutional and regulations will vary with regard to ‘cultural tolerance’. Will local regulations permit, for example, the award of smaller ‘chunks’ of five or ten credits, which are often more appropriate to a workforce development setting?

Using a framework with learners and employers

Frameworks facilitate the negotiation of programmes and drive the agreement of learning contracts by providing the structure for designing flexible curriculum. In this way, the product – the framework – is also the way of working, a method or process, but this can be hard to explain to employers and potential learners in comparison to a traditional academic curriculum that details and specifies content. This can raise practical issues – if this is to be the mechanism for an employer’s workforce development, it is important to be able to give some idea of what the programme is going to look like, and to show how the pedagogic approach meets the outcomes both of the learners and of the organisation that employs them.

In talking to employers, ‘the framework’ can be introduced and explained as an infrastructure that can allow people in their workplace to gain academic credit for learning through work. It can also help employers to identify their workforce development needs through the design and sequencing of learning into study programmes that, while different from an academic subject curriculum, still adhere to the principles of logical development and coherent structure. It can be a huge task for an individual or employer to articulate what they want, but this process can be assisted through the work of academic staff acting as consultants in the early stages of engagement.

The advantage of a more open type of framework is that it sets out to everyone the underlying principles of work-based learning. The primary principle is of experiential learning, gained day to day on the job, as opposed to taught 'work-related' modules. In some cases, a model will be designed that includes elements to meet an employer's specific needs, together with the scope for personalisation for individual learners in other aspects of the programme. Notional hours of learning used to estimate credit value are based on all types of learning, and in this context will clearly include equivalent hours spent learning at work.

This can then be turned into a learning contract or agreement. For each level of study, students on individually negotiated routes might complete some form of an approved studies learning agreement in consultation with their personal tutor, which can then be submitted to the programme team for approval.

Using an established validated framework, within which programmes can be designed and approved, can also alleviate the often laborious process of authorisation and speed up the institutional response time to employers. Institutions should not necessarily be restricted to thinking of traditional honours or even foundation degrees at the start; employers may want only one module initially or perhaps a short award, for example, a Certificate of Credit of ten to 110 credits, or a Professional Certificate of 60 credits. This has the advantage of enabling the learning relationship to become established between all parties, which may then lead to the development of progression opportunities for further learning either for full cohorts or on an individual basis. Both employers and employees may be more inclined to become engaged with higher level workforce development following a positive initial experience with a successful outcome, and the framework can set smaller awards or modules within a 'climbing frame' for progression.

Frameworks and institutions

Institutions may find that a distinct WBL framework offers the facility to be more flexible – or more specific – than is feasible within a more standardised institutional modular scheme. For example, a standard framework may have compulsory requirements relating to core or optional modules that are inappropriate for a work-based learner, for whom there may be different core requirements, such as a self-review module. A WBL framework, through its characteristics, defines the identity of its programmes of learning; its rules – although not its regulations – may distinguish it from other programmes in the institution.

There are a number of operational factors that institutions intending to introduce a WBL framework may wish to consider. For example, the use of a WBL framework enables flexible start and end times at different points within the year. This accommodates a range of provision where credit, not the full-time academic year, can be the organising principle, although the organisation of institutional systems around

the time lines and life cycles of the full-time student can create operational restrictions. An example of this is in the timing of assessment boards and the relationship to the funding methodology with regard to progression and achievement.

The approval processes for WBL programmes are based clearly on an academic model, in order for the academic credit gained through WBL to have validity and currency within the wider conventions of higher education. One, but not the only, value of a fully-validated WBL framework is that it can facilitate quicker institutional responsiveness by avoiding having to take everything through full approval in each individual case – programmes can be created by slotting contextualised content and outcomes into the module boxes. It can be questioned whether the modular framework, organised by empty boxes with labels, titles and specified hours, in fact tends to constrain thinking about whether studies might potentially be planned more thematically, but a sufficiently open framework can nonetheless provide the flexibility and the structure to meet both the needs of learners and the requirements of institutions.

Institutions have found it important to examine and determine the level at which programme approval powers can operate. At what level is authority vested to negotiate and approve modules or programmes of study and learning contracts, and through what procedure? This authority could potentially be assigned at the level of the individual tutor, the WBL team, an approval panel or a full validation event. Some institutions that use their WBL framework in the design of foundation degrees still take that level of award through a full validation procedure. At one institution, foundation degree proposals that include at least 40 credits of modules from the WBL framework at each level can be approved through a designated standing approval panel, whose membership is drawn from across the institution. This panel meets on a monthly basis to consider the authorisation of all new provision for employers that has been designed using the framework. The panel also monitors individually negotiated programmes that have been approved by the WBL team, including those modules customised from pre-validated 'templates'. Some institutions' WBL teams have delegated authority to negotiate and approve credit for individual modules. In some schemes, the full learning contract or individual learning pathway can be approved and signed by an individual tutor; in others, authority to approve the learning agreement and proposed award title resides at the level of the full programme team.

There are also organisational questions relating to where within the institution the ownership of the validated WBL framework resides. Does the framework belong to one school or faculty, or to the whole institution? Do programmes and awards using the WBL framework sit within school or faculty subject structures or in a centralised, dedicated WBL section – or both? Different institutions adopt different models, but it is generally found that some degree of central leadership and oversight is valuable. The WBL framework might belong to the whole institution and any programme may adopt one of its modules; for example, on experiential learning, if appropriate. However, in these circumstances, advice and support from the team of WBL specialists may be found beneficial by other departments offering these modules.

How may academic coherence be achieved within negotiated WBL programmes? What is the balance between subject discipline focus and WBL modules? How does the overall profile of modules undertaken relate to the named award? A large proportion of generic WBL modules, as against subject-focused modules, in programmes of study could be seen by some to raise issues of academic coherence.

One issue relates to the coherence of the WBL experience over a long time, with regard to learners who would like to get transcripts and to notch up credit as they go along. Credit accumulation can be facilitated by starting with small chunks of credit and building up to awards. However, this approach, which is an effective way of engaging new learners and thereby widening participation, could be viewed by some institutions as fragmented and lacking coherence. This highlights tensions and raises the question, 'Are we facilitating a flexible process for accrediting learning, which allows for changes as individuals develop and evolve, or should we at the beginning identify key areas for a person's development needs to give a sense of overall coherence?' These key areas may not be specific at the outset, as in some cases individuals may be looking at a very broad field; conversely, they might start by being very specific in the first instance, and then broaden out as their studies progress. With regard to coherence, it can be argued that there is an analogy with research programmes. Research changes shape and nature over the course of its development, so these programmes may actually be thought to have more intellectual rigour; this applies to research programmes at any level. In such studies, coherence can be defined less by an existing academic discipline, than by the learner for their own needs and interests, which may be transdisciplinary.

Through a WBL framework, a university can award a degree in 'studies in... whatever the student works in', whereby the coherence of the degree is defined purely in relation to the job they are doing and the relevance of the learning to the workplace. The award title would reflect the approved studies in the negotiated programme, perhaps with an indication in the title that the studies have focused on work-based learning. This is one reason why many institutions that have been successful in scaling up WBL have a specific framework in order to meet the needs of both employers and institutions. Interestingly, it has been found that this can also then lead universities into considerably more flexible frameworks for other provision.

Accreditation of prior learning [APL] and accreditation of prior (experiential) learning [AP(E)L]

A WBL framework can also provide a flexible means of giving academic recognition to higher level work-based learning gained by an individual outside the university, through accreditation of prior learning and of prior experiential learning.

A good, clear system is needed. Some institutions have centralised, some decentralised, processes for accrediting prior and experiential learning. The percentage of the award that can be accredited in this way also varies between institutions, with examples being: two-thirds; half; variations according to level; and up to all but the last 60 credits.

AP(E)L systems may distinguish between 'general' and 'specific' credit. At one institution, where a learner may AP(E)L up to two-thirds of an award, the AP(E)L process with regard to WBL does not involve specifying the learning outcomes that have to be demonstrated; rather, an equivalence of general credit against the level descriptors is acceptable because the focus is on the individual's prior learning, and not on the institution's programme content. This approach contrasts with more subject- or discipline-based requirements that may apply in professional programmes. In health and social care, for example, a specific map of outcomes that have to be matched is needed if a licence to practise is involved. Some professional associations may also have a requirement of a specified number of hours for a continuing professional development [CPD] award, which may affect the scope to give credit in recognition of prior learning or experience.

Issues can also arise for learners who may be disappointed to find that academic credit from a previous award is not necessarily transferable; for example, from an HND or HNC to a foundation degree. It has been found beneficial to have processes in place in order to demonstrate both the recent currency of the prior learning and its coherence within the proposed negotiated programme.

The nature of the pre-validated modules within a WBL framework means that they may easily be used to map out AP(E)L claims, particularly if flexible experiential learning 'templates' are available. A significant aspect of WBL concerns how students are supported through such processes. In doing AP(E)L at one institution, it has been found that a good stimulus for learners is that of looking through units on a database and trawling, with guidance, through areas that might be relevant. This sensitises learners to academic level and to what a curriculum might look like, and involves asking, 'What do you know? What would you tell someone taking over your job?' At this particular institution it has been found that, where students on foundation degrees have been asked to start with tick-box checklists of competence, they find this boring; however, they do enjoy being asked, 'What do you know about the theory relevant to your work and practice?' They can be shown examples of the type of syllabus they can cover, including professional values, and then asked to create their own syllabus. This is one type of process that institutions may wish to put in place to create effective work-based learning; the issue may be less about frameworks than about how to ensure that there are processes to get students to engage with the potential of WBL.

The roots of the flexible WBL approach perhaps lie closer to the adult education tradition of self-planned or informal experiential learning outside institutions, where the 'subject' or 'content' is defined by the individual or the context (Tough, 1976; Coffield, 2000). Institutions tend to claim that traditional university students should be independent, but in practice there is often little scope for autonomy regarding what they study and how they are assessed.

However, the structure of the WBL framework can ensure that there is an emphasis on individual process and reflection within the programme as the primary means of capturing and awarding credit for experiential learning. This individual engagement can be seen as an enactment of a higher level academic process, helping to articulate the questions that learners need to put to themselves and facilitating their demonstration of learning outcomes recognised at HE level. In this sense, there are similarities with the pedagogic concept of research supervision. The approach is very different, although potentially complementary, to that often taken in the practice elements associated with professional education including, for example, work placements and the undertaking of work-related projects or assignments in order to meet professionally defined standards and requirements.

Elements of commonality in the use of WBL frameworks for individual learners include a process of negotiation of the territory of enquiry at the outset, leading to a learning agreement or contract, and also the necessity for understanding and recognition of level. As has been discussed, this involves at an early point a needs analysis undertaken by the learner with support from a tutor in higher education, and key modules can be included that prepare the learner to undertake a negotiated programme.

There may be no fixed order of study of modules or units. Some frameworks always start programmes with self-review, as this introduces the way of learning and enacts the view of how WBL takes place. This may assume that there are particular underpinning WBL skills that learners must have before they embark on WBL programmes. A self-review module at the outset (using processes by which the learners go through their job descriptions, draw out skills, and identify what knowledge they have) can be important in engaging new learners. This is about introducing reflective practice, capturing and understanding what and how they have already learnt by interrogating themselves and asking, 'What do I know?' and 'How did I come to know this?' (Brodie and Irving, 2007). This process engages people in the processes of work-based learning and develops an understanding of the theory underpinning the approach.

Early self-review can also be helpful diagnostically and can provide the individual material that drives the process of negotiating the elements to be in the learning programme. This is one way of setting the overall coherence of a programme, but

need not necessarily be introduced through a module positioned at the start. In other cases, the framework may allow learners to start by finding out about something specific, which may have a knowledge base either within the academic institution or in the workplace; awareness of self can then come into the package later. There are, therefore, benefits to including a self-review module at some point, if only to pull the studies all together and integrate the learning. An honours degree, for example, has to be more than just 360 disparate 'crumbs' of credit, but its coherence will depend upon the individual and how they can justify this in relation to their professional development, rather than through an externally predetermined set of modules.

However it is designed, the structure of a framework itself provides the means of ensuring that an element which is characteristic of reflective, experiential learning is built into all WBL programmes. The link between the pedagogic model and how learning is assessed can be strengthened by consistent use of level descriptors translated into assessment criteria and marking criteria reflecting generic work-based learning outcomes.

Conclusion

It can therefore be seen that there is a range of characteristics and associated processes that are distinctive to many work-based learning frameworks. This represents a common principle the implementation of which may be locally varied. Different institutions may design and use their frameworks differently to reflect their own organisational principles, practices and cultures. However, most institutions currently engaging actively in work-based learning and the promotion of workforce development have found it beneficial to validate and use a specialised framework, incorporating all or some of these characteristics, as a flexible and responsive means of designing customised higher level programmes of learning both for employers and for individuals. A framework can give structure, coherence and identity to a work-based learning award, while building in pedagogic approaches that can underpin effective learning in and through the workplace.

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Accreditation of in-company training provision: an overview of models and issues

Sue Graham, Ruth Helyer and Barbara Workman

Introduction

Accreditation is the formal recognition of learning achievements of an individual, linked to an internal or external standard. Professional accreditation involves meeting standards agreed by a particular sector's governing body. In academe it is normal for qualifications and programmes to be credit-bearing; furthermore processes also exist to award university credit for evidenced learning from both inside and outside the higher education institution. Therefore academic credits can be attached to programmes delivered outside formal higher education award structures. Universities can utilise the accreditation process to confirm that an individual's performance or training at work, or indeed a training programme itself, conforms to standards that are agreed and approved by a higher education institution or a further education college. Accreditation not only provides a quality assurance process of an assessed learning activity, but also enables the university to benefit from the opportunities to form new external partnerships and confirms to learners that the programme of study is robust and of a high standard.

Northumbria, Teesside and Middlesex Universities are committed to meeting the challenge of engaging employed learners by offering solutions that are work-related and tailored to company requirements. All institutions have developed ways to provide vocationally relevant education on a flexible basis in order to maximise opportunities for access and progression and to encourage participants to recognise the value of, and engage in, opportunities for learning at higher education level. This includes the accreditation of in-company training, which can provide an excellent tool to engage employers in a way that is responsive and directly addresses their needs.

Credit is marketed as a portable, international 'currency'; part of a system that makes 'learning flexible, adaptable, valued, accessible, tailor-made, quality driven

and market led' (NICATS, 2001)¹. It identifies learning by amount and level. Higher education level credit gives status by recognising successful completion of modules, courses and programmes, including qualifications. Higher education credit is often (but not always) valued more when: the training manager (or equivalent) is a graduate; or the profession in question has evolved into a graduate profession with many employees who do not have the newly required qualifications already in place; or a strong research ethic is fostered – hence the university's research ability and strength is valued. The challenge here is to increase the awareness of employers of the benefit of accreditation by higher education.

Using accreditation processes depends on employers valuing academic credit. If the company feels that its training programme is robust and already provides the knowledge and skills that its employees need successfully to undertake their roles, then it may need a little persuading that credit at higher education level will bring added value. This is particularly the case when the addition of credits to an in-company programme requires a clearly defined assessment method.

There are various ways in which higher education institutions can satisfy employer demand for academic accreditation, and these include:

- recognising existing company training activities as already being at higher education level
- developing new programmes of learning in partnership with employers
- transforming a company's ideas, often partly devised, into a format that can carry credit
- accrediting prior experiential work-based learning [AP(E)L]²
- creating a programme using existing modules with some new material
- or, and this is more usual, a combination of the above.

This chapter will describe some models of accreditation at higher education level of external employer-led provision, and will provide some examples to illustrate how these have worked in practice. These will not and cannot form a definitive list; other models will exist.

1 See www.nicats.ac.uk/mainindex.html for more information.

2 *"The University therefore seeks to recognise learning wherever and whenever it occurs and strives to incorporate the varied learning experiences of potential students by allowing them credit against University programmes. Applicants are encouraged to identify the learning already achieved through training, work and previous educational experience, so that the University can ensure that they are not required to repeat such learning and that their study with us both builds on and integrates with their experience."*
— University of Teesside Quality Handbook, p.1 Section D3 – Regulatory Framework, September 2007.

Collaborative partnerships

The development of accreditation services within higher education institutions requires collaborative partnerships with the organisations. This challenges higher education with regard to the epistemologies of practice and knowledge generation. However, this provides the opportunity to capture and develop new knowledge and ideas from work and reposition them within the theories that support the vocational and professional areas from which they originate. The organisation can be assisted in recognising and acknowledging the human and intellectual capital that is engendered from the educational development process. The developmental activity that goes into constructing an educationally sound programme has to be collaborative; the higher education institution should not try to impose structures and content that are alien to the organisation; the organisation needs to be aware of the quality assurance processes that oversee higher education programmes. The developmental process and the explicit nature of determining tacit knowledge can reflect the new model of knowledge that Gibbons *et al.* (1994) describe as 'Mode 2', which is knowledge that is generated by transdisciplinary activity, produced through the co-operation of users and participants at the place of application, as opposed to 'Mode 1', which is discipline-specific and tends to emerge from universities.

The quality assurance environment

Quality assurance of accreditation processes, and the consequent provision, is maintained by a programme of moderation and annual monitoring and review. The in-company activity and the outcomes of this activity are monitored with the same rigour as standard university programmes. This ensures similar levels of outcomes are attained with all delivery partners while also providing an opportunity for changes or realignment to take place³.

The quality assurance procedures are carried out by the academic school responsible for the modules or programmes being delivered, or by a relevant central unit. Programmes offered by, or in partnership with, organisations will be externally examined in line with standard university procedures. Where programmes are too small to sustain or require an individual external examiner, it is sometimes deemed useful to engage one anyway for an overview of quality assurance for this kind of hybrid activity. If appropriate (for example, if there are

3 Any programme which is delivered entirely by an external organisation is the subject of a Memorandum of Agreement, which is agreed between all involved parties and sets out all obligations in line with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (see www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/section2/default.asp). This would typically include the following headings: rationale for provision; structure; assessment; resources; entry requirements; learning outcomes; monitoring and review; CATS level and points claim; background/supplementary information.

high numbers of participants) the organisation might be encouraged to appoint an external assessor itself.

Accreditation may apply to any of the following categories of assessed learning offered by the university and/or external organisations, which are not part of a higher education award:

- short courses
- professional courses
- training and development programmes
- stand-alone modules e.g. from university-approved programmes
- open and distance-learning courses.

A negotiator and/or link person is normally appointed to liaise with the company. Each accreditation proposal needs to be considered by a relevant academic standards committee, which will ensure: academic integrity; appropriate learning outcomes; volume and level of credits; and appropriate assessment strategies. The academic standards committee will seek comments from a variety of experts including an internal specialist assessor not involved in negotiation and discussion with the client and, if appropriate, an external specialist assessor, perhaps the subject external examiner.

Principles

Our universities have found it useful to develop and use a university-wide framework that sets out the principles and procedures for different models of external accreditation (e.g. *The Northumbria University Framework for Corporate and Community Collaboration*, 2002). The following list of principles is an extract from this framework:

- Importance of maintenance of the standards of HE whilst recognising and respecting the cultures and goals of the partner.
- A commitment at the outset to organisations of what they can anticipate and what might be achieved.
- Ownership of corporate activity at School level which is supported at University level.
- Responsiveness to individual, team and organisational needs within different participating organisations.
- Respect of the knowledge, skills and abilities of partner organisations and a desire to learn from them in order to add value to both organisations through flexible approaches to programme design.

The application of the university's quality management and enhancement procedures ensures that the accredited provision is delivered at a standard that is equivalent to that of the university. It is also important to ensure that there is a clear contractual

arrangement, covering such issues as intellectual property rights (usually these remain with the organisation) and financial arrangements. These principles provide a useful bedrock on which to build, and it is envisaged that as this type of work increases, it will move into the mainstream of university activity. However, it is important to retain the ability to be flexible and responsive to employer needs while drawing upon good practice and previous successes.

Different models of accreditation – description and examples

Many different models of accreditation exist; the following examples are indicative but not exhaustive:

I. Mapping

a) Mapping against existing provision

Where the company has an existing programme of training provision, rating can be given via a comparative mapping exercise. The in-company programme is mapped against a subject/module or skills-based set of learning outcomes that already exist within the university. The confirmation of the achievement of academic credit is demonstrated by the learners through assessment procedures that ensure learning outcomes and level descriptors have been met. The assessment must be appropriate for the specificity of the credit being awarded, but also be related to the learner's company work role.

Example 1 – University of Teesside

An example of this is a Tees Valley Small or Medium Enterprise (SME) that provides fabrication, installation and testing of pipework and supplies labour for offshore and marine industries. Their training manager had completed his degree at the University of Teesside and was eager for the company training they were already delivering to be accredited.

Their 'Line Management Development Programme' gave an excellent opportunity for collaboration as elements required delivery by several academic schools (Teesside Business School and the School of Science and Technology) and partner further education colleges. It resulted in the students becoming registered students of the University. Project funding from the Learning and Skills Council meant that the initial cohort could be subsidised. This definitely 'kick-started' the process, however, the company realise that subsequent cohorts will incur full fees for accreditation. Currently the company is using its own training officers; this means that fees are reduced to approximately 30% of the usual module fee to cover the quality assurance mechanisms and university administration processes.

Example 2 – Middlesex University

A Graduate Diploma in Approved Social Work (for those working in Mental Health) has been validated, including an accredited component of 60 credits at higher education level 6, which is provided by a charity in London, and is already approved by the General Social Care Council (the professional body), and used by a range of participants from across London. The remainder of the programme can be taken at various universities. Those who chose to take it at Middlesex combine it with a consolidation module, as well as a specialist area of practice. This enables the University to use its resources for those courses that have a large number of applicants and where the specialist programme could be provided by practitioners. This makes a valuable link with an external local partner, utilises training already accredited by the professional body and provides continuity of provision and quality across the programme.

b) Credit equivalence

A credit equivalence exercise is another way for organisations to gain university recognition for learning or training delivered within the workplace. This could be used where an organisation is delivering provision not sufficient to equate to a full or long university award. The university will assess the provision offered and recognise this as being equivalent to an agreed amount and level of credit. The organisation receives a certificate (time-limited) for display confirming the status of the 'programme'. Learners are not registered with the university and therefore will not have student status. It is very rare that a company-owned training programme is immediately suited to this process, and there is usually a period of negotiation between the employer and the university-based expert to bring the programme into line with university requirements. This provision is moderated by the university sampling assessments in line with other collaborative ventures and under the guidance of an appropriate external examiner.

Individuals who successfully complete the programme, and wish to take their learning further, are able to have this equivalence recognised by university admissions through Accreditation of Prior (Certificated) Learning procedures, providing they have written confirmation of successful completion from the organisation. Normally the university would agree any exemption arrangements against specific programmes with the organisation in advance, via an articulation programme. These arrangements would be outlined in the submission document. Credit achieved will be considered to be current for five years.

At Middlesex, a number of postgraduate accredited programmes have been developed using up to 80 credits at higher education level 7 (Masters). These are based on the equivalent level to higher education, but are specific to the organisation that has accredited them, providing postgraduate level education and continuing professional development for their own workers. Participants can then transfer to a negotiated work-based learning postgraduate programme and, by adding research and final project

modules, can gain a Masters award, thus augmenting the organisational programme with critical thinking and enquiry skills at higher education level. This model has been used successfully in providing professional development for participants from a wide range of public and private sector employers.

Example 3 – Northumbria University

A global company with a regionally based filtration and purification plant contacted the university with a view to seeking accreditation of training packages that it delivers via e-learning. A university expert worked with a counterpart at the company to support it through the approval process. This process established that the training was being delivered at higher education level 5 and was equivalent to approximately 20 credits. The assessment procedures were deemed to be equivalent to those used on a degree-level programme. The company put together the documentation and attended a successful credit equivalence approval event.

2. Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning [AP(E)L] and prior (certificated) learning [AP(C)L]

Credit may be awarded via the Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL] process. This prior learning can either be experiential [AP(E)L] or certificated [AP(C)L] and is managed through specific university mechanisms. The credit awarded might be 'general' (i.e. around notional learning hours, level of learning experience) and/or 'specific' (i.e. against a named award or particular module, mapped against learning outcomes). For example, at Teesside APL is widely used by the Work-Based Studies Degree programme, a scheme designed specifically for employed learners. This route is offered primarily in the evenings and attaches credit to previous learning when appropriate to the current award and obtained within the last five years (or if older, students may provide appropriate evidence). By submitting a portfolio of evidence, a student is able to claim up to 300 credits against their new award, hence gaining considerable advanced standing.

Table I gives an example of a recent cohort, showing various levels of certificated and experiential learning, plus 20 credits for undertaking the module in which the students conduct a self-audit and produce a portfolio of evidence as an APL credit claim. The evidence can be assessed via a range of approaches including a reflective commentary, annotated curriculum vitae, presentation, interview etc (QAA, 2004). Typically this course enrolls two cohorts of 20 to 30 learners a year.

Table I: Variation in the number of credits awarded to members of one cohort for previous learning.

| Number of credits awarded | Level | Number of students |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 10 | 4 | 4 |
| 20 | 4 | 2 |
| 30 | 4 | 2 |
| 60 | 4 | 3 |
| 70 | 4 | 2 |
| 100 | 80 at level 4 20 at level 5 | 1 |
| 120 | 100 at level 4 20 at level 5 | 1 |
| 190 | 130 at level 4 40 at level 5 20 at level 6 | 1 |
| 220 | 100 at level 4 80 at level 5 40 at level 6 | 1 |
| 240 | 120 at level 4 100 at level 5 20 at level 6 | 1 |
| 260 | 120 at level 4 100 at level 5 40 at level 6 | 1 |

Recent claims for areas of expertise have included: ‘The Construction & Co-ordination of Corporate Training for Children’s Services’; ‘Police Small Team Management’; ‘Financial Management in a School Environment’; ‘Ultrasonic Welder Design Project’ and ‘Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Literacy’. These claims are supported with ‘Areas of Learning’ – short essays substantiated by pieces of evidence. The level at which the credits are awarded is decided by mapping the student’s learning against the existing university level descriptors. The amount of credit awarded – i.e. 30, 40, 60 credits is decided by comparing the claim against the outcomes for existing modules, i.e. assessment criteria specified to obtain 20 credits at the same level. This takes time and experience to map adequately. Recent research undertaken at Middlesex has explored AP(E)L assessment of general credit volumes in an attempt to make this a more transparent and objective process (Workman, 2007; Armsby & Workman, 2007).

3. Hybrid solutions

It is unusual for company-owned training provision to be presented in a format that is recognisable and immediately acceptable for university accreditation. There is

usually work to be done around the translation of company requirements and higher education institution products and processes. This is especially important with regards to assessment criteria and raises questions about how these criteria can be articulated to meet the requirements of the academy and the profession or workplace. This leads to programmes being devised in collaboration, which ensures that both employer and higher education institution are satisfied with the outcome, as described below.

Example 4 – Teesside University

The University of Teesside worked with a local chain of convenience retail stores to develop a management programme. The chain had tried to engage with higher education level learning for several years, but had always been unimpressed with the existing offering; modules and courses that were not suitable due to lack of flexibility of content, assessment, place of delivery and so on. The Training Manager had already developed a good deal of material to support management training and together with the Work-Based Learning team and Teesside Business School the required activities, content and assessment were developed into three 20 credit modules, in keeping with University of Teesside requirements (levels, outcomes, aims etc) while satisfying all of the company's wishes. The course became a year-long programme of seminars, tutorials and presentations: a 60 credit University Certificate in Advanced Professional Development in Resource Management in the Retail Sector (UCAPD). The modules are: 'Finance and Trading', 'Personal Development in Management' and 'People Management'. Although created with this company's needs in mind, this programme is also suitable for others in this same sector.

The programme is delivered by the company's training team on their own premises and overseen and quality assured by University staff. The modules are primarily assessed by written reports and presentations. All assignments are approved and moderated by University staff, who also attend the presentations. Before the modules commenced the managers attended an information session at the University where they were enrolled as associate students, welcomed to the campus and introduced to the Learning Resources Centre. The first cohort consisted of eight store managers who had undergone a competitive application process. Two subsequent cohorts are running now consisting of eight local managers and a further eight at a distant office elsewhere in the country – where the chain has purchased a company with a similar profile.

4. Academic recognition of continuing professional development

Many people working in both the public and private sector undertake continuing professional development [CPD] as part of their work, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis. Often this is required for membership of their relevant professional body, or it can be simply through a desire to keep abreast of developments in their field of work. It is possible to offer such people the opportunity to gain university credit for such activity, via a wraparound assessment, such as Northumbria University's Academic Recognition of Continuing Professional Development [ARCPD] module.

The aims of the module are:

- to enable individuals to gain academic credit from CPD learning experiences and events such as short courses, conferences, workshops, one-to-one coaching etc, which is not currently credit-rated by the University
- to develop and demonstrate the skills and knowledge gained from attending, participating in, recording and reporting on higher level work-related learning.

Participants attend a learning event or events lasting the equivalent of at least three full days. They will participate in the event(s) in whatever way is appropriate and intended by the organisers. Examples are: a short full-time management course; a manufacturer's equipment course; one-to-one coaching; workshops; conferences including such elements as papers, discussions and plenaries; and so on. They then produce a portfolio to provide evidence of the learning gained from their experiences.

The analysis of evidence should demonstrate understanding of the facts, principles, opinions and skills acquired, explain how the knowledge and skills gained build upon current competence and how these have been applied, or will be applied, to the student's own work. In addition, it should show how the person's understanding of the knowledge gained is based upon relevant and up-to-date theory.

A high proportion of accredited CPD activity focuses on health-related professions. The award of Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning [CETL] status to Middlesex's department of Mental Health and Social Work has provided the opportunity to create programmes for mental health professionals and service users. Accredited programmes are taught by academics from the CETL as well as practitioners and service users, who all contribute to the students' learning experiences.

Summary

Positive outcomes

- Accreditation offers extra opportunities for universities to collaborate with the world of business, and also with other higher education institutions and further education providers, with sponsors, and across their own institution more effectively. This collaboration brings not only increased student numbers and revenue, but also a stronger, more active and informed institution, better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Useful and long-standing relationships can be forged between the university and the companies they are dealing with, with future learning and business opportunities being fostered (from high level consultancy arrangements to renting university lecture theatres for their own meetings).

- By liaising with employers to develop and accredit training they are either delivering to staff already or are at an advanced stage of programme development, higher education institutions will deliver genuinely demand-led, responsive provision, in line with Government agendas that aim to increase the UK's levels of skills and knowledge. Because of its political relevance, the development and accreditation of training often attracts project funding: this may be viewed as both an advantage and a disadvantage – an advantage in that it allows the activity to happen, but a disadvantage in that good work is sometimes not sustained due to funding difficulties.
- Accrediting company programmes of learning, whatever their size and irrespective of where the learning is delivered, can also be used as a mechanism by which to facilitate the progression of students to specific degree programmes. Work-based studies routes are particularly useful here. The encouragement given from receiving higher education level credit for training already being undertaken at work is often enough to encourage students on to the next stage, some of them students who would never have considered higher education level study normally. By giving recognition of the level, size and quality of a company's education and training, higher education institutions enable and encourage more individuals to access other credit-based learning opportunities.
- Because this work is hybrid and unusual – profiles can differ enormously from company to company – it provides interesting case studies and material for conferences, marketing, and publications. The work also offers development opportunities for company trainers; some internal company trainers delivering on a recent programme for a local newspaper company have been nominated for a national media training award.
- Accredited programmes attract mature learners who would not normally consider studying at university levels. This contributes to the widening access and participation agendas for the university.
- Accrediting programmes of study can be lucrative for higher education institutions, but should be developed on a business model. If costs are kept artificially low then the service tends not to be appreciated as much as it would be if costs are business like and on a par with business models. It can also attract individual self-employed trainers who self-fund, as well as larger organisations with considerable training budgets, so costs need to be realistic. Costs of programme development time should be calculated appropriately and can be a source of income for academic subject groups proving specialist advice.
- Accrediting a programme in partnership, in common with other learning opportunities, enables members of an organisation to articulate and capture the tacit knowledge that is held among colleagues and which is known as

common practice in the organisation, and to incorporate it within training and development programmes so that future worker/learners have access to it. It is important to encourage organisations to capture and value this individual and collective tacit knowledge, as Eraut (2000) notes, making tacit knowledge explicit: improves the quality of individual's performance; communicates that knowledge to others; keeps actions under critical control by linking performance with outcomes; and constructs artefacts that assist in decision making or reasoning.

Some pitfalls encountered

- There are funding implications associated with the design of learning for only one recipient; it is always more sustainable to develop more generic packages and allow the assessment to contextualise. Having explicit AP(E)L processes for individuals can therefore provide progression routes and keep costs reasonable.
- Difficulties are sometimes encountered if university schools and departments are not accustomed to working together and/or with external agencies, or are reluctant to do so. Although the benefits of networking and collaboration outweigh this, it takes time and effort to make cultural changes.
- Employees who are resistant to training, or who have not had to undertake assessments in the past for similar activities may choose not to submit assessments. Credit can only be awarded to assessed learning. This could have a negative effect on HEFCE core funding and again is a cultural change issue. Further issues arise when the training includes elements of professional body activity. Organisations can improve uptake of such programmes by providing financial incentives or bonuses for successful completion.
- Attempting to offer the flexibility that busy companies need while still being tied to the traditional academic timetable (for example, the scheduling of examination boards) can present problems. One way to address some of these issues might be to hold special monthly boards, which could be cancelled if they had no business in a particular month. Alternatively, the organisation can control the assessment process and report back to the university board at the appropriate juncture.
- Some university staff can be very suspicious of educational programmes outside the university and can be difficult to engage, possibly presenting a negative response to the public front of the institution. One of the best ways of changing this can be to engage them in successful examples, such as supervision of projects that use subject-specific learning in creative and dynamic ways.

- Unfortunately, organisations still tend to use training courses as a way of addressing poor performance without engaging in the disciplinary process, so participants may be unaware as to how the programme is intended to develop or improve their performance. This means that failing a course or perceived lack of participation may have an impact on their work role. The implications of failure should be discussed with the organisation as part of the accreditation process so that it can be addressed in the course documentation from the outset and issues of failure or non-completion are anticipated.

Conclusion

Although there are challenges arising from accreditation activities, we believe the positive outcomes outweigh them. This kind of work can give the higher education provider a route into external organisations that can prove to be mutually beneficial on many levels from staff development, to knowledge exchange, to meeting the Government agenda.

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Creating and managing partnerships with employers: workforce development with public sector and private sector employers

Maura Banim and Adrian Evans

Introduction

The impetus for higher education institutions increasingly to get involved in the employer engagement agenda is discussed elsewhere (Leitch, 2006; Nixon *et al.*, 2006). In an economy experiencing employment and demographic changes, employer engagement is seen by many higher education institutions as a way of extending their reach and responding to government, national and international agendas. Employer engagement also provides a route for meeting widening participation targets and other participation rates. However, there is need to understand what is in such engagement for employers. What is their impetus to make the financial commitment to engage with higher education in order to develop higher education programmes that will absorb their energy and resources? Why do it when engaging with an external body inevitably brings with it another set of rules and regulations?

In an abstract way, Leitch (2006) and Lambert (2003) provide the answers with their discussions of the lack of intermediate and higher level skills and the need for British businesses to be globally competitive. This thinking may indeed drive the agendas of governmental agencies, which in turn may drive policies and strategies at national and regional level. It may even drive the thinking of larger companies that operate at national and global levels. It is, however, less clear how national agendas drive workforce development activity at a local level. Smaller companies operating in niche markets or companies with a more local reach may have already devised local solutions (schemes such as in-house training) for workforce development, and these may have been working well for some considerable time (Hogarth *et al.*, 2007). If companies are open to approaches by higher education institutions to develop accredited learning (or if they approach such institutions themselves), and are willing to commit the financial and staff resources, it will rarely be because they want to be respond to the Leitch agenda per

se. There will be additional reasons, which are usually linked to what may be termed 'local drivers'. For example, it may be because they have perceived a 'problem' to which higher education learning could provide the answer. This 'problem perception' will shape what they want developed or delivered, and the success (and continued use) of the provision will be measured by the extent to which the problem is being solved. It may also be because they perceive that learning generated through higher education will add some value to their business beyond that of their existing practices. Again, that perception of added value will shape their expectations and their impressions of success. In short, employers engage with higher education with locally-based specific and variable expectations, and these expectations shape their role in the partnership.

In the examples presented here, the University of Teesside was approached by employers who articulated specific workforce development requirements that were emerging within their own workforce. In both case studies, one from the public sector (the regional NHS) and one from the private sector (the North East Chamber of Commerce), training and development opportunities for staff were already available, and the decision to approach a higher education institution as a way of meeting their emerging requirements was not inevitable (similar enterprises nationally have taken different paths). Developing higher education provision was one possible solution out of a range of viable solutions. To some extent, the continued existence of alternative viable solutions serves to 'test' the partnerships and provision that are developed at every stage of the process. The success of higher education provision is being measured not only against employer expectations (and University promises), but also against its suitability in comparison to other forms of workforce development. The need to understand and acknowledge the specific motivations and expectations of employers has had a profound effect on the partnerships between higher education and employers, and this chapter considers the impact of the partnership on the provision itself and how the provision is designed and delivered.

Governmental and sectoral drivers for workforce development

The governmental emphasis on the employability of graduates, skills development and the need for higher education institutions to be more responsive to employers is not a new phenomenon. In fact, its constant reiteration (from, for example, the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative of the late 1980s and early 1990s, via the Dearing Report and the Enterprise Education initiative (both in 1997) and through to the Leitch Report in 2006) reminds us that vocational, employer-responsive higher education has yet to become an integral part of the way that mainstream higher education 'imagines' itself. Nor is it yet a core concern of many businesses.

For the two examples presented here, it is relatively easy to locate the relevant (and numerous) governmental and sectoral policy drivers that have led the NHS to become one of the heaviest users of higher education for workforce development purposes.

Growing professional registration of clinicians has led to a huge expansion of higher education provision (see Symes and McIntyre, 2000). In addition, under its Modernisation Agenda, the NHS has increasingly committed itself to be a learning organisation with an emphasis on valuing all levels of staff in the organisation (see, for example, *A Health Service of All the Talents*, 2000). Relatively generous funding and managerial time and effort have been invested in this area. As Edmond *et al.* (2007) state:

“The public sector is important both as a role model for employer engagement but also as a context in which the need for associate professional and higher technician skills has grown (and continues to grow) markedly as the result of the government’s ‘modernisation’ agenda.”

— Edmond *et al.*, 2007, p.172

The governmental and sectoral policy drivers for the NHS form at least part of the motivation for employers in this context to engage with higher education institutions and also provide higher education institutions with a base of information that can help when planning provision in this curriculum area. However, it is less easy to locate sectoral policy drivers for the other example study, North East Chamber of Commerce [NECC]. The British Chambers of Commerce is a non-political, non-profit making organisation, owned by its members, who essentially focus on promoting local and regional business development. Part of its remit as a representative body is to work ‘with Government to shape policy affecting UK businesses’ (see www.chamberonline.co.uk). However, the 5,000 businesses that make up the membership of the NECC represent a vast range of sectoral and competitive interests and look to the Chamber to provide ways of increasing their own business. As others have argued (see Brennan and Little (2006) and Hogarth *et al.* (2007)), the diversity of private sector enterprises and their relative competitive position make it virtually impossible to identify or discuss overarching political or economic drivers. Governmental and sectoral policies provide much less of a clue to motivations and expectations in this example.

Local drivers: The NHS

As stated in the introduction, whatever the presence or absence of national or sectoral policy drivers, we want to argue that it is the local imperative (the problem perception) that will ultimately ‘tip the balance’ and encourage employers to form partnerships with higher education institutions. Further, it is the local imperative that ultimately shapes those partnerships. In the NHS example, two management groups independently approached the School of Health and Social Care in 2001. One group was from a regional acute trust that was developing a Centre for Excellence in Coronary Care, and the second group was a subregional network of diagnostic radiography managers. Both management groups were engaged in a process of creating new roles and role redesign in order to meet changing service needs, and, fundamentally, they were both seeking to ‘upskill’ their existing, non-qualified

workforce to meet that need (in this context the non-qualified workforce is taken to mean those undertaking roles within the healthcare workforce that do not require professional registration with the concomitant qualification). Both units of practice faced some similar issues – the emergence of new technologies meant that non-registered staff could carry out diagnostic procedures that previously had been done by registered clinicians, thus freeing up clinicians to treat more patients (see Edmond *et al.* (2007) for fuller discussion of the rise of ‘para-professions’). Alongside this, both units of practice had been experiencing long-term recruitment difficulties. In short, both sets of managers were looking for a way to retain and maximise use of existing staff. With the recent arrival of, and publicity related to, foundation degrees, both groups were keen to explore ways forward with the University.

Local drivers: The NECC

In the NECC example, the Regional Development Agency (One NorthEast) had identified leadership and management as skills development priorities in the Regional Economic Strategy, 2006:

“There is need for significant effort to be put into developing the leadership qualities of individuals, businesses and institutions in the region. This will help close the economic gap between North East and the rest of the country. Leadership is key to strengthening the North East’s competitiveness.”

— (Regional Economic Strategy, 2006)

As mentioned earlier, the NECC has a remit not only to improve the prospects of regional businesses, but also to provide training and development for employees. It had recognised that the development of a leadership and management programme aimed at the right level, and provided in a ‘business-friendly’ manner, not only could help achieve the aims of the Regional Economic Strategy, but also would provide a unique business opportunity. Its aspiration was to develop the expertise and skills of its own staff who could then offer (at a defined cost) those skills and expertise to other companies, thus creating income-generating opportunities. Further, the opportunity to participate in a programme at higher education level was seen as an incentive to retain valued staff. Throughout 2006 it had been seeking a higher education partner with which to develop this provision. Some higher education institutions had been deterred by the level of set-up costs, by the concept of partner-providers, or by the development and approval timescale the NECC was proposing. In the autumn of 2006, agreement was reached with the Teesside Business School to develop a foundation degree in Leadership and Management, with a first cohort enrolling in January 2007.

In sum, the employers in these case studies were of the view that higher education provision would help them meet the challenges they faced – new technologies,

maintaining competitiveness, meeting targets and the need to retain existing staff. As the NECC stated in a recent publication, engagement with higher education must lead to a 'knock-on effect on bottom line profits' (NECC, 2007, p.2).

Creating the partnerships – managing expectations

This section discusses how the specific employer challenges and local drivers study shaped the nature of the two employer partnerships and the provision that was initially developed. Before the specific issues for each case study are discussed, their common elements are outlined.

In the case of the NHS, early discussions crystallised the need to develop provision that delivered a mix of skill, competency and theoretical knowledge. It was very important to employers that the learners were able to achieve a rapid development of clinical skills while simultaneously demonstrating a deep understanding of the extent and limits of their role. Further, the demonstration of their knowledge, understanding and skills needed to be evident in their practice *throughout* the educational process, rather than at the end. The delivery and enhancement of the service to patients had to be maintained: i.e. learners had to remain 'on the job' as much as possible and demonstrate their learning as early as possible. The NECC had a similar set of requirements. Not only was it important for the employees in their own organisation to demonstrate their learning as early as possible, they also had the aspiration to promote the programme to their member organisations and thus required the programme to be 'business-friendly'. Expectations from the employers were high, which in itself created challenges for the University.

In both examples, the partnerships benefited from existing links which the University had with the employing organisations and from a long history of partnership working at the University of Teesside. While the type of provision was new, modes of communication and skills in working with external stakeholders were well established.

Creating the partnerships – challenges relating to the NHS

The process of creating higher education provision that met the requirements outlined in the previous section was facilitated in the NHS example by the fact that the managers involved had had previous experience of this level of study. They all possessed higher education qualifications and were all already involved in partnership working with the University in respect of the provision of pre-registration training and post-registration continuing professional development. While it was the first time they had considered foundation degree education for support workers, they were at least familiar with, and had an understanding of, concepts such as learning outcomes and assessment of practice. As Brennan and Little (2006) have argued:

“The NHS strategic changes in workforce planning and the development and delivery of patient care have created an environment in which using the workplace as a site for learning (for both potential and existing staff) is fundamental. Thus, in the health service, partnerships between higher education institutions and employers are the norm.”
— (Brennan and Little, 2006, p.49)

The managers’ earlier involvement with the University did facilitate the development of the programme. However, it also meant that they expected the development of this provision to follow a similar pattern (time frame of development; clear agreements around lines of responsibility for delivery and assessment; consensus around the outcomes). In many ways, however, the level and nature of the provision were new and untested, which challenged their expectations of what higher education could provide.

a) The evolutionary nature of the knowledge

As mentioned earlier, one of the key drivers for managers approaching the University was the emergence of new technologies in the workplace. A major challenge for the partnership was to develop a curriculum in which the technology and work roles linked to that technology were constantly changing. It was also the case for the radiography managers that the X-ray clinics in the different hospitals were using different generations of technology. All the managers required that the staff on the foundation degree could use the technology in their units safely and with a degree of autonomy, and yet, from the University point of view, the nature of the skills (and the underpinning knowledge) was evolutionary, making it challenging to ‘pin down’ specific module content, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. As for many work-based learning programmes, it was possible to write outcomes for the foundation degree programme that emphasised the ability to learn and adapt to new and emerging knowledge. However, the partnership did not want to develop what have been called ‘content-free modules’ as this would decrease the portability of the qualification and could hamper learners’ opportunities for progression. It proved necessary to have the flexibility to adapt content in, and outcomes of, modules on an ongoing basis. For the higher education programme to be of value to the employer (and the learners), modules have to be continually updated within the University approval systems, which requires a commitment of University staff time and resources.

A further consequence of emerging technology and roles was the issue of who owned the knowledge. At the outset of the programme the University had to rely on the expertise of staff in practice to contribute to the design, delivery and assessment of student learning. In the context of NHS provision, the programme was able to benefit from long-established principles and practice that may be less evident in other employment sectors.

“In recognising that learning can and does occur in settings well beyond the walls of academe, higher education may need to cede much of the exclusivity of its role in the transmission of knowledge.”
— Brennan and Little, 2006, p.75

While this was not especially problematic at the outset of the programme, emerging funding crises in the NHS have led the University to re-evaluate the extent of its reliance on outside expertise. For example, the University now recruits practice staff on secondment to deliver part of the programme.

b) The evolutionary nature of work roles

Another aspect that proved challenging for the partnership was the evolutionary nature of the students' work roles. In their previous involvement in higher education provision, the managers had been working towards the development of a clearly defined work role, usually legally defined in statute. For the foundation degree, the graduate work role was not new, but it had not been fully established at the outset. (Indeed, eight cohorts later, there is still no regional agreement about the grading and terminology for the foundation degree graduates.) While managers had a clear vision of the skills and aptitudes they wanted learners to develop, they also wanted to see what kind of person was emerging from the programme before they designed a specific role. Once again, this calls into question traditional higher education practice (linked to Quality Assurance Agency requirements) where programme content and outcomes are known and complete before a learner enrolls. From the very first cohort, learner achievement has exceeded the managers' expectations and, in this way, the programme (or, rather, the cohort of learners on the programme) has determined the 'graduate' role, rather than the other way round. While this is exciting and empowering for the learners (and the programme team), it has some implications for the programme team's capacity to 'guarantee' the quality and equivalence of the learner experience. (See Brennan and Little (2006) for further discussion of this.) Much is dependent on the support and opportunities provided to them in their own workplace – a point which raises issues for the concept of equity as contained in QAA Code of Practice (see Hillier and Rawnsley (2006) for further discussion).

Creating the partnerships – challenges relating to the NECC

The NECC required its staff to develop additional leadership and management skills, which they could then in turn use to promote effective leadership in their member organisations. (At this stage the NECC has the aspiration to deliver the accredited programme to others, which will in time raise the issue of how universities quality assure delivery by non-university staff). As mentioned above, managers from the NECC had had less experience of working with higher education than the NHS managers. While they too were grappling with the challenges of creating staff development that would help their organisation remain competitive in a rapidly evolving economic environment, they also needed provision that would allow staff to stay 'on the job'. Additionally, there was an extremely short time frame for development to meet Regional Economic Strategy targets.

As this programme was developed in 2006, the foundation degree that emerged from the partnership was able to draw on ‘best practice’ examples from foundation degree and work-based learning frameworks from across the University. It was also able to utilise, to some extent, existing modules from the Business School. However, given the lack of experience of higher education in the NECC and the nature of the target market, it became clear that language, content – and most significantly the delivery methodology – would need to change.

a) Language and content

As many authors (including Nixon *et al.*, 2006) have identified, the language of higher education does not always match the language of business:

“Overcoming cultural differences and language barriers to establish a shared strategic intent will require substantial time and effort on both sides. Additional resources will be required.”

— Nixon *et al.*, 2006, p.8

Time and effort were required on behalf of all members of the partnership to learn (and amend) the language of academia, and the University was fortunate that the NECC was willing to make the resource commitment to that process. This in turn enabled the emergence of innovative modules that focused on the developmental needs of individuals within the context of their specific working environment. Additionally, the NECC requested that learners should be called ‘delegates’ (see next section). Although the foundation degree programme in Leadership and Management was able to utilise some existing modules, the NECC requested that the titles were changed to reflect its own understanding of the main learning outcomes and to demonstrate to employers and learners the aim of the module (for example, Introduction to Marketing evolved into Customer Service Excellence and the Competitive Edge). A measure of clarity was thereby brought to modules that had previously only been offered to full-time undergraduates. Again, as anyone involved in higher education appreciates, changing the titles of modules delivered across a number of undergraduate programmes is quite an undertaking.

The NECC also required that some module content was modified for the new programme. Again this was a reflection of its ‘closeness’ to the business customer and its need to develop future focused provision. Module content was changed most significantly in modules in which the NECC had direct and recent experience; for example, in coaching and mentoring. Its aspiration to become responsible for the delivery of the programme in the future has led to a general ‘updating’ and refocusing of Business School modules – a beneficial if resource-hungry outcome.

b) Delivery methodology and the ‘wow factor’

The NECC was very specific that delegates could not spend significant time away from their workplace and that the programme should allow a ‘step on – step off’

approach to meet their changing work and personal situations. As a result, the delivery methodology chosen was one of a sequential calendar year featuring modules of eight weeks in duration. The modules mainly have evening delivery (at either the University or the workplace) and significant learner support is provided by a high standard virtual learning environment and workplace mentoring. Initially, this delivery method raised issues for the traditional assessment board and moderation processes, which required reviewing School quality assurance processes.

Each module is supplemented by two one-day 'master classes' to which high profile speakers are invited to contribute. Their inclusion emerged from the desire on the part of the NECC to build 'wow factors' into the programme – i.e. factors which would be an incentive for their own staff and 'unique selling points' for the wider market envisaged later. As well as the factors mentioned above (high standard virtual learning environment; delegates attending master classes), the programme needed to contain work relevant assessment, and so each module has an element of workplace application in its assessment (for example, in the module *Customer Service Excellence* learners are required to develop, pilot and evaluate the impact of customer service improvements). Further, they requested 'benefits beyond credit'; for example, the programme is now accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management.

In this instance the University has benefited from working with a partner that not only wanted the programme for its own staff, but also positioned itself as a potential future provider (with University accreditation). This meant that the NECC remained sensitive to the needs of the delegate and was happy to develop provision that emphasised the importance of the 'learner experience'.

Ongoing partnership delivery of the programmes

This section discusses some of the issues that have arisen as the higher education programmes have been delivered. A key aspect of employer-led provision that must be acknowledged is that the world of employment is subject to external and internal pressures and changes that will necessarily impact on the ongoing experience of delivering programmes. Successful, sustainable partnership working involves a constant dialogue with employers, and it is only natural that constant dialogue brings to light new needs that require swift response by the higher education institutions. The drivers that prompted the initial desire to design provision can and do change, and, just as the initial drivers shape what is designed, new and emerging drivers continue to mould ongoing provision. The capacity of a higher education institution's learning, teaching and quality assurance systems to respond swiftly to new needs is a critical factor in sustaining the value of higher education to employers.

Within the NHS, the workforce development landscape has changed considerably within the seven-year lifespan of the programme. The NHS has moved, often with dizzying speed, from expanding to shrinking budgets, from one priority target to another, and from one organisational infrastructure to another (and this is still in a state of flux). The very elements that initially enabled the development of provision (availability of funds, established experience of working with higher education, strong organisational and policy support) have become the elements that have thrown up the greatest challenges as the programme has rolled out. To date the key challenges for the partnership have been the following:

a) Changing organisational priorities

As the programme evolved and its reputation grew, the number of areas of practice wishing to send learners has grown, and a framework with routes has been developed to accommodate this. The development has been supported by the emergence of an articulated national educational requirement for all healthcare workers, the Knowledge and Skills Framework [KSF]. The KSF (in turn supported by the work of Skills for Health) will ultimately help standardise the curriculum. However, and as noted throughout this chapter, local drivers and imperatives are often stronger than national ones, and in several cases local NHS managers have wanted staff in new roles before the skills and competencies for those roles have been agreed nationally. Consequently, as national agreements emerge, programmes need to adapt to meet those requirements. The need to keep the framework (module content, outcomes, methods of assessment) flexible has meant that the programme is constantly engaged with quality approval processes.

b) Changing funding bases

The recent funding crisis in the NHS (and the ongoing funding pressures) have had an impact not only on the level of recruitment and viability of the programme, but also on the experience of learners on the programme. Uncertainties about funding mean that managers' decisions about sending learners to the programme are made very near to enrolment deadlines, which in turn means that more time has to be allocated to preparation and learning skills within the programme. More managers are now requesting that learners are only enrolled on the certificate in higher education, with decisions being made later about whether they will be supported to enrol on the foundation degree year. Additionally, the amount of contact time with University tutors (i.e. time away from the job) has been reduced, although the programme team at the University has developed its virtual learning environment in order to ensure that learning continues to be appropriately supported.

c) The impact of changing landscapes of workforce development

Funding difficulties and organisational pressures have meant that the experience of the latest cohorts of learners is different from that of the earlier cohorts. However, the

situation and constraints they face mirror the changing working environment. Over the last seven years, learners on the foundation degree programme have been recruited from nine employing organisations (regional trusts, local social services etc) and have been working a similar number of specialist areas of practice (e.g. nursing assistants, medical laboratory assistants). Not only does the employing organisation face different challenges, but also professional bodies and their representatives have moved at varying speeds to embrace (or not) the concept of 'skilling-up' the non-qualified workforce.

Recent graduates and learners currently on the programme have to cope with the opportunities and challenges such a situation brings with it. Some learners have found themselves in new, promoted roles (with enhanced pay) while undertaking the programme; others have had the prospect of promotion withdrawn from them weeks before they completed the programme. Some learners have been supported by their employers to progress on to professional pre-registration programmes, while others face the prospect of redundancy. Again it is the impact of local drivers that is felt most keenly, especially by the learners.

The higher education-employer partnership, which developed and continues to deliver this programme, still works hard together in order to provide valuable learning opportunities for the learners. However, as Brennan and Little observe: 'It is important to recognise that the interests of the learner do not necessarily equate with the interests of the employer' (Brennan and Little, 2006, p.75). For the authors of this paper, this is one of the most challenging aspects of employer-led provision. Accustomed to viewing the lecturer-student relationship as primary and the basis of an approach to higher education emphasising the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, university staff are now entering a more diverse pattern of relationships involving a number of stakeholders. Adapting to these new patterns and working within the new power structures that inevitably brings will require some reimagining of the role of higher education in society.

Maintaining the partnerships – challenges and opportunities relating to the NECC

At the time of writing, the NECC programme is just about to complete its first year and so there has been less opportunity to reflect on the ongoing challenges. However, it is interesting to note that, even in that short time, issues have arisen that have impacted on the partnership and the provision.

a) Potential expansions and rising cohorts

The success of the programme to date and the strengthening partnership with the NECC have recently led to a number of opportunities to expand the programme. Firstly, interest is being generated among the NECC's own member organisations, and cohorts from these are expected in early 2008. Secondly, the partnership has recently identified an opportunity to expand the provision to regional Chambers of Commerce. These expansions will use a combination of University of Teesside

delivery, e-delivery and 'local' delivery. This is creating significant challenges to the organisation of the existing programme, which the partnership is currently addressing. In particular, a number of quality assurance, teaching and learning, and student support processes (e.g. module evaluation; moderation; workplace mentors; virtual learning environment; enrolment, induction etc) will need to be reviewed in order to face the challenge of up to 40 cohorts a year delivered sequentially over a calendar year and across the UK.

b) Impact on undergraduate provision

As mentioned earlier, the NECC programme utilised existing modules from the Business School's undergraduate portfolio. Aspects of these modules were modified to make them more relevant and 'attractive' to the NECC staff. The retitling of modules was generally welcomed. Further, some of the modules have developed alternative assessments (one set aimed at full-time undergraduates and the other at work-based learners). Many full-time learners have expressed an interest in undertaking the work-based learning assessment (utilising their part-time work experience). Interestingly, this is happening in a school in which the take-up of optional sandwich years has declined in recent years.

Concluding Thoughts

It is important to acknowledge the benefit that has accrued from working with larger employers who have the culture, personnel, resources and organisational capacity to engage with higher education. As for smaller employers, the point made by Hogarth et al. (2007) reflects the University's experience:

"One thing that both sides of the employer-HEI relationship were agreed upon was that the constraints identified above are much greater, relatively, for small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs] than for larger organisations."

— Hogarth et al., 2007, p.12

The two programmes in which the authors have been involved have many differences reflecting the nature of the workplace, the skills and knowledge required, and the nature of the sector and its funding regimes. However, the experience of working closely with employers to develop and deliver work-based learning to employees has brought similar challenges that are summarised below.

Firstly, it is vital to acknowledge and accommodate the specific, local drivers and 'problem-perception' that motivates an employer to consider higher education learning. Following on from that, once programmes are built around local drivers and 'problem-perceptions', it is more than likely that they will be constantly changing and evolving. The willingness of management (in both the University and employers) to support innovative (risky?) provision has been a critical feature of their success. While flexible quality

assurance and learner support systems are being developed in response to this agenda, it is perhaps inevitable they will always be playing 'catch up'.

Secondly, and linked to the above point, the growing complexity of the partnerships we have been involved in has become apparent as programmes have rolled out. A diverse, wider range of employers has become involved in both programmes, each of which has brought its own 'problem-perceptions'. Additionally, emerging technologies and changing workforce patterns have meant that managing these complex and diverse partnerships has required higher education staff to develop new skill sets. Just as the programmes constantly evolve and change, so too the partnerships and approaches to maintaining those partnerships have to adapt.

Lastly, there is an implicit thread running through this chapter that also runs (implicitly) through much of the writing in this area – what are the implications of employer-led provision on the learning experience of learners who are also employees? The higher education-employer dynamic does raise very complex and deep questions about where the learner fits in and ultimately where accountability lies. Issues have been raised about equity and comparability, which have been addressed, but only to a limited extent. The University, as provider, is confident that the learners are having a positive learning experience. However, the University has only limited control over what happens in learners' individual workplaces. Moving forward into employer-led provision means that higher education has to start to rethink some of its long-held, cherished values about the nature of the learner experience.

Staying with the concept of the learner experience, the design and delivery of these programmes had a greater impact than anticipated on more 'traditional' forms of higher education provision and on the learner experience of 'traditional' full-time undergraduates. Overall that impact has been positive, but it still remains something of an unknown and, as such, it is something that will be monitored more closely over the next few years.

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Creating and managing partnerships with the voluntary sector: examples from South East Wales

Robert Payne, Kathryn Addicott and Danny Saunders

Background

This report discusses the scope for large-scale training and staff development operations within not-for-profit organisations based in South East Wales. The study on which this report is based was undertaken by the University of Glamorgan as part of a collaborative feasibility study between seven higher education institutions that are researching the need for a pan-Wales workforce development centre. The evidence presented is based on questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, and the outcomes inform an analysis of the volume, style and context of delivery within voluntary sector workplaces. The aims of the study were:

- to gauge the potential for accreditation at level 4 and above
- to explore the issues surrounding collaboration with the voluntary sector
- to estimate the potential for accrediting prior learning.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Higher Education and Economic Development Task and Finish Group Report entitled *Knowledge Economy Nexus: role of higher education in Wales* (Wales Assembly Government, 2004) offers some salient points, noting that:

“The innovation performance of an economy depends not only on how the individual institutions (SMEs, multi-nationals, universities, government departments and agencies, etc) perform in isolation but also on how they interact with each other as elements of a collective system of knowledge creation and use their interplay with social institutions.”
— *ibid.*, para 1.6

and that:

“University knowledge combined with commercial market-place acumen can lead to stronger universities and increased added-value in companies, both of which

create prosperity for their operations and communities...whatever the geographical separation, collaboration will not take place unless there is awareness of what knowledge is available, it is easily accessible and all parties have confidence in each other.”

— *ibid.*, para 4.1

In the context of this study, workforce development, or ‘demand-led learning’, is analysed in a Welsh context – with regard to both volume and impact, and also its potential for growth and ability to enhance the nation’s competitiveness and educational distinction. It can be argued that work-based learning and continuing professional development should be more than ‘just-in-time training’. They should be essential elements of business up-skilling and management capacity building. The needs for Welsh higher education institutions, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Welsh Assembly Government are as follows:

- to expand awareness and use of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) credit system – ‘building credit, building qualification’
- to encourage growth in high level (CQFW levels 4 and higher) workforce education in Wales
- to build a proper business case that entices companies into sustainable workforce development
- to offer innovative ‘learning solutions’ to businesses/workers – for example: e-learning; work-based assignments; reflective practice; mentoring
- to design user-friendly approaches to the accreditation of WBL and continuing professional development
- to mobilise ‘buy-in’ from small and medium-sized enterprises via Regional Skills Partnerships and new Lifelong Learning ‘networks’.

Recently, the WAG economic development agenda, articulated in its publication *Wales – a Vibrant Economy (WAVE)*, recognised that a strong economy, by association, should provide ample training opportunities and support social development (see Wales Assembly Government, 2005). WAVE rightly stresses the importance of work-based learning, but does not highlight the fact that the availability of high quality work-based training and CPD would also help to attract high calibre employees to Welsh businesses, and to retain them. The stress on importance is consistent with the Welsh Development Agency’s call for ‘knowledge transfer academies’ in higher education institutions and places this proposal in an earlier political debate, which noted that one of the main drivers WAG has for higher education in Wales is broadly with respect to economic, social and cultural regeneration. Additionally, the recent ‘knowledge economy’ seminar and report commissioned by Cardiff Council highlights the need for universities and businesses, in partnership via workforce development initiatives, to extend the range and volume of ‘higher level skills’ in their ‘city regions’ (Hepworth *et al.*, 2006).

Additionally, the National Assembly for Wales (NAFW) Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's (2001) *Policy Review of Higher Education* quoted Lord Dearing by commenting that 'They [universities] are the engine room of the economy' (ibid., para 6.1).

The studies

This report focuses upon the voluntary sector and three studies that were undertaken. The three organisations interviewed were Voluntary Action Cardiff (VAC), the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and Llamau (which is an interesting organisation as it works in South Wales to improve the lives of socially excluded, homeless people). These are specialist providers of advice, accommodation and support services to homeless young people with exceptionally high support needs. All three organisations are registered charities covering South Wales, but are working on different levels – VAC as a local infrastructure organisation, WCVA as a Wales-wide infrastructure organisation, and Llamau with a specific area of interest.

In the organisations surveyed, the respondents and interviewees indicated that higher level accredited training in relation to management (and in particular to human resource management skills) was a potential need for the sector. These were most likely to be taken up by larger voluntary organisations with resources to send paid middle and higher managers on such courses. There was also potential for higher level accreditation of training for voluntary organisations in, for example, Housing, Community Housing, and Housing Management.

The responses also indicated the potential for higher level accreditation of training for interpersonal skills such as counselling, anger management and assertiveness. However, some negative views were expressed by some respondents that indicated a significant level of suspicion and mistrust of the involvement of higher education with the sector and its training. There was also the question of credibility of the higher education sector as partners with adequate knowledge and understanding of voluntary sector.

A majority of the respondents made a plea that attention needed to be paid to the 'volunteer' dynamic of the voluntary sector, respecting the volunteer workforce and volunteer senior managers of organisations and engaging with them in working out how best to meet their needs. The evidence has shown that most respondents would require the nature of accreditation process, and the delivery and assessment of courses: to be transparent, flexible, and accessible; to include some choice of methods; and to be tailored to meet needs of diverse potential participants, including paid staff and volunteers. There was a preference for face-to-face, as a tried and tested, traditional and continuingly popular method, but there was potential to encourage blended methods, which can contribute to flexibility and accessibility. However, a recurring practical issue of limited resources was noted, as was the limited capacity of voluntary organisations to take part in AP(E)L and credit-rating

processes. Potential capability is evident, but training and guidance would also be needed for key personnel.

It is premature to draw much in the way of a conclusion from this study at this stage in the project. However, it does indicate that the establishment of partnerships between higher education institutions and voluntary agencies is likely to require mutuality in adjustment if it is to be successful.

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Organising assessment

Kate Irving

Assessment in workforce development programmes is vital to the success of employer and employee engagement in the learning process. This chapter will review the most significant aspects of organising assessment in a workforce development context and provide practical suggestions for how appropriate assessment strategies can be planned and sustained.

As earlier chapters have discussed, higher education institutions engage in workforce development activity when employees as learners study existing modules and programmes (often through flexible delivery patterns, such as part-time, distance, on-site and technology-led options). Additionally, bespoke learning opportunities derived from existing programmes may be used, focusing on particular organisational outcomes at a local level. In-house training may be accredited. Learners may be supported directly from a higher education institution on individual programmes. Increasingly, institutions work in partnership with employers to design specific programmes of study to meet local economic and employee needs.

An increasingly common model is for work-based programmes to be provided through a specifically-designed academic framework (see Chapter 3), providing 'shell' modules with employer/learner-specified learning outcomes and assessment. Often an initial 'self-review' module and a concluding module are provided. As such frameworks develop, banks of generic modules (such as research methods for work-based learning, project/dissertation modules) may be validated by the institution to increase the range of choice and flexibility of individual programme design. As Chapter 5 indicates, meeting with the employer at an early stage to clarify workforce development needs, is an essential part of this process.

As other chapters in this publication indicate, it is important to recognise that, in order to provide a good fit to the achievement of business benefits, workforce development programmes and their assessment need to be 'demand-led' rather than 'provider-led': the 'curriculum' will be the workplace itself and its activities. This applies particularly to programmes developed in partnership with employers to meet local learning needs,

or where assessment is directly focused on the application of module content to the learner's workplace context. In this form of provision, a particular framework may be essential. Within specific work-based frameworks, module assessments are usually designed jointly between the employer, the learner and an institution adviser/tutor as they formulate the mechanism for students to demonstrate, analyse and formalise both the overt and the tacit learning that takes place at work, together with the knowledge and skills that they need to develop in order to function effectively and to manage change. While some assessments may incorporate the application of theory from academic contexts, others may principally involve the demonstration of higher level knowledge, skills and behaviours through activities that simulate the activities and conduct of a particular work role. Outside traditionally designed programmes, the assessment of this form of learning is one of the demanding and fascinating challenges of providing workforce development through higher education.

It is important to recognise that an employer 'investing' in HE level learning will be doing so in order to achieve specific business outcomes, whether the provision is focused on individual or group achievement. Assessment, as a central part of the learning process, needs to cater for the aims of both the individual learner and the employer. The following extract from a recent advertisement on behalf of the Sector Skills Councils makes an important point:

"Employers may not be aware of what HEIs can offer. And what HEIs can offer may not be what employers need..."

— Skills for Business, *THES*, 7 December 2007, p.9

Institutions therefore need to show to employers how the pedagogy, the curriculum design and the assessment contribute to the development of the organisation and its capacity to manage change. As assessment is the main driver for learning, particular attention needs to be paid to the effectiveness of assessment in indexing both the individual's and the employer's outcomes.

Appropriate forms of assessment for workforce development

Universities developing workforce development programmes need to think creatively and innovatively about the design of assessment. The appropriateness of the assessment task is the key to successful learning and impact. For example, a learner could write a critically reflective essay on how they might make a professional decision in a particular situation. Alternatively, they could engage in a reflective dialogue with an assessor, where through skilled questioning they are enabled to demonstrate the complexity and depth of knowledge required to make that decision within their work role.

In this case, a reflective essay *could* demonstrate the knowledge required. However, it could also be argued that a dialogue, based on consideration of an 'in-tray

exercise' or 'critical incident' would be a more effective means of assessing whether a particular employee could demonstrate this *knowledge in practice* and their ability to *make decisions* within a time frame, to explore and respond to questioning and to demonstrate their *interpersonal and communication* skills. This approach, of course, has similarities with the use of a viva in a traditional higher education context and also, as discussed below, requires the assessor to also have mastered specific skills, knowledge and abilities. The development of appropriate interpersonal skills and behaviours is more difficult to assess using traditional approaches, and these are often the areas of learning that most impact on the ability of an organisation to respond positively to change and development.

Group assessment tasks, if carefully designed and monitored, effectively support and demonstrate the development of employment-related skills. Many activities are conducted in the workplace by teams, with individuals taking responsibility for the overall output. As where group work is assessed in higher education, equity and validity of marking at the level of the individual student needs to be considered. Practical matters, such as what to do if a colleague in the team is moved to another area of work or leaves their employment, or if one person's contribution is deemed to be below 'pass' standard, also need to be considered and planned for in advance.

Other methods of assessment that have been successfully used in workplace settings include:

- annotated reflective journals, which review workplace learning through 'critical incidents' or particular types of activity. Students apply relevant theory and workplace documents as supporting evidence for their critiques of experience
- group presentations
- critically reflective essays that use appended evidence of practice to substantiate learning claims
- documentary (audio/video) programmes created within the workplace
- documents to be used within the workplace context
- 'in-tray' exercises
- research projects designed to make a specific contribution to the workplace.

Formative assessment

A consideration of Boud's (2000) concept of 'sustainable' assessment is relevant here. Boud argues that assessment has a role beyond the summative process of certifying the achievement of learning outcomes. In today's rapidly changing society, formative assessment, to inform learners about how they are learning, is needed to facilitate the development of lifelong learning skills. Learners need to share in the ownership of the assessment process, for example, through the design of tasks. Assessment needs

to facilitate the learner's ability to self-assess and to make judgements about when learning has taken place; assessment tasks should be designed to enable learners to demonstrate improved performance in their learning. Thus assessment strategies for workforce development, as in other contexts, need to incorporate opportunities for formative assessment and to recognise and utilise learning experiences within the working environment.

Students in a workforce development context may be new to learning at higher education level. Indeed, many may not have been in formal education beyond the age of 15 or 16. This presents challenges for workforce development programmes, to those involved in programme design, delivery and assessment, and to the students themselves. However, due to national and international policy on widening access to higher education, there is now a wealth of research, experience and good practice to support work in this area. Colleagues working in professional schools and faculties, particularly those delivering continuing professional development [CPD] programmes, will be a useful source of support and guidance, as will those with expertise in delivering higher education programmes in partner further education colleges.

As indicated above, formative assessment has several purposes:

- to guide the student on what is expected at assessment and to provide opportunities to 'practice' assessment tasks
- to understand the assessment process and in particular, assessment and marking criteria
- to develop skills in self-assessment
- to develop ability to demonstrate learning outcomes by choosing and using appropriate skills
- to provide teachers with feedback on the effectiveness of the learning process, and thus a mechanism for early evaluation and development of learning, teaching and assessment strategy
- to identify students with specific learning differences and needs (see separate section below).

In planning formative assessment, institutions may like to consider online feedback (which may have advantages with regard to overall costs, but may not be optimally effective for new learners) or a set timetable of site-visit meetings, where students come together to share formative activities and learn to provide peer support. Workplace assessors as well as institution tutors would deliver these sessions.

Workplace mentors can also provide important support, but their role does need to be clearly defined. The role of a mentor varies with the professional context; this is another area to explore at the early stages of programme design and delivery. It is generally the case that a mentor's role is to support learning; to discuss strategies for managing work/study/life balance; to provide encouragement; and to make

suggestions for where new opportunities for learning in the workplace may be found. In health care and teacher education settings, however, the role of the mentor may also include assessing learners. The range and nature of the role in any particular employment context needs to be agreed in advance, and, if assessing is to be included, the potential for tension between supporting and assessing learners needs to be fully explored. Institutions may also find it useful to provide development opportunities for mentors, where the interpretation of the role is considered, and appropriate skills and knowledge are shared and discussed.

Integrating the assessment of capability

It can be seen that workforce development learning, to be effective, needs to involve the assessment of *capability* as well as of academic skill development. It is important to recognise the difference between ‘competence’ and ‘capability’. Competence in a skill or area of knowledge has often been tightly defined and has thus been amenable to precision in assessment. *Capability* relates to higher level skills and behaviours: those which, it could be argued, are essential to develop a more responsive workforce. ‘Capability’ refers to a learner’s ability to transfer, generalise and build new skills and abilities; to think in a strategic way; and to use ‘competences’ at the right time and place within a particular workplace context. It can be seen as fundamentally integrative.

The assessment of capability presents particular challenges to traditional assessment strategies and approaches in higher education. Additionally, the current Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) does not make provision for capability assessment at any level (Brodie and Irving, 2007), although this should not preclude the sector from developing this work. Indeed, we would argue that it is essential if higher education is to make a valid contribution to workforce development.

Obviously, professional skills are assessed at higher education level – for example, in medical, nursing and teaching programmes. However, this is often in addition to standard modes of assessment and is based on a model of ‘competence’ (is/is not competent). It is suggested here that ‘capability’ should be assessed and that this, following the definition given above, must *include a measure of the level achieved*. This is particularly important in the assessment of an individual’s ability to make complex decisions, a demonstration of both higher level knowledge and practice. However, this also demands detailed knowledge and experience of the workplace context on the part of the assessor and an appreciation of how to use modes of assessment, such as reflective dialogues, to explore and determine the level of performance achieved. This leads us to consider the establishment of workplace assessors.

This is one of the most interesting areas of engagement with employers and one that requires higher education institutions to explore and constructively critique their beliefs about where knowledge resides in the workforce development context, and who is in the best position to make valid judgements about its assessment. In order to be truly effective, employers need to be actively involved in the assessment of their employees. Also, where the institution is the less knowledgeable/expert partner in the provision, colleagues within the workplace should be identified and provided with appropriate academic development programmes to enable them to take on the assessment role. This provides excellent opportunities for institutions to explore how such support should be designed and delivered. It also requires that colleagues working in quality assurance and human resources may need to adapt and develop regulations to facilitate this work.

A number of institutions already arrange for an employer to identify colleagues in the workplace who will contribute to the assessment process. In many cases, this may so far be limited to 'competence' rather than 'capability' assessments, particularly relevant to the development of more advanced skill base in technical, business and health care related activity. Usually, employer staff are provided with training sessions by the institution to support their roles: indeed, to ensure that quality assurance is maintained, it is essential for this to be put in place. However, innovative work is also being developed in this area that enables, through appropriately designed and validated staff development programmes, employees to 'qualify' as workplace assessors so that they meet institutional requirements for appointment as associate tutors. This means that they can undertake teaching and assessment in the workplace on a recognised basis. Such a programme can be devised, for example, as bespoke 'work-based learning facilitation' certificate programmes at level 3 or level M, which also meets the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education at Standard 2. Such programmes may typically include:

- the organisation's workforce development strategy – background and rationale; change management and leadership
- associate tutor role and responsibilities, including links to institution's tutors and employer-based mentoring schemes
- employment context – specific knowledge underpinning area(s) of practice
- WBL pedagogy and how this informs the identification of the curriculum and the design of the student learning experience and assessment
- generic aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, emphasising the importance of formative feedback and the use of critical reflection on practice
- professional values underpinning practice
- institutional and programme regulations, including quality assurance matters
- specific skill development related to the forms of assessment used (e.g. for conducting dialogic assessments and assessing reflective journals), including

- assessed role play and practice assessments
- enhancement of the associate tutor's personal and professional capabilities; links to local (employer-based) career development.

Institutions will need to consider, in discussion with their employer partners, the extent to which their workforce development programme is likely to involve the assessment of work-specific skills, knowledge and abilities. Clearly, the length of the employer engagement needs to be considered, as does the impact of workplace assessor development on the overall cost of the package. For some forms of engagement, the need to respond quickly to demands for workforce development programmes will need to be balanced against the length of time needed to develop workplace assessors.

However, with careful planning it is possible both to deliver learning and to develop tutors concurrently, and this will embed a considerable value in the programme and sustainability in the investment for both sides. It will also assist in developing the programme itself, through reflecting on the approach and demands of assessment and how these can be achieved. Equally, once an institution has developed a capacity for developing assessors in the workplace, a common approach can be extended to new employer partnerships.

Where an employer can afford to sponsor colleagues to undertake this form of professional learning, they will be providing a valuable incentive for the staff who become 'associate tutors'. However, the establishment of employer-based assessors may provide challenges to higher education institutions that have particular regulations about who may assess learners. Innovative practice in this area, which institutions may wish to explore, is evidenced by Alverno College (1994) in its 'External Assessor' programme, and by the University of Chester in its undergraduate level 3 'Certificate in work-based learning facilitation'. This 120-credit programme is being mapped on to the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education, at Standard 2.

Applying assessment regulations in a workforce development context

This is another area in which employers and institutions need to plan their strategy early on in an engagement and where institutions need to review how their assessment regulations should be interpreted in a workforce development context. The easy, and possibly easiest, approach is to apply existing regulations irrespective of the student's learning context. Institutions simply apply their assessment regulations to workforce development learning, with all the attendant processes for late submission penalties, arrangements for extensions and deferrals, and so on. This has the advantage of limiting the 'creative interpretation' of regulations at a local level and provides robust evidence for quality assurance purposes. Additionally, submission and marking can be designed to

fit in with the existing cycle of assessment boards. Ultimately, of course the goals should be fairness to all learners and, as far as can be established, validity of assessment marks.

However, many involved in workforce development programmes would argue that particularly in the area of penalties for late work, normal regulatory procedures are unnecessarily harsh to work-based learners, since they do not take account of the very different nature of the learning environment (see Chapter 1). Indeed it could be argued that this approach is counter to the ethos of lifelong learning that underpins such programmes of study. As an example, experience of workforce development delivery and assessment shows that it is difficult for some learners to adhere to submission dates. Like all learners, those in an employment context may feel that 'pressure of work' is sufficient reason to delay handing in or attending an assessment. If the employer demonstrates commitment to its employees' higher level studies (for example, through allowing some study to be undertaken during working hours) and employees are clearly informed of the responsibilities of being a learner at the outset, pressure of work may not be acceptable as a valid justification for an appeal based on 'mitigating circumstances'.

There are, however, alternative approaches that can be adopted. Some institutions have 'open-ended' submission dates for learners studying on workforce development programmes. However, this is counter to most institutional regulations and can lead to problems with completion and continuity within a work-based cohort, and most importantly, may not foster a supportive and committed attitude towards the workforce development learning activities in the workplace.

Increased emphasis on completion rates, retention and quality assurance suggests that a mid-way position may be the most effective. The following extract from the validation document for the University of Chester's Work Based and Integrative Studies [WBIS] programme illustrates this approach:

... the WBIS programme team operates an assignment deadline system that has some built-in flexibility within agreed limits.

*There are currently **four submission deadlines per year**, one every three months and the Department of Work Related Studies and individual tutors keep in regular contact with students to apprise them of these dates.*

Submission of assignments is negotiable within set limits across the programme. These are:

Single modules. A maximum six-month period before submission, with submission for either the **first or second** deadline after module registration

Double modules. A maximum nine-month period, submission for **one of the next three** deadlines after module registration

Triple modules. A maximum twelve-month period, submission for **one of the next four** deadlines after module registration

Within the limits outlined above, the deadlines students wish to submit their assignments for are negotiable.

However, if a student misses three negotiated deadlines across their programme of study, they may be asked to attend a progression interview with their tutor or the programme manager. This will involve a consideration of how progress on the programme can be helped or – in extreme cases – whether continued participation on the programme is viable.

Variations on the above scheme (using the same basic principles) apply on client-negotiated programmes, though the precise details may vary in response to client needs.
— University of Chester, 2007

Whatever regulations are applied, to minimise the difficulties that may occur in this area, institutions are advised to make regulations for submitting work completely transparent to learners and employers, specifying, inter alia, penalties for late submission and the process for applying for deferral in mitigating circumstances.

Marking work, particularly if it forms part of a group submission and has a high profile within the organisation, needs careful consideration. In some contexts ‘failing’ a piece of work can set up divisions within work teams and can lead to a significant loss of motivation among individuals and groups. This needs particular attention in employment contexts where redundancy is or has been an issue. This is where selection of suitable candidates for study at higher education level, appropriate induction into learning at this level and formative assessment are very important. It may be possible for work-based learners to be guided to submit when their draft or ‘practice’ work demonstrates the appropriate level of learning. Another approach is to use the term ‘not yet ready for assessment’ rather than ‘fail’, although many institutions would find this difficult to record within their administrative systems. Whatever approach is used, the quality of summative feedback, justifying the mark awarded and giving pointers for future development, is essential. If formal examinations are required as an assessment method (although it is particularly difficult to justify their use in a workforce development context), practice sessions are advised. Institutions need to recognise that difficulties with assessment by examination may have been the reason that learners did not enter higher level training in the past.

Marking criteria

It is good practice to develop marking criteria for workforce development assessment that reflect the context of learning, that is, the workplace. As an initial step, institutions may find it helpful to examine the extent to which their institutional

generic assessment criteria can be applied to work-based learning assessments. For example, it is helpful if these include: descriptors relating to the achievement of reflective skills; the exercise of professional judgement; and the ability to communicate effectively in a range of contexts. A further development that will assist learners, employers and tutors to produce valid and effective assessment activities is to create level-related marking criteria for each mode of assessment: presentations, reflective essays and so on. This provides valuable support for all stages of assessment. The descriptors for categories of learning within each level can be considered alongside the design of an assessment; the criteria form the basis of discussion with learners about the level of work required and provide opportunities for self- and peer-assessment, as well as a framework for marking and evaluating assessed work.

External examiners

External examiners for workforce development programmes will preferably have experience of assessing learners in work-based settings, knowledge of appropriate frameworks, and have sympathy with the aims of institutions engaging in this area of work. The Higher Education Academy, Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) with a workforce development focus, and organisations such as the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL – see www.ual.ac.uk) may be useful sources of contact.

WBL and personal and professional development [PPD]

One of the main aims of workforce development in both higher and further education sectors is to support the development of a technically competent and more flexible workforce. In order to achieve this, programmes need to include opportunities for developing learners' self-awareness of their own learning, of personal career and workplace organisational development, and of promoting the skills required at each level. Reference to the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, and in particular, to the 'typical' abilities for each qualification level, is important (QAA, 2001). Again, in order to promote alignment, assessment strategies should enable learners to demonstrate these skills at an appropriate level and, where possible, should be integrated into existing organisational staff development review processes and, where appropriate, performance management schemes.

It is helpful if early meetings with employers include representation from the organisation's human resource management staff, in order to ensure that the learning provided is recognised and embedded within wider organisational human resource planning. This particularly applies if colleagues are identified for higher level learning in order for them to be included in leadership, promotion and 'succession planning' schemes.

Institutions may also consider how their work-based learners can benefit from engaging with institutional PPD processes, such as e-portfolios. Often these can be useful for

developing curricula vitae and longer-term development plans, and for lodging initial assessments, particularly if they are of the 'self-review' type. An institution may wish to involve, in learners' tutorial sessions, those of its staff who provide PPD/careers guidance.

Working with learners with specific learning differences and disabilities

As institutions will be aware, legislation relating to special educational needs and disability clearly sets out an institution's responsibility for learners with learning differences (for example, dyslexia) and disabilities. It can be anticipated that among any cohort of workforce development learners there will be at least the same (or even higher) proportions of learners with these needs. In some cases these may have not have been disclosed, due to a concern that they may impact on employment security and promotion prospects. Others may not be aware that they have a specific or general difficulty that impacts on their ability to achieve their potential. Tutors and assessors, who are most likely to identify learning needs, must deal particularly sensitively with these learners and be aware of how to refer them for expert guidance. Again, arrangements for supporting learners with specific needs when they are learners in the workplace needs to be discussed at the planning stage, before individuals are identified. Some employers may not be fully aware of their responsibilities in this area. Clarification of who should provide support, should it be needed, is essential. For institutions, colleagues in learning support and learner guidance will be able to provide valuable advice.

Ensuring comparability of level between Negotiated Experiential Learning Modules [NELMs] and traditional modules

A feature of most WBL programmes is 'individually negotiated' modules where learners determine the content, learning outcomes and assessment for learning directly related to their workplace and/or career development plans. To achieve this successfully, programme teams need to devise procedures for facilitating comparability between NELMs in relation to level of learning outcomes and assessment approaches across cohorts. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this is often managed by institutions through the establishment of academic framework approval panels.

Avoiding plagiarism

Many of the strategies used in mainstream provision in higher education can be applied to assessment of workforce development assessments. As for all learners, the nature of plagiarism, its consequences and how it can be avoided, needs to be considered as an important part of the induction and formative assessment processes. It must be remembered that new learners may not be aware of the issues involved.

Careful planning of assessment strategy and approaches can reduce opportunities for plagiarism. Where learners have negotiated the assessment focus and mode of assessment, plagiarising the entirety or even part of the text is much more difficult. Oral assessments, the production of artefacts (where originality is confirmed by an employer or mentor), reflective essays on an individual's practice and reports of work-based critical incidents supported by employer-validated evidence are modes of assessment in which plagiarism is less likely. Text submitted in an appropriate electronic format can be checked with plagiarism detection software. Learners need to be made aware of how this may be used. If time and resources permit, scanning learners' draft submissions with detection software can provide valuable learning in how to use referenced material appropriately.

Intellectual property: who owns workforce development assessments?

This is another area to discuss at an early stage of employer engagement. Do employers, learners or higher education institutions 'own' the intellectual property rights to work based on learning in the workplace? Discussions on this matter may be advised with employer organisations and as appropriate, institutional staff involved in research and knowledge transfer. There are, of course, valuable opportunities to pursue through workforce development for collaboration with organisations, including opportunities for joint research and development. In the case of level 6 or 7 research projects and professional doctorates, appropriate arrangements for the ethical approval and supervision of research projects also need to be considered.

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Supporting work-based learning: listening to the learners

Frank Lyons and David Young

A response to Leitch

A significant part of discussion about responding to the 'Leitch agenda' has been about replacing the approach where higher education determined what would be learned (the so-called supply-side model) by a regime in which employer demand would identify skills gaps to be filled by higher education providers, who would 'deliver' parcels of discrete curriculum content as if learning were a straightforward process of knowledge transmission. Because learning – at all levels, and particularly in higher education – is not a commodity to be presented to learners, but rather a process of change and transformation, it is arguable whether or not the term 'delivery' is conceptually appropriate when applied to higher education. However, the term is widely used and, so long as the centrality of learner engagement in the whole process is not ignored, it can be demonstrated that work-based learning (WBL), with its focus on learners' involvement in designing and managing their own programmes, is a reliable way of ensuring that higher education 'delivers' to the needs of employers, without forgetting that learners are the heart of the process.

Leitch (2006) defines higher level skills with regard to the knowledge needed to do the job. This plays down analytic and research skills, and theory-based ways of thinking, but such skills and approaches to study are necessary for lifelong learning in general, are essential to higher education levels and crucial for continuing professional development (CPD). Leitch has overlooked the point that work-based learning in higher education is not just about employer needs. Any move to a curriculum based on 'employer demand' needs to remember that work-based learners have their own demands, that learner engagement is the sine qua non in addressing the post-Leitch agenda, and that these learners are the immediate drivers of the curriculum, with their own motives and leaning support needs.

Work-based learners' motives

In 2007, 47 learners at the University of Portsmouth indicated the following reasons for joining the September cohort of the Portsmouth Learning at Work programme, which is managed through a learning contract:

| Reason | N |
|--|----|
| Career development needs of various kinds | 47 |
| Wish to enhance academic qualifications | 37 |
| Wish to expand knowledge around current work including upgrade management skills | 27 |
| Wish for recognition of prior learning to lead to a qualification that matches work status | 18 |

These motives are the personal aspirations of workers who have reached lower middle management and technician posts, and are looking to work-related learning in order to progress their careers. Of these learners, 41 believed their employers or companies would benefit through the development of new skills in the workforce; 23 of the respondents cited management and financial skills in particular. The potential benefits of work-based development projects (including testing and developing work practices or new products) were mentioned by 18. Only five believed there would be no tangible benefit to their company.

Individual learners on the University of Derby's Learning through Work (LtW) scheme express similar views about what they perceive to be the benefits of their degree studies to their companies:

"... it's taking my job, which is what I think is important, and getting a lot more background development and knowledge to take my job further, as well as getting a qualification."

— Trudy: BSc Nursing

"From the company's point of view, part of the reason why they're sponsoring me is because they see that it actually fits with the work I do here and whatever I do will actually be of benefit, not only to me, but also to the company."

— Kevin: MSc Engineering

Work-based learners are busy people with often unpredictable workloads and other commitments to home, family and friends. The biggest support they can be offered are the flexible modes of study offered through work-based learning. At the beginning of their programme, well over half of the Portsmouth group identified this as important, stressing the opportunities offered by part-time registration, bite-sized learning, the accreditation of prior (experiential learning) (AP(E)L) and the flexibility of learning while working. The following comments from learners at a range of levels from foundation degree through to Masters degree at the Universities of Derby and Portsmouth, tell us how they appreciate the flexibility of WBL and the various structured and other sources of support they meet on their journeys.

Flexibility afforded by the work-based learning curriculum

WBL offers the flexibility because of the many forms it takes. At both Derby and Portsmouth, WBL managed through learning contracts allows learners to vary the pace and content of their learning to suit their work and life needs:

“... you can do it [the programme] as quickly or as slowly as you want to ... So it really is in tune with, you know, coping with other things in your life.”

— Martin: BSc Engineering

“I could carry on working, carry on earning a salary and at the same time learn something directly related to what I do ... To bring the two things together is a marvellous opportunity and I don't know why other people don't do it.”

— Carina: BSc Nursing

Foundation degrees offer the flexibility of part-time study and real opportunities through learning on the job:

“I like it because you can have children, a family and work, pay the bills and get a degree at the same time.”

— Diane: FdA Early Years

Work-based learners can manage to fit their learning around their other commitments because of the flexibility of their curricula and because credit can be counted from a rich variety of learning activities that includes: development projects; accredited training and prior learning; professional conference attendance; application of university taught theories in the workplace; and the reflection and review of current work practices.

Development projects

Work-based learning that provides a development project for the employer and a vehicle for developing the learners' knowledge and practice, offers the flexibility of learning while earning. Ali provides support to childcare practitioners and helps them review their practices in their early years settings. At university she was looking at how the use of information and communications technology (ICT) was being implemented with children:

“It was an area I had not previously felt confident in and quickly realised that many practitioners didn't either. For my work assignment, I decided to produce a training pack and deliver a series of training programmes to childcare practitioners on ICT for the under threes. Approximately 90 delegates attended the training and although initially most people were apprehensive about implementing ICT with babies, the feedback and evaluations from all delivered sessions was very positive. I am now in those childcare settings on a daily basis observing practice and monitoring the impact of the recent training.”

— Ali: FdA Early Years

Sandra, having not been in a position to study earlier in her life, had finished one career in sales and sales training, tried her own business and then came back into the workplace through retail pharmacy. She wanted to contribute to the sector, felt that she needed to have qualifications to show that she was capable, and took the opportunity to achieve a qualification through workplace learning.

“Currently, every proactive decision I make for the business is a result of research that can be used in my studies ... I wonder what I will do next. [My programme] has created a lot of conversations within the business that we wouldn't have had. I am constantly looking at ways to diversify the business. It has helped me hugely. Without the course I would have gone on as before.”

— Sandra: Applied Studies in Retail Management

As Sandra concluded the business is 'sleeker and more professional ... and has ... remained profitable'.

The professional conference as WBL

Both Derby and Portsmouth have developed 'shell' units of study through which learning achieved on short courses, and attendance at professional conferences and training events can be credited. Shell units offer guidance on measuring the level and volume of credit that might be awarded, and provide protocols regarding the sort of evidence that is required to prove that learning outcomes have been achieved by the learner. The following examples show how shell units enable work-based learners to be responsive to professional opportunities arising from normal work activities.

Sam, an RAF officer, used a university shell unit as a way of gaining credit for valuable learning that came from a short course at the Centre for Leadership Studies at Exeter University entitled *Strategic Leadership and the Management of Change* that ‘fits well into what I want to study on the *Learning through Work* programme’.

Nick, a local authority employee studying for a BA in Business Studies, said that by attending the *Transport for London* conference he ‘gained invaluable insights and understanding about possible answers for my work project [on urban traffic management] through which I eventually learned about cost-benefit analysis, legislation, project management, computerised management systems, and health and safety issues’.

Valued learning support

In all cases, work-based learners attest to the importance of learning support from tutors, mentors and administrative staff. This support can be provided in guidebooks, online websites and through one-to-one conversations but, whatever the mode, the learners’ voices give consistent messages about what they need to hear and what advice is superfluous.

Getting the specification right

The most important advice is getting the specification right, whether the work-based learning is a development project or an assignment developed in relation to a taught module. Hence the valued support is clear guidance material, particularly guidance that is accompanied by outlines of example work-based learning activities. With such guidance, even for a project managed within a learner’s learning contract, the specification can be developed in a relatively short time.

Trudy works in health management and is doing a project on international health standards at work as part of her Masters degree. Reflections from her learning journal tell about her journey:

“At first I thought how can I fit in such an intense study programme around my demanding job whilst prioritising my family. The examples of past projects in the guidebook made me realise others had done it and so could I. And knowing that every other learner was now going through the same process albeit with different pressures was comforting. Writing a general study plan and then moving to a definite programme of work helped me realise I could manage even when my mentor emigrated to New Zealand and my man went off on a month-long training programme. And all this in eight weeks, I have achieved my definitive learning contract, already improved my time management a hundredfold and am now training my new mentor to help me. Positive thinking creates positive results!”

Sometime, of course, it takes longer, as in the case of Jane, a senior nurse in an advisory role, commenting to her tutor through the LtW online dialogue system:

“You would not believe that I have lived and breathed this learning contract for about six months would you?”

But, of course, this is the point of the flexibility of WBL, which does not constrain learners within a conventional timetable.

The specification for work-based learning has to include resource management as well as learning outcomes. Relatively quickly most learners take control of their learning resources as well:

“I have now got a WiFi in the garage to avoid disturbing the family when working late at night and have set myself up with my own Pro Engineer for work on the AUV [Autonomous Underwater Vehicle] project.”

— Roy: MSc Engineering and Management

Self-managed learners

Learning management and professional development guidance illustrated with exemplars drawn from past learners’ work provides professional and study skills advice that encourages learners to take active control of their learning. Through such self-managed learning, the learner gains insight into how they learn, as Leone illustrates below. He works as a manager in the voluntary sector and is a paid employee:

“My Learning Contract is now complete...I found this assignment [the learning contract is usually an assessed piece] to be a vital tool for planning a structured programme of study. Already I can see that the progress through this learning will far exceed my initial expectations. In order to achieve success on my degree and for my business I have taken on two full-time staff: an Operations Manager to take forward our Marketing Strategy and a PA to take control of organisational and administrative roles and look after my diary.”

— Leone: BSc Business and Management

Learners are also taught to take control of their meetings with others to whom they turn to help them with their learning programmes, whether this be their tutor, mentor or line manager. Outlining her conversations with her tutor, Jo (FdA Leadership and Management) explains:

“Whenever I need help I can email, phone or use the dialogue facility on the web, and we can sort things out. At the beginning I was in touch quite a lot, but now it’s probably once a fortnight.”

Trudy (BA Business and Management) indicates that she has learned how to manage her meetings at work:

“My conversations with the boss or my mentor are brief and to the point, most times I try to send an agenda of the things I want to discuss beforehand.”

Reflective learning skills

Many learners at first resist the idea of reflective writing and struggle to proceed beyond describing what they have done to reflecting on what they have learned. The journey beyond the descriptive has many outcomes within work-based learning: reflection on practice can lead to improvements in practice, whether this is the practice at work or of learning itself:

“It may sound obvious but it wasn’t to me but you learn a lot by reflecting on good examples. I learned to write good reports by reading good examples not by critiquing bad ones. I have also learned how to critique and develop our business planning model by reviewing similar approaches used in the voluntary sector and the NHS. This helped as I was unable to uncover specific critiques of the approach we used.”

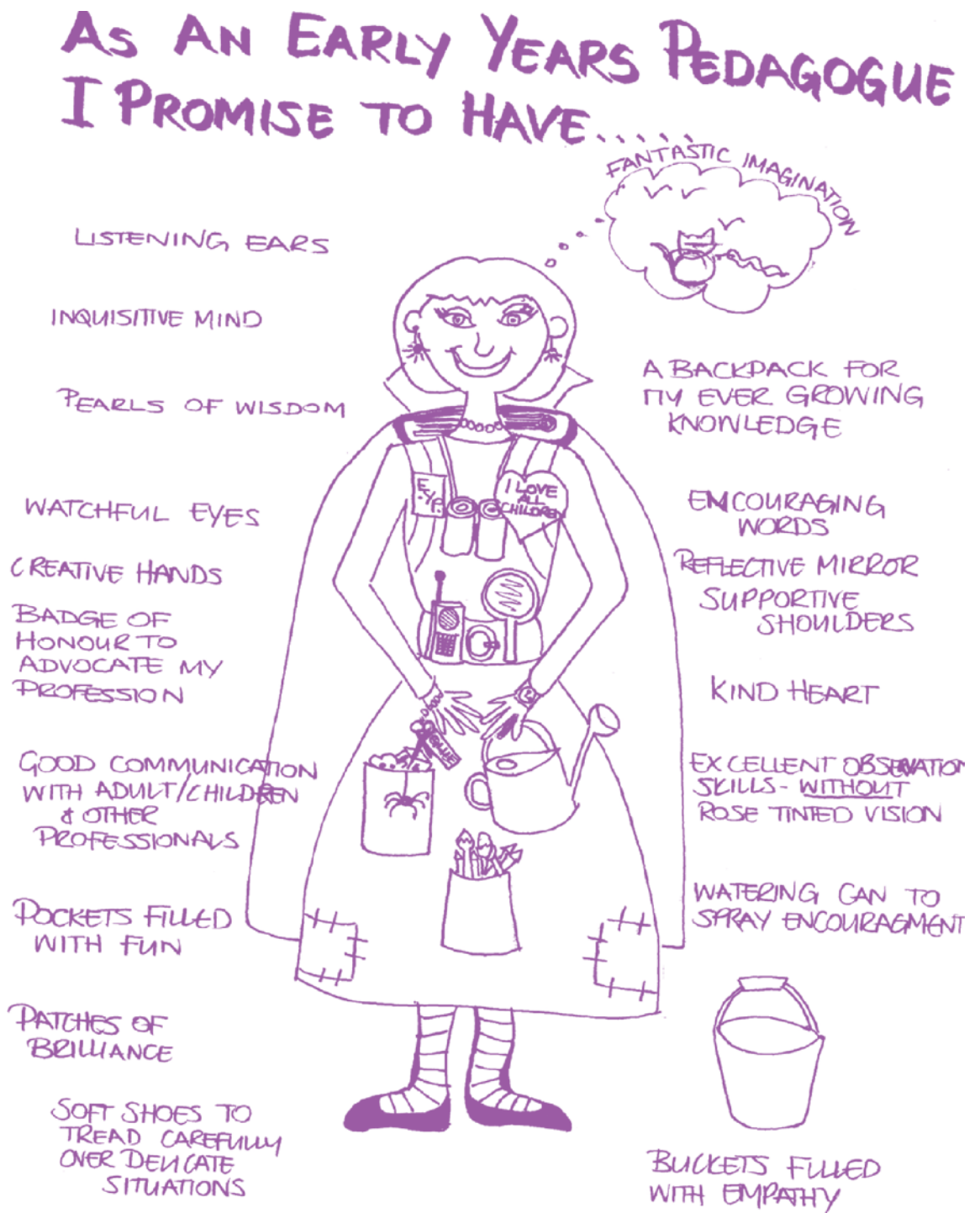
— Patrick: BSc Business and Management

Reflection also leads to realisation about tacit knowledge, and serves to bring it to the surface and more. Within the curriculum design, the reflective writing (so often initially resisted) paradoxically becomes a tool that helps build confidence among work-based learners especially when this writing records the points along the learner’s journey, as in reflective journals and reflective progress reports. Guidance on the reflective process has proven critical. Feedback evaluations at Portsmouth have shown that the self-auditing of learning against pre-written competency statements is unpopular. Challenging learners to reflect on their learning through exercises, using mindmaps or by analysing their domains of learning (theory, practice and professional) has been more stimulating:

“Looking through my Benchmark Statement [written by learners at the very beginning of their foundation degree] I see how much my writing has developed since beginning the course. I made statements I would now word differently. I believe that over the past two years I have moved to the next level of writing and thinking. Also the first benchmark statement shows how I was not used to the idea of research and did not realise what an impact research would have on my own personal life, as well as my studies! Now I find myself reading articles and wanting to know where they came from, how they relate to me; whether through my studies, work or personal experiences. I now select what I read looking for follow up information; I tend to skip articles and information which does not provide me with any further insight. Never before have I been so serious about my reading!”

— Lucy: FdA Early Years

To help Portsmouth work-based learners explore professionalism, learners are asked to write their own Professional Oath. Anjila Clark, an Early Years practitioner, posted the following on the course website:



Commenting on the same exercise, an FdA Education Administration learner said:

The exercise has reinforced my belief that we, as administrators, work to high professional standards, and the coursework in the first year has certainly made us aware of this. Many of our codes include areas that we have studied that we may not have acknowledged before. A clever piece of homework!

How tutors can help

Tutor support for work-based learners is often online, but also involves conventional face-to-face tutorials. The tutorial repertoire for WBL includes: explanation of WBL; building confidence among adults returning to learn; encouragement that helps learners maintain momentum and motivation; and support in developing skills like academic writing, referencing, work-relevant research techniques, understanding of professional codes of practice and a willingness to work outside subject comfort zones.

Whatever the content or the medium of the tutorial, as Young and Stephenson suggest:

“... the tone of tutorial discourse is critical. It needs to balance friendliness and a degree of informality with clear and precise guidance. This guidance should be facilitative rather than directing and the tutor needs to be prepared to move in directions proposed by the learner, while maintaining a focus on the academic parameters within which the study is taking place.”

— 2007, pp.94-5

In Young and Stephenson’s research, the majority of tutorial discourses were initiated by the learners. Such dialogues often involve an interweaving of academic and social exchanges, which help to build and maintain good relationships. The same mix has been evidenced in the stories told for this chapter – for example, the following:

“I see your team did rather well, when did Pompey last score seven? I don’t need an answer to that one but would appreciate some thoughts on my enterprise audit report. It has taken up an enormous amount of time and I have been involved in a wide variety of areas, to top it all the audit has now become a working document within school. Through this project I have extended my original specification and achieved a lot of additional learning. Can I and should I revise my Learning Contract to account for these developments?”

— Rikki’s email correspondence to her Learning at Work tutor

Sometimes, learners can be self-deprecating, as:

“Please ignore the last part of my previous email about not being able to find it! [An advice section in the Learning through Work virtual learning environment] I have now located this! I ask myself if undertaking a degree is a good idea!! ... I appear to have this

entire section wrapped around my neck so tightly it is OBVIOUSLY constricting the blood flow to my brain!!”

— Andrew: BSc Computing Studies

Nevertheless, the feelings of pride and achievement shine through when the results are published:

“Thanks so much for the result and feedback. Just sitting in the office telling all. Can’t believe I did so well!”

— Rikki: BA Education and Management Studies

Steve is an Engineering and Management undergraduate who works in the defence sector. After AP(E)L, he went straight into higher education at level 3, and valued the supportive skills guidance:

“I should have broken down my project into smaller bits as first advised, but I am now realising that reflecting is not only interesting but becomes easier with practice: there is now more reflection and analysis and less reporting.”

Steve also learned through the tutor’s recognition and valuing of his tacit work knowledge:

“At first I thought I wasn’t getting as much new learning from the lectures as the full-time students, but I now see that what I am getting is more real and it broadens, deepens and theorises what I know. When lecturers asked me to give the industry perspective on what is being taught I realised my knowledge was as good, if not better than the other students.”

Responsive tutorial support can be challenging too:

“I can email my tutor with drafts of my papers, and she comes back within 12 hours with suggestions and comments. The first time I sent her some stuff I joked with some guys at work and said ‘this degree is easy’ – I feel embarrassed now even at the thought. She came back with three pages of critique, and I had to make changes to the whole thing.”

— Sarah: BSc Nursing

Mentor support

Work-based learners access a wide range of sources of help in addition to the tutor. Mentor support comes in many guises. It can be formalised through company schemes (as in the Health Services and some companies), but whatever the form perhaps the most important help comes from within the workplace: from the mentor, coach, line manager and work colleague:

“I had learned about the topic outdoor play in the University and wanted to use play as a way of getting more inclusive activities with the children in the nursery. It was raining and I thought that children acted very differently toward each other when it rains. My mentor agreed with me, found the wellies and umbrellas and opened the door. I was left with some unexpected data about what I observed in the rain that changed my way of working and learning.”

— Hannah: FdA Early Years

Clarke is a Business and Computing learner working for a biomedical company. His projects include a comprehensive forecasting and planning system and an EU-compliant sales and marketing reporting procedure for the biopharmacy industry:

“At first I was sceptical about work-based learning and the mix with University study; now I appreciate the mix. I learned to ask at work about connections when I got stuck and realised how I didn’t normally do think [sic] this way. I am learning best practice in the use of business warehouses, project management and e-commerce.”

Donald works for a biopharmacy company and included a project involving the design of a blister pack for contact lenses through which he would learn product design skills, the use of rapid prototyping, costing and the use of materials and their potential interactions with the human eye. Commenting on his mentor’s support, he said:

“He pushed me to raise the bar in terms of quality, design and style for the company and for my learning.”

Supporting the mentor who is supporting the learner has proven difficult, and both Portsmouth and Derby Universities have adopted simplified and brief guidance approaches that have been supplemented by mentor training courses and websites for mentors who want them. Portsmouth has also found that teaching the learners to manage their relationships with their mentors can be beneficial. Our experience suggests that, in the mentoring situation, the tone of support offered is centrally important. While learners appreciate tutors being friendly and accessible, they also welcome clear and precise guidance. This needs to balance willingness to respond to learner aims and intentions with an appropriate focus on a programme’s academic requirements. Mentors are effective when they have detailed knowledge of credit systems and academic regulations, the confidence to support generic skills, and willingness – in what is almost always transdisciplinary activity – to work outside their subject comfort zones.

Support from all sides

Tutors and mentors are important, but work-based learners also tell us that they navigate through their learning using support from all sides. Portsmouth foundation degree learners develop an understanding of the idea and value of learning communities through structured groupwork activities and online discussion groups:

“I am convinced that my practice has also developed following establishment of a study partnership with a friend. We regularly meet at the library or at each others homes and share and discuss our studies. By providing a support network for each other we were able to share our experiences, both good and bad, and were able to balance and complement each others strengths and weaknesses. This support helped motivate and focus both our learning and personal development.”

— Joy: FdA Early Years

There is evidence that self-managed work-based learners soon recognise the value gained by looking in all directions for learning support:

“My major WBL project was to produce a system security policy for the Type 42 destroyer. The support offered by my tutors, work colleagues and customers pushed me to levels I never expected including expertise on legislative frameworks, documentation protocols, relevant operating systems, networks and network architecture, and research and project management skills... job done, in budget and at a professional standard of which I am proud.”

— Kevin: BSc Engineering and Management Studies

“There was a French child in the Nursery so we had a bilingual support person to help. My GCSE French got resurrected and I started reading stories to all the children in French. All those ideas about stages in human growth were confirmed when the children started using a few French words and talked to the French child in her own language ... One day I would like to set up my own multilingual nursery school.”

— Hannah: FdA Early Years

“The parents were helpful when I was asking parents for permission to record my observations of their children, they all agreed and some other parents asked me to include their children in my study so the nursery would learn better how to look after special needs babies in the future, not that they were complaining about what we do now.”

— Tricia: FdA Learning Support

Conclusion

The voices of work-based learners tell us about the richness of the learning network in which they learn. Outside the walls of the university, the unpredictability of work and weather, the sources of knowledge and personal support, and the freedom to explore and experiment have created the different learning journeys to which the learners have given voice. These sources are as unpredictable as the learning opportunities that emerge to suit the learner’s needs from previously hidden places in the workplace. Analogously, Michelangelo suggested that the angels he carved were already hidden in the marble. As Lyons and Bement (2006, p.149) suggest ‘marble seemed a rather ‘arty’

and exclusive material ... that clashed with the learner centred and student mediated ideals' inherent in work-based learning, and hence came to the idea that the metaphor of angels in concrete was better suited.

From a discussion of this point, one of the authors was challenged to write a haiku encapsulating the idea. Here it is:

*Work-based learners plan
to shape, beyond semesters,
angels in concrete.*

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Engaging with workforce development: what do staff in higher education need?

Renata D Eyres, Elaine Hooker and Alison J. Pringle

Issues for higher education

Given the significant need identified by Leitch (2006) for increase in higher level skills, higher education is becoming much more important in the national and regional role of supporting and enabling employers to meet their staff and organisational objectives. However, it is recognised that, if positive responses to this agenda are to be embedded within institutions, it will require transformational change to the traditional models of delivery in higher education. This can only be addressed through significant investment by the higher education sector to respond effectively to the new market opportunities by developing their capacity and capability to deliver a flexible and responsive portfolio of provision to meet the specific needs and demands of employers and the adult workforce. One of the key challenges is to ensure that staff in higher education have the necessary skills to support this activity. It is also important that adequate staffing resources are made available to support this agenda, as traditional undergraduate teaching cannot be ignored.

Ongoing and future development within workplace learning and employer engagement activities will require staff with different sets of skills, knowledge and understanding. This applies not only to staff within the higher education sector being able to communicate more effectively with employers, but also to staff within the workplace who, together with colleagues from higher education, may be responsible for the development, approval, delivery and assessment of these programmes. It will also link closely with the requirements for quality assurance and enhancement processes and procedures in the workplace, particularly in relation to mentorship and supervision of learners.

In order for higher education institutions to engage effectively in these developments, they will need to: 'have an agreed set of "rules of engagement" so individual departments that seek to engage with employers and workplace learners can do so on the basis of an institutionally agreed set of standards' (Brennan and Little, 2006,

p.11). Without such rules and standards being both developed and embraced, higher education institutions risk failing to meet employers' expectations and requirements. Much good practice exists across a wide range of higher education institutions, and across their schools, departments and practitioners. However, such practice should not operate in isolation, practitioners should strive for their work to become examples of good practice that contribute toward the strategic development of employer engagement within their respective higher education institutions. Development of suitable guidance and communication systems across the institution (e.g. establish rules of engagement; database of contact made with employers etc) is vital to ensure that employers receive clear and consistent messages when engaging with an institution.

Issues for employers

Increasing numbers of employers across all sectors are recognising and identifying specific staff development needs that are focused on areas of practical skills and competencies, and are linked to underpinning theoretical knowledge. In many of these sectors higher education has not always been the primary source of provision. However, as the skills priorities and levels of skill required to deliver on this agenda evolve, higher education will become much more important in supporting and enabling employers to meet their staff and organisational objectives.

The expectations and needs of employers must be explored and understood by higher education institutions, and should be considered in the institutional development of any supporting regulations, frameworks and staff development to support the employer engagement agenda. In order to respond to employers' needs, higher education institutions and their employer-facing staff need to be in a position to provide appropriate responses in respect of the following:

- *Clear point of initial contact for the employer*
Higher education institutions risk missing out on potential partnership with employers if they do not provide information regarding a clear point of contact. Employers will not appreciate being 'shunted around' possible sources of engagement.
- *Support regarding the articulation of employer needs and the definition of what the employer's goals are*
Higher education institutions should be prepared to listen to an employer and understand what its goal is, before making appropriate suggestions from a 'toolkit' of possibilities (which might include accredited or non-accredited learning; programme length, level and content; suitable modes of delivery; supporting the employer in an analysis of learner need of the workforce, and so on).

What do higher education institutions need in place to ensure their readiness for successful employer engagement?

One of the challenges of employer engagement is meeting the continuing professional development [CPD] requirements of relevant institutional staff, which require a breadth of appropriate skills and knowledge, along with the robustness, yet flexibility, of the institution's support systems.

Staff CPD and training opportunities

One priority should be to identify the specific CPD needs of all relevant staff – regardless of whether they are support, academic or administrative staff. The required skills and knowledge are both complex and numerous, and it is generally accepted that a team that can offer a broad range of expertise is vital in supporting workforce development [WFD]. Although the balance of expertise between academic and support staff will vary from institution to institution, all staff who may have a role in employer engagement should be well-versed in the appropriate processes. This can be as important when dealing with an initial query from an employer, as when supporting a development through knowledge of matters such as work-based learning frameworks, awards and QAA requirements, or bringing expertise from a particular academic field.

Engaging in workforce development activity can provide valuable career development, along with reward and recognition opportunities, for those who have an interest in external collaborative work. The skills, knowledge, and even personal characteristics, required for working with external partners, such as employers, Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies, are often very different from those that are required for a traditional academic position or for internal-facing support staff. It is important that these differences are recognised and that appropriate CPD and training are made available to staff; although, of course, there are several approaches, none of which need to be mutually exclusive:

- utilising existing CPD frameworks/provision for staff, for which new opportunities may be developed
- identifying and encouraging appropriate staff to participate in CPD
- appointing key staff in schools/departments to be responsible for co-ordinating workforce development
- encouraging the development of an appropriate infrastructure within schools/departments to support and manage workforce development activities
- developing a mentoring scheme.

The underpinning requirement is that there is an agreed institutional approach, with key staff clearly identified and supported to develop their skills and

knowledge, as well as supportive institutional systems and processes. There may also be a 'rewards and incentives' policy, which actively promotes and provides opportunities for career development.

There are a number of generic skills that appear common to staff involved in this area of work:

I. Communication skills required for staff engaged in workforce development

“Communication is the key to generate knowledgeable demand and supply”
— Wedgwood, 2007.

- **Effective listening and effective questioning**
A higher education institution's ability to deliver effectively requires an interpretation of business need. Effective communication (involving effective listening and questioning) is vital, whether involving the use of diagnostic tools, the sharing of good practice, and so on.
- **Translation (from academic to business language)**
Much of the work required to support workforce development calls for staff who can navigate the terminology, jargon etc. The use of acronyms is prevalent in most domains, and higher education institution/business partnerships require the ability to translate between the terminology used by both parties.
- **Ability to network effectively**
The ability to network effectively is an essential skill in business and those staff involved in workforce development require similar network, marketing and selling expertise in order to engage with companies and support the development of higher level skills.
- **Relationship management**
Perhaps the most critical aspect of working with employers is for institutions to have staff who possess excellent social skills. Such skills are acquired through experience and interaction with others. In managing relationships with employers/employees, staff will be required to have the ability to:
 - identify/liaise with internal and external clients
 - act as a conduit through which knowledge is transferred to employers/employees
 - use diplomacy in negotiations
 - provide ongoing interaction with regular contact
 - be reliable and trustworthy
 - persevere
 - update sector/regional/local company knowledge
 - market and sell higher level training effectively.

2. Knowledge requirements for institutional staff engaged in workforce development

Staff involved in workforce development also need a broad understanding of a variety of internal and external factors that may have implications for successful, sustainable engagement in initiatives. These include:

- **Awareness and understanding of related strategies at all levels: governmental; regional; institutional; and school**
This allows the staff member to identify, promote and develop employer engagement that links into, and supports, strategies.
- **Funding opportunities**
Institutional staff should be aware of which department or colleagues to contact regarding current available funding. Public funding is often linked to governmental or regional strategy. Sector Skills Councils, Chambers of Commerce, employers and employees themselves are all possible sources of funding for development and/or fees.
- **Organisational resources**
Staff need to be aware of which staff and departments across their institution can offer expertise and support in employer engagement:
 - staff dedicated to such areas as employer-facing support; work-based learning teams; and knowledge transfer partnership development
 - finance staff (covering costing and pricing, Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) etc)
 - registrars (covering quality assurance; academic processes; ASNs)
 - external funding teams (dealing with funding opportunities, see above).Physical resources might include suites and IT facilities dedicated for work-based learners; CPD; teaching; and so on.
- **Programme subject matter/content**
An employer's requirement for a transdisciplinary approach to its needs can be a challenge to an institution. Employers/learners do not necessarily want, nor is it always possible to fit appropriate learning into, a single academic discipline. Cross-institution collaboration regarding the institutional response needs to be carefully managed.
- **Appropriate professional bodies and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)**
Representing given sectors, these organisations can prove to be valuable partners in engaging with employers. They have knowledge of the sector's CPD requirements and workforce development needs, through access to latest research and policy initiatives. They may be able to offer some financial resources in support of relevant programme development.

- **Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and work-based learning**

Staff should have knowledge and understanding of institutional regulations relating to the accreditation of prior learning, of prior experiential learning, and of work-based learning, and of how to apply them in the assessment of learning.

- **Credit levels**

The relevance of the recognition of credit will be dependent upon the goals and requirements of the employer and employee/learner. However, staff engaging with employers should be able to articulate clearly the differences between accredited and non-accredited learning, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

3. Institutional mechanisms that will support workforce development

If institutions are to engage effectively with employers they will require additional staff development resources, which may initially involve external advice and support. Alongside these, the institution will need to agree an organisational framework to support the new types of activity generated, which may require a significant cultural change as well as a review of existing policies and procedures. The following are likely to be needed:

- Strategic input and support at institutional level, as evidenced by institutional mission statements and strategies that need to be acknowledged and included within the subsequent strategies and action plans of the institution's schools and departments.
- Development, and dissemination through staff training sessions, of frameworks for the development of types of approved awards; the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning; and programme approval requirements for work-based learning, including distance and online learning.
- A co-ordinated approach, both across the university and within the schools or departments, needs to be developed, agreed and adhered to. It is important that, when approaching an employer or organisation, an individual representing the university has knowledge of any prior relationship.
- Clear points of contact for developing workforce development programmes need to be communicated across the institution (e.g. funding knowledge; costing and pricing; pedagogy in work-based learning; skills support for non-traditional learners; and so on). These points of contact need to be clear to partners both external and internal to the university.

Examples of practice

Meeting the development needs of staff, in order for higher education institutions to enhance their support of workforce development needs, will vary hugely between institutions and will depend upon the existence of current staff development practice and mechanisms, as well as the current levels of engagement with and expertise in supporting the workforce through work-based learning. Below are some examples of current and/or planned activity from a variety of UK universities, indicating different ways in which universities are moving forward in supporting and resourcing their staff to engage successfully with the increasingly important workforce development agenda.

Example 1. University of Teesside: Staff training

Staff development needs are being addressed at the University of Teesside, which has significant experience in work-based learning. However, most of this is facilitated by the University's Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement [CLQE], which provides generic staff training, rather than formally-accredited programmes, for those staff engaged in workforce development. These training activities include:

- project management
- implementing client relationship management systems
- customer responsiveness.

Further staff development is available through:

- an Enterprise Business Development Programme
- a consultancy guidance manual, which details how to liaise with employers.

Currently, a workforce strategy bid is under development that includes the development of an accredited, staff training programme to provide CPD to staff working in this area.

Example 2. University of Salford: Creation of new staff posts

As part of the employer engagement project at the University of Salford, a Staff Development Co-ordinator is being appointed who will be responsible for overall management of the staff development element of the project, including the design and delivery of support and development for employers, and for academic and support staff in higher education who are engaged in the delivery and assessment of workplace learning. A key aspect of the role will be to work in collaboration with colleagues across the institution to meet the objectives of the project.

The Co-ordinator will be required to:

- organise, manage, develop, contribute to and evaluate the workshop and blended learning staff development programme for employers and University of Salford academic and support staff
- undertake training needs analysis with employers and within the institution, related to the staff development element of the project
- design and develop supporting staff development materials and blended learning materials as appropriate.

Also to be appointed are four Business Development Managers, who will have direct links with each of the four faculties of the University.

The Business Development Managers will, in conjunction with the Enterprise and Development Division, co-ordinate all of the activities involving their respective faculties in order to bring new market opportunities to fruition. Their primary role will be to develop existing and new relationships with employers. They will have overarching responsibility for relationship management and will network both externally as well as internally, being the initial primary contact to 'translate' business needs.

Other areas of existing activity in which strong employer relationships already exist can provide a springboard for the development of new types of business. For example, knowledge transfer partnerships can have a number of spin-offs that bring benefits not only to the institution, but also to the individual academic members of staff.

Example 3. Northumbria University: Developing work-based learning

This work-based learning module is a 20 credit-point postgraduate module that has been designed for University staff who have an initial interest in exploring whether work-based learning could be established within their area, and for those who already have considerable experience in designing and delivering work-based learning.

The module explores work-based learning as a learning methodology, the theories, principles, knowledge and skills underpinning it, and its practical application. It encourages collaboration with peers. It supports staff in developing and evaluating work-based learning opportunities within their own practice. For the summative assessment learners will be asked to analyse a specific aspect within existing work-based learning provision or the potential for work-based learning within their areas of expertise. There are several submission dates, which allow learners to fit the work around other commitments. The module is delivered and supported by a team of staff with wide-ranging experience in designing and delivering work-based learning.

One of the University's Aims, in support of the Mission Statement, is *the employability, lifelong learning and continuing professional development of its students and staff*. Supporting and developing employer engagement (including work-based learning, continuing professional development and workforce development), is writ large in both the Teaching and Learning and the Research and Enterprise Strategies, as well as in the University's Corporate Plan (all of which relate to the period 2007 to 2010).

In support of each these strategies and the University's Mission, this module has been developed as part of the University's CPD programme for its staff.

Example 4. University of Chester: Redeveloping a traditional programme for the work-based learning market

The Department of Geography and Development Studies at the University launched a traditional Urban Studies programme that did not recruit successfully. The Department then worked with the Department of Work Related Studies, a central University agency, to redevelop the programme into a distance work-based learning programme, rebranded as *Regeneration for Practitioners*, for the different market of those already in work.

Some key features of the programme, which illustrate some of the issues considered by this paper, including the diverse skills and knowledge required by higher education staff engaged in WFD, are:

- Working with experienced tutors, learners devise their own programmes and can also choose from a suite of 'off the peg' modules that are based upon research into the requirements of practitioners.
- The 'off the peg' modules include generic modules (e.g. Negotiation Skills, Working with Partner Organisations) as well as modules that are tailored specifically for urban regeneration practitioners (e.g. The Economic Function of the City, Urban and Regional Regeneration Policy and Practice, Effective Leadership Strategies for Regeneration).
- Learners can study individually, or programmes can be designed to suit organisations.
- Programmes are taught through a blend of distance learning, study in the workplace and lectures, tutorials and workshops.
- Up to 50% of an award can be claimed through a process that gives accreditation for prior learning.
- Learners can choose how many or how few modules they take at any one time.
- The programme has its own designated Virtual Learning Environment, which is available via the internet. This includes all learning materials and enables electronic submission and feedback.

Example 5. The Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia: Staff development programmes for administrative staff

As discussed above (see Staff CPD and training opportunities), the often complex and varied responses required for successful workforce development are generally best met by a team approach, with expertise coming from a variety of areas within the institution.

Victoria University, Melbourne has an awareness-raising strategy for its staff that includes offering training and continuing professional development in work-based learning to selected administrative staff. This has the double benefit of upskilling administrative staff and broadening the raft of knowledge about work-based learning across the University, thereby allowing administrative staff to share knowledge and better support the University's academic staff.

The University also encourages heads of department to assist staff, both administrative and academic, in developing capability for work-based learning through the following practical ways:

- appointing key staff, in schools and departments, to be responsible for learning in the workplace (for example, as placement co-ordinators)
- developing appropriate infrastructure within schools and departments in order to support and manage activities relating to learning in the workplace
- encouraging staff to apply for learning and teaching awards
- developing a mentoring scheme for new teaching staff
- conducting industry seminars for staff.

Conclusion

Is it possible for one person to fulfil all the requirements identified? Probably not. A team-based approach is needed, with key individuals knowing who within the university to call upon regarding specific needs in the development of ongoing delivery of these activities.

The examples identified above, and other ongoing work, will need to be monitored and evaluated in order to capture and analyse the detailed resources required; their impact, effectiveness and long-term outcomes; and the implications for both the institution and the individual.

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Appendix I: Quick reference for successful engagement with workforce development

Employer requirements

- 1) Clear point of institutional contact
- 2) Support in articulation of employer needs/possibly inc. an analysis of learner need
- 3) Flexibility:
 - Mode of delivery and meaningful assessment
 - Open distance learning
 - Timeframes
- 4) Cost effective partnership/profitability
- 5) Accredited or non-accredited options
- 6) Quick responses.

The points listed below will support higher education institutions in positioning themselves to deliver according to employer requirements.

Institutional mechanisms

- 1) Strategic lead and support at institutional level, to be incorporated into school/departmental strategies
- 2) Supporting frameworks, e.g. APL/AP(E)L; Awards; content free work-based learning programmes; QAA
- 3) A co-ordinated approach
- 4) Clear points of institutional contact to be established throughout the development/partnership process, for both internal and external use.

Communication skills for staff in higher education

- 1) Effective listening
- 2) Effective questioning
- 3) Translation (from academic to business, avoiding acronyms, jargon etc)
- 4) Relationship management:
 - liaising with clients
 - acting as a conduit
 - exhibiting diplomacy in negotiations
 - providing ongoing interaction with regular, reliable contact
 - persevering
 - possessing recent sector/regional/local company knowledge
 - marketing and selling of higher level training
- 5) Ability to network effectively.

Knowledge requirements for staff in higher education

- 1) Current strategies (government/regional/institutional)
- 2) Subject matter, including sectoral knowledge
- 3) Institutional resources:
 - limits of what the institution can deliver
 - who, internally, to bring on board to support a development/partnership
- 4) Funding opportunities
- 5) Costing and pricing
- 6) AP(E)L/APL
- 7) Academic processes
- 8) Appropriate professional bodies and Sector Skills Councils
- 9) Quality Assurance.

Biographies

Kathryn Addicott is a Senior Lecturer with Glamorgan Outreach at the University of Glamorgan. She was a co-director with a voluntary agency for a number of years and joined the university to deliver a community-based intergenerational project. Her academic interests lie in the fields of management and communication studies, and intergenerational practice (IP).

Dr Maura Banim works at the University of Teesside where she has been responsible for developing a range of Foundation degree programmes and employer led provision, mainly related to the public sector. She is currently Work-Based Learning Project Officer in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement.

Alan Beadsmoore is Principal Lecturer in the Centre for Excellence in Professional Learning from the Workplace (CEPLW) at the University of Westminster. He is currently involved in developing further education and higher education partnerships, employer engagement into the curriculum, and the evaluation of work-based learning pedagogies.

Stevie Bezencenet is Principal Lecturer in the Centre for Excellence in Professional Learning from the Workplace (CEPLW) at the University of Westminster and a consultant to the University of Skovde, Sweden. She is currently working on documenting and disseminating models of professional learning, and in developing student engagement with CEPLW activities.

Adrian Evans is Director of Corporate Programmes at Teesside Business School and recently led the development team that designed and introduced the foundation degree in Leadership & Management with the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC). He is currently working on a number of workforce development related initiatives and challenges.

Renata Eyres is currently Head of Business-led Learning and Development at the University of Salford. She has been involved in skills and workforce development for a number of years initially within the NHS and Social Care and more recently across all areas of the University. She now leads on Employer Engagement and Workforce Development.

Jonathan Garnett is Professor of Work Based Knowledge and the Director of the Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University. Jonathan has sixteen years experience at the leading edge of the development of work based learning programmes with public and private sector organizations in the UK and overseas.

Sue Graham's professional background is in teaching / teacher-training (English as a Foreign Language). She has taught in Spain, France and UK in companies and in Higher Education. She became directly involved in work-based learning at Northumbria in 2001, becoming the University's Work-related Learning Manager in 2004. She is responsible for a small central team coordinating and developing Northumbria's flexible work-based learning activity in response to employer demand across the university and in partnership with key stakeholders. Her interests lie in the pedagogy of lifelong/ work-based learning and the surrounding policy context.

Dr Ruth Helyer is Head of Workforce Development at the University of Teesside with experience which includes being Programme Leader for the Work-based Studies degree and managing large employer engagement projects. Recent publications include: 'What is Employability?: reflecting on the postmodern challenges of work-based learning' in the Journal of Employability in the Humanities (August 2007).

Dr Elaine Hooker is a Workforce Development Consultant in the Department of Academic Enterprise at the University of Teesside. Working with Dr Ruth Helyer, she is currently involved in several work-based projects, delivering modules and engaging with local companies/employers offering HE level learning to their workforce.

Kate Irving is Senior Academic Development Adviser and a Senior University Teaching Fellow at the University of Chester, where she has responsibility for the development of academic practice and pedagogic research. She has had significant experience of devising learning, teaching and assessment strategies at HE level, including workforce development programmes, and of supporting learners in work-based contexts.

Frank Lyons is the CETL Director at Foundation Direct, University of Portsmouth. He has been developing curricula, mentor and student support systems for work-based degrees since 1991. The degrees include learning contract managed, corporate and foundation degrees for workforce and career development. He also works as a curriculum design and employer engagement consultant.

Dr Robert Payne is the Head of Glamorgan Outreach at the University of Glamorgan in Pontypridd. Rob's current role in Glamorgan Outreach involves leading teams and managing projects which are associated with off-campus learning provision and work related learning. Rob's current research focus is upskilling communities through lifelong learning and quality assurance in community learning.

Alison Pringle developed an interest in workplace learning whilst teaching at Louisiana State University, where she became involved in developing 'Service Learning' programmes. Upon returning to England she has worked at both Sunderland and Northumbria Universities in the areas of work-based learning and is currently at Northumbria supporting programme development across the University within the employer engagement/workforce development agendas.

Professor Danny Saunders is the head of the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Glamorgan. He has recently been developing a national work-based learning and training programme for over 300 Learning Coaches throughout Wales. The coaches are compiling portfolios based on their provision of learning support for disengaged and disadvantaged young people.

Dr Anita Walsh is a Lecturer in Work-Based Learning at Birkbeck, University of London. She has been involved with work-based learning since the early 1990s, and has developed a range of work-based learning programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Anita's research area is experience-based learning in the workplace, and the pedagogic challenges involved in the academic recognition of such learning.

Karen Willis is Director of Widening Access at the University of Chester and also involved in the management of a Lifelong Learning Network. She has experience of teaching, curriculum development and management in adult, further and higher education, including flexible learning, post-compulsory teacher education, professional programmes and undergraduate modular schemes.

Barbara Workman DProf, MSc, BSc (Hons), RN, RNT, RCNT, FHEA, is the Director of the Centre of Excellence in Work Based Learning (WBL) at Middlesex University. She has a background of nursing and teaching with expertise in accreditation of organisational and individual experiential learning, and facilitation of work-based learning across all higher education levels. She is committed to sharing, spreading and facilitating good practice in WBL across a range of higher education activities.

David Young is Professor of Work-based Learning at the University of Derby. He has been engaged in the development of award-bearing work-based learning since the mid-1990s. He led the University of Derby team which won the Times Higher Education Award in 2006 for Most Imaginative Use of Distance Learning. He was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2007.

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