Quality and responding to employer needs
Demonstrator project reports

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Foreword

When the Leitch Report of December 2006 recommended that universities pay more attention to the provision of higher education for people already in the workplace, relatively few were experienced in what was required.

It soon became clear that this would not be more of the same, but might call for highly flexible approaches in relation to:

- content that was more negotiated with employers and employees;
- delivery situated in the workplace, or at least off-campus;
- programmes delivered at a distance or through technology;
- learning at times and pace to suit the learners;
- assessment perceived as relevant to work activity;
- learning based on more generic learning outcomes;
- study programmes collected into shorter credit- or award-bearing packages.

All such elements appeared to present a greater risk to quality and standards, as the latter were defined in protocols conceived of in the context of more traditional provision. The responses of some were that it could not be safely undertaken. Others declared that it must be undertaken but that the current QAA framework for assuring quality was not appropriate. Those who were a little more experienced maintained that it could perfectly well be done, drawing upon familiar protocols and adapting them to become more fit for purpose.

The debate was a matter of considerable concern to HEFCE who had been set challenging targets to meet for employer-responsive provision by Government. Together with QAA they established in 2007 a joint Task Force to investigate the truth of the matter. In June 2008, a report was published which was able to claim, on the basis of a wide ranging survey, that “the existing QA tools and processes (the QAF in its widest sense, encompassing internal and external procedures) are seen as largely sufficient to deal with the challenges this agenda presents at this moment in time” though it might need adaptation, or further articulation, in order to clarify for HEIs what might be expected in these more collaborative contexts. It was agreed to address the report’s recommendations through the following routes:
i. the Higher Education Academy to be asked through its support network for Employer Engagement Projects to promote sharing of good practice on managing quality of provision and to work with partners to disseminate learning across the sector;

ii. the Higher Education Academy, Foundation Degree Forward and the Quality Assurance Agency to be asked to work together to take a lead role in working with the HE sector on addressing the need for greater support and guidance where needed;

iii. HEFCE to work with the Higher Education Academy and other partners to develop criteria for Demonstrator Projects on key areas identified by the Academy network group;

iv. HEFCE as part of its ongoing work to develop a new long-term funding method for workforce development to consider the data collection of needs of this provision.

QAA undertook to publish a reflective report which would show in more detail how the Code of practice might be interpreted by HEIs in making employer-responsive provision. During 2009 a survey of institutions and Academy subject centres was undertaken by QAA to establish perspectives in relation to specific issues, and various consultative seminars and conferences were held to triangulate findings. Employer-responsive provision survey: a reflective report was published by QAA in February 2010.

The Higher Education Academy, in addressing the responsibilities allocated by the Task Force, was contracted by HEFCE in 2009 to commission a number of Demonstrator Projects which would show good practice in operation within HEIs in the context of employer-responsive provision.

The object was not to stimulate further development work, but to capture the lessons learned by institutions who had already ventured a good distance along this pathway, e.g. those contracted for Employer Engagement Projects, for Higher Level Skills Pathfinders, for Third Stream Second Mission projects, and others like them. Through networks for Employer Engagement Projects and the Academy’s Supra network, which drew all such initiatives together, the Academy was able rapidly to engage willing volunteers to lead a series of Demonstrator Projects, with about five to six partner institutions in each case, which would draw out a range of exemplar approaches to tackling the key issues which challenge quality and standards in making employer-responsive provision.
These key challenges had been to some degree indicated within the Task Force report, but they were drawn out by a joint grouping of QAA, the Academy and fdf, and consulted upon in the networks alluded to above, to agree their key features. Nine foci were identified as worthy of detailed scrutiny:

— managing employer and cross-institutional partnerships;
— rapid response and fit-for-purpose solutions for employer-responsive provision;
— assessment of employer-responsive provision;
— accreditation of company-based learning;
— designing, accrediting and assuring bitesize provision;
— APEL;
— determining credit volumes for negotiated learning;
— supporting academic staff who contribute to employer-responsive provision;
— supporting workplace staff who contribute to the mentoring process within work-based academic awards.

These are not deemed necessarily comprehensive, and in due course it may be appropriate to add further studies. However, they provided a good starting point.

An initial editorial meeting was held in June 2009 with lead institutions and some of their partners to agree a reasonable standard approach for their studies and for the resulting publication. In October 2009 a further progress meeting was held to consider, for example, early emerging points, areas of helpful and unhelpful overlap. In December 2009 the emerging conclusions were consulted upon in a joint Academy/QAA/fdf conference, held in Birmingham, and the outcomes helped to shape the final reports.

The partnerships worked extremely hard in a short timescale to bring to us the fruits of their experience, which are collated into nine focused reports collected into this publication. They are deliberately separated into specific aspects, for ease of focus and attention. They do not provide standard or even comprehensive solutions, but rather a range of current approaches which HE providers may find it useful to consider and adapt to fit their particular situations. Some partners were more experienced than others; some worked in institutions that had made a major commitment to work of this kind, and others in institutions where it was a lower priority. However, since this reflects our likely audience, we have deemed it appropriate to bring the full range of solutions, since readers will need to begin in different places.
The Higher Education Academy editors hope that the publication will provide a valuable resource for those developing employer-responsive provision, and for those supporting staff who need to do so, or developing systems and infrastructure. We have offered general guidance and a range of specific case-study material which could be abstracted and used in staff development contexts.

This publication can be profitably read alongside the QAA reflective reports, which together present a broad and deep set of guidance for the sector in extending employer-responsive provision in such a way as to ensure quality and the maintenance of standards.

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Using the assessment of prior experiential learning in the context of employer engagement

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Contributing partners
At each institution involved in this project, care was taken to talk to both a member of the Registry (or equivalent) department and an academic practitioner, because the assessment of experiential learning involves both regulatory and academic practice. Some institutions have established APEL practice, others are currently developing it. The HEIs contributing to this document are:

Birkbeck College, University of London
Birkbeck is a small, research-intensive institution that provides part-time, evening undergraduate education for mature students. Nick Pronger is an Associate Lecturer in Work-Based Learning and is a member of the Institute of Professional Studies. He is actively involved in APEL on Work-Based Learning programmes and co-ordinates the Birkbeck Foundation Degree Network. Scott Miller is the Assistant Registrar (Operations and Projects) in Registry Services. The College is committed to the further development of APEL, and Scott is directly involved with the systematisation of processes across the institution.

London Metropolitan University
With considerable experience of recognising experiential learning, London Met has “a commitment to engaging primarily with the diverse economic, social and educational challenges presented by London”. Helen Pokorny was the Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Development Co-ordinator in the Centre for Academic and Professional Development. She had a cross-institutional role, and worked with APEL Co-ordinators within departments. (Helen is now employed at the University of Westminster.) Graham Taylor-Russell is the Deputy Academic Registrar, with responsibility for the assessment process. He is Chair of the University APEL Board.
Thames Valley University
TVU has a commitment “to enhance the social, cultural and economic lives of the communities [it] serves” and is one of the institutions that has assessed and recognised prior experiential learning for a considerable time. Audrey Blenkharn is a Senior Lecturer and a Programme Leader in the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. She has considerable experience of APEL, both as an adviser and an assessor, through her work with post-registration nurses. Dieter Herde is a member of the Academic Quality and Standards Office. He takes a leading role on matters relating to quality and work-based learning assessment, APEL and accreditation.

University of Bradford
In addition to their commitment to confronting inequality and celebrating diversity, Bradford's mission is ‘making knowledge work’, and they are actively developing APEL as part of their commitment to employer engagement. Alan Maybury is an Academic Development Consultant attached to the School of Lifelong Education and Development. He has considerable expertise with APEL and works closely with employers on tailored awards. Jenny Beaumont leads the academic advice team in the Academic Standards and Support Unit, which advises schools across the institution on policy and practice. She and her team also contribute to policy development.

University of Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire is actively reviewing and extending its commitment to APEL, as part of its mission to develop “new and creative approaches to learning, teaching and research with a commitment to adding value to employers”. Rachel O’Connell has wide experience as a nurse/educator through her involvement with post-registration professional development. She is Project Manager for the APEL Pilot Project, which is developing new arrangements for APEL in the flexible credit framework. Catherine Rendell is the Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Enhancement, and is taking an overview of the development of the new flexible credit framework. This includes the new APEL processes and procedures.

1 Introduction
The recognition and assessment of prior experiential learning has been part of the practice of higher education since the late 1980s, initially partly due to the activities of Norman Evans (1987, 1988, 1989) and the Learning from Experience Trust (see Appendix for details). However, interest in this area has been given a new impetus
by the current activities relating to employer engagement, because the ability to recognise learning that has taken place through experience is an important element in awarding credit for learning that takes place in the workplace. This guide is intended as a resource for those colleagues who are working in the area of employer engagement, and who are working with the integration of experiential learning into academic programmes. It draws on ways in which some institutions have met the academic challenges in this area, and demonstrates that experiential learning can be equivalent to learning that results from teaching within the university. The focus is on using quality assurance processes to ensure equity and consistency in the recognition of experiential learning that has taken place outside the institution.

This work looks only at practice relating to the recognition of prior experiential learning and does not deal with the recognition of prior certificated learning. Those who are unfamiliar with the general area of assessment and recognition of prior learning, may find it helpful to revisit brief definitions and to be reminded of the difference between the two:

1.1 Prior certificated learning
This is learning that is formal and has been assessed. There is therefore evidence of successful achievement of learning in the form of award certificates, credit transcripts, professional qualifications etc. Where students bring evidence that they have gained qualifications or awards, or passed courses or modules, it is necessary to evaluate the status and content of the programme.

In order for such learning to ‘count’ the student must demonstrate that it is:

- **relevant** the subject content of the learning must be directly relevant to the programme involved;
- **adequate** the level of the learning must be appropriate and the volume of learning adequate for the claim made;
- **current** the learning must be sufficiently recent for the student to draw on in the context of their proposed programme;
- **authentic** the learning must be demonstrably that of the student involved and must have been appropriately quality assured by the organisation delivering it.

In the Glossary of terms of the QAA Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning (2004, Appendix 1), the definition of the accreditation of prior certificated learning is given as follows:
Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL): a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

This definition indicates clearly that there is no requirement on institutions to recognise prior formal learning, and that part of the process for such recognition requires a judgement as to the appropriateness of the learning outlined in the certificate(s).

1.2 Prior experiential learning
This is learning that has taken place informally, through experience in the workplace or through voluntary activities and/or other life experience. Students are claiming that, through such experiences, they have acquired learning equivalent to that required by the university. However, the informal nature of their learning means that any such learning has not been assessed. In order to receive credit for experiential learning against an academic award, the student needs to demonstrate successful learning, since it is the assessed learning that gains credit not the experience itself. This is clear from the QAA (2004) definition:

Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL): a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

Note the reference here to 'assessment' rather than 'consideration', which is the term used in the APCL definition – this represents an important distinction. Any experiential learning that is recognised by an institution is assessed by that institution to ensure it is of an appropriate standard.

For those who are interested in exploring the debates around experiential learning in more depth, there is a considerable literature relating to both theory and practice, a small selection of which is given in the References section, together with a short list of useful websites.

2 Why recognise experiential learning?
As the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) point out in their foreword to the Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning (2004), “the emerging agenda for higher education (HE) in the United Kingdom (UK) promotes lifelong learning, social inclusion, wider
participation, employability and partnership working with business, community organisations and among HE providers nationally and internationally”. They refer to the importance of higher education institutions being able to recognise “prior learning achieved through life and work experiences as well as prior learning gained in less formal contexts in community-based learning, work-based learning, continuing professional development and voluntary work”.

The group for whom recognition of experiential learning is particularly relevant are those mature people who undertook compulsory education prior to the relatively recent widening participation initiatives. They therefore entered the workforce either from school or college at a young age, and, although they have progressed through their careers, many have not acquired formal qualifications at higher levels. In addition, it is common for employees to be required to undertake training and/or continuing professional development. Such programmes are frequently unassessed, which means that the learning achieved through them does not gain broader recognition.

The recognition of experiential learning can benefit many students, but students who are combining work and study can gain particular advantages. APEL can:

— reduce the time needed to achieve a higher education qualification, which is particularly attractive to mature students;
— mean that the overall cost of studying is lower – an important factor in the current economic climate;
— ensure that people are assessed on and receive validation of learning that they have already achieved – which is particularly appropriate in the case of mature professionals who are operating at a high level of competence in their work;
— avoid the need for students to be formally taught things they already know, an experience which is undemanding and unsatisfactory.

Until relatively recently the focus within APEL was on recognition of individual learning, but, with the increasing recognition of work-based learning, an important extension of APEL is the ability to recognise group learning experiences. The university’s ability to assess and recognise learning from in-company training and professional development programmes means that individuals can gain formal recognition of learning they have been required to undertake. Such recognition provides them with a wider acknowledgement of their achievement, and a nationally recognised valuation of their achievement. Where an organisation has delivered the same continuing professional development to groups of employees, a common assessment process can be used for them all. A form of ‘group APEL’ can be used.
More generally, the recognition of experiential learning in the workplace facilitates the design of employer-responsive provision, and ensures that all appropriately assessed learning is recognised (QAA, 2010, para 95). This enables institutions to reach a group of potential students who have been rather neglected by the current widening participation initiatives – those who left formal education a while ago, and whose personal situation prevents them from taking ‘time out’ to do a degree or other award.

This document is organised to show examples of innovative practice relating to the recognition of experiential learning that have met the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) APEL guidelines. The guidelines do not require a specific approach, just that institutional procedures can show how they address the principles outlined in the guidelines. This means that processes can be tailored to specific institutional needs.

Questions
How widely is APEL used in your institution?
Are there particular areas where APEL is used?
How could you use APEL in your own subject?

3 The requirement for accessible information

Principle 4: Higher education providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants …

Principle 6: … information and guidance materials outlining the process(es) for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or previously certificated learning should be clear, accurate and easily accessible.

—QAA, 2004

For many people ‘education’ is about being taught, and although they may be aware that they have acquired skills and knowledge during the course of various experiences, they do not know that such learning can have value in higher education. In addition, there is no central information point providing information about APEL or promoting experiential learning in higher education. There is no UCAS equivalent for the experienced mature person who is thinking of returning to learning, and who wishes to find out if their experience ‘counts for anything’. The only way students can find out about APEL is if institutions publicise its availability.
However, most institutions do not offer easily accessible information on APEL for potential applicants. This lack of information is disadvantageous to potential students who are aware that they are more proficient and experienced than young people who go into higher education, but who do not know how to get their learning recognised. Most if not all universities make reference to the availability of APEL in course literature. However, the recognition of experiential learning is a complex concept to those unfamiliar with it, and it is not always clear to potential applicants precisely what APEL means. Straightforward, user-friendly information on APEL is therefore fundamentally important.

The University of Bradford provides a good example of clear non-technical information.

What is APEL?
The term APEL stands for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and is based on the principle that people can and do learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings. People can develop a wide range of strengths and skills through:
- work (paid or unpaid);
- family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation);
- community, voluntary or leisure activities;
- key experiences and events in life.

We call this experiential learning, or learning from experience. Often the skills, knowledge and abilities that are gained through this type of learning are equal to those gained by students following traditional courses through formal educational institutions. Learning from experience is different from ‘formal learning’: it is largely unstructured; it is more personal, more individualised and is often unconsciously gained. It is, however, just as real as learning which is gained in a formal academic setting. What is more, it is usually more permanent: it is not readily forgotten or lost.

In addition to a definition that is clear to its intended audience, it is also helpful to have a specific section of the website and prospectus that clearly addresses availability of APEL. Experienced APEL practitioners recommend that the website information should cover the following:
- a clear, institutionally agreed definition of what APEL is (see above);
- an outline of the benefits that accrue to successful APEL applicants – for example, the saving in time, money etc;
- case studies to provide ‘real-life’ examples of the principles in practice;
- clear details on the APEL process, and on the support available to students if they decide to undertake a claim;
— an indication of likely cost;
— it may also be useful to indicate that separate arrangements can be made for ‘cohort’ APEL (i.e. for assessing and recognising the experiential learning of a group of employees with a common core of experience);
— finally, it is important to specify a named contact(s) so that any enquirer can contact someone familiar with the institution’s APEL process to discuss it. (Many of us recognise the caller who begins ‘Thank heavens you know what I’m talking about!’)

Questions
Have you tried to get information on APEL from your own university website?
Could you provide clear, structured information to someone asking for APEL?
Which aspect of APEL would be particularly important for students at your institution?

In common with a number of other institutions, Birkbeck has developed a work-based learning ‘top-up’ for Foundation Degrees. This is a generic award that can admit students from a wide range of FDs. There are other awards that involve academic and vocational learning – for example, Higher National Diplomas and Higher National Certificates – but mature learners have often gained these a while ago. It is possible for students to use APEL to demonstrate currency of their ‘old’ awards. This is often appropriate if there has been a change in career. For example, at Birkbeck a student with an HND in Biology, who had moved into a career running their own business and managing a team, was asked to write a report outlining how they used generic level 5 capabilities in their current role. Reference points for quality assurance purposes were the national credit framework and The framework for higher education qualifications (QAA, 2008). Advice and guidance was provided to the student to support them while they prepared their report.

4 Institutional regulations/policies

Principle 2: Where limits are imposed on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicitly stated. The implications for progression, the award of any interim qualification and the classification or grading of a final qualification should be clear and transparent.

Principle 3: Prior experiential … learning that has been accredited by an HE provider should be clearly identified on students’ transcripts.
Principle 4: Higher education providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 5: The terminology, scope and boundaries used by an HE provider in its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.

Principle 11: The locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly specified.

Principle 12: All staff associated with the accreditation of prior learning should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined. Full details of all roles and responsibilities should be available to all associated staff and applicants.

Principle 13: Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 16: Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.

—QAA, 2004

At first glance these principles look complex and detailed, but effectively what they are saying is that:
— policies should be clear to all involved, both staff and students;
— the terms used should be explicitly defined;
— practices involved in assessing experiential learning should be clearly specified and the roles associated with these practices defined;
— the locus of decisions relating to the recognition of experiential learning should be identified;
— staff development necessary to ensure staff operate effectively in whatever role they have is provided;
monitoring and review of APEL processes and practices should take place.

These are general principles of good practice, and can be integrated with other processes in the institution. Although the recognition of experiential learning does not involve formal teaching as such, it does involve supporting and assessing learning – colleagues have considerable expertise in both these areas. A familiar example of supporting learning is project supervision – where the supervisor provides expert input to ensure that the student's self-managed learning process is effective.

If the bullet points are considered one by one, the requirements they contain can be clarified.

4.1 Policies should be clear to all involved, both staff and students

The ability to recognise prior experiential learning against the requirements of an award must be contained in the institution’s regulations and expressed through related policies and procedures. Usually institutional regulations are facilitative, in that they allow for the recognition of such learning where appropriate. However, frequently varying attitudes to the recognition of experiential learning are expressed in programme regulations.

Most institutions set a ‘ceiling’ on the volume of prior credit – whether certificated or experiential – that can contribute to a final award. Commonly at undergraduate level this is two-thirds of an undergraduate award, allowing full-time students to enter the final year of an Honours degree, although the maximum credit that can be transferred into postgraduate awards is sometimes lower. Although no explicit rationale was given for imposing this ceiling, Johnson and Walsh (2005) report that institutions wished to ensure that students had undertaken a sufficient volume of learning in the institution for there to be confidence in the judgements made on their achievements. This perspective could be judged valid when institutions ‘import’ learning that has been assessed elsewhere, but need not hold when the assessment is ‘in-house’ (QAA, 2010, para 102).

Until recently institutional policies tended to bracket together recognition of prior certificated learning and of prior experiential learning, in that any ‘ceiling’ imposed on such learning would apply to either and/or both. This is interesting to consider in the light of the earlier distinction between ‘consideration’ of APCL and ‘assessment’ of APEL. Some institutions are currently revisiting their regulations to distinguish between credits ‘imported’ from elsewhere, and those assessed at their own institution.

The University of Hertfordshire has recently introduced regulations that permit APEL for up to 100% of an award:
The prescribed limits to the amount of credit that may be recognised through APEL for University awards have been removed. It is now therefore possible for a candidate to obtain an award wholly on the basis of APEL. In practice it is unlikely that a named award of the University would be made in this way since the APEL would need to align with the prescribed learning outcomes of that award. It is more likely that an Open Studies award would be made by this means. Any award based solely on APEL could not be classified, since APEL credit is not graded. Limits on APEL may still apply where a University award needs to comply with the requirements of a PSRB.

—excerpt from flexible credit framework documentation

The rationale here is that the institution supports the evidencing of the learning and assesses the student's work, so they can be confident that the required standards are met.

Programme structures can be an important influence on the facility to recognise experiential learning against awards. There was general agreement that institutional frameworks that provided for the flexible construction of academic awards were the most effective way of supporting full recognition of experiential learning. This is because matching outcomes on an award that specifies all its content very tightly legislates against wide use of APEL. The integration of options or of elective modules across a programme provides a mechanism whereby it is possible to recognise a wide range of prior experiential learning. As do negotiated awards where the coherence of content is decided by the students (subject to appropriate approval processes) rather than determined by staff on the basis of disciplinary demands. The reference to an Open Studies award in the excerpt given above indicates the important of being flexible regarding content requirements in order to fully exploit APEL.

Moving on from consideration of institutional maxima for APEL, for those institutions working with in-company accreditation (formal recognition of the workplace professional development referred to above) it is also important to signal to learners the minimum volume of credit that can be recognised. If students gain four or five credits from ‘bitesize’ learning, can they use the credits against a university award? If so, how? People from outside the university are not familiar with the structure of academic programmes, and may not understand that such small volumes of learning are not common in institutions or that they may not ‘count’ against awards (QAA, 2010, para 101).
4.2 The terms used should be explicitly defined

Such a requirement may seem excessive but the discourse relating to the recognition of prior learning is relatively new, and institutions have adopted terminology that fits with their philosophy in this area. There are a range of acronyms: APL, APCL, APEL, AP(E)L, RPL (recognition of prior learning). There is not one commonly agreed set of terms, but it is important that the specific usage is identified, so that both sides to any discussion are clear on the meaning.

4.3 Practices involved in assessing experiential learning should be clearly specified and the roles associated with these practices defined

This refers to the assessment of experiential learning, and is dealt with in detail in a separate section. However, the processes and procedures for the evidencing and assessment of experiential learning should be part of the assessment section of institutional regulations. In addition, the administrative processes that support and record APEL claims and their assessment should be clearly set out.

4.4 The locus of decisions relating to the recognition of experiential learning should be identified

Since the recognition of experiential learning involves undertaking assessment this is an academic decision, but it is important to specify which academic staff are responsible for assessment of experiential learning and which assessment boards they will feed into. It is important that there is a formal record of decisions relating to APEL, and that, when awarded, APEL credits are clearly indicated on the student’s transcript.

4.5 Staff development necessary to ensure staff operate effectively in whatever role they have is provided

Staff awareness and understanding of APEL activities is fundamentally important to the effective establishment of such practices. A wide range of staff will be involved in the recognition of experiential learning to varying degrees. Most institutions have comprehensive guidance materials in both hard copy and online that relate to APEL processes and practices. However, in unfamiliar areas, it can be difficult to fully grasp practices from text, so face-to-face interaction can be helpful. This need not be onerous. Johnson (2002) points out that levels of staff development required vary according to the degree of involvement in the APEL process. For example, those staff dealing with advertising and marketing need only to be aware that APEL is available (so a short briefing sheet may be helpful); others dealing with admissions queries and applications need to have a general
understanding of APEL principles and the processes involved; only those directly involved with academic advice, support and assessment need be expert practitioners. The location of APEL expertise (i.e. whether it is centrally located in a distinct unit working with colleagues across the institution, or there are APEL practitioners embedded in schools/departments) is likely to vary according to institutional structure and practice. However, if a distributed model is adopted, it is important to address the issue of consistency in practice, and it can be helpful to set up an APEL network of some sort so that APEL practitioners can exchange good practice and share issues (see QAA, 2010, para 77, and the Demonstrator Project presented by the University of Salford on supporting academic staff).

Responding institutions ensured that appropriate staff development was available a number of ways. All institutions offered APEL staff development sessions and had expert practitioners as a resource. In addition:

— London Met valued the staff development that took place through committees convened to consider APEL claims and used these as a way to identify useful advice and guidance;
— Bradford offered APEL seminars and occasional workshops to provide colleagues with the opportunity to consider APEL issues;
— Hertford are planning an integrated programme of staff development workshops on the practice of APEL within the institution’s new flexible credit framework;
— TVU has a Masters-level APEL module for staff, which is also open to staff from partner colleges via the West London Lifelong Learning Network;
— Birkbeck hosts the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network, which provides APEL seminars/workshops for both novice and expert APEL practice.

4.6 Monitoring and review of APEL processes and practices should take place All processes and practices relating to learning, teaching and assessment are monitored to ensure their effectiveness, and those relating to APEL should be considered as part of internal review processes. It is important to ensure that processes and practices are working as envisaged, and that students claiming APEL are having a positive learning experience.

In addition to monitoring processes, there is also the need to monitor standards. The involvement of external examiners will vary according to scale of activity and volume of claims. Where the number of claims for experiential learning is limited the 'external’ needs to understand the general principles that are applied to assessment, and have access to students’ work if required. For larger volumes of activity it may be appropriate to have an APEL committee with its own external to supplement other assessment boards. Either way, it is important that there is some central record of
APEL assessments across the institution, so that a clear overview of practice can be obtained, and any inconsistencies explored.

London Met and TVU, which are the institutions with the strongest and longest tradition of APEL of the respondents here, both have specific APEL Boards and APEL externals, i.e. externals whose expertise is not in a particular subject but in APEL processes and practices.

Birkbeck and Bradford currently use subject externals to quality assure APEL submissions because the volume is small.

Hertford has experienced renewed interest in APEL through the introduction of their flexible credit framework and are appointing an external with expertise in the pedagogy of experiential learning.

Questions
Do your regulations allow space for effective use of APEL?
If not, could they be amended to do so?
What would be the initial staff development requirements to support the effective use of APEL in your institution?

5 Assessment

Principle 1: Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

Principle 7: Higher education providers should consider the range and form(s) of assessment appropriate to consider claims for the recognition of learning.

Principle 8: The criteria to be used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be made explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders and assessors and examiners.

Principle 10: The assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures.

—QAA, 2004
The most important point to make relating to the assessment of experiential learning is that institutions are awarding credits to successfully demonstrated learning from experience, not to the experience itself. Any work submitted as evidence for an APEL claim therefore has the same status as other forms of assessment in the institution, in that the work must evidence learning, and will fail if it does not. In contrast to certificated learning (which involves receiving learning assessed elsewhere) the acceptability or otherwise of evidence of experiential learning is judged by academics within the institution. This means that considerations of relevance, adequacy, currency and authenticity (the characteristics required when considering prior certificated learning) can all be designed into the assessment. Academic staff can ensure that any assessment required as ‘evidence’ of learning explicitly addresses these issues. It is therefore possible to have confidence in the standard of the work because it is assessed inside the institution and in a manner consistent with institutional assessment policies.

The first task when considering any potential APEL claim is to consider whether any such claim is likely to be valid. Most institutions require applicants to complete an APEL claim form of some sort as this provides a picture of the person’s qualifications and/or experience and can help tutors to identify where the opportunity to learn from experience may have occurred. The completed form can provide basic information on which the applicants can be interviewed, so that their learning can be explored in more depth – it is as a result of the interview that a decision can be made about the likely level and volume of learning to be evidenced. (This is not an assessment of learning, it is a judgement of the likelihood that the applicant will be able to evidence the learning claimed.) Where appropriate such an interview can also include elements of advice and guidance relating to formats for assessment, and one institution records such interviews so there is a formal record of the proceedings, which can be helpful both to the applicant and in ensuring consistency in APEL practice.

The assumption has frequently been made that APEL, reflection and a portfolio mode of assessment are inextricably interlinked. However, institutions made reference to a wide range of assessment methods:

- reports;
- projects;
- artefacts accompanied by a commentary;
- essays on ‘applied’ topics;
- interviews etc;
- practice-based documents;
- reports on observations of practice;
— video/audio tapes, with commentary and analysis related to achievement of learning;
— analytic and evaluative description of practice.

On more than one occasion, it was emphasised that all ‘portfolio’ means is a collection of work, and that portfolios could be extremely slim, sometimes containing a limited selection of written work without much supporting material as evidence.

Respondents were at pains to emphasise that the stereotypic ‘wheelbarrow portfolio’ was a misperception, and that precisely what a ‘portfolio’ contained would vary. For example, in digital areas London Met uses a short summary and a link to a digital artefact. Both Bradford and TVU emphasised the importance of the commentary that demonstrates both level and coherence of learning, stating that supporting materials are “almost an appendix”. This emphasis on the demonstration of learning and understanding through a written or oral summary or commentary makes it easier to develop appropriate criteria for assessment. The institutions frequently have generic assessment criteria that can be adapted appropriately.

Whatever mode of assessment adopted, it is widespread and established practice to mark APEL submissions on a ‘pass/fail’ basis, which means that work submitted to evidence experiential learning is excluded from consideration at degree classification. The work is therefore at a disadvantage compared to learning undertaken inside the institution, because even outstanding work cannot be fully recognised. A view is sometimes expressed by staff that, since APEL students are claiming credits and a ‘pass’ triggers the required credit, grading is unnecessary. However, given that there is now an established expertise in APEL assessment, it may be worth revisiting institutional decisions relating to grading since the lack of grading can result in students being classified on a relatively small volume of credit. For example, in areas such as Policy Studies, if a student is actually working with a policy/legislation that is the focus for assessment, rather than requiring an essay that considers the area in a decontextualised way, it is possible to amend the title so that a report on implementation/application can be acceptable. Such a piece of work can often be judged by similar grading criteria to those applied to ‘mainstream’ assessment.

It is also important not to disadvantage APEL applicants by requiring a higher level of performance from them than that required on taught modules. Students inside the institution are awarded credits for a pass mark (usually 40% on undergraduate programmes and 50% on postgraduate programmes). Although bare passes are not seen as a desirable level of performance, the fact that we award a pass to the work indicates that it is acceptable. In designing assessment for APEL it is important to keep in mind the
requirements of a taught programme at the same level to ensure equivalence in demand, so that APEL claimants are not required to do more for the volume of credit involved.

Since an APEL submission has the same status as other assessments, i.e. it can be failed, there needs to be a mechanism for the provision of feedback and also arrangements for resubmission.

Questions

What range of assessment would be most appropriate for your subject area?
What is the assessment schema for a standard module in the institution?
What APEL assessment could be considered equivalent?
Could such an assessment be graded?

6 Supporting learning rather than teaching

Principle 9: Applicants should be fully informed of the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 14: Clear guidance should be given to applicants about when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.

Principle 15: Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for the accreditation of prior learning and to provide feedback on decisions.

—QAA, 2004

Most people who work with APEL will have heard the phrase: ‘Isn’t it just easier for them to take the module?’ The question to be asked is: easier for whom?

One academic respondent, widely involved with Foundation Degrees since their inception, referred to ‘teasing out’ the knowledge that students had. In the tutor’s experience, the absence of APEL means that students “could be forced to do Principles of Marketing, and they’ve been working in a marketing department for ten years and are sitting there bored to death”. In such a context, it isn’t easier for the student to take the module – they feel wrongly advised, and they are paying to take something most of which they already know.
A frequently used approach to APEL is to require that students map their learning against that required on a given module(s) or programme, although sometimes students can be required to write their own learning outcomes. Both these exercises are extremely challenging to do, even for educationalists. Colleagues who work in this area recognise the fundamental importance of academic advice and guidance when supporting students in the identification of learning they already have, and in translating such learning into a format that can be assessed at higher levels. The pedagogic approach to supporting students making APEL claims has more in common with supervision than with more formal teaching, in that the supervisor/APEL adviser provides guidance on the academic material that the student is producing.

It can be restrictive to require applicants to evidence learning identical to that achieved on taught programmes, and, where a precise match is not required by a professional body for accreditation purposes, it may be more appropriate to use the aims and objectives of a module for mapping, as this gives more flexibility while still requiring the student to demonstrate equivalence in standard. At the moment, such an approach is more commonly taken if applicants have a volume of learning equivalent to a whole level of a programme or more. On occasion ‘general credit’ is the term used for credit awarded against one or more levels of a programme, with ‘specific credit’ being reserved for credit claimed against the outcomes of a module. When institutions feel that a distinction between ‘general’ and ‘specific’ credit is helpful, it is important to indicate to the student which type of credit they are being assessed for, as this is likely to affect the way the student approaches the assessment.

As with any other learning, it is important that students are appropriately supported in achieving the learning outcomes – a formal process therefore needs to be in place.

The institutions responding here mainly supported students who were making an APEL claim through a combination of workshops and tutorials. The advantage of such support, when contrasted with a timetabled module, is that applicants can start their APEL claim at any point in the academic year, allowing them time to work towards the appropriate entry point on a programme. Depending on scale of application, support can be provided face to face, either individually or through group workshops, and, increasingly, the virtual learning environment can be used to supplement or replace direct staff/student interaction.

Questions
Do you have an institutional policy on support for APEL claimants?
What do you think is the most effective way of providing support?
Has your institution explored the possibility of online support for APEL applicants/claimants?
Summary of key findings

All the institutions involved in the project were clear that recognition of experiential learning was fundamentally important, particularly in the context of employer-responsive provision. Those colleagues who work in partnership with employers and/or support workplace learners are aware of the wide range of experiential learning that occurs. More than once the point was made that experiential learning did not need to be ‘prior’ as in ‘APEL’, and that experiential learning in the workplace (both planned and unplanned) was an important area. Work-based learning is not the same as work experience – the learning is assessed to meet specific outcomes in the way that general exposure to experience cannot deliver. On many vocational awards that have been developed more recently, reflection on past and present workplace experience is an integral part of the programme, and experiential learning is embedded. However, it continues to be the case that many full-time programmes are designed to meet the needs of young students, and the pedagogy underlying experiential learning both in the workplace and elsewhere can be used more fully with mature students in the workplace. This is the group of students who entered the labour market before the recent focus on widening participation, and whose needs are not addressed by the shape the current policies take.

Formal assessment and recognition of the value of experiential learning can benefit both employers and individual learners, in that it provides a valuable affirmation of hitherto unrecognised personal and professional capabilities. The transparency provided by The framework for higher education qualifications (QAA, 2008), and by the higher education credit level descriptors, supplemented by generic descriptors from other sectors, offers a mechanism whereby equivalence can be drawn between learning inside and outside the institution. However, the concept of experiential learning is unfamiliar to many employers and also to many learners, and the challenge for HEIs is to communicate both the benefits and quality of such learning.

Initial feedback on this document indicated that colleagues did not need a ‘how to do APEL’ – there is a mass of existing documentation on processes and practices – but an opportunity to consider how they could meet the principles set out in the QAA APEL guidelines within the context of their own institutional processes. The sections in this document are intended to support consideration of these principles, and the questions are intended to act as initial prompts. Across a range of contexts there has been a flurry of activity relating to APEL, and some of the valuable resources produced have been included in the References. All our academic colleagues have considerable expertise in the support and assessment of students, and examples in this document
demonstrate that it is possible to extend that expertise into the workplace. There is no need for a standard format of assessment for experiential learning outside the university, any more than there is a need for one form of assessment on conventional courses. What is necessary is a consistent approach to the principle that any assessment designed should be clearly linked to measurement of the learning outcomes that have been developed. There is an established scholarship and practice in the assessment of experiential learning in a range of contexts, which has supported the development of a more mature and creative approach to this area. The product of such assessments can be of exceptional quality – one respondent here stated that, although colleagues unfamiliar with experiential learning sometimes were uncertain that the process could produce valid outcomes, they were “wowed by [the quality of] the work”.

References


Learning from Experience Trust website: www.learningexperience.org.uk. A number of downloadable documents are available from this site.

Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (LLLLN) website: www.linkinglondon.ac.uk/. Materials relating to APEL and credit available on this site.


MOVE The Lifelong Learning network for the East of England website: www.move.ac.uk. A number of downloadable documents are available from this site.


Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) website: www.seec.org.uk. SEEC members have considerable experience and expertise relating to APEL and higher education, and SEEC has a range of publications relating to APEL.

West London Lifelong Learning Network (WLLLNN) website: www.westlondonlln.org/apel. Guidance on APEL and materials available on this site.
Maintaining HE standards in accredited in-company training

*University of Hertfordshire (lead) – Frank Haddleton*

I Contributing partners

University of Hertfordshire is a business-facing university, and is one of the higher education sector’s greatest innovators in finding ways to engage with business and the community. It has established a small central team as an employer-focused training and development interface for the University, although partnerships are managed mainly at a faculty level. To enable a consistent approach across faculties, the University has developed its ‘Flexible Credit Framework’, a University-wide framework that describes the principles and processes for a range of employer-based and employer-led activities. Frank Haddleton is the Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement at Hertfordshire, and as such maintains an academic quality oversight for all employer engagement activity.

University of Bradford. Building upon its mission, ‘Making Knowledge Work’, the University of Bradford has, through the Escalate employer engagement programme, been working to reposition itself as a major influencer, facilitator and delivery agent for higher-level skills and workforce development. The Escalate Programme provides a central team and ‘champions’ in each of the academic schools. Escalate’s role is to broker and build employer relationships and facilitate the development of flexible work-based learning solutions to meet employers’ needs. This often includes accredited in-company training and Escalate has been working to pilot approaches to accommodate this, including the development of a ‘shell’ award framework and working closely with fdf/EBTA. Celia Moran is Director of the Escalate Programme and as such maintains oversight of all aspects of this activity.

University of Derby has a dedicated unit, University of Derby Corporate (UDC) to oversee employer engagement, and a School of Flexible and Partnership Learning to generate responsive academic solutions to meet learner needs. Many of its employer programmes fall within an overarching Lifelong Learning Scheme, which provides an ‘academic home programme’ with associated quality assurance mechanisms for monitoring, assuring and enhancing standards and provision within these programmes. Both the School and UDC have close links within faculties through the Workforce Development Fellows, a network of academics who specialise in developing bespoke work-based solutions to meet employer needs within an HE context. Ann Minton is the
Workforce Development Fellow for the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning at Derby, maintaining an academic quality oversight of the employer engagement provision.

Liverpool John Moores University is committed to enhancing students’ employability, leadership and entrepreneurial skills. This is taken forward by the World of Work initiative and via programmes run in partnership and collaboration with employers. These programmes are designated as collaborative programmes and quality management processes are managed by the central Quality Support team, under the operational guidance of the Quality Support Manager, Trish Barker. Streamlined processes for CPD awards (between 4 and 60 credits) have been introduced to respond more effectively and efficiently to employer sponsored requests.

University of Westminster has a well-established portfolio of professional courses and CPD with relevant industry and public sector collaborations. In response to the growth in demand it has recently redesigned its processes for the accreditation of external provision so that enquiries come through, and are scoped in the first instance by a central Accreditation Service. The Service forms part of the outward-facing work of the University’s learning and pedagogic research development unit called Westminster Exchange. The Service takes responsibility for risk assessment, for brokering and supporting useful collaborations between the client and relevant academic departments, and for supporting the client through any course design and staff development needs that may be identified. As such it is able to fulfil a development role internally, while ensuring continuity of service and standards in the collaboration. Sibyl Coldham is Director of the Centre for Excellence in Professional Learning from the Workplace.

The contribution of a number of other awarding institutions is also acknowledged including Kingston University and the University of Chester.

2 Introduction

The aim of this project was to examine the suitability of the national quality assurance framework for emerging processes for accreditation of in-company training programmes or training provided by private providers (referred to here as ‘external accreditation’). In particular:

— to examine the models and processes in use or proposed for external accreditation, including how delivery, assessment, student support and staff development are addressed;
— to identify how these models support effective quality assurance, and explore aspects where the current national quality assurance framework presents a barrier to their development;
— to identify the ways in which these issues have been overcome;
— to propose ways in which the quality assurance framework needs more detailed
  articulation to render it fit for purpose in the context of external accreditation.

The project has focused on the accreditation of training programmes developed
by companies, as opposed to courses developed for and with companies by awarding
institutions1. It covers the initiation, development, approval and ongoing quality
assurance issues associated with stand-alone credit-bearing short courses, small awards
and large awards developed by employers.

For the purpose of this project, external accreditation is defined as a process
whereby an awarding institution gives recognition to a range of in-company training.
In this respect, there has been some reticence in the past to recognise such study
as worthy of HE credit. However, there is now general acknowledgement that these
forms of learning are equally as valid as ‘traditional’ academic study. This research has
identified at least 60 awarding institutions offering some form of external accreditation
service. The models vary significantly across these awarding institutions, from the
accreditation of stand-alone credit to the validation of large awards, from four credit
points to 360 credit points, from delivery of off-the-shelf university provision to
accreditation of the company’s own provision and from policies of the company carrying
out all assessments to the awarding institution taking responsibility for all assessment.
Similar challenges are faced across these spectra, although to differing extents. In some
circumstances the QAA Academic Infrastructure seems entirely appropriate; in others
it can be likened to ‘a sledgehammer to crack a nut’.

It is apparent that processes for the accreditation of employers’ own in-house
training are not currently well developed. Many awarding institutions have only recently
embarked, or are planning to embark, on such activity. Other awarding institutions
mainly embed in-company training within existing university awards, and enhance the
training with other university materials.

A common theme is the need for proportionate approaches to quality assurance,
and approaches that are responsive to employers’ timescales. Employers tend to expect
quicker turnaround times, and many awarding institutions have been criticised for

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1 See the University of Derby Demonstartor Project report in this series: Rapid response
and fit-for-purpose solutions for HE employer provision.
being too slow. Therefore, some ‘lighter touch’ processes are offered in this report, as possible approaches to satisfying both employers’ needs and quality assurance expectations. However, it is recognised that it is often not the processes that are slow, but the ability of staff to support curriculum development within the timescales involved.

3 Credit or awards?
The traditional approach to collaborative provision is that full awards, usually of significant study size (120 credits points or more), are validated to approved partners of the awarding institution. Section 2 of the QAA Code of practice (Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning, September 2004) focuses on this traditional approach rather than stand-alone credit that could contribute to an award. However, the awarding institutions who contributed towards this project often find a demand for the accreditation of as little as five credit points of study (and HEFCE co-funding is available for as little as 3.6 credit points of study), a point that was reiterated in the February 2010 QAA Employer-responsive provision survey: a reflective report2 (paras 92-103).

Section 2 of the QAA Code of practice also states: “The inclusion in these definitions of ‘specific credit toward an award’ has raised questions of the type ‘how much specific credit is needed before this code is applied’ to a particular collaborative or FDL arrangement. Such questions are for an institution itself to answer by using this section of the Code as a reference point against which to consider and test its own arrangements.” This makes it clear that the awarding institution can, where appropriate, use proportionate measures in the quality assurance of stand-alone credit, particularly where the volume of credit is small. This report highlights where awarding institutions have implemented such measures. However, many other awarding institutions have adopted a zero-risk approach, possibly due to uncertainty over how QAA might respond at Institutional audit to institutions’ interpretations of the Academic Infrastructure.

It is essential to establish at an early stage whether the company actually wants its training accredited to the extent that a credit-rating is attached to the study involved. If an award is not possible for the volume of study concerned, then many companies do not value academic credit as an alternative option, particularly as this requires the outcomes of the course to be assessed. Alternatively, some companies may prefer a ‘kitemark’ for its training, rather than credit for transfer or accumulation towards a

2 See www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/effectiveprovision.pdf
HE award. To date, very few awarding institutions have responded to this demand, possibly because it does not attract HEFCE co-funding. The processes associated with the confirmation of a ‘kitemark’ or ‘endorsement’ (i.e. where the awarding institution acknowledges that the training is at HE level but does not attach a level or credit-rating or award to that training) would be very different to those associated with the approval of credit or a named award. There may be fewer quality assurance implications with this route, but reputational implications mean that approval processes and legal agreements are still important. Alternatively, the employer may be interested in the study (along with its associated work-based learning) being recognised as contributing to an existing university award (through APEL).

There are differences in opinion across the sector on the value of accrediting small amounts of credit. Some awarding institutions only approve stand-alone credit, rather than named awards, as the latter would need to go through a full validation route. Other awarding institutions do not accredit less than 30 credit points of study (packaged into university small awards), for financial reasons. Some others will approve packages of stand-alone credit down to units of ten credit points (the University of Westminster, the University of Bradford) or even five credit points (the University of Derby, the University of Hertfordshire). The February 2010 QAA reflective report on their employer-responsive provision survey (para 97) revealed that the FHEQ may be less helpful in accrediting small amounts of learning, and other, more generic, guidance such as the SEEC3 and NICATS4 credit level descriptors may be more helpful.

The accreditation of smaller packages of credit should not be financially dependent upon HEFCE co-funding (at around £10 per one credit point per student), and many awarding institutions question the viability of small packages of stand-alone credit. However, while they may not in themselves be financially viable, such credit-rated short courses could initiate a relationship with the employer that leads to an award constituted of a much larger package of study.

The February 2010 QAA reflective report on their employer-responsive provision survey (para 101) recommends that employers need to appreciate that “a specified level of academic rigour and depth of knowledge to the training is likely to be needed

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3 See www.seec.org.uk/docs/creditleveldescriptors2003.pdf

for an institution to be able to award academic credit” and that “the award of credit is a measure of academic achievement and not merely a ‘kite marking’ exercise”.

Where stand-alone credit (without an associated university award) is being awarded, there needs to be careful review of how a client markets their course. If they want a university award then the process is clear (validation of the course for an award, or eligibility for a generic small award). However, if the company plan to give their own award for university credit then their marketing materials need to make absolutely clear that the award is not being offered by the awarding institution. Legal agreements typically cover such requirements.

Case study 1: Small awards

With many in-company training schemes there is insufficient study to enable large awards (CertHE, DipHE, Foundation Degree, etc.) to be considered. However, many companies are not interested in recognition of the specific credit worthiness of their courses alone, and instead would like an HE award to be made. In response, many awarding institutions have responded by developing ‘small awards’, some for as little as 12 credits of study but generally for 30 credits or more:

— At the University of Hertfordshire, awards of a Diploma in Professional Development (30 credits at level 7) or Certificate in Professional Development (30 credits at level 6) can be made for the accumulation of CPD credit. These awards are made at the University Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) awards board, rather than having separate boards in each academic school.

— At Liverpool John Moores University, CPD credit is aligned to an award of a Certificate of Professional Development, which can be given for anything from 4 to 60 credits of study (although typical minimum is 12 credit points).

— The University of Derby has experience of developing accreditation of large awards, small awards and small packets of credit. The smallest award is a 30 credit Certificate of Achievement at level 4 to 7, so most of their activity leads to an award. There are also some University Certificates (60 credits at level 4), University Diplomas (60 credits at level 5) and Advanced Diplomas (60 credits at level 6). No validation event is required for any of these awards (because they are awarded through an existing programme, the Lifelong Learning Scheme, which has delegated powers of approval).
However, care needs to be taken over the naming of small awards. One university was criticised in its recent QAA Institutional audit for claiming that all its awards were covered by FHEQ, whereas two awards did not comply (these were exit awards on traditional programmes of study, but the same arguments apply to small employer-based awards). There were concerns that these awards (i) were not included in programme specifications, (ii) had credit ratings outside the HE credit framework for England and (iii) external examiners did not consider these awards. QAA felt that using terminology such as ‘diploma’, when these awards did not meet FHEQ requirements could lead to confusion and misunderstanding. As the University stated in response to the audit report, “this outcome calls for sector-wide discussion amongst the substantial number of awarding institutions making such awards and using the same, or similar, terminology”. Until QAA issues further guidance on the naming of small awards, it may be sensible to consider whether they do meet the qualification descriptors in full, and state where they do not. Some awarding institutions make clear to employers where such awards do not. It is also worth noting that small awards may have an effect on the ELQ (equivalent or lower qualifications) status of an individual. Any student accumulating credit without it contributing towards an award can continue to do so with no ELQ ramifications. But those accumulating credit and who subsequently achieve a small award (for, say, 30 credits at FHEQ level 4), and then decide to enrol on a first degree might have to be classified as ELQ, at least for their first year.

4 Infrastructure to facilitate the model
The presence of institutional-level infrastructure to support the external accreditation process, particularly in the early stages of the process, is critical. This support can manage the ‘external face’ of the awarding institution, and can facilitate the early stages of accreditation. Many awarding institutions have developed or are developing centralised business support structures. However, one awarding institution considers that further control at a central level would only add another layer of bureaucracy, and they instead make money available to schools to work with potential employers to establish the finer detail of proposals.

Alternatively, EBTA (Employer Based Training Accreditation) has demonstrated its potential to fulfil the role of a central business support service. This fdf-co-ordinated

5 Source: Hefce verbal guidance
service works with interested universities and employers (and other stakeholders), to
give initial advice to employers on the accreditation of their training, carry out analyses
of training and offer credit and level advice, and arrange for an appropriate university to
take the accreditation process forward. EBTA is also helpful for sharing ideas on best
practice in accreditation of in-company training in respect of both QA and financial
aspects of accreditation. There are currently over 40 universities engaged in the EBTA
HEI Community of Practice. Despite the difficulties resulting from the diversity of
accreditation and ongoing quality assurance models in place across the HE sector, EBTA
endeavours to give continuing support to employers once a suitable university has been
identified to accredit the training.

There is also a need to properly document and administer externally accredited
courses, and central student records systems need to be able to manage these
‘untypical’ study modes (particularly where HEFCE co-funded numbers need to be
processed and reported). Many university central records systems are set up to manage
students registered on awards, and not stand-alone credit. This makes it very difficult
to administer stand-alone credit, and is one reason for some awarding institutions
choosing not to accredit down to this level. Others do not register such students
onto the university’s central record system. However, it is acknowledged that the
maintenance of a minimum dataset is required. Small awards overcome this issue to
some extent (see Case study 1, above). At the University of Hertfordshire, a parallel
student record system has been set up to manage stand-alone credit, and packages
such credits as ‘credit-bearing short courses’, as opposed to modules that are units
of study attached to programmes. It also overcomes the need to register students on
programmes of study.

Many awarding institutions have developed university-wide frameworks that
describe the principles and processes for external accreditation. For instance, the
University of Hertfordshire’s ‘Flexible Credit Framework’ describes the University’s
processes for the rapid approval of credit-bearing short courses, the consideration
and approval of APEL, external accreditation of in-company training and professional
development awards. The framework enables a consistent approach to these processes,
and to a standard equivalent to that achieved within the University itself.
Case study 2: Central business engagement units

Many universities have introduced central business engagement units, to support their strategic employer engagement objectives. They have a good general understanding of employers’ needs, are able to explain academic needs, and because employer engagement is their core activity they can be more responsive to employer enquiries. They are therefore able to effectively support academic schools in meeting the institutions’ strategic objectives:

— University of Derby Corporate (UDC) is the employer engagement interface for the University of Derby, responsible for partnership liaison, managing partnership finances, supporting students, etc. However, it has no delegated responsibility for quality assurance (which remains the responsibility of University of Derby’s Quality Enhancement Department (QED)). An initial request from a company would typically be directed to UDC, as are requests for accreditation of specialist disciplines. Initial discussions take place alongside the academic school, and both work with the company to develop the programme — they evaluate the request, identify credit and level, and then provide advice on how to achieve what the employer wants and what extra material is needed to achieve the credit. The approval stage is managed by QED, but often draws upon the approval mechanisms within the Lifelong Learning Scheme with UDC involved where necessary. Once approved, UDC and the academic school jointly manage the partnership (UDC doing the client relationship management, the academic school the academic/QA management).

— The University of Hertfordshire has established UH Ventures as an employer-focused training and development interface for the University. It was driven in part by the University’s need for a more commercial training vehicle operating outside their mainstream activities and to stimulate the market for accredited in-company learning. Among its responsibilities, UH Ventures acts as the initial contact with the employer, to familiarise them with the process, identify their needs, likely fees, etc. Along with the academic school and the University’s Accreditation Office, it would then agree the following accreditation arrangements with the employer: (i) the proposed level and credit-rating of the credit; (ii) the extent to which the University is involved with curriculum development, delivery and assessment (which govern the costing arrangements); (iii) the costing arrangements; (iv) content of ‘External Accreditation Agreement’ template (the legal contract); and (v) the audit process and evidence required from the company. Once approved, the academic school would take responsibility for managing the partnership, with ongoing support from the University Accreditation Office. Again, UH Ventures has no delegated responsibility for quality assurance.
— The University of Westminster are planning to put into place a similar structure. Their Central Accreditation Service (CAS, within the Westminster Exchange, an academic department at the University that leads innovation in learning, teaching and pedagogic research) will collaborate with academic schools, and act as a project manager for new collaborations, with schools providing discipline-specific input. Both would support partners in preparing a proposal to the University Accreditation Board. Once approved, the partnership could be managed by the school or CAS, depending upon the subject specialism (or not). CAS would also manage generic training (eg mentoring, coaching, assessing).

5 Approval of companies

In all awarding institutions, a formal relationship is established between the awarding institution and the company (or training provider). Approval mechanisms tend to be based upon, or identical to, those established mechanisms for approving conventional collaborative provision partners. Section 2 of the QAA Code of practice states: “A9 - An awarding institution should undertake, with due diligence, an investigation to satisfy itself about the good standing of a prospective partner or agent, and of their capacity to fulfil their designated role in the arrangement. This investigation should include the legal status of the prospective partner or agent, and its capacity in law to contract with the awarding institution.” This is totally appropriate for a company delivering a large award (CertHE, Foundation Degree, etc.), and most awarding institutions confirmed that their normal collaborative partner approval processes would also apply for large awards. However, is this precept appropriate where a company is only planning to deliver a five-credit point short course or a 12-credit point Certificate of Professional Development? Should it be more stringent because the company does not normally deliver at HE level? Often, any associated due diligence is tailored to the scale of the provision. However, some awarding institutions choose to undertake full due diligence whatever the scale of the provision, as they always identify collaborative provision as high risk. Risk-based approaches to partner approval are generally not well developed among awarding institutions, and further guidance in Section 2 of the QAA Code of practice on such proportionate approaches would be welcomed. The February 2010 QAA reflective report on their employer-responsive provision survey2 (para 55) reflects these same concerns, particularly where the awarding institution has competitively tendered for the provision.

The approval arrangements for tripartite agreements (that is, where an awarding institution approves a training provider to deliver courses to a company) will vary according to the individual nature of the agreement and who ‘owns’ the course:
If a company owns the intellectual property rights (IPR) to a course and then contracts one or more training providers to deliver that course, then the company would need to be approved (along with its courses and resources), and the training providers would be approved by the university through confirming the acceptability of CVs. A teaching staff qualifications policy is essential in these situations.

However, if a training provider owns the IPR and delivers the same course to several companies, the university would normally approve the provider only. The approval process for the delivery site would depend on the nature of the course and the physical resource requirements. If all that is required is a teaching room to deliver the course then this responsibility could be delegated to the training provider (however, some universities do still insist on approving the site in this situation). However, where the workplace environment is key to the assessment of employees then there is a greater argument for university to approve the company. The formal agreement between the two parties would need to specify these delegated responsibilities.

Most awarding institutions reapprove companies as formal partners, through renegotiation and re-signing of a contract, typically every five or six years. However, two awarding institutions give indefinite approval to its approved companies and instead identify criteria that might lead to the termination of a course (student feedback, student performance, external examiners’ reports, etc).

Case study 3: Company approval processes – strategies for a ‘lighter touch’
The activity that an accredited company undertakes will vary considerably, from the delivery (but not assessment) of a five-credit-point short course to the development, delivery and assessment of a 240-credit-point Foundation Degree (or higher). Some institutions have developed proportional processes for approving these companies (as opposed to approval of the credit or award itself):

The University of Hertfordshire has developed a process for the approval of external providers of stand-alone credit that combines the due diligence element of partner approval with ability to deliver/assess the credit itself. Following the initial approval of the University’s Academic Development Committee (using a risk-based approach) and support for the company to provide a body of appropriate evidence, an audit and moderation process are carried out. There are ten criteria included in the audit process (rationale and demand, the proposal, programme management, publicity/recruitment/admissions, physical resources, staffing resources and staff development, learning and teaching strategies, assessment, quality assurance,
student guidance and support) against which the University seeks to assure itself that the company has the capability to deliver/assess the courses, and to determine the appropriate level and amount of credit that each is worth. Once the auditor (based in the faculty, but trained centrally to conduct the audit) is satisfied with the evidence base, the documentation together with the auditor’s report is reviewed by a moderator. If the moderator is satisfied that the criteria in all ten areas have been met, then the faculty can sign off the process. The approval of individual short course descriptors would follow, through a separate process.

— If Liverpool John Moores University approves a partner where the University plans to carry out all delivery and assessment, the partner approval process would be a lighter touch, with the focus being on physical resources (there would be a resource trip, including an external if there is a need for specialist equipment). If the company carries out some or all of the delivery and assessment, there would be a full partner approval process.

— Where the University of Westminster has accredited a training provider to deliver the same short course at several sites, it would delegate the approval of delivery sites to the training provider, if all that is required is a teaching room. This delegated power would be approved at the approval stage for the training provider, with minimum requirements identified in the contract and assured through the monitoring processes.

6 Development and approval of courses

Where awarding institutions are approving awards, the processes used are basically the same as for a validated collaborative programme – i.e. programme validation and periodic revalidation, with external involvement. The approval of small awards in an employer-provided programme often apply streamlined approval processes (particularly where there is a university-wide awards board to consider and approve all awards of this type, at all employers), but essentially all quality assurance issues are covered. Most awarding institutions have paper-based processes for the approval of stand-alone credit, with external involvement as appropriate.

The mapping of in-company training to FHEQ and subject benchmarks is generally carried out at the developmental stage of approval. FHEQ was seen to be a more useful benchmark than subject benchmark statements at this stage. The translation of subject benchmark statements into work-based learning outcomes was seen to be more difficult than translating into traditional programme outcomes, often because the levels of credit typically involved are only likely to satisfy a small proportion of the subject benchmark statements in a discipline.
The nature of externals involved in course approval varies across awarding institutions, and will depend upon whether awards or stand-alone credit is being delivered. In some awarding institutions, an external with knowledge of the work-based environment would be used. For instance, the University of Westminster appoint an external to the accreditation board who has experience in work-based learning as they are assuring the quality of the learning rather than the subject. The subject-specific content is assured by a specialist link adviser who acts as an external moderator, and is part of the accreditation board (however, if the learning outcomes of the accredited programme are subject-specific then Westminster would appoint an additional subject specialist external to the programme). However, other awarding institutions insist on the use of externals with specialist knowledge of the discipline being approved (on the basis that one of the external’s primary functions is to approve the standard of the proposed courses). The former approach is more likely to be used for the significant proportion of in-company training that tends to focus on leadership and management skills of employees, because as experienced academics these externals typically have an understanding of the level of skills required. For award/credit of a specialist nature then knowledge of the discipline is paramount. For instance, the standard of a Masters level, credit-rated short course for doctors and surgeons in advanced practice techniques could not be judged by a generic external.

Three of the awarding institutions involved in this project do not externally approve stand-alone credit, along with several other institutions not involved. In the case of the University of Hertfordshire, generic credit-rated short course descriptors were developed and approved at each academic level, including external approval of both the process adopted and the standard of each of the descriptors (see Case study 4). The approval process for individual short courses is internal only, but using a generic template that has been externally approved. However, in its March 2009 QAA Institutional audit report, an advisable recommendation was made that the University “revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment”. It is therefore likely that an external approval stage will be reluctantly added to this process, particularly for credit-rated short courses delivered external to the University.

Involvement of appropriate university staff at an early stage is key to the approval process, most notably in agreeing the level and credit rating of the proposed course of study. In particular, they need to have good understanding of the academic standard required of the chosen level, and if appropriate need to be able to give advice to the
company on what additional development is needed to achieve that standard. However, there is also a need for university staff to understand that this is not their course material, and they should not impose their views on it. These courses are mostly demand-driven, and as long as the standard and quality of learning is appropriate then it should be supported.

Case study 4: Course approval processes – strategies for a ‘lighter touch’
Universities have each adopted slightly different models for the accreditation of the courses offered by companies. These models will be dependent upon the institution’s policies on (i) awards (small awards, shell frameworks, named award titles, etc.) and (ii) credit (minimum unit of credit, who assesses, etc.):

— Liverpool John Moores University operates a fast-track mechanism for the initial approval of new CPD programmes if there is pressure from an external client for rapid approval. A faculty would request a paper-based initial approval process, requesting feedback on any concerns about the CPD proposal that may need to be discussed by approval committee members. If no concerns have been received by the deadline (within five working days of the original email), the Chair takes Chair’s action, which is ratified at the next approval committee meeting. If concerns are expressed about the CPD award proposal, Chair’s action will not be taken and the proposal will be considered at the next approval committee meeting.

— Where small CPD awards are being validated (from 4 to 60 credit points), Liverpool John Moores University use a smaller panel than a traditional validation panel, and conduct either a validation event or a ‘virtual’ event, with comments being given on documentation. The size of the panel and the validation event ‘mode’ will be determined by the size of the award being approved, as well as the nature of the partner.

— The University of Derby have a fast-track approval process, which is not currently used for collaborative provision but could be in the future. If the award is less than 60 credits (postgraduate) or less than or equal to 60 credits (undergraduate), then the Lifelong Learning Scheme has delegated powers to approve an award – it must be lifelong-learning-related.

— The University of Bradford are adopting a shell framework for the approval and consideration of some awards, with a ‘light touch’ approval process for pathways or awards within this framework. This would be managed by the academic school, by Chair’s action (Chair of the Course Approval and Review Team).

— The University of Hertfordshire have developed generic credit-rated short course descriptors at each academic level (from levels 4 to 8). These generic descriptors
have adopted learning outcomes based upon the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors, and individual credit-rated short course descriptors identify an appropriate selection of these outcomes. The approval process for individual short courses is internal only, but using generic templates that were externally approved when they were first developed. This document (a) enables the short course to be formally approved, (b) provides the necessary data for the student record system, and (c) provides the information for a website entry. In this way, new credit-rated short courses could be approved in as little as three weeks from submission of the draft descriptor.

7 Delivery, assessment and support

Some awarding institutions identify a mismatch in employer and institution expectations of credit and academic level as a challenge in the initial stages of curriculum development and approval. Some employers anticipate credit at a higher academic level than the university is prepared to approve. In this respect, guidance for employers on academic credit and level in a form that does not require significant experience of a higher education environment would be invaluable. This is discussed further at the end of this report (see Making the partnership work, below).

Approaches to delivery and assessment vary significantly among awarding institutions. Some insist on both delivering and assessing all accredited in-company training (this model is not the focus of this project). Others have approval processes to assure themselves that the company is able to deliver the course content. In many of these cases, universities also offer support for companies to deliver the course and assess to an appropriate standard (often, this would incur an additional fee).

Awarding institutions are more likely to be involved in developing assessment with the partner, as this is an area where the employer is likely to have less experience or confidence. The long-term intention in most cases is that the company should assess if they are delivering the course (with the support of the awarding institution). It was acknowledged that often the company does not wish to undertake responsibility for assessment, as they feel that the awarding institution is far more able to understand assessment needs.

Concern has been raised over the potential for over-assessment with small units of credit (e.g. five credits), due the nature of some assessment methods and difficulty in scaling down. This has been identified as a developmental need, not just for company trainers but also for academic staff.
Case study 5: Support for in-company assessment

Many companies have identified assessment, particularly assessing at an appropriate academic standard, as a developmental need. This topic is covered in more detail in another project. However, two programmes worthy of note were identified during this project:

— University of Derby Corporate, through the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning (who are responsible for all partnership provision at the University) provides a staff development programme for all employers who are assessing as part of the course, covering the administrative systems (for hand-in, etc.), plagiarism, marking, assessment criteria, grades and grading descriptors, feedback, feed forward, moderation, etc. This would usually include a joint marking workshop, with discussions on matters such as ‘failing students’ and how feedback should be constructed including the need to reflect the language of University of Derby grading descriptors and feed forward. At the assessment stage, all employer-marked assessments would initially be second-marked by University staff and this would be used to continue the developmental process. After time, with confidence in the company’s ability to assess to the required standard, the arrangement develops into one where the University moderates the work.

— The University of Westminster also mandate a training programme for the staff of those companies undertaking assessment themselves, unless the provider can demonstrate sufficiently and relevantly experienced delivery staff. The assessment workshop is delivered at the University, and allows staff to demonstrate competence at the relevant level.

8 Confirming credit and awards

One awarding institution offers the possibility of the company managing the assessment board process, under controlled circumstances and with university representation. However, all others feel strongly that responsibility for assessment and award boards should rest firmly with the awarding institution, in order to satisfy the expectations of Section 2 of the QAA Code of practice, precept A1, which states: “The awarding institution is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name.” In turn, this responsibility is delegated either to the faculty or to university-wide assessment boards, where they exist.

The scheduling of examination boards is a pragmatic decision. Small numbers of students or small volumes of credit are often scheduled alongside regular faculty assessment boards held at the awarding institution, according to normal timescales (usually at the end of each term or semester). Alternatively, the University of Derby
considers small ‘generic’ awards together within the Lifelong Learning Scheme assessment boards, which meet three times a year. However, where the volume warrants separate boards they usually take place at the company – at Liverpool John Moores University, a Foundation Degree for the Merseyside Police Authority requires ten examination boards annually. This regularity of examination boards needs to be negotiated with the company concerned – their needs and expectations for feedback on assessment performance will vary greatly.

Some universities grade performance on individual units of credit, and others mark on a pass/fail basis. This again is a matter of negotiation with the company. However, with small units of stand-alone credit and small awards (i.e. for less than 60 credits) a pass/fail criterion is often perfectly satisfactory for all concerned, and will avoid the extra quality assurance burden in confirming a level of performance in addition to confirming that a standard has been met.

External examiner involvement in assessment is fairly consistent among awarding institutions. They are often the existing external examiners on a related university programme. Any programmes that receive a university award have an external examiner appointed, using standard criteria. External examining arrangements for stand-alone credit are also fairly consistent. Examiners will approve assessments, consider samples of student work and submit a report to the university. At the University of Hertfordshire, credit-rated short courses that are delivered several times a year are externally reviewed on a sampling basis (typically, 50% of the instances of delivery). While most prepare separate annual reports, some include their comments about the partnership in conjunction with those for the university programme. The requirement to attend assessment boards is variable, however. At the University of Hertfordshire, external examiners for credit-rated short courses are not required to attend Short Course Assessment Boards but will, prior to the Board, have moderated samples of marked student work and will, subsequent to the Board, ratify the decisions taken by it.

As is the case for externals for course approval, the nature of external examiners varies across awarding institutions. Some external examiners are appointed because of their knowledge of the work-based environment, others for their specialist knowledge of the discipline (on the basis that one of the external’s primary responsibilities is to confirm academic standards in the discipline). The nature of the accredited course will determine the nature of the external, bearing in mind that primary responsibility and the fact that academic standards are currently high on the national agenda. It is generally accepted that for award/credit of a specialist nature using an external examiner with knowledge of the discipline is important.
Case study 6: Assessment boards

Two common approaches to assessment boards are described in the following paragraphs, in both cases resulting in efficiencies compared to the traditional assessment board approach:

— The University of Hertfordshire CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer) programme board acts as the award board for all candidates offered awards for aggregated credit that is not aligned to a specific award. The University has introduced ‘Open Studies’ awards within the CATS programme for these candidates, available at Diploma, Bachelors degree and Masters degree levels. In order to qualify for an Open Studies award, it is necessary for a candidate to have acquired the necessary amount of credit at the appropriate level. It is possible to give a more specific title for an award if there is an appropriate measure of coherence within the credit being offered. For example if a candidate had a collection of credit that is predominantly health-related (and can be demonstrated to have broadly met the needs of the relevant subject benchmark statements), it might be appropriate to give an award title of ‘Health Studies’, rather than an award in ‘Open Studies’. The CATS board is also responsible for the award of the University’s small awards (Certificate in Professional Development, Diploma in Professional Development). In this manner, those who have accumulated credit through accredited in-company training can achieve a generic award without the need for an award to be validated at the company.

— The University of Westminster ‘Accreditation Board’ has several functions. Firstly, it forms the final stage of the accreditation process, where the company and the standards and quality of its credit are formally approved. Secondly, it acts as an Assessment Board, meeting at least three times a year to award credit for those registered on accredited courses. Students have a deadline identified for assessment submission, just before the Accreditation Board meets. The University appoints one external to the Accreditation Board (and additional externals as the work of the Board increases) experienced in work-based learning programmes. They also have responsibilities at two levels – external members for course approval and external examiners for ongoing quality assurance.

9 Monitoring and review

Where awarding institutions are approving large awards rather than stand-alone credit, the monitoring and review processes used are often the same as for a validated collaborative programme – i.e. use of ‘link tutors’, external examiners reports, student feedback, annual monitoring reports, periodic review, etc., but with the inclusion of
employer feedback. For small awards and stand-alone credit, a number of procedures have been introduced to assure a ‘fit-for-purpose’ approach to monitoring and review – however, the principles are unchanged.

10 Making the partnership work

One significant factor that affects the relationship between an awarding institution and a company is a potential lack of understanding of each other’s needs. The introduction of central university business engagement units and the use of groups such as EBTA are helping universities to understand and respond to the needs of business. One significant driver for universities is the need to address the expectations of external reference points such as FHEQ, QAA benchmark statements and the standards of Professional and Statutory-Regulatory Bodies. It is a challenge to explain these expectations to companies in a manner that does not require several years of experience in a higher education environment, and a challenge that QAA and other bodies could address by publishing easily understandable explanations of their standards, codes of practice, etc. It is often difficult for those who are immersed in such expectations to be able to address such a different audience – maybe it would be better for an employer to be given the job of preparing such guidance?

11 Summary of key findings

In summary:

— Processes for the external accreditation of employers’ own in-house training are not currently well developed, but where they have been a range of processes are in use.

— A recurring challenge to awarding institutions is to what extent they can use proportionate measures in the quality assurance of stand-alone credit, particularly where the volume of credit is small. This report highlights where such measures have been implemented, but many awarding institutions retain measures developed for large collaborative awards, possibly due to uncertainty over how QAA might respond at Institutional audit.

— There are differences in opinion across the sector on the value of accrediting small amounts of learning, and the usefulness of the FHEQ in the process. The potential for over-assessment of small units of credit has been identified as a developmental need, for all concerned.

— There is a need for approaches to quality assurance that are responsive to employers’ timescales. Employers tend to expect quicker turnaround times, and many awarding institutions have been criticised for being too slow. In turn, employers need to appreciate that in order for an awarding institution to accredit their training there is a need for academic rigour.
Negotiating the size and credit value of work-based learning projects

Caroline Ramsey and Morag Harvey
The Open University

Steve Partridge and Barbara Workman
Middlesex University

1 Contributing partners

The Open University hosts four centres of excellence in teaching and learning (CETL), one of which is the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL. Caroline Ramsey and Morag Harvey are both fellows of that CETL.

Middlesex University has a long standing association with work-based learning having won a Queen’s Anniversary Prize for innovation in 1996, one of two CETLs awarded for work-based learning in 2005 and HEFCE Strategic Development Employer Engagement Funding in 2009. Steve Partridge is senior lecturer work-based learning and accreditation at Middlesex University. Barbara Workman is the Director of the Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning, Middlesex University.

2 Introduction

Work-based learning projects provide something of a problem to a modular system within higher education. For the most part, the modular system is built around a tutor determined syllabus of knowledge, skills and competencies. A negotiated, work-based learning project, on the other hand, is very much an emergent process, and while some learning outcomes can be identified at the outset, the very nature of negotiated work-based learning will throw up surprising learning opportunities. For this reason, the process of negotiating work-based learning is crucially important both to the learning journey of the learner and also to the quality control systems of the accrediting university.

Work-based projects, or evidence-based initiatives as The Open University calls them, are an essential component of the majority of work-based learning programmes
as they provide the opportunity for the learner to explore their own context and work community, focused on a relevant area of current work practice. They may be desk-work-based but usually include fieldwork that is situated within the work context and are bounded by the learners own role, sphere of influence and profession. Work-based projects aim to develop personal and professional practice through research and development and to discover and develop knowledge from within that practice (Costley and Armsby, 2000). Therefore they have to be individually negotiated to meet learners’ and organisations’ requirements and must reflect real-time, real-work issues, but also respond to the vagaries of workplace changes and uncertainties.

It is notoriously difficult to get an agreed definition of work-based learning. Various different terms, for example, ‘practice-based’, ‘work-based’, ‘workplace’, ‘work-related’ and ‘work experience’, all cover related learning activities that also hide significant differences in practice and learning outcomes. Garnett (2007) defines it as “learning which is at a higher education level which primarily takes place at and through work in order not only to meet individual development aspirations but also the performative aims of a relevant organisation (usually the employer)”. This means that there are often three participants in work-based learning – the learner, the workplace and the university – each with a different perspective of what should be accomplished through the learning activities. Consequently when defining a work-based project within a negotiated work-based programme, the quality assurance problems that tutors supporting negotiated work-based learning face are clearly evident. In Table 1, syllabus-structured learning is contrasted with work-based learning.

Table 1: comparison of work-based and structured learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus-structured</th>
<th>Work-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— determined in advance</td>
<td>— emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— tutor designed</td>
<td>— learner centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— knowledge authority clear</td>
<td>— knowledge authority contested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= A defined package of learning</td>
<td>= A varying learning journey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where an academic course team or tutor designs it, determining the size of a module is reasonably straightforward, and while mistakes might be made, for example in filling a module with too many topics, the very fact that a tutor is determining the syllabus to be followed allows for greater flexibility in, say, reducing the prominence of
a topic from a module. This flexibility exists within a work-based learning project, but it is negotiated between tutor and learner, rather than being within the control of an academic tutor. It is this feature that often leads to the most transformative learning, but does create quality assurance problems for an institution.

The second contrast that foregrounds the quality issue of negotiating and managing the size of a project lies within the differing forms of work-based learning. Table 2 contrasts the work-based learning involved in accrediting competence to practice with the work-based learning aimed at supporting continuous professional development.

Table 2: comparison of accrediting competence to practice and professional capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessing competence to practice</th>
<th>Developing professional capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— work-based mentoring resources in place</td>
<td>— usually no funded mentoring to be called upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— clearly defined competencies</td>
<td>— contextual and emergent criteria for evaluating learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— with clearly defined assessment criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As healthcare professionals or teachers engage in their practice-based (work-based) learning, there are clear resources and practices available to be drawn upon in managing the size and time demands of any work-based learning involved in assessing their competence to be accredited to practice. This is not usually the case for people working in other professions or organisations, or where work-based learning is aimed at continuing professional development. So, the project negotiation process in work-based learning is problematic and vitally important, not only to maintain quality standards but also in supporting deep and relevant learning for the learners.

Consequently, this project focused on one aspect of that negotiation process: the size and credit value of a project. Our interest at the outset was in whether there was a consistency of approach across universities to the negotiation and also to explore the processes used to manage the emergent nature of work-based learning. To explore these two facets of negotiated work-based learning, we conducted five in-depth interviews with tutors and four additional interviews with learners. We used in-depth, qualitative interviews, both with individuals, and in two cases with groups, to explore the negotiation and management processes of particular work-based learning projects.
3 Negotiating and managing work-based projects

As we spoke with tutors and learners from a range of universities about their experience of designing work-based learning projects, we were able to identify three distinct stages in the process. These were:

1. preparing the learners;
2. negotiating the project size;
3. managing the project process.

We shall explore each of these stages in turn.

3.1 Preparing the learners

A key word that was repeated time and time again during our interviews was ‘experience’. For both tutors and learners, what made the sizing process easier was their experience of designing previous work-based projects or of working in conventional, classroom programmes of higher education. This was reasonably straightforward for the academic tutors, but learners had to build this experience. Several of them spoke of their experience building over a series of projects, but that still means that learners starting a work-based learning journey need support through the project design process.

All the universities we spoke to had some formal introduction to the writing of learning contracts (LC) and work-based project proposals. LCs formalise the negotiation process, usually of the work-based programme itself, but may be used to define the expectations and outcomes at specific stages of the programme, possibly through distinct projects at transition stages in the programme, for example when 120 credits at a particular level are to be completed. Some LCs are used for particular pieces of work, such as a specific project; some scope the programme as a whole. LCs provide the quality assurance process that allows individually negotiated programmes to fit into a validated framework and yet demonstrate that all the university quality assurance processes have been met in relation to meeting learning outcomes and robust assessment processes.

The LCs in use either had specific ‘taught’ modules or used online learning contract ‘wizards’. The formal modules varied between 10 and 15 credits (an example of the University of Portsmouth’s Learning Management Unit is given below). The online learning contract ‘wizards’, or expert systems, guided learners through a structured series of questions, with interactive space for learners to note and save their responses. The University of Derby use the University for Industry (UFI) ‘Learning at Work’ website and The Open University have designed their own system.
There is a noteworthy difference between The Open University’s approach to learning contracts and that of other universities. Most work-based learning programmes use learning contracts to shape a year or a whole programme of learning. The Open University asks learners to work through the LC process for each of their projects. Both processes have their advantages in managing the learning journey and our inquiry did not find that either approach was an improvement on the other, but the chosen approach depended on the type of work-based learning programme. That is, if it was negotiated learning throughout then there tended to be an LC that covered the whole programme, but if it was only negotiated at placement opportunities then an LC may be devised to focus on that specific placement activity or project. All of these formal processes include three essential steps:

— a space for learners to consider for themselves:
  — their learning needs;
  — their working environment (work is very broadly defined to include home, social and voluntary sectors);
  — the opportunities offered by their working context for learning and developmental projects;
  — any ethical issues, including data protection or copyright that might arise from their proposed project activity;
  — proposed timescales;

— a space to consider what resources learners will need to support their learning. This might include:
  — formally taught, classroom modules;
  — short, formal, work-based training courses;
  — tutor supported, structured reading guides;
  — a programme of skills-based reading and development;
  — guidance from academic tutors and work context mentors;

— a space to consider how learners will demonstrate their learning. This would be likely to include:
  — the kinds of project that would develop and demonstrate learning;
  — appropriate learning outcomes and sometimes assessment criteria;
  — potential methods (for example, reports, artefacts and presentations) for mediating their learning to academic and work context assessors.

A fourth process is significant at some universities, for example Middlesex University, and involves the contribution of a programme of work or project to an employing organisation or profession (particularly if there is co-funding). This is likely to involve:
employer permission/agreement that the project is appropriate, within the learners sphere of activity, with access/data available to the learner;
— identification of the benefits to the organisation of the learners programme in general and the project specifically;
— an acceptance that how the project will align with the academic programme specification may be explicit or implicit within this.

Such processes involve learners in a considerable amount of investigation, reflection and writing. They are supported through this process by academic tutors – working mostly through email, fax, online discussion boards and telephone calls – and in many cases by learner peer groups, such as action learning sets. Additionally those universities who did not use the online ‘ wizards’ provided learners with some form of handbook. Many tutors stressed that the iterative nature of building learning contracts and designing work-based learning projects meant that learners needed very detailed advice and guidance in written form. The majority of tutors interviewed reported that this written guidance had grown ever more detailed over the years. Conversations and correspondence between tutors and learners then tended to involve a process of clarifying regulations, examples and suggestions as well as being able to focus on the particularities of a learner’s work and learning context.

Example 1: Learning Management Unit at the University of Portsmouth’s Partnership Programme
Alongside each level of the range of named work-based programmes, the University of Portsmouth run a small 10 or 15 point learning management unit. This unit comprises four elements:
— a learning management day course early in the programme;
— ongoing individual tutorial support from Partnership Programme staff;
— a learning contract;
— six-weekly progress reports.

Tutors and learners from Portsmouth told us that the learning management day course was a very full programme and hard work for all involved, but respondents reflected on the importance of this day. Another element that was stressed was the organic nature of the learning contract; it changed and developed as the work-based projects matured. (This point and the six-weekly progress reports are discussed later in relation to how project size was managed through the course). Following the learning
management day, contact between learners and tutors tended to be done by email, although on occasion learners would call in for face-to-face meetings.

A final aspect of the learning management day was the Learning Management Handbook. This is much more than a conventional ‘module guide', and is a detailed piece of work to which the learners can refer as they build and then carry out their learning contract. As with the online learning contract wizards, having detailed, printed or online guidance was considered a vital aide-memoire for learners. Many tutors we spoke to told us of how these handbooks or online guides had developed and been refined over time so as to create a robust, general framework for a considerable variety of particular learner issues.

Example 2: The Open University learning contract wizard
Essentially, the ‘wizard’ is a structured series of questions that guides the learners through their thinking about what project they will do. Lying behind the screens is an e-portfolio system that allows the learners to type in their thoughts and reflections, saving them so that next time they work on their learning contract earlier thoughts are still there to be amended and developed if necessary.

The screens below shows a typical page, with some guidance notes, questions and space for the learner's reflections (which are kept confidential). There’s also a link to a case study (second screenshot) and also a link that reveals feedback and further questions to help the learner think through this aspect of their work-based project (third screenshot).
3.2 Negotiating the project size

All the tutors contacted had considerable experience of syllabus-based higher education. They, therefore, had a confidence in ‘knowing’, or perhaps ‘feeling’, what was an appropriate size of learning. Additionally, several had considerable experience of working with learners on research dissertations, which they used as a baseline when comparing to the size of a work-based learning project. Learners quickly built on past experience of negotiating and scoping previous projects when judging an appropriate size and credit value of new projects for their programme.
While the LCs are a tool to scope the projects within the overall programme, the project size and learning process is commonly negotiated through dialogue with the learner and their academic tutor. Other tutors may be involved, such as their work-based tutor or mentor. A key starting point in the dialogue process is the modular structure within which all our respondents’ work-based projects are located. Project size is not negotiated blind. Learners generally have the choice of working with projects that would need to fit into 15-, 20-, 30- or 40-credit modules. The actual module sizes depend on the modular structure of that particular university. So, right from the start the learners and tutors have some indication as to the size of that project. This size is generally considered in relation to the final report word count and time needed to do the project.

Example 3
This short extract from an interview gives an indication as to the issues that were shaping this particular credit award. The learner had previously been discussing a short project on report writing, and then, with his tutor, recalled designing a longer work-based project:

Participants: Jane, a tutor; Tom, a learner; and an interviewer (Int).

Jane: … but before that, didn’t you do a longer project?

Tom: Yes, on the initial one, there was a 30.

Jane: It was much chunkier, wasn’t it, because there were lots of different things that were involved in it? There was some skills development; there was some desk-based research in terms of looking at theories of remediation, and looking at how the work was currently done in your company. So it was a much chunkier piece of work, and actually related to a specific project that he was developing. We’d kind of, consolidate it, everything that he’d done so far.

7 This extract was taken from a longer interview at a Midlands university. We have not used names of individuals or the university in order to protect anonymity.
That was a level 5 module, I believe, we came at the end of his level 5, and summarised everything that he’d done in level 5, and pulled it all together in a summary piece of work. It was chunky, wasn’t it Tom?

Tom: It was, yes. I’m sorry; I’ve been looking through them all this morning.

Int: Oh right, so could you say, perhaps, Tom, what was helpful in the way that the volume was worked out? I mean, Anne’s mentioned the fact of looking at the notion or number of hours. What sort of help did you get in terms of your understanding? Did you get an actual document to read through, to understand, or was it more a dialogue?

Tom: I think that it was a more a dialogue that was helpful really, there was the publication that they’ve got [unclear] through work. But really, it’s been Jane and Debbie (another tutor), and the dialogue with them which has helped me to put it together and make it more sensible. Probably the most useful part for me was the actual, not so much the time, but the actual word size of what was required.

Int: So the word count, is that right?

Tom: Yes I mean, there’s so much information out there, that meant it was probably most helpful, to pick out the most common types of relevant information, rather than having an actual, I don’t know how many hours I’ve worked on a project, probably double what I expected. But really, the dialogue with Anne and my tutor, that’s been most use…

Tom’s story of a project size negotiation includes words like ‘feeling’, and terms like ‘chunkier’ have a quite physical sense to them. Notice how that initial feeling is then built upon by some clear-cut tasks that will build up a sophisticated evaluation of the anticipated project size. It is the process of dialogue, often conducted by email, that refines what is an initial ‘feel’ into a clearly reasoned definition of project size. As we shall see later, this process of moving towards a sound judgement of the project size is an important aspect of the learner’s learning in and through work-based projects.

Tutors were very keen to stress that loose terms such as ‘project word count’ and ‘time calculations’ were only the starting points of discussions. They are far too approximate and have too much potential to multiple interpretations. For example,
tutors from Portsmouth’s Partnership Programme pointed out the difficulty of being too precise about the time needed for a project, by questioning the balance between time taken on a work-based project that was part of the daily job requirement and the time taken that was focused on the learning from that work project. Of course, project report word counts ceased to have any meaning when tutors and learners agreed on the use of a public presentation as the mode of delivering the assessed work. Essentially, there are judgements to be made on these issues. It is not clear-cut and several of the tutors argued that the real risk in trying to be too precise and too keen to fix rules that will cover every eventuality in a project size negotiation, is that learners and tutors will miss genuine learning opportunities.

The use of assignment word counts and time required to undertake a project should therefore be considered more as prompts to dialogue than as guiding parameters in quality assurance terms. Indeed, the discussion we’ve noted between ‘Tom’ and his tutor ‘Jane’ above, gives a clearer idea of some of the issues that determined the judgement of project size. Apparently simple details, such as word count and project time demands provided a tool, by which learners could initiate their thinking about their projects, ruling out some possibilities because they were too large or too small for the given module size. Additionally, we argue below, that these two terms were actually more symbolic and represented more subtle learning factors that inevitably affect work-based learning projects.

3.3 Managing the project process
An important factor in negotiated work-based learning is that projects are emergent. They do not stay neatly within boundaries that learners and tutors originally set up for them. There is nothing going wrong here; it is just in the nature of work-based learning that work projects tend either to grow or wither as they develop. Just as dialogue is important in arriving at the initial definition of the size of a work-based project, so continual communication is vital to the ongoing management of that work-based project. Tutors spoke ruefully of times when learners ‘went quiet’ on them. All too frequently an absence of contact from learners would be the mark of a project where the learner was encountering problems.

Example 4
In order to encourage frequent communication, the Portsmouth Partnership Programme requires learners to submit a range of 500-word progress report every six weeks. These progress reports form part of the assessment of the Learning
Management Unit, which we have mentioned above. The progress reports include:

The six-week reports (about 500 words) that refer to:

— the progress made with developing the learner’s learning contract;
— learning from the introductory Learning Management course;
— progress and difficulties encountered with work-based and university study;
— actions planned and remedies sought.

Additionally, mid-contract reports include the topics above and additional comments on:

— progress achieved with the learner’s studies, compared with the timetable in their learning contract;
— actions taken or planned in response to departures from the original programme;
— quality issues relating to the Partnership Programme and other University provision;
— results received (reflections on successes and failures);
— the relevance of the learner’s learning to their career and professional development;
— the benefits of their learning to their employer’s organisational interests.

Finally, an end-of-contract report is a self-appraisal commenting on:

— quality issues about the Partnership Programme and other university provisions;
— the learner’s achievements set against the original aims of their learning contract;
— the relevance of their learning to career and professional development;
— the benefit of their learning to their employer;
— their future career and learning plans.

Tutors also stressed that a project changing its size as learners were undertaking it did not have to be considered a problem. Indeed, on occasion it was the ground for further deep learning. Where projects do significantly change size, the problem is that the project grows and the learner struggles to keep their project within manageable limits. Here tutor–learner discussions tend to move in one of two directions. First, tutors can help learners determine how to restrict a project and manage it more successfully. Secondly, where the project unavoidably grows and where the learner’s job requires them to complete the growing project, tutors help the learners to refocus their attention and efforts on particular issues where there is a potential for the most interesting and helpful learning, or where the cut-off point in recording that in the academic project should be. This can be a profoundly helpful experience, as learners are forced to consider which part of their work is actually helping them learn and how important academic issues are affecting the practice of their job.
Example 5
Steve Partridge, from Middlesex University made this point during the preparation of our report:

An interesting point about a project ‘going wrong’ is that this is often where the most valuable learning emerges, so the ‘failure’, if you like, of the project can be as much a positive as a negative. There is also the fact that many work-based projects at Middlesex are often incomplete when the actual academic work is handed in – this fact is acknowledged and explored in the project report to exploit the learning. This has a knock-on effect, of course, on the ‘effort’ variable (see below) as the learner continues to work on the project at work, but stops working on the academic project.

4 Discussion
The emphasis placed by interviewees on the importance of experience could well hide some sophisticated use of evidence and inferential analysis that is implicit in the negotiation process. Two factors were mentioned by learners and tutors in articulating how they made sense of the credit value of their projects. The first factor was the word count required of the project report. The second factor was the amount of time expected to complete the project. In both cases we argue that these two factors are actually the headline of a more nuanced and detailed analysis of an array of sub-factors. We outline how we see these sub-factors below.

Figure 1: Project report word count
We suggest that the message that learners and tutors take from module assessment delineation of required word count includes some implicit assumptions about:

a. the complexity of a topic
   While the complexity of a work-based topic would have its most significant impact on the credit level of a module, still it will also affect the time required, i.e. the credit volume, to conduct the project. Issues involved in this factor would include:
   — implications as to the level of description and analysis required to write up a project report;
   — implications as to the number and complexity of the variables that will affect the learners' understanding of their learning.

b. contribution of academic ideas
   In programmes where work-based projects are expected to show an understanding and use of academic ideas and theories:
   — how much understanding of academic ideas is to be articulated in a report?
   — the requirement for experience to be made sense of using academic frameworks.

c. reflective capacity
   In some WBL programmes, learning and knowledge is understood as being located in the workplace as well as in within academic disciplines. In such cases, an alternative understanding of the requirements implied by project report word counts might include:
   — the space and time required by a greater or lesser sophistication in reflection;
   — the need for careful and thorough inquiry upon which to base the learner's reflection.
Accounting for the amount of time that a project might take was not a straightforward calculation. Most of the interviewees started from a basis point of calculating hours work for each credit point, so a 20-credit module/project should be expected to take 200 hours of learning work. This, however, was only the starting point. For example, several tutors took care to point out that they were only considering the time spent learning, for in many, if not most, work-based projects learners were doing work that their employment required of them anyway. Nobody was able to furnish us with a mathematical equation for working this out anyway. Rather, most told us of an iterative process by which learners and tutors reached an agreement.

Pedagogic principles of devising a taught module size could offer some guidelines and be replicable in devising the time or size that a work-based project might take, but those principles that are used to inform a higher education curriculum are based on classroom learning and contact hours where specific content is communicated. However, within work-based learning the curriculum is the workplace and the learner has his or her job to do alongside project activity. Consequently hard and fast rules and ratios of hours of academic endeavour do not translate well to work-based learning. Additionally, much of the project learning is self-directed and while tutors can guide and facilitate the learning experience, the actual ‘content’ is specific to the individual learner’s needs, and must be mediated by them. This involves additional learning skills as part of the project process and impacts the effort involved. However, four variables were identified that shaped tutors’ assessment of the time demands of a project.
Table 3: variables impacting on project time demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>in particular seeking parity of time demands with conventionally ‘taught’ modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>any work-based project has an element of risk involved, colleagues who won’t help the learner, extra jobs that interrupt a project, work reallocation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>the difficulty and complexity of a project will have an effect on time needed to conduct it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill building</td>
<td>linked to effort in some ways, but if a project makes considerable personal and professional development demands of a learner, then time will be needed for this development that may not be as evident in a non-work-based module</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Case studies for discussion
The following two brief descriptions are both from degrees for qualified professionals, who were using work-based learning as part of their continuous professional development and to top up from a DipHE to a degree. We think that they provide an interesting basis of debate of the different factors that affect project size that we have discussed above, and illustrate the complexity in making a judgement about size and negotiating the processes of learning.

Case studies
The following are summaries of two work-based project proposals:

Case study 1
Proposed WBL project explores the handling of risk assessments and incident reporting procedures in my place of work (Mental health trust). Risk assessment forms a vital part in mental health nursing, it is good practice to assess for risk in all situations one encounters in mental health, but more importantly to come up with an effective risk management plan. I have taken personal interest in the matter as a result of incidents resulting from lack or bad management of risk. I hope to address this problem by highlighting to my colleagues the significance of effectively managing risk, resulting in difficulties of providing continuous and effective patient care. I expect my employer to benefit from the project as I hope to reduce the labour costs incurred by employing additional staff to cover absenteeism resulting from incidents that were poorly managed, and resulting in sick leave. The project will assist in improving the standard of care and the safety of nursing staff. This project will compliment and consolidate the learning acquired through the previous taught module on risk assessment.

Case study 2
This project will draw together everything I have learnt in the previous three modules, culminating in a project that can provide useful outcomes for specific work-based activity. The aim of my project is to explore the benefits of dance within the current education system. By relating my project to my current role as a dance teacher I can take a self-reflective approach as the subject matter will be of relevance to me and my employers and will tie into my CPD activities. I will also be able to draw on the research methods module and literature review. I have designed my project to support my work in education as this can be a controversial area between teachers, pupils and parents/carers. Dance is sometimes looked upon as a subject that does not hold much importance and relevance in today’s educational system. Through my project I would like to delve into the different viewpoints on this subject matter. Through research into carefully chosen literature and data collection and analysis I will argue that dance is a relevant subject in this day and age. I will work towards proving it to be advantageous to those pupils who study it. As my school is a performing arts college, my employers have given me their full support towards this project.

There are ethical issues associated with this project as I work with under-16s, so I will require parental consent before any child contributes to my project. Any research that I do will be done so that their education is not disrupted and should anyone wish to withdraw they can do so without risk or prejudice.


These two case study illustrations are offered as talking points for discussion with a view to untangling the facilitation insights that are required by tutors in order to make the project process work.

Suggested task
1. Use the word count and time required factors in the figures above to work out what credit value you would give to the above two projects.
2. Can you see any ways that projects could either be developed or curtailed, so as to fit within the parameters of your own institution's module sizes?
3. Discuss your conclusions with a colleague.

Conclusion
The process of negotiating project sizes is often based on tutor experience of taught modules, which is mediated by the time span in which a project must be conducted and
the word count designated to satisfy academic regulations. The skill is in the facilitation process whereby a project is negotiated between the learner and the tutor to make it fit into QA requirements, whether that involves curtailing or stretching the learning activities. In work-based learning the project often continues even when the academic components have been completed and submitted, which is not usually the case for taught academic programmes, but that does allow the learning to continue.

7 Summary of key findings
There are significant differences between learning through syllabus-structured learning and work-based learning that have a bearing on work-based projects. There appear to be three stages in negotiating and managing work-based projects: preparing the learners, negotiating the project size, and managing the project process. Preparing the learner usually involves a learning contract of sorts, whether that is for a programme as a whole, or just one project. Negotiating the project size draws on the experiences mainly of the tutor, but also on the learner’s own experience of meeting requirements of previous projects in relation to word count and time taken to execute the project. Managing the project process tends to be emergent and dynamic and has to be responsive to the learning opportunities, both positive and negative, that arise during the process.

The size of project, which is defined by the academic framework that constitutes the learners programme, is tempered by the complexity of the project, the contribution of academic ideas and the reflective capacity required to draw it together and make sense of it. The time span in which the project is undertaken has some bearing upon the process, but requires a balance of the risk involved by the learner in being able to do the project, equity with taught modules, effort required in relation to engagement with complexity of ideas and the personal and professional skills that must be built through the project in order to complete it.

8 References
Managing employer and cross-institutional partnerships

Janet Lange and James Dawson
Centre for Employability through the Humanities
University of Central Lancashire

Contributing partners and summary of case studies

Case study 1: University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) – School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors (University Certificates and Foundation Degree programmes in swiftwater rescue)
Rescue 3 (UK), a small private training organisation that leads the way in swiftwater rescue training in the UK and Ireland, delivers courses for many UK emergency services including fire brigades and police forces, as well as whitewater professionals and rescue teams. Through partnership with UCLan, eight university Certificates and foundation programmes in Swiftwater and Rope Rescue, and Swiftwater Rescue Instruction are now University accredited. The academic programme is overseen by a member of staff from the School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors at UCLan and led by a lecturer who is jointly funded by UCLan and Rescue 3 (UK). Delivery staff are employed by Rescue 3 (UK) but complete the UCLan internal CPD programmes for teaching staff.

Case study 2: The University of Manchester (Postgraduate Certificate programmes in project management)
The University of Manchester hosts executive education programmes for mid-career project managers based in different locations across the world. The programmes address a need for the development of organisational capacity within BP and were developed jointly with the University, drawing on expertise from Manchester Business School and the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, as well as subject matter experts from the BP Group. Course content is delivered during intensive residential periods on campus, combining experiential learning, workplace practice, classroom learning and case-based teaching. These elements are embedded within non-residential sessions of distance learning enabling participants to apply what has been learned to the workplace.
Case study 3: The University of Reading – Institute of Education (IoE) (Foundation Degree programmes for support staff working with children)

These Foundation Degree programmes provide career routes for support staff working with children within the primary curriculum. The Early Years Development and Learning degree is sector endorsed by the Children’s Workforce Development Council, while the Children’s Development and Learning degree was specifically written to address the requirements for Higher Learning and Teaching Assistant status. Through the steering committee, that has had oversight of the courses from the beginning, the programmes have close links to local authorities and respond to employer needs in the sector. The close partnership between the University of Reading and the three partner colleges delivering the programmes ensures consistency and parity of the student experience by way of regular meetings of the management team and a frequent programme of staff development and standardisation events attended by teaching staff from all the colleges.

Case study 4: Thames Valley University (TVU) (Foundation Degree programme that satisfies National Occupational Standards requirements)

This public sector employer-led workforce development initiative, aimed at workforce development, enables Healthcare Assistants to move into new roles as ‘Band 4 Practitioner Associates’. The partnership, initiated by Hillingdon Hospital Trust, in collaboration with Unison and Skills for Health, contracted Thames Valley University to develop and deliver a structured Foundation Degree programme to satisfy their workplace requirements. The University retains responsibility and control for the academic delivery of the programme and works in collaboration with the Hospital Trust to ensure that the programme meets both the needs of the students and the employer.

Case study 5: University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) – Cardiff School of Management (Foundation Degree programme in applied professional practice)

This generic programme was recently developed in response to a gap in the market, highlighted during a scoping exercise carried out for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The programme, developed in consultation with the Sector Skills Agency for Construction in Wales, Lifelong Learning Wales and Acorn Recruitment is an ‘off-the-shelf’ programme that can be adapted for a range of partners and workplace contexts. From October 2009 it has been delivered as a Foundation Degree in Hospitality Management with Cardiff Management School.
Case study 6: The University of Exeter – Business School (Postgraduate Certificate in programme management)

This two-year programme forms part of a wider management development programme intended by South West Water to upskill its middle management. The course combines existing modules, taken from the Business School’s CPD portfolio and modified in negotiation with South West Water, together with bespoke provision designed in response to the company’s need. Each module is delivered by a combination of teaching days, a South West Water event to provide contextual input from company directors and senior managers and independent work based on reflective practice. Study support is provided by individual sessions in the workplace with an academic coach.

I Methodology

The following six case studies, describe HE accredited programmes initially designed and developed in response to one or several ‘external’ drivers. The resulting partnership arrangements provide examples of how the initial key elements of ‘training-based’ learning, employer-responsive content, continuing professional development for the participant, and/or response to changing sector requirements, can be integrated with an academic context to provide university-validated learning opportunities.

The examples illustrate and provide guidance in relation to the maintenance of quality and standards across a range of partnership activities, and they highlight how management of partnership activities meet the precepts included in the QAA Code of practice. Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning). Mechanisms that consider all aspects of the security of academic standards of the award and assessment of the achievement of students have been considered and, where appropriate, show how programme and partnership management has been built into the development, delivery and assessment of work-based learning programmes to ensure that enhancement of the student experience is integrated into programme review and evaluation. The intention is to ascertain not only what has taken place, but to highlight impact, lessons learnt, student perspectives and how the QAA precepts/guidance have worked in ‘real life’.

The case studies offer a ‘snapshot’ of some of the different types of workplace partnership activities currently being offered. They are by no means exhaustive, nor are they necessarily typical of the many different workplace partnership arrangements accredited by HE institutions. The range, and in many cases the complexity, of relationships makes categorisation of programmes artificial, and to encourage innovation and the creativity of the development of workplace learning it is suggested that these case studies be seen as a small selection of a potentially wide spectrum
of activities and partnership arrangements. From the individual cases reviewed the challenges and benefits of developing, maintaining and articulating quality-assured, employer-responsive provision are discussed and current good practice highlighted.

2 Key features

The diverse range of partnership activities considered highlighted a number of areas that explicitly enabled HE institutions to demonstrate the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes, together with conformity to QAA guidelines. In the main, direct references to specific guidelines are limited and, instead, development and delivery of activities are undertaken within the regulation and quality assurance frameworks of each individual HE institution. There was a common desire to assure quality and rigorously safeguard academic standards, a desire that came direct from those staff actively engaged in building the partnership and who then applied university quality assurance procedures often unaware of any QAA guidelines. Institutions were able to apply their quality assurance procedures with flexibility in responding to the requirements of a broadening range of employer-responsive partnership arrangements and, in some cases, to amend processes to ensure all stakeholders participated in the quality review and enhancement process.

The variety of opportunities for work-based and partnership-delivered learning considered in the case studies are the results of a number of different drivers and motivating factors but, in all cases, the common factor for quality assurance purposes is that the innovative developments to learning have been assumed into or used to amend existing HE procedures and processes for quality maintenance and enhancement. The typical mechanisms for demonstrating quality-assured partnership development and management are categorised under the following headings with cross-reference to the case studies and the QAA Code of practice precepts:

2.1 The steering committee

The early establishment of a steering group, made up of key stakeholders who meet regularly and are involved proactively in monitoring progress and dealing with problems, is vital to the success of a partnership. Once the HEI–partner relationship has been determined, the attendance of their representatives within a formal and required structure enable any issues that arise to be discussed and dealt with.

Representation of the HEI partner on the steering committee, as demonstrated by the Reading, Manchester and Thames Valley case studies, provides a means of facilitating precepts A3, A8, A12, A16, A20 and A27 of the QAA Code of practice.
2.2 Active selection of the HEI and the process of tender

The development of a clear statement of requirements and a business plan gives a sense of clarity to the process of identifying compatible prospective partners (of good standing) and an appropriate programme, even where there is already an existing relationship between the employer and the HEI. The HEI highlights how their programme could meet the requirements of the employer, with the agreed terms articulated in a contract or Memorandum of Agreement.

The Reading, Manchester, Thames Valley and Exeter case studies demonstrate contractual arrangements established in response to perceived risk, as suggested in precepts A3, A6, A7, A8, A9, A10 and A28.

2.3 HEI responsibility for academic delivery

Under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement, where partners are involved in the delivery of teaching and learning, the university retains overall responsibility for the academic delivery and for ensuring that the learning environment is fit for purpose. The teaching, assessment and certification arrangements are governed by university regulations, even where there is a contribution from the employer.

Each case study demonstrates clear mechanisms for ensuring that the HEI meets precepts A1, A2, A19, A20, A21, A22, A23 and A24.

2.4 Admissions

The HEI is responsible for ensuring that application processes and criteria select students with the potential to achieve a programme’s intended learning outcomes, and building a relationship between the HEI and both the employer and the learner is vital. The provision of appropriate course information and support, and being sensitive to differences in the employer and student culture and environment is important. Students are frequently admitted with either a long-time absence from, or have never experienced, HE and processes to include both the assessment of prior experiential learning and the evaluation of students’ wider learning needs are required.

The case studies of UCLan, Manchester, Reading, UWIC and Exeter show how, through monitored, partner-delegated processes and blended learning provision, individual HEIs meet precepts A12, A14, A18, A25, A26, A27, B1, B2, B3 and B4.

2.5 HEI support for mentors and work-based learning

HEI provision of appropriate paperwork and training in the support of workplace mentors and tutors offers consistency of approach, parity of learning and assessment, and
helps assure quality. Student work is overseen by an academic and/or work-based tutor.

The UCLan, Reading, TVU, UWIC and Exeter case studies support partner staff development as outlined in precepts A12, A17 A20, B5 and B6.

2.6 Assessment
Careful selection of assessment methodology (by the university) can allow the learning of the (atypical) student to relate to the work-based nature of the work, acknowledging the importance of application of learning and reflection. Usual university practices are carefully adapted to ensure that the learning outcomes are developed, practised and assessed.

The case studies each demonstrate how they meet precepts A14, A19, A20, A21, A25, B7 and B8.

2.7 Student support
Support mechanisms, frequently virtual, to develop study skills and to develop learning methodologies of non-traditional learners in non-traditional settings are essential for student motivation, engagement and retention.

The case studies each demonstrate how they align with precepts A26, B5 and B6.

2.8 Student input/feedback
The early consultation of students during the process of developing the programme, their involvement in the selection of the HEI partner and their continued attendance at steering committee meetings enables the early identification of problems and provides a forum for student concerns.

Each case study demonstrates student input into, or attendance (Reading and TVU) of students at, steering committee meetings thereby facilitating precepts A12, A26, A27 and B5.

3 Emergent issues
In developing and delivering quality-assured, employer-responsive provision, the case studies considered each faced challenges to their institutional attitudes and accepted academic practice and procedures. There also needed to be a willingness to change and adopt a more flexible approach to the delivery of teaching, learning and academic administration. To assure a quality learning experience, in the work-based learning context, amendments to traditional processes needed to be made, and the participating institutions all showed willingness and innovation in making the required changes, often resulting in examples of good practice. These included:
3.1 Infrastructure
The Manchester and Exeter case studies highlight the need for consideration to be given to providing appropriate university facilities and programme information and the support expected by (executive) work-based learners, if the (employer and learner) expectations are to be met. In the TVU and Exeter case studies, the need for work-based learning and timetabled university sessions to be co-ordinated with the employer’s work-scheduling was of importance. The Exeter case study highlights the need to be sensitive in timing conversations about the sustainability of programmes, appropriately timing discussions with the employer’s review of budget priorities.

3.2 Administrative support
To enable co-ordinated delivery of employer-responsive provision, more flexible and responsive university administrative systems, capable of dealing with non-standard partnerships and programmes delivered outside of the traditional academic calendar, were established, with dedicated staff (wholly or in part paid for by the employer) appointed to administer the non-standard learning provision (UCLan and Manchester case studies).

3.3 Academic
At university validation events, course teams were required to detail how the non-traditional delivery of programmes would offer a structured and supported learning environment, to show how access to learning resources (physical and online) would be provided (UCLan and Reading case studies) and to explain how assessment parity would be ensured where a flexible assessment methodology was proposed (UWIC case study). It was important for course teams to clearly articulate the level and validity of learning associated with academic awards against the FHEQ, to compare learning outcomes with subject benchmark statements and, where appropriate, to highlight recognition by associated professional bodies (UCLan case study).

While the flexible and blended delivery of programmes acknowledged the constraints of time and geography faced by students (UCLan and Manchester case studies), it was important to recognise the tutor time commitment required to support blended and distance learning sessions (Reading case study). In all instances maintaining academic integrity and quality has been paramount, and the approach has been ‘this is what needs to be provided, how can we assure quality’, and practices, processes and policies have then been developed to provide an assured programme.
3.4 Academic staff
The UCLan case study highlights that conventional HE processes and perspectives do not easily recognise the validity of vocationally qualified staff to teach on academic programmes and an equivalence of vocational qualifications and their appropriateness to the delivery of teaching and learning needed clear articulation.

The Manchester and Exeter case studies highlighted the need for academic staff delivering on employer-responsive programmes to have experience of workplace practice or, on occasions, to undertake additional training to prepare them for employer-responsive learning. The UCLan case study outlines the importance of the appointment of a jointly (university–partner) funded link post, with clear understanding of the HE institution and partner needs to facilitate clear communication of expectations and feedback between the partner organisations. A similar outcome was achieved in the Manchester case study, by siting the partner project manager on the University campus.

3.5 Continuing professional development for partner staff
A variety of work settings, a range of experience within partner staff and differing employment patterns of students can give rise to significant disparities in the amount of workplace support offered to students and their mentors. In all case studies recognising the CPD needs of partner staff took place, ranging from raising awareness of the support required for students studying in HE, to managers’ own experience in the support and delivery of mentor. Typically this was addressed through the programme VLE where the study support and advice was extended to support mentors in the workplace. This was then supplemented by websites and leaflets, together with the provision of CPD workshops. This was particularly effective in promoting a greater understanding of programmes in UCLan and Reading.

3.6 Development opportunities
Offering opportunities to accrue university credit for learning attracts students with an interest in the practical, and by building on the academic can open up a greater range of opportunities for further potential HE and career progression as highlighted by the UCLan and Exeter case studies.

Initial employer/sector relationships fostered further partnership opportunities for a broader range of programmes (Reading and TVU case studies), initiated additional employer engagement projects (Manchester case study) and resulted in increased research capability (Exeter case study).

The involvement of employers and sector workers in steering groups contributes to continuous development and currency of programmes (Reading case study).
Employee learning development has impacted on the employer organisations’ culture, as seen in changes in ways of working and language used within the company (TVU and Exeter case studies).

4 Recommendations for the future
After completing the case studies, and reflecting upon the process and the findings, a number of points are highlighted for future consideration:

— developing a mapping process to provide an increased understanding of alternative qualifications appropriate for teaching and learning;
— promoting the capacity for local interpretation of the QAA guidelines at institutional level while maintaining nationally recognised standards;
— developing an ‘employer-friendly’ version of the guidelines;
— establishing a national database of partnerships to be used for comparative and dissemination purposes;
— making available resources for developing and extending partnership provision.
Case study 1

HEI: University of Central Lancashire
Partners: Rescue 3 (UK)
Year established: 2007
Student numbers: c. 500 per year on Swiftwater Rescue modules (programme allocated approx. 85 student FTE) with cohorts enrolling throughout the year.
Qualification: University certificates and Foundation Degree in Swiftwater and Rope Rescue and Swiftwater Rescue Instruction
Other stakeholders: Rescue 3 International
Key features: Structured around credit accumulation. Leads to HE and industry qualifications.
Drivers: Industry and training organisation led.
Development: University accreditation of existing training organisation courses.
Delivery: Blended: online input via VLE provides theoretical underpinning prior to a five-day residential block at partner’s Rescue Training Centre.
Assessment: Online multiple choice, combined with short answer assignments, in-class tests and practical skills audit.

5.1 Context
Rescue 3 International is a global training corporation whose training programmes were developed in recognition of a lack of training among fire and rescue personnel for water rescues. Rescue 3 courses are internationally recognised and form the base training for many emergency services. Rescue 3 (UK) has co-ordinated the delivery of Rescue 3 International training in the UK and Republic of Ireland since 1997. Prior to joining forces with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), Rescue 3 (UK) offered training in partnership with another HE institution; however, staff changes brought the programme to UCLan in 2007.

5.2 Programme design

5.2.1 Content
The Rescue 3 (UK) qualification is recognised by the emergency services as the minimum level of achievement required for operating in this area of deployment. In the process of writing new University validated modules and developing the Foundation Degree (FD) programme, a number of the key emergency services trained by Rescue 3 (UK) were consulted about their training needs. With the strong level of input from these public service employers it was possible to ensure that learning outcomes align with national
Demonstrator projects

training levels for emergency service staff at management and operational levels.

The emphasis, within the emergency services, on the acquisition of academic qualifications as a criterion for promotion and as a means for progression, is an incentive for rescue staff to undertake academic study. Financial incentive is also offered in some areas; for example, fire service personnel have both a training allowance and an education allowance to support development needs.

Although originally a vocational course, the Rescue 3 courses required participants to relate the theoretical to the practical and so, at the level of cognitive behaviours and the underpinning theoretical knowledge required to operate effectively in whitewater rescue situations, the learning outcomes of the Rescue 3 (UK) programmes fitted well into the UCLan academic structure. The language of the learning outcomes did not need to change significantly during the University accreditation process and the level of learning matched well with levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ. Students on the course need to show that they understand a range of possible scenarios and can apply critical judgement to the process and situation on the ground.

5.2.2 Structure and award

The programme is structured around credit accumulation rather than a target award. All modules have been validated individually as a University Certificate and students build up credits and awards that contribute to further awards through a process of accredited prior learning. Students usually register initially for a single module and then return to do other courses at a later date, accumulating credits that can build up to an advanced certificate, a foundation certificate and finally an FD.

Since each module carries Rescue 3 certification as well as higher education credits, successful students achieve both a vocational/industry award and an academic qualification. Eight Rescue 3 (UK) training courses are currently validated by UCLan, including Swiftwater Rescue Technician, Swiftwater Rescue Technician Advanced, Rope Rescue Technician, Management of Water & Flood Incidents.

It's a building blocks approach— if you've got an Advanced Certificate at 80 credits you can come back and do another 40 credits to get a foundation certificate. If you do another 120 you'll get a Foundation Degree. That's part of the widening access agenda because people can accrue university awards without having this big scary monster of 'doing a degree'. It's more like — 'actually you've got half a degree, why don't you finish it off?'

—Nigel Garrett, Division Leader, School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors, UCLan
5.3 Programme operation and delivery

5.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
In general, each cohort is made up of students from a single employer; for example, a fire service will identify employer and individual professional development needs and recommend 12 individuals for study of a specific module. After the initial contact with Rescue 3 (UK), who admit the students to the course, student names are forwarded to administrative staff at UCLan for enrolment at the University. Cohorts are admitted and enrolled throughout the year with, at peak times, four or five cohorts starting in one week.

5.3.2 Delivery
Each module begins with a six-week period of online learning, delivered via the University’s virtual learning environment (eLearn) and focusing on the theoretical underpinnings for the module. Material is presented through a combination of web-enhanced PowerPoint, text, video and interactive question and answer formats. Students then attend a five-day residential school delivered by Rescue 3 (UK) staff at the National Whitewater Centre in North Wales, which has a fully equipped and controlled swift water and rope rescue training environment. Within the block the theoretical knowledge is advanced and applied to practice.

5.3.3 Assessment
During the six-week pre-residential period for each module, students complete an online multiple choice assessment. In the residential block they complete a number of further assessments. These vary from module to module, but typically include:
— a written coursework assignment, normally a set of short answer questions;
— a practical skills audit;
— an in-class test, held at the end of the residential block.

Staff assess and mark all assignments while students are ‘on-site’, so that students receive all their formative and summative feedback, before leaving the residential block with a complete list of non-confirmed marks.

5.3.4 Student support and access to resources
Students often enrol and come to their first module with no recent academic experience and they frequently feel daunted at the challenge of having to produce academic outcomes at level 4. Considerable effort has been put into student support,
and the pre-residential online learning programme is deliberately easy to follow. Further modules are designed to be developmental, enabling the skill sets of students to be incrementally increased as they progress through subsequent modules. All module participants are enrolled as distance learning students of UCLan, and therefore have access to all the University’s support and resources. All core texts are online and accessible through the eLearn portal. The partner organisation has a stock of key texts, for use during the residential block. Students undertaking these modules are keen to access professional development and are also employer sponsored, resulting in a highly motivated student population.

5.3.5 Progression routes
In the final stage in the evolution of the suite of courses, managed from the School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors (SSTO), the FD was validated in January 2009. A final year ‘top-up’ award into Fire and Fire Sciences in the School of Forensic & Investigative Sciences, offers an emerging partnership across the University. As yet, no students have progressed this far and so no actual progression routes have currently been evaluated. Cohorts enter the programme from a spread of regions across the UK and exit with a transcript of achievement to take to other HE institutions, as required. It is not yet known how many will further their learning with UCLan, because of the relationship established, or choose to continue their study elsewhere.

5.4 Programme and partnership management
The business plan for this partnership programme included a workload allocation for a supervisory person, to provide the link between the HEI and the partner organisation. In development discussions that lead up to validation, it was decided to create a jointly funded lecturer post with responsibility for the management and development of the partnership. The person appointed had previously been a Rescue 3 employee and therefore had significant insight into the partner organisation. More importantly from the operational aspect of this programme, is the dual operational responsibility that this individual has, in reporting directly to both the UCLan Course Leader and the Managing Director of Rescue 3 (UK).

The programme is also directly supported by administrative staff in both UCLan and Rescue 3.
I find the joint lecturer position really helpful because it’s such a strong link between the two organisations. It’s taken me a while to fit into the University side of things and find where all the useful information is, but actually working for the University just takes that extra link out of getting information back to the partner organisation.

—Vicky Barlow, Joint Lecturer, Rescue 3 (UK) and UCLan

5.5 Quality assurance: monitoring and evaluation

The systems and procedures for quality assurance and monitoring replicate those of standard UCLan provision. The partner organisation, Rescue 3 (UK), and its relationship to UCLan was evaluated using the University’s process for Institutional Approval and Partnership Agreement and modules were validated as per on campus modules. The delivery of the programme is evaluated using the same quality assurance processes as for on-campus courses, but incorporating additional evaluation for Rescue 3 (UK) purposes. The residential and intensive nature of the modules provides module tutors with the opportunity for significant interaction with students and thereby feedback, towards course development, is received on an ongoing and informal basis.

Assignments are assessed by delivery staff during the residential block and are monitored in line with University standard procedures. The moderation process includes internal and external elements with a sample of work externally examined; marks are confirmed by the Board of Studies. An annual report produced by the course leader feeds into the UCLan Annual Quality Review process.

The course is delivered by Rescue 3 (UK) personnel, who are highly qualified rescue trainers and outdoor specialists, but may not have traditional university backgrounds. All delivery staff attend the standard UCLan HE teaching CPD programme as an induction to the University and to help them develop understanding of HE expectations and the requirements of delivering learning at HE level. Peer observation is also an embedded practice in the Rescue 3 programme of delivery.

The quality assurance stuff is only an enhancement to what the partner organisation already does. It’s formalised our process for that totally – which from an organisational point of view has been really good. For example, annual monitoring is something Rescue 3 did informally. Every now and then we’d have department meetings and look at how things were going. … and student feedback – it was something we chipped away at but there was nothing formal there – but now we’re obliged to undertake the annual monitoring process: to regularly have student feedback; to regularly have department meetings; do module leaders’ reports; a course leader’s report; an institution report. It has just formalised the process and given us a much better overview of how our courses operate over the year. I think that’s really helped Rescue 3 to enhance its practice.

—Vicky Barlow, Joint Lecturer, Rescue 3 (UK) and UCLan
5.6 Challenges

5.6.1 Infrastructure
UCLan’s considerable experience of working in partnerships with further education colleges had shaped their expectations and procedures for partnership approval and validation. At the institutional approval stage there was an expectation that Rescue 3 (UK) would have certain infrastructure in place. For example, as part of the standard protocol for the approval process, UCLan requested a visit to the Rescue 3 library to view stock and to speak to the librarian in charge of resources. In a small to medium-sized commercial training organisation, this did not exist.

Coming to terms with the University’s operations has been a steep learning curve for Rescue 3 (UK). The partnership organisation is non-standard – an outdoor training organisation rather than an FE college, so we haven’t got the background of experience of working in either FE or HE, and so there was a huge amount of information on processes and policy to pick up on.
—Vicky Barlow, Joint Lecturer, Rescue 3 (UK) and UCLan

5.6.2 Administrative support
Due to the non-standard nature, ongoing operation continues to raise issues and challenges. For example, the University delivers learning associated with the academic calendar while Rescue 3 (UK) runs rolling programmes throughout the year. That has been problematic for the University’s information systems department who were used to assigning staff to support online enrolment in September and January only. Enrolling students onto individual modules rather than for a target award has also been problematic, and the University has had to adapt and develop systems in response to these needs. Initially this wasn’t easy, as the internal processes of the University were not devised to be so client-focused. The experience of developing this collaboration has, however, fed into other partnership developments and within the School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors at UCLan, there is now a dedicated 0.5 FTE member of staff to administrate non-standard programmes. Systems have been adapted to offer more flexible support of non-standard partnerships and the University is widening its experience in dealing with non-standard qualifications.

5.6.3 Academic
Throughout the development and validation of the programme a number of issues around the delivery of the programme emerged. These centred on three recurring themes: level;
academic content; and staffing. In justifying the level and validity of academic content of the awards, it was helpful to articulate issues in the context of the professionalism of the emergency services, and to relate to other longstanding vocational qualifications, such as accounting, where students gain a vocational certificate alongside an academic award. Explaining the integration of competence with critical understanding and judgement, was key to illustrating how these qualifications are not simply competence based, but satisfied the teaching and learning expectations at levels 4 and 5.

5.6.4 Staff
Perhaps the biggest hurdle has been concern over the equivalence of staff qualifications. Many of the delivery staff working for Rescue 3 (UK) have high-level qualifications in their area, and are recognised nationally or even internationally in their specialism, but do not have traditional academic qualifications. Conventional HE perspectives and processes often do not easily recognise vocational qualifications and thereby question the validity of vocationally qualified staff to teach on an academic undergraduate programme. Increased discussion and understanding of equivalence of vocational qualifications and their appropriateness to the delivery of learning is assisting with a mapping process to highlight appropriate qualification recognition.

It hasn’t been easy. There is some resistance when people don’t understand the nature of the programme. There is a little bit of ‘that’s not what we do’ and you just have to say, ‘well yes, it is what we do. We’re a modern, forward-thinking university – it is what we do.’
—Nigel Garrett, Division Leader, School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors, UCLan

5.7 Good practice
— Management model. The jointly funded link post is now adopted as an operational management model for working relationships with other partners.

… without having that understanding of how Rescue 3 operates, it would have been harder to get a working system in place. Having a really clear understanding of the partner organisation is important in dealing with university systems – being able to say this is just not how they operate and they’re not going to be able to implement this”.
—Vicky Barlow, Joint Lecturer, Rescue 3 (UK) and UCLan

— CPD for partner staff. Having partner organisation staff attend the University’s
CPD programme for teaching in HE, has helped embed university practice and procedures within the partner organisation. The CPD programme includes traditional on-campus delivery and, although not always directly relevant to Rescue 3 staff, provides a background and a context to learning in HE, initiating further discussion and development within the partner organisation.

— Career development opportunities

A lot of the students have been out of education for a long, long time and, by their very nature, they’ve gone into industries where they haven’t had to be academic. But with the professionalisation of those industries, they’re having to get academic qualifications in order to progress in their careers, and this is allowing them a way to do that gradually.
—Nigel Garrett, Division Leader, School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors, UCLan

— Delivery. Offering single modules, as university certificates, that accrue university credit has attracted students with an interest in the practical which, by building in the academic, then opens up a range of different perspectives and potential opportunities for further development and progression.

We hear all these buzzwords about being client focused, and we are, because the programme is driven by the client rather than by the product. What happens quite often in universities is that we develop a product and then find a population to buy into it. This is quite different. We’ve got a clientele and we’ve evolved the product to fit the clientele.
—Nigel Garrett, Division Leader, School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors, UCLan

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6.1 Context

After a period of outsourcing technical activities, BP identified a number of gaps in the core competences of their employees and invited tenders from the open market on one of these; namely, how project management methodology is applied by managers on the ground and the skills needed to apply these principles and processes in real-world situations.

The University of Manchester’s (UoM) successful bid was put together by the Business Relations team with cross-faculty support from Manchester Business School and the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering (MACE). This cross-faculty approach was one of the elements particularly liked by BP, who were also attracted to the proposed blended structure for the programme and the use of the UoM’s virtual learning environment to support learning.

6.2 Programme design

6.2.1 Structure and award

The University was initially commissioned to deliver the Postgraduate Certificate in Managing Projects, which sits in Manchester Business School; however, this was followed very shortly after by the development of the Postgraduate Certificate in Engineering Management, managed by MACE. Both programmes have been through a full standard validation process.
The programmes are intended for delivery to senior BP executives based across the world, sometimes in remote locations, and so bringing them together for long periods in one place would not be possible. In response to this, and working closely with BP, the University developed a framework for delivery. This incorporated: blended learning with web-enabled tutor and distance learning support consolidated by two intensive residential weeks; research-based content grounded in practical experience and consolidated in reflective practice; and engagement of subject matter experts from the University, BP and wider industry. These were all within credit-bearing modules enabling postgraduate level accreditation.

The programmes each comprise four units, of 15 credits each. The Foundation Unit, which runs prior to the first residential week, provides a vehicle for accrediting prior learning, while the major programme content is delivered through the other three units. Although the content of this programme is very much BP specific, the framework for delivery was developed by the University in response to BP.

6.2.2 Content
The subject content was developed collaboratively. From the learning outcomes required by BP, key topics were identified and clustered into three main subject areas, which later became Units 2, 3 and 4. Once the clusters were in place at least two academics worked together with two or three subject experts from BP to develop the programme to meet the directed professional requirements of the company.

6.3 Programme operation and delivery

6.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
A typical programme delegate is a highly experienced (at least 10 to 15 years of experience) project or engineering manager or team leader, with potential to progress. All participants have a first degree and some have higher degrees. Delegates are nominated through their line managers and selection for the course is done by BP. Although the University has no input into the recruitment process, it is a requirement of the 15-credit Foundation Unit that participants take an online multiple choice test to ensure that they have a base level of knowledge. The test is administered by BP and is drawn from the question bank used in the assessment of their internal BP Way programme. The University has access to the questions used. Successfully passing the test provides accreditation of prior learning (APL) and contributes 15 credits towards the Postgraduate Certificate. (If participants subsequently wish to progress to a higher degree, University of Manchester regulations prevent these 15 APL credits from contributing to the higher award, as they have not directly been assessed by the University.)
6.3.2 Delivery
Both the Managing Projects and the Engineering Management programmes are delivered over a 12-month period. They are structured around two residential weeks on the University campus with pre-session, inter-session and post-session periods of independent study, supported by a web-enabled tutor and distance learning support provided by the virtual learning environment (VLE). The Foundation Unit is a distance learning unit including pre-work with formal, online assessment for APL. Delegates use the VLE to assist with their pre-session study, providing them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves and engage with its functions early in the course, before the bulk of the work begins.

During the intensive residential weeks, delivery of the other three units includes teaching sessions that cover the main topics, with a mix of case-based teaching, discussions, experience sharing, group work and individual activity. As well as covering academic input, the company context is provided by a number of BP Subject Matter Experts (selected from a group of senior managers) who also attend the residential weeks and contribute to discussions. The reflective practice approach to assignments has also supported the achievement of the University academic requirements alongside the achievement of the partner company’s strategic objectives of workforce development.

*BP has been pleasantly surprised by how successful this has been. We didn’t realise how effective the academic rigour and discipline could be through the reflective practice process. They hand in drafts, get comments back and then use the comments and you can see from the first draft the process of applying something and making it work. In every single paper you see the effectiveness of the programme.*
—Alan Johnston, Programme Director, BP

6.3.3 Assessment
Experiential learning is a central feature of these programmes, enabling the integration of concepts and theory introduced during the formal sessions and through distance learning into the delegate’s working practices. From BP’s perspective, the primary aim is for delegates to learn and develop as project managers or engineers and to embed their learning back into the workplace. In order to facilitate this, assessment of each unit is via a 3,000 word reflective practice paper. The final three reflective practice papers are submitted securely via the VLE. Once submitted, University regulations take effect.
and the papers are assessed following usual University processes. They are marked by academics, subject to the University’s second marking process and open to external examiner scrutiny. A sample of delegates’ work is also monitored to ensure that material is not being reused across the three assignments. None of the marks are disclosed to BP.

6.3.4 Student support and access to resources
The five-month inter-session and the post-session periods are supported by the VLE, providing access to all course materials and offering access to academics through the discussion forums. Participants on these courses, although called delegates, are fully registered as University students with access to all University resources and services, including the University library and electronic journals.

For many delegates there is a substantial gap since their last period of academic study and the programme team at the University have developed a detailed process to support the development of the written academic essay. Five steps are outlined: identify a situation to work on; consider which principles, concepts, models can be applied to the situation; apply these to the situation; evaluate the application; and finally reflect on the whole process. Support and feedback is provided on all drafts (via paper, face to face and podcasts). The submission of these drafts for individual feedback is intended to replicate a tutorial process. In the post-session period, the three reflective practice papers are developed further in the light of the feedback received and the final paper is completed.

6.4 Programme and partnership management
The two programmes sit within the context of the University’s wider strategic alliance with BP, overseen by a Joint Steering Committee, led by a vice-president of the University and a senior member of BP. This committee meets every six months and takes a wide strategic view of the interactions between the company and the University, dealing with any serious relationship issues. The sponsor of these programmes sits on the Joint Steering Committee and has high level oversight of their operation.

The detailed expectations and arrangements around the Managing Projects and Engineering Management programmes are laid down in a formally contracted Memorandum of Agreement, negotiated between the University and BP. Routine responsibility for the management of the programmes lies with a Governor’s Board, which meets every six months. The Board includes members of the immediate project team from BP and the University who are involved with day-to-day management of the programme. Both programmes have an Academic Director and
Deputy Director. An experienced BP Project Manager has been appointed as the BP Programme Director and is based on campus to deal with queries. This role provides a critical link between the University and the company, ensuring that BP input into the programmes is managed and relevant. The on-campus presence of the BP Programme Director was particularly beneficial in the early stages of relationship building between the University and the company and continues to provide a means of negotiating between the partner organisation’s expectations and university systems and procedures. There are also three dedicated administrators who support the two programmes.

In addition, two further full-time members of staff provide IT systems support for the VLE, specifically for this programme. This offers VLE support throughout the year; to set up and deliver the programmes to three cohorts, at different stages of learning, who do not fit into the traditional academic timetable.

6.5 Quality assurance: monitoring and evaluation
The programmes are subject to a formal annual review process, undertaken by the Board of Governors. This is supported by detailed evaluation reports from feedback given by delegates. Participants complete an evaluation questionnaire for each of the sessions during the residential weeks and a more comprehensive questionnaire at the end of the residential week. In addition, the Deputy Director for the course attends for the full residential week and the BP Subject Matter Experts, sitting in on teaching sessions also provide feedback. Out of the review process, the Board sets joint improvement objectives for the next year, an example being the establishment of a programme website for line managers to ensure that they get the right level of programme information.

The content of the Engineering Management programme is still evolving and, in response to a recently identified BP requirement, training for employees who specialise in projects and ongoing operations is to be included in the course. The changes that this has necessitated are being negotiated by academics and Subject Matter Experts and gradually introduced.

The Managing Projects programme is now seen as being in ‘steady state’ and therefore a management of change process has been implemented. The process is very light touch: University leaders work with BP Subject Matter Experts to make ongoing incremental improvements and to make sure that unit leaders are kept informed of these small changes. Anything that impacts on the underlying learning objectives is subject to consideration by the formal management of change process, and approval from the Board needs to be secured.
6.6 Challenges
Although largely successful, a number of challenges have arisen as a result of differences between the academic culture of the University and the corporate culture of a global company:

6.6.1 Infrastructure
The University is accustomed to dealing with the traditional student body in a fairly informal way and is not structured to operate as a service organisation for a global company. It has been difficult to find appropriate facilities for executive education and to offer the reception facilities that meet the expectations of corporate visitors.

6.6.2 Administrative support
The University's internal systems are devised to meet the needs of the 'traditional university'. For this programme the University has used funding from the BP contract to overcome resource issues and to cover the costs of administrative support. Nevertheless, tensions have arisen due to the devolution of financial systems into individual schools, who are relatively free to take decisions about how they deploy resources. The BP programmes are a cross-faculty initiative, and while Manchester Business School has long and well-established practices for dealing with the financial requirements of executive education programmes, other parts of the University are less familiar with these types of programmes, and policies in this area are still evolving. This has caused occasional difficulties, both internally and with BP.

6.6.3 Academic
There are challenges for the University in managing the expectations of different parts of the BP organisation while ensuring that the content of the programme retains its academic integrity and independence. University quality assurance systems, such as the validation process, the Board of Studies and the external examiner, as well as the vigilance of individual academics, each play a key role. This is further promoted by the BP Project Manager who, based on campus, is able to present the University point of view to colleagues in BP.

6.6.4 Staff
This type of professional, executive education programme requires a different teaching style to that of the standard Masters course. Delegates are seasoned professionals, with many years of experience in the field, and programme tutors need to adopt a different
stance. Some academics struggle to fully achieve the desired form of interaction and generally the most successful staff on these teaching programmes either are or have been very close to industrial practice.

6.7   Good practice

6.7.1  Management
The ongoing commitment and input from BP through the partnership of Subject Matter Experts with academics in developing and delivering the programme and basing the project manager for the teaching programmes on the University of Manchester campus has facilitated clear communication of expectations and requirements between the two institutions.

6.7.2  Delivery
The flexible model of blended delivery for the programmes with intensive residential periods and distance learning supported by the VLE has enabled the courses to deliver material at a postgraduate level, while acknowledging the constraints of time and geography faced by the delegates.

6.8   A note on the QAA Code of practice: section 2
The Code of practice is embedded in university policies. However, in the day-to-day negotiation of the University of Manchester’s relationship with BP it has little explicit recognition. BP were very clear at the outset that they had a defined set of learning objectives for these programmes and if, in the process of delivering the learning objectives, the University could not accredit the courses, they still wanted to go ahead. However, the accreditation of the programme has had significant benefits for the individuals undertaking the courses and, as a result of the discipline of the reflective practice process, for the organisation itself.

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Case study 3

HEI: The University of Reading
Partners: Bracknell and Wokingham College; Berkshire College of Agriculture; Newbury College
Year established: 2005
Student numbers: 1st Cohort: 43 students; 2009 Cohort: 99
Qualification: Foundation Degree programmes in Early Years Development and Learning and in Supporting Children’s Development and Learning
Other stakeholders: Children’s Workforce Development Council and sector endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years, Training Development Agency and local authority involvement: Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Reading, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham.
Key features: Employer and sector-led development.
Drivers: To meet employer identified needs for workforce and organisation performance development and achieve government standards.
Development: Close consultation between employers and academics after initial employer request.
Delivery: Flexible blended learning with strong mentor role.
Assessment: Diverse range of assignments with some reflective practice.

7.1 Context
Since 2005, the University of Reading’s Institute of Education (IoE) has run two highly successful Foundation Degree (FD) programmes in Early Years’ Development and Learning and in Supporting Children’s Development and Learning. These programmes were developed and operate in collaboration with three local FE colleges, two of which hold Centre of Vocational Excellence status in Early Years. The programmes are based upon a strong collaborative partnership between the University and the partner colleges, with close links to local authorities (LAs) and other employers in the sector.

The FDs were developed as a response to a direct request from LAs and employers. The LAs were particularly interested in improving the skills of Early Years practitioners and also saw the opportunity to respond to Government agenda and provide a work-based qualification for Higher Level Teaching Assistants in schools; thereby providing vital career routes for staff seeking opportunities for HE at a later stage in their careers.

A steering group, with representatives from the LAs, employers from Early Years settings and senior managers from the University and the three FE colleges, was
convened to consider workforce needs and how best those needs might be satisfied. Subsequently, a working party, including one subject specialist from each of the partner colleges, was established to write the FD programmes.

7.2 Programme design

7.2.1 Content

The project, lead by the IoE, established a working party to ensure that the level of delivery and outcomes required for HE qualifications were understood by partners, while the University’s Quality Support Officer provided input on how to meet the University’s validation standards.

> Working within the constraints of academic quality for work-based assignments can be difficult but once we’d started, and got the level fitting into Reading University criteria, it was OK. There are really meaty essays and they have a final academic project to do on an aspect of children’s development and learning.
> —Kathy Piercey, Former Course Leader BCA and Early Years Practitioner Specialist

To ensure that the level of the work was appropriate, the learning outcomes were written with reference to the QAA’s FD qualifications benchmark (October 2004), fdf guidance, QAA level 4 & 5 descriptors for Educational Studies and mapped to the University’s assessment criteria. A timetable based around pre-established University module structures and templates was used, which built in acknowledgement of workplace learning and the consolidation of learning that occurs within practice. The LAs had clear views of the intended impact of the FDs, and it was important from the outset to ensure that the programmes provided opportunities for students to acquire, develop and demonstrate these required skills.

7.2.2 Structure and award

The Early Years Development and Learning FD is delivered by Bracknell and Wokingham College and Berkshire College of Agriculture for staff working with Early Years and Key Stage 1 children. In 2009, when the Children’s Workforce Development Council took over sector endorsement, this programme was successfully re-endorsed, confirming that the qualification addresses the stated needs of the children’s workforce.
The Supporting Children's Development and Learning FD, delivered at Newbury College, was specifically written for staff working with children in the 5 to 13 age range and addresses the requirements of the Professional Standards for Higher Learning and Teaching Assistants (HLTA), introduced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools. Achievement of the HLTA status runs parallel to the FD. Newbury College have established themselves, separately, as a HLTA Assessment Centre, running a three-day assessment course offering an additional qualification to those having completed the FD. Wokingham and Hampshire LAs are especially supportive of this and encourage their students to participate; they both offer financial incentives to students and recognise the FD as supporting the underpinning knowledge necessary to gain this status.

7.3 Programme operation and delivery

7.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
Within agreed guidelines for entry requirements and interview procedure, the partner colleges are responsible for recruitment of students to the programmes. The colleges share marketing and recruitment responsibilities and the University is closely involved in the development of promotional material. Recruitment is also supported by a number of LAs. As courses are capped by HEFCE numbers and with only 50 places available across the three sites, there are often waiting lists.

Students can apply to the University through the UCAS system, although they rarely do this and, in common with other non-traditional entrants, they often apply directly to the college. Tutors act as informal admissions tutors and provide an informal counselling session with prospective students before they fill in the application form. Once accepted either the tutors or the college register the student onto the UCAS system. The University has provided training to the colleges to enable them to do this. Students then enrol at the college at which they will be studying and also complete online enrolment with the University.

7.3.2 Delivery
Students on the FDs attend the appropriate partner college on one day per week, for an afternoon and evening taught session. Most students are full-time practitioners and workplace learning is maximised and valued through link visits to students in their work settings and consolidated through the flexible, blended learning design of the programmes. Employers in the Early Years sector can apply for funding from the LA
Graduate Leader Fund to support a student’s day release. The use of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) contributes to the flexible delivery of the programme, enabling students to support each other, share ideas, communicate with tutors and to reflect upon employment-based activities.

7.3.3 Assessment
Most modules have two or three strands of assessment, with a workplace assignment, in the form of a guided discussion, making up 10% of the marks for designated modules. Due to the non-traditional nature of the programmes, and the student cohort, the course developers were keen to offer a range of assessments to include presentations, studies, reports and essays that challenge the student to relate their learning to their practice. The module assessment tasks for each year are agreed collaboratively by the Course Leaders from each of the partner colleges in consultation with the University’s Project Lead and the external examiner. All work-based elements of the programmes have clearly defined and related learning outcomes. Employment-based assessments are evidenced through guided professional discussions based around entries in the student's reflective journal on a given topic.

Progression is built into assessment tasks with much of what students do in the first year serving as preparation for second-year assignments. The FD management team are further reviewing second-year work to consider how these achievements can be further developed in the third year of the associated ‘top-up’ degree.

7.3.4 Student support and access to resources
All students identify a mentor who knows the context of the student’s workplace and can act as a critical friend. The mentor provides work-based support and guidance and authenticates work-based evidence for assessment. Part of the mentor’s role is to assess the guided discussions and to engage in dialogue with students on a regular basis.

Mentors have access to support and training in their own time and at the point of need including: a mentor information pack with a DVD modelling the process of guided discussions; mentor training and drop-in sessions once a term; visits from a link tutor to build relationships with the student and the mentor and to moderate work-based assessments; a twice-yearly newsletter, which provides additional support and information; and this year a mentor website for further information and access materials has been set up within the VLE. At present, certificates recognise mentors’ contribution to the overall success of the students, but there are discussions around further developing mentor training to enable accreditation by the IoE.
The role of the mentor within these programmes is evolving and becoming more formalised. Mentors who have participated since the beginning are becoming more experienced and some past students are also becoming mentors. The mentor relationship often gives both mentor and mentee additional perspectives and a deepening understanding of effective practice and the role of reflection in the workplace.

Although the partner colleges provide adequate academic and pastoral support to students, the University’s policies and procedures for collaborative provision and the Memorandum of Agreement between the colleges and the University ensure that the students have access to a wide range of University-based student services, such as study skills advice mapped to assignment requirements and the use of e-learning. Representatives from the University visit both year groups in September/October to welcome students and talk about the programme and progression opportunities. On these visits students are shown the student services pages on the University website and reminded of their entitlements. Students are eligible to join the University library as ‘external borrowers’. They also receive student diaries and handbooks from the University, containing information about student services and study support.

7.3.5 Progression routes
Successful completion of either of the FD programmes allows progression, via a third-year top-up, to the IoE’s BA in Children’s Learning and Development. The programmes also provide training for those students who work in private, voluntary and independent settings, recognised by the Children’s Workforce Development Council for Early Years Professional Status. Students from school settings can apply to be assessed for HLTA status via Newbury College or another local assessor.

7.4 Programme and partnership management
Senior University officers, management representatives from the three FE partners, representatives from LAs and from private, voluntary and independent employers sit on the programme steering committee, which meets twice a year and operates as an advisory, strategic and monitoring group. In addition the Course Leaders from each partner college and the Project Lead at the University hold management meetings once a month; the frequency of these supportive and collaborative meetings ensuring ongoing effective communication.

This collegiate approach is further evident in the cross-college tutor meetings for training, moderation and standardisation and formal Boards. The partner colleges involved each have different strengths, and regular meetings provide opportunities
for staff teaching on the courses to share information and resources. Use of the same tutor for some cross-college modules provides further opportunities to share practice and ensure parity. FD teaching staff from partner colleges have access to CPD courses and many are working towards further qualifications; some of which can be supported by the IoE through external funding arrangements. Some staff from partner colleges also undertake personal tutor roles for third-year BA degree top-up students. This has enabled tutors to gain a greater understanding of the culture of higher education.

7.5 Quality assurance: monitoring and evaluation
As an integral part of an established university, the IoE’s provision is embedded in a robust internal quality assurance system including a rigorous validation process for all awards. The Board of Studies for Employment-Based Programmes, which covers the FDs, Early Years Professional Status and the BA in Children’s Development and Learning and has responsibility for the oversight of recruitment, progress, successes and issues arising from these courses. Student and tutor evaluation reports from each college programme of the FDs are submitted to the Board of Studies, which includes student representatives from each year group and each of the partner colleges. The representatives for each college chair term meetings each term at which the students have an opportunity to identify positive aspects of the course together with areas for improvements; discussions from these meetings are fed back to the college leader and key issues raised at the Board. The Board of Studies includes representatives from the BA top-up programme in year three to link through to the progression route.

Each college has internal self-assessment procedures and the Course Leader for each college writes an annual report on that year, which goes to the final Board of Studies meeting. The annual reports from all three colleges feed into an annual programme report agreed by the Board of Studies, which, in turn, then feeds into the University quality, monitoring and evaluation procedures.

The timetable for both internal verification within each college and external verification is planned in advance each year. Course Leaders and the tutors from each of the colleges meet at regular intervals for cross-college standardisation of assessments. The Programme Leader from the University is responsible for ensuring that the quality assurance procedures and framework for assessment monitoring are in place and that there is parity across the IoE awards. The annual tutor training days help FE tutors understand HE levels and assessment criteria.
Through the steering group, LAs and employers feedback on the impact of the programme and ensure that it maintains content appropriate and relevant to the sector. The monthly meetings between the college Course Leaders and the Programme Director at the University provides an informal forum to monitor and manage issues and changes before they get to the Board of Studies or steering group.

At the beginning of last year I suggested we could have management meetings less frequently but leaders value being able to talk to the other colleges and being able to sound out their reflections ... Also, because it is the children’s workforce, things change all the time and meeting so often enables you to monitor things as they come up and deal with issues that arise in a proactive way.

—Kriss Turner, Programme Director, the University’s Institute of Education

In parallel with academic scrutiny of the programme for validation, the Quality Support Office carry out a due diligence investigation and a detailed site visit to all prospective partner colleges before the programme begins in order to ensure that the college meets the University’s partnership criteria. A business plan is put together by the relevant Head of School and a formal contract is drawn up. As part of standard university procedures, all programmes undergo internal periodic review every six years, and in the case of collaborative programmes this forms part of an overall review of partnership arrangements, entailing further site visits to review strategic direction and operational workings and a detailed financial review. Partner colleges also receive a Providers’ Handbook each year and any interim partnership issues are reported at the FD Steering Group.

7.6 Challenges

7.6.1 Infrastructure

Learning resources essential to the programme are provided in college libraries and resource centres and, in addition, the University offers from its existing stock, complementary materials which allow students to extend their reading to a wider range of material, or indeed, to broaden their education to matters not covered by the FD programmes. Because of the non-traditional nature of students’ engagement with the University, there are restrictions on their lending rights and access to online journals. Further progress in enabling access to online resources for students on collaborative programmes has recently been made.
7.6.2 Academic
Differences in institutional ethos between the FE and HE institutions have presented issues concerning the style of delivery and the way that teaching hours are counted. The focus in FE tends to be on direct contact time with less allowance made for the programme development expected of staff in HE institutions. For example, in the delivery of VLE material where there is no face-to-face contact with students, it has been important to develop an understanding that tutors need to be allocated time to read, reflect and respond to the discussions between students.

7.6.3 Employer understanding
Due to the variety of work settings and different employment patterns of students, there are significant disparities in the amount of support offered to students and mentors in the workplace. While employers (often more familiar with NVQ-type qualifications) encourage staff to undertake the FD programmes, they do not always fully appreciate what is involved. A website and leaflets for employers have raised their awareness of the programmes and the kind of support that students may need.

7.6.4 Infrastructure
The cap on HEFCE numbers means that there is already an inability to support demand for the Early Years and Supporting Children’s Development and Learning programme in some parts of the catchment area.

7.7 Good practice

The programme team is extremely well managed and organised and the collaboration that occurs between the University and its partners is a strength of the programmes … The students were extremely complimentary of the course and in particular the support they receive from tutors. Students feel that they are studying within a very enabling environment of support and that their voices are listened to and any concerns or issues are acted upon promptly as appropriate; they had become more reflective and open minded … The workplace-based assessments are a strength of the course and enable a professional two-way dialogue that serves to highlight student strengths and knowledge and set future targets within an atmosphere of trust, support and encouragement.

—External examiner, 2007
7.7.1 Development
Links with LAs and the Children's Workforce Development Council have led to the development of further programmes and projects that enhance delivery in this area, for example the Early Years Professional Status award, the Early Years Practitioners Network at Reading and, working with Government Office South East, a funding tool for Early Years qualifications in the Children’s Workforce has been provided.

7.7.2 Management
The regular management meetings timetabled throughout the year and the frequent opportunities for teaching staff delivering the programmes to meet together for moderation meetings and training sessions give a sense of coherence to the programme across the three colleges, who see themselves in partnership with each other as well as with the University. This has established a pattern and procedure for collaboration that enables regular, good quality communication between all the partners. This collaborative teamwork promotes parity of experience for the students and a shared understanding of the assessment of each module between tutors. Training events have enabled the University to promote understanding of their quality assurance procedures and ensure that the colleges are acting in line with University policy, within which the QAA Code of practice, section 2 is embedded.

7.7.3 CPD for partner staff
Access to University CPD opportunities and regular tutor conferences help staff from the partner colleges to develop HE teaching skills, which can then be cascaded down. In addition, some of the sessional staff from the colleges have been appointed as personal tutors on the BA top-up programme in Children’s Development and Learning; further embedding HE expectations in their teaching practice.

7.7.4 Programme design
The involvement and support of six LAs, as well as private, voluntary and independent sector employers, from the initial communications and consultations through to their ongoing position on the steering committee, has enabled the FDs to draw on their wealth of knowledge of the sector, together with individual knowledge of settings and the staff within them.
7.7.5 Quality enhancement
The need to meet requirements for occupational standards and be audited for sector endorsement has provided an additional layer of quality assurance. When making revisions to the programme specification, the management group, additionally, took into consideration Section 9: Work-based and placement learning of the 2007 QAA Code of practice.

7.7.6 Supported delivery
The emphasis on flexible delivery, in part through the VLE, provides study support and access to resources from the moment that students enrol. Tutors have completely taken on board the flexible learning approach and the bid to the Children’s Workforce Development Council to further develop flexible learning has enabled this aspect of the course delivery to grow. The VLE is now providing an additional means of supporting employers and mentors. Across the country a high proportion of FD students drop out of their courses. This programme has high retention rates, with students rarely leaving without an award.

I like the principle of it being based on reflective practice – things we’ve spoken about at college and then you learn and you take it back into the workplace and apply it … It is scary but because I love what I do, I’m channelling through and it’s helping me to give the children the best start and it has exceeded my expectations by 150%. It has opened up whole new world and given me a chance to prove that academically I’m as good as anyone else.
—Lynette Long, Foundation Degree graduate

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Jennie Chetcuti, Senior Quality Support Officer, the University of Reading j.l.chetcuti@reading.ac.uk
8.1 Context

Hillingdon Hospital Trust (Trust) was funded by the Skills for Health initiative to work together with Lifelong Learning Networks to develop a new educational pathway underpinned by National Occupational Standards for practitioners (at a new ‘Band 4’ role) with skills in rehabilitation.

*I developed an ongoing programme of in-service training for the assistants .... Many in the therapies have completed NVQ3 and, because they were so motivated to learn and develop, were looking for the next stage on.*

—Helen Parr, Inpatient Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Manager

The Trust appointed a Project Co-ordinator and established a steering group (SG) with representatives from West London Lifelong Learning Network and Unison. A project plan, timetable and the project design were developed and terms of reference established. The SG carried out a detailed role analysis, consulting with potential students, and desired competences were identified by clinical leaders, and incorporated into the new Band 4 job descriptions. It was only after this consultation and scoping process was complete that the decision to develop the Foundation Degree (FD) route was made.

The SG drafted a clear statement of requirements and these informed the tender (and the later Memorandum of Understanding). Thames Valley University (TVU) had already
mapped their degree and their work-based learning competences to the Knowledge and Skills Framework, met all the required criteria, and was appointed as the HE provider.

The leap in change of practice from Band 3 to a 4 motivated the change from an in-service programme to the idea of a Foundation Degree. It's knowing that the assistant practitioners would be able to clinically reason and be accountable for their clinical reasoning … that we can actually say that this person has been educated to this standard in this topic and are deemed competent …
—Helen Parr, Inpatient Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Manager

8.2 Programme design
The Skills for Health funding enabled the consultation findings to contribute to a structured, well-devised and appropriately resourced programme. Involvement of Unison and Unison Learning Representatives and the Trust's HR department helped to facilitate agreement to new Band 4 roles and has given credibility to this area of workforce development.

8.3 Programme operation and delivery

8.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
Students, selected jointly by the project and TVU, have all completed the in-service programme to NVQ level 3. It has been important that the chosen HEI had experience of recruiting and supporting non-traditional students.

Although the HE Demonstrator Site funding provided the resources to develop and establish the programme, it does not provide payment for student fees or “backfill” to cover students or mentor release. This has been provided by the Strategic Health Authority for London (NHS London), and has been an essential element in ensuring delivery of the programme.

8.3.2 Delivery
Students spend one day a week on TVU campus and one day a week on work-based learning. This provides a balance between formal delivery of directed reading, research and discussion in a HE setting with the achievement of planned experiential learning in the workplace. The FD in Long Term Conditions at TVU has students from other workplace settings, allowing students to mix with those who are from other settings and on other FDs.
8.3.3 Assessment
Modules on the FD are assessed by assignments (marked by academic staff) under the University’s normal assessment procedures. The work-based learning module is assessed by a portfolio of evidence and the achievement of Knowledge and Skills Framework outcomes are documented and evidenced. The mentor signs off the outcomes, overseen by an academic tutor, and the final assessment of the module remains in the hands of TVU.

8.3.4 Student support and access to resources
Each student chooses someone that they work with as a mentor who is there to provide support and plan and make sense of their practice-based learning. TVU have provided appropriate paperwork and been involved in training to support mentors.

8.4 Programme and partnership management
The Memorandum of Understanding is based on the terms of the initial tender and includes requirements for the employer to: determine the outcomes required; provide funding for fees and backfill; give practical support for both students and mentors; identify that success will open opportunities for progression. The requirements for the HEI include to: deliver academic learning, provide a timetable (in consultation with the employer), and offer a competence framework and appropriate paperwork to support objective setting and recording of evidence of competence. It also highlights responsibilities for the briefing of mentors at the outset and at designated intervals and for accreditation of the degree.

The early establishment of the steering group, representing all major stakeholders is the main vehicle for sustaining the HEI/employer partnership. This group is key to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the project, and has been vital to the success. Students attend meetings on a rota basis, each taking a turn to represent student views. This ensures that the responsibility for attending meetings does not fall onto a single individual and that students each get an opportunity to provide feedback.

A curriculum subgroup provides a forum for detailed discussion of course content and delivery and is instrumental in supporting TVU to adapt its academic framework for year two of the course curriculum to meets the needs of both students and the Trust.
8.5 Challenges

8.5.1 Delivery
Work-based learning needs to be planned in advance to be fully effective and a consistent timetable for university sessions needs to be identified so that the employer can plan for when students are out of work.

8.6 Good practice

8.6.1 Partner benefits
Clinicians have recognised the benefit of staffing specialist areas with a Band 7 professional therapist plus a Band 4 assistant, and areas of the Hospital not directly involved have begun to enquire about getting access for their staff.

8.6.2 Service improvement
Training needs, relevant to the wider therapeutic team and leading to a broad improvement in patient-centred working have been identified. Through the planned work-based learning opportunities provided, students spend time in other departments and are sharing knowledge around the hospital. Interactions between the students are contributing to team building.

Some of the girls who work here, I didn’t really know very well – they’re physios as well – but now we’re buddies, so if ever I wanted to ask them anything … it’s broken that down as well – we’ve networked and we share ideas. So, it’s done lots of good things that I don’t think people realise really.
—Mandie Ball, Foundation Degree student

8.6.3 Career and personal development

It makes you more confident if you know there’s a lot of theory behind it. A lot of people have proved it right before. You feel a bit more, sort of, confident in your interventions.
—Foundation Degree student (quotation taken from Guidance for Mentors document)
On my team, they are forever saying to me ‘why don’t you go to university and do the proper qualifications’ but with the children it was always very difficult and I didn’t have the confidence. Maybe now, I might say ‘I’ve done this Foundation Degree, I know what I’m in for’… but, if I hadn’t done it through work, I wouldn’t have been able to do it – I need my salary, I’ve got a family.

—Mandie Ball, Foundation Degree student

This is a lovely job, it’s great. I leave the children to come to a job I love, but along with it now it is about me really – they want me to be a super assistant who has an opinion and that’s what it is – I’ve got a voice. If somebody is prepared to support you doing stuff it makes you feel better about you, because you think they actually care where I’m going.

—Mandie Ball, Rehabilitation Assistant Practitioner and Foundation Degree student

Key contact
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Case study 5

HEI: University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC)
Partners: Acorn Recruitment
Year established: 2009
Student numbers: 20 to 25 expected in first cohort enrolling
Qualification: Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice
Key features: Structured around credit accumulation. Leads to HE and industry qualifications.
Drivers: HE institution responding to researched employer need.
Development: HE institution in consultation with potential partners.
Delivery: Face-to-face academic input, combined with workplace learning tasks.
Assessment: Diverse assessments including APL/APEL recognition, reflective practice and negotiated assignments.

9.1 Context

The Foundation Degree (FD) in Applied Professional Practice grew out of a HEFCW-funded feasibility study to gauge demand, interest and recognition of work-based learning at level 4 and above. Several Sector Skills Councils and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, together with small and medium-sized enterprises, larger employers and Lifelong Learning Wales were canvassed for their input. Two common factors emerged: the need for leadership skills and project management skills for aspirant managers. In response, the Cardiff School of Management within the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) developed the Applied Professional Practice programme for individuals, currently involved in a managerial role, who want to improve their career prospects via the flexibility of workplace learning. This generic award, the first of its kind in Wales, aims to explicitly appeal to a broad range of potential partners across a number of sectors, offering flexible delivery options and enabling work-based learning. The Acorn Group, a UK-wide recruitment and training company were consulted as part of the development process and plan to send their own staff on the programme and also to endorse the programme to their clients.

All our programmes align directly to the National Occupational Standards for management and over the last few years we have been working with UWIC to provide a progression route for our learners who wish to attain at a management level suitable for progression to formal learning. In partnership with UWIC we
are able to promote this Foundation Degree to provide both our own staff with their next stage of development, and also to provide our clients with a work-based opportunity for their internal development programmes.
—Sarah John, Acorn Director

9.2 Programme design

9.2.1 Content
The programme aims to facilitate the personal, academic and professional development of students, enabling them to become reflective practitioners with a critical understanding of the management role in organisations together with graduate competences, such as communication, problem solving, change management and the skills of independent learners. The design recognises the non-traditional learner demographic of the participants in the extensive use of learning contracts and negotiated assignments. These methodologies are designed to be academically rigorous while allowing learners to play a significant part in their learning process and also to facilitate the workplace focus. Other key elements of this programme are a reflective journal as part of an e-portfolio, and the role and support of employer-based mentors.

9.2.2 Structure
The modular programme runs over two calendar years of part-time study. Selected modules are drawn from existing undergraduate programmes and students on the FD study alongside other undergraduate students, offering a wider opportunity to experience university life. Other modules are specifically created for the programme, designed as shell/open modules to facilitate independent study within the student's own work context and to allow for recognition of prior experience and learning. During the consultation process, it was found that while generic programmes have worth and credibility among learners, they are not necessarily perceived in the same way by employers. Additional modules, specific to particular employment sectors, can therefore be introduced to allow the programme to be adapted to suit the needs of individual employers.

Successful students will be able to top-up to a BA Honours degree in the Cardiff School of Management, and ultimately, on to a new Masters qualification in Applied Professional Practice, due to be launched in February 2010.
I passionately believe that HE is not about 18-year-olds. The sector in Wales, as in England, is flatlining in terms of volume … if you look at the number of people who are properly going to need HE skills and should have an opportunity to buy into it … the market is monstrously huge. We are the only sector that can accredit level 4 and above, but if we don’t do that very well or if we don’t get that out to the marketplace, somebody else will. The whole approach to learning is less about didactic approaches, it’s much more about blended learning and student-based enquiry, which is what the APEL, the shell modules and the negotiated assignments in this programme are all about.

— Peter Treadwell, Dean of Academic Development, Cardiff School of Management

9.3 Programme operation and delivery

9.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
This FD has been designed specifically for students with no formal qualifications and admission is on the basis of the likelihood of the applicant completing the course successfully and deriving benefit from the programme. Entry is via the personal statement on the application form, subsequent interview and evidence of relevant work experience. At the time of writing (October 2009), the course is in the process of recruiting the first cohort of students. It is recognised that because adult work-based learners do not generally apply for courses in the same way or at the same time as traditional students, effective marketing is a vital consideration and recruitment and admission processes need to be flexible and responsive to applicant needs.

9.3.2 Delivery
Modules are delivered through a combination of distance and blended learning and face-to-face teaching, with an emphasis on developing reflective practice. Through work-based study, learners will be able to carry out learning activities in a negotiated manner, focusing upon their current workplace activities. This will require the acquisition of reflective and critical skills, which will develop learners as individuals inside their organisation and also hopefully add value to the company. Employers will be aware of the content of the course and can have input into what they want their employee to do for the project in the work-based learning modules.
9.3.3 Assessment

The modules are assessed by coursework rather than formal examinations because of the negative response that many adult learners have to 'exams'. A variety of assessment methods are used including: portfolios with reflective commentaries on focused observations and enquiries; critical appraisal of materials and resource use; investigations into theories and practice; case studies; accounts of plans for and evaluations of professional development; and analysis of issues arising from work experiences, reading or seminars.

For some modules assessment is by 'individually negotiated' assignments. These could be quite different; for example, for the work-based project, a student working in a research-based area may submit a 10,000 word report, compared with a student with a more client-facing role who submits a poster presentation. To maintain academic rigour, while accommodating flexibility, learning contracts will be negotiated and agreed between the student and their tutor to show how assessment methodology aligns with the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the module.

The majority of work will be assessed by academics; however, there will also be a small amount of assessment within the workplace. Employer/mentor assessment will be used to verify the process of completing work-based assignments (rather than intellectual content). To facilitate this, the employer contact will be provided with appropriate paperwork, such as checklists, logbooks etc. UWIC will maintain a proactive role in monitoring the quality of the workplace learning element and, through employer support, ensuring effective operation and management.

It’s recognising the quality work that people do in the workplace and giving it an academic stamp; so we consciously have to make sure that we ensure our academic standards.

— Elspeth Dale, Programme Director for the Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice, UWIC

9.3.4 Student support and access to resources

In recognition of the different needs of learners from non-traditional backgrounds and those who continue in employment while undertaking these awards, the programme has been designed with an emphasis on learner support with resource guides, study skills packages and clear module descriptors containing learning outcomes, indicative content and structured criteria for the assignment. These resources will be available
to students via the joining pack, the module handbooks and the University’s virtual learning environment.

To enable and support the adult, work-based learners engaged on this programme, careful consideration has also been given to the selection of the delivery team in order to ensure that they have a working knowledge of learning at work and who are willing to be flexible in delivery schedules, for example for weekend or intensive courses.

As part of the support system, workplace learning support mentors will be identified jointly by UWIC staff and employers and will be offered training appropriate for their role.

_The big thing on the ground is the extent to which we have enough support staff and the skills of our own staff to develop exciting material and to deliver face-to-face to part-time mature learners, who are a bit more hard-nosed. You've got to deliver good stuff._

—Peter Treadwell, Dean of Academic Development, Cardiff School of Management

_Tradition is good, but we’ve got to embrace alternatives. It is difficult in an institution like this where the system works very much around three terms. We have to be able to negotiate the systems in a different way to be able to deliver this sort of course._

—Elspeth Dale, Programme Director for the Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice, UWIC

### 9.4 Quality assurance: monitoring and evaluation

The FD validated by UWIC is subject to the University’s quality assurance processes.

In line with UWIC practice, assessment criteria are written for all the assignments for each module. For the negotiated assignments these will be established in the learning contracts. Assessments are second marked and externally examined to ensure that the assessment is fit for purpose, meets the learning outcomes and that it has been marked to the appropriate level. Student feedback is collected online after each module and, together with the external examiner’s report, feeds into an annual programme report. Each course undergoes a formal process of evaluation, including periodic review.

A programme committee will also be set up with partner organisation, student and employer representation.
When the partnership with Acorn, or with Acorn on behalf of another organisation, comes to fruition a Memorandum of Understanding with the end-user organisation, with Acorn recruitment as the link, will be put in place.

9.5 Challenges

9.5.1 Academic
Both internal and external members of the validation committee were initially concerned by the extent and amount of blended leaning involved in the programme and the breadth and flexibility of assessment associated with the shell/independent study modules, where the study and the nature of the learning journey for individual students cannot be predetermined. The validity of the programme was established, however, once the learning from generic modules structured around a work-based project with clearly identified learning outcomes relating to higher-level project management skills, interaction skills, knowledge skills and pedagogical craft skills became evident.

Key contacts
Peter Treadwell, Dean of Academic Development, Cardiff School of Management, UWIC
Elspeth Dale, Programme Director for the Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice, UWIC
HEI: The University of Exeter
Partners: South West Water Limited
Year established: 2007
Student numbers: First cohort of ten students, second cohort of 13.
Qualification: Postgraduate Certificate in Business Management
Key features: Employer-led development.
Drivers: Employer identified needs for developing capacity and performance of workforce and organisation.
Development: Close consultation between company and academics; modification and tailoring of an existing programme.
Delivery: Face-to-face academic input, company input and workplace learning and mentoring.
Assessment: Diverse range of assessments including reflective practice.

10.1 Context
This partnership grew from an existing relationship: South West Water Limited (SWWL) was already working with the University of Exeter (UoE) in research and recruitment activities as well as through the South West Leadership Forum, a networking initiative based within the University's Business School.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Business Management programme emerged from the Business School's proactive approach to seeking business with regional organisations already linked with the University. It came at the time when SWWL were in the process of looking for a management development programme. The company had recently identified a set of competency skills required by their middle managers and had highlighted generic areas that needed further development, including strategic thinking and accounting. SWWL deliver in-house, a range of craft and industrial work-based training but, because of the level and subject knowledge required for the proposed employee development programme, were looking for an academic partner. This was the first time that the company had collaborated with a HE institution to develop a bespoke programme, and that there was an existing relationship gave them the confidence in working with the University of Exeter.

10.2 Programme design
Designing the programme took the form of an extensive dialogue between SWWL and UoE representatives to establish company need. Several managers from SWWL
contributed the business perspective, defining what needed to be covered and helping to shape the programme.

10.2.1 Structure and award
During the consultation process three existing modules of the University’s Business School open access, modular CPD (Masters level) award programme (Financial Management, Strategy and Change Management) were identified as relevant to SWWL’s training needs. In order to accredit the modules as a Postgraduate Certificate, a fourth module in Systems Thinking was created specifically for this new programme. The Systems Thinking module appealed to SWWL in giving credibility to the training programme, and was written and validated in accordance with the University’s procedures.

10.2.2 Content
During the development phase it was particularly important to find a way to incorporate SWWL’s own context and needs into the generic CPD programme. As a public utility company, SWWL operates on a different business model than private companies and, during the consultation process, it was agreed that students needed to be made aware of the core material, but that this then needed to be overlaid with SWWL’s own practices and procedures. This was achieved through blending academic and practical within the elements of the programme and by supplementing the formal delivery of the course by the University with input from, and internal training by, senior executives from SWWL. The adopted modules already had prescribed assignments, but within the structure there was sufficient flexibility to incorporate workplace-based learning, including written assignments based on reflective practice.

10.3 Programme operation and delivery

10.3.1 Recruitment and admissions
Participants are recruited internally by SWWL from a pool of middle managers with aspirations for promotion. These professionals, with on average ten years’ company experience, come from a range of backgrounds, not all with undergraduate degree qualifications. Admitting students with these non-traditional backgrounds meant that the University had to ensure student support was built into the programme.
10.3.2 Delivery

The SWWL Postgraduate Certificate in Business Management is structured from the following elements:

— a ‘gateway to study’ day;
— academic teaching days;
— contextual input from company directors and senior managers;
— tutoring for each module (action learning), provided by the University;
— independent work on assignments.

The scheduling of these different elements is a collaborative process.

Academic input for each module is delivered via three intensive teaching days by academic staff from the Business School and the Centre for Leadership with a background in industry and with experience of dealing with industrial colleagues. This is usually offered as three consecutive days at the beginning of the module or two days at the beginning followed by one later on. For the first cohort these initial teaching days were held in a local hotel; however, it was felt that this detached the programme from the University and subsequent modules have all been delivered on the University campus. This gives a greater sense of affiliation and offers students greater access to resources, such as the library.

The workplace learning element of the programme was carefully planned to ensure full integration with the academic learning. For each module a senior executive from SWWL delivers an internal strategy training day at the company. In addition, a number of SWWL senior managers are involved in the delivery of teaching; for example, the Director of Corporate Services contributes to the assessment of student presentations for the Systems Thinking module. The SWWL financial controller attends the teaching days for the Finance Management module to input the company perspective into the lectures just when needed and as part of a dialogue with the academic input.

10.3.3 Assessment

Assessment has been designed so that, while meeting the required academic learning objectives for postgraduate programmes, they are also rooted in relevant business practices. Although each module requires two or three assessed outputs, there is diversity of the assessment medium. For example, the Systems Thinking module is assessed through a practical project followed by a presentation. Written assignments are often based on reflective practice. Summative assessment is done by academics and is subject to usual University quality procedures.
Part of the value added in terms of the assignment was that they were academic and based in the university way of doing things — the hardest thing for most people was to write assignments that covered the academic theory learnt and didn’t just concentrate on their own experiences and familiar approaches. The company wants reassurance that people have considered a range of options and can go through that right process and make considered judgements.

—Nigel Fenn, Organisation and Employee Development Manager, South West Water Limited

10.3.4 Student support and access to resources
Experience from other programmes in the Business School has shown that academic presence in the workplace both helps to ensure academic quality and maintains communication channels with the company. For each module, programme participants are supported in the workplace by ‘action learning’ tutors who provide guidance and advice through individual support sessions.

10.4 Programme and partnership management
The University takes a stakeholder management approach to relationships with partner organisations. The wider relationship with SWWL, as a significant local employer, is managed by a lead University-wide contact and the Postgraduate Certificate teaching programme, managed through the Business School’s CPD Office, feeds back into regular reviews of the co-operation …

During the early stages of delivery the partnership was still evolving. However, for the second cohort, instigated by the Director of CPD, a formal agreement, to provide terms of reference and to establish a formal process in the management of collaborative programmes, was negotiated and contracted between SWWL and the Business School. Although the real negotiation of agreement was undertaken for delivery to the first cohort, the contract provided a formal means of documenting partnership arrangements: articulating agreed terms; outlining the University and partner obligations; determining a process of change control; and scheduling the programme, staff roles and programme fees.

When things are going well and you’ve got a good relationship you think ‘do we really need a contract?’ From experience we are a good, effective partnership so we haven’t had to call on the contract but it’s good to know it’s there if it is ever needed.

—Nigel Fenn, Organisation and Employee Development Manager, South West Water Ltd
Students on the programme are experienced managers with high expectations of the programme and their learning, and also of their general encounters with the University and the wider physical learning environment. They expect the course to be delivered in a professional manner, to have the information they need, when they need it and to have someone to respond to their queries. For these reasons the day-to-day administrative infrastructure of the course is an important element in managing the relationship with the company, and a member of the CPD office in the Business School has responsibility for ensuring the smooth running of the programme, making logistical arrangements, liaising with faculty staff and the company and negotiating between the University’s way of doing things and the company’s expectation of how things should work. This individual is also the named contact for students, providing support through the whole process from enrolment to submission of assignments to certification.

_We are all business managers (busy people), so having things like car parking sorted out, things that ordinary students don’t get, goes the extra mile._
—Nigel Fenn, Organisation and Employee Development Manager, South West Water Ltd

### 10.5 Quality assurance: monitoring and evaluation

The modules delivered as part of the programme are all quality assured through the normal University procedures for validation and accreditation. The programme is subject to periodic review and a number of modifications to the programme were made between delivery to the first and the second cohorts. A formal student evaluation form, devised, separately from usual University mechanisms so as to accommodate differences in the type of course and the type of student, is completed by individual participants at the end of each module. In addition a student handbook has been tailored specifically to the programme, detailing what is to be delivered and what is expected of participants.

Academic staff visit the company at least once per month, contributing to informal monitoring of the programme and the partnership. Course issues and student feedback are also informally monitored by the dedicated administrative staff in the Business School CPD office.

The programme is evaluated internally by SWWL; there are currently no formal mechanisms to elicit feedback from the company beyond verbal feedback from key contacts. A client-level evaluation form, based on criteria used by the Financial Times in ranking customised executive education provision of Business Schools is soon to be implemented.
10.6 Challenges

10.6.1 Academic
Students need to be aware of the level of commitment required and it is important for them to receive full and correct information prior to the beginning of the course. It was necessary to adapt the content of the student handbook to cover the needs of in-company participants. Timetabling requirements for university courses differing from those needed for in-company programmes also created some tensions.

*You have got to explain what the requirements of an academic degree are because unless you’re clear and unambiguous they will have different expectations. You have to be clear that this is at Masters degree level and we’re not going to lower the level. However, I would argue some of the finest and best stuff has come from these students because once you’ve opened them onto academia, they start thinking and you get some marvellous insights.*
—Roger Maull, Professor of Management, the University of Exeter

10.6.2 Staff
Academic staff delivering ‘in-company programmes’ are not always aware of the differences between executive education and traditional university courses and some additional training has been provided for a few of the academic staff involved in programme delivery.

10.6.3 Infrastructure
The sustainability of the programme is dependent on the internal resources and priorities of SWWL. Utility industries review budget priorities every five years and universities wanting to engage with partner organisations need to be sensitive to the internal budget cycles and priorities of the organisation. Timing of conversations about the future running of the course is, therefore, very important.

10.7 Good practice

10.7.1 Management
The time spent considering academic aspects together with the business impact that the company wanted the programme to have and the required ‘return on investment’ was important in establishing programme requirements. Building
relationships and the ongoing maintenance of the understanding and trust established at the outset is perhaps the most significant contributory factor in the success of partnership programmes.

Any partnership is only as good as the people that are operating that partnership, although on paper it’s two organisations, the reality is that it’s a few people and a few people. And from my perspective the reason why it’s been so successful as a partnership is really down to the good work and the approaches of those individuals.
—Nigel Fenn, Organisation and Employee Development Manager, South West Water Ltd

10.7.2 Partnership development
This partnership has deepened the University’s relationships with SWWL and is building further links in the regional economy. Having direct access to company data and case studies is helpful for academic research and the additional Systems Thinking module has expanded the CPD portfolio and enabled the CPD office to develop their product range, with reduced risk to the University.

10.7.3 Career development
Coming in to the University has taken some students out of their comfort zones and provided space for them to think about the theory behind what they do. Students have also gained confidence in articulating how actions influence and impact on others. This has helped raise individual profiles within the company and, since embarking on the programme, some students have moved into senior management roles.

10.7.4 Partner development
Employee development activity is much more defined in relation to company objectives. The impact and the value of the programme have not yet been fully evaluated by SWWL. However, anecdotally the course has impacted on organisational culture, as seen in changes in the language used within the company and in the company’s ways of working; for example, an articulated methodology for change management has been developed.

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## Appendix: Managing employer and cross-institutional partnerships

Framework showing key mechanisms for quality assurance with cross-reference to *Code of practice*  
**Section 2 (collaborative provision)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Central Lancashire</th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Thames Valley</th>
<th>University of Wales Institute, Cardiff</th>
<th>Exeter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precepts: A3, A8, A10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner (a sector trainer)</td>
<td>Partner identified professional development needs and learning requirements.</td>
<td>A steering group of all stakeholders identified needs.</td>
<td>Sector promoted initiative, with stakeholder steering group to determine requirements.</td>
<td>Generic HE workplace learning initiative, informed by feasibility study.</td>
<td>Professional development needs identified by partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme design</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precepts A2, A10, A12, A13, A14, A16, A20, A27</td>
<td>Strong input from public service employers regarding content and delivery structure.</td>
<td>Strong input from partner regarding content, context and delivery structure.</td>
<td>Programmes designed by working party with FE and local authority representation.</td>
<td>Sector Skills Councils, SMEs and larger employers consulted on the programme aims.</td>
<td>Extensive dialogue to establish partner’s needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Collaborative approach to achievement of partner and academic requirements.</td>
<td>FD benchmarks, Educational Studies level descriptors and fdf guidance used as reference guidelines. Sector endorsement obtained.</td>
<td>Integration of generic academic study with partner’s processes, procedures and context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>with national training levels for emergency service staff, leading to vocational award.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>QAA benchmarks for L4 and L5 and University criteria define requirements.</td>
<td>Student-centred learning modules have clear learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>clearly define desired academic requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme validated in accordance with University’s QA framework.</td>
<td>University Quality Officer used to achieve validation requirements.</td>
<td>Programme validated in accordance with University’s QA framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified progression to further study available.</td>
<td>Progression to further study available.</td>
<td>Progression to further study available.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Programme operation and delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject to minimum requirements, students are employer/partner admitted.</th>
<th>Subject to minimum requirements, students are employer selected.</th>
<th>Partner colleges responsible for recruitment, subject to agreed entry requirements.</th>
<th>Students jointly selected by HE institution and partner.</th>
<th>Students selected by HE institution based on 'likelihood to succeed'.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery by partner staff who have undertaken University-led professional development.</td>
<td>Selected partner Subject Matter Experts contribute to delivery.</td>
<td>University modular structures used as a template for delivery. Workplace mentor roles formalised and supported.</td>
<td>Workplace mentors support learning in the workplace.</td>
<td>University trained workplace mentors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing formative feedback.</td>
<td>All summative assessment follows University QA assessment procedures.</td>
<td>Clearly defined learning outcomes form the basis of assessment.</td>
<td>All summative assessment follows University QA assessment procedures.</td>
<td>All summative assessment follows University QA assessment procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive pre-residential online resources tailored to non-traditional students.</td>
<td>Pre-sessional distance learning package refamiliarises students with academic study prior to delivery of programme. Full access to University’s support services and resources. Stock of key texts at partner site.</td>
<td>Partner college resources and access to a range of University support services and resources.</td>
<td>Non-traditional learner resources support programme delivery. Student support built into programme.</td>
<td>Partner contribution to delivery.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Programme and partnership management

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard University processes used for quality monitoring and assurance.</td>
<td>Programmes are subject to formal annual review.</td>
<td>Programme development, monitoring and evaluation embedded in robust University quality processes.</td>
<td>Standard University processes used for quality monitoring and assurance.</td>
<td>Standard University processes used for quality monitoring and assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional partner evaluation of programmes.</td>
<td>Additional feedback and evaluation input from partner.</td>
<td>Partner colleges each have additional self-assessment procedures.</td>
<td>Informal monitoring by administrative staff and partner provides additional feedback.</td>
<td>Informal monitoring by administrative staff and partner provides additional feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rapid response and fit-for-purpose solutions for HE employer provision

Dawn Whitemore
Head of University of Derby Corporate, University of Derby

Ann Minton
Workforce Development Fellow, School of Flexible and Partnership Learning and University of Derby Corporate, University of Derby

1 Contributing partners

Lead institution

The University of Derby has a dedicated unit, University of Derby Corporate, to oversee employer engagement, and a School of Flexible Learning, to generate responsive academic solutions to meet learner needs. Many of its employer programmes fall within an overarching Lifelong Learning Scheme.

Partner institutions

The University of Aston has received a HEFCE Employer Engagement grant to establish a Centre for foundation degree development.

The University of Chester has a central development team of business development staff, who oversee employer engagement and liaise with academic staff to develop the offer.

The University of Hertfordshire has positioned itself as a business-facing university. Developments are managed mainly at a faculty level, though a small central team supports.

North West Universities Alliance (NWUA): The NWUA (Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)) has adopted a collaborative approach to the supply of HE provision to employers in the region.
cross-universities team helps to identify and support need and individual universities’ offer according to their strengths.

2 Introduction

Quality assurance issues relating to university-level provision developed for and with employers are critical to the employer engagement agenda. While such issues pertain to many aspects of such provision, this Demonstrator Project focuses upon the development, approval and quality assurance issues associated with short awards or credit-bearing short courses. Through such provision, learners are encouraged to develop their knowledge, competence and skills by engaging with learning opportunities related to the principles and practices of their work, thus embedding HE within the workplace and employment within the HE curriculum.

Clearly, quality assurance processes for such activity must be robust – the ‘university’ imprimatur is, after all, why employers are engaging with higher education rather than with a training provider. However, in order to meet business requirements and timescales, these processes should be proportionate, fit for purpose and not constrained by the artificial constructs of the academic year and procedures designed for full-time students.

The project deals with the development of new learning solutions for a specific client or clients, not the accreditation of existing in-company training programmes, which is the remit of a different Demonstrator Project, being led by the University of Hertfordshire, one of our partners in the current project. These new solutions will vary in their academic level and volume of credit within a programme. Experience from within the partners acknowledges that employers do not necessarily require whole awards to achieve their learning objectives. For example, the Higher Education Academy report, Work-based learning: Impact study (Nixon, 2008), acknowledges the value that employers and employees placed on small programmes of only 30 credits.

The success of foundation degrees and their subsequent ‘top-ups’ indicate that there is still demand by employers for full programmes of study leading to major awards, and that approvals mechanisms need to take account of the spectrum of requirements.

Answers to questionnaires and discussion within the partnership identified the following key themes as being crucial to the institution, when developing rapid response and fit-for-purpose solutions for employers, which maintain standards:

— institutional structures;
— curriculum development;
— approvals mechanisms;
— QA arrangements for implementation.
Institutional structures

Where employer engagement activity sits within the university, whether it be within a faculty or cross-institutional department, will often be influenced by the priority that the university places on employer engagement activity.

Wherever the activity is located, high-level support at VC/PVC/Dean level is essential, so that key decision makers can influence the wider university systems to develop an infrastructure that supports and enables a proactive response to employers. This is supported in the findings of a joint study from CIHE and the University of Exeter (Bolden et al., 2009).

A key finding of the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder in the North-West was the importance of the link to systems within the university. Manchester Metropolitan University has sought to roll out employer engagement governance, developed in one faculty, across the other faculties.

Within our partnership, governance of employer engagement activity was found to lie along a continuum:

Figure 1: Continuum of governance of employer engagement activity

Wherever the activity is located, the central academic quality department is involved, although they may devolve governance and approval of shorter awards to faculties, sometimes within clear criteria in relation to volume of credit and academic level. It was noted that consideration should be given to progression routes for those who have achieved credit in this way.

At MMU, one faculty has developed an Open Professional Programme with identified industrial partners including a strong relationship with the fashion industry. The programme comprises a portfolio of short courses that build into accredited units from levels 4 to 7. This programme is managed within the faculty, the Dean and heads of departments are all members of the programme committee, which also includes
membership from the library, ICTS and admissions teams. There is a programme leader who co-ordinates activities within the Open Professional Programme.

At Hertfordshire small faculty-based teams currently manage significant levels of discipline-based provision. They find that this is far more responsive and is likely to be retained, alongside the development of a central team to support the remaining provision. The University has recently developed procedures for the approval of credit-based short courses. Although based upon the existing framework, these new procedures allow the development of short courses, based on the achievement of credit rather than the achievement of awards in the traditional sense. The process that the University has adopted for the approval of short courses resides at faculty level, and involves the completion of standard templates (the Short Course Descriptor), one at each academic level. These can be initiated at any time and are approved by the Head of School and Assistant Director Academic Quality and, in the case of short courses involving partner institutions, a resource manager from that institution. They are signed off by the Dean.

Furthermore, credit-bearing short courses can be used in a portfolio for a University award at undergraduate or postgraduate level. While it is clear that this streamlined approval process is a helpful innovation from the point of view of responsiveness, the audit team was concerned that the onus for ensuring the availability of adequate resources and the appropriateness of level, content and assessment is placed entirely on two senior members of staff from the originating faculty. It was the view of the team that by seeking external input at the approval stage of short courses, the University would have the potential further to secure the standard of the awards. Consequently, the team recommends it is advisable for the University to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment.

At Aston the focus of employer engagement activity has been on the development of foundation degrees. Here the Foundation Degree Centre (FDC) leads development work for new FDs, ensuring the proposal meets business need, but works in close collaboration with relevant schools (faculties) and their staff. Once validated the new FD programme becomes the responsibility of the school for delivery and operation.

In Derby, employer engagement activity is managed through a central business-facing unit (University of Derby Corporate), which has key links into the faculties and schools of the University and utilises the approvals mechanisms owned by the Lifelong Learning Scheme – a scheme specifically designed to meet the needs of employers and to promote work-based and lifelong learning. This central unit has systems specifically
designed to meet the needs of businesses, but which link into the wider University systems, such as IT, student records and the library.

The faculty links are academics, Workforce Development Fellows, with significant experience of working with employers, to develop, support and deliver contextualised learning.

In Chester, the governance is similar to that in Derby with a central Employer Engagement team of business development managers and administrators who are responsible for forging links with employers. This unit does not house academic staff and does not have specific links in the faculties. The academic expertise is drawn from either the faculties or the Professional Development Unit, based in the Business School. This unit provides pan-University provision by academics who specialise in negotiated work-based learning, and manages the framework for approval and governance of employer engagement activity.

4 Curriculum development
Quality will have an interest in the people involved with the development of the curriculum, how ideas are generated and the determination of the assessment strategy (see QAA, 2010, para 32).

All partners agreed that employers have to be involved in the identification and scoping of the curriculum, including the identification of relevant professional or industry benchmarks that can be aligned to the curriculum (see QAA, 2010, para 76). Academic partners were involved in the articulation of the agreed curriculum and aligning it to HE standards, together with shaping the assessment so that it is relevant and rigorous.

A variety of employers were involved with our partners – from large multinational companies to SMEs. In each case contextualisation of the curriculum within the workplace is vital for success for both learners and employers and is felt to have greater impact on the organisation, particularly where the assessment is based on real-work activity (Nixon, 2008).

A variety of approaches were adopted depending on the needs of the employer and the portfolio of employer engagement programmes offered by the institution. Again this was found to lie along a continuum:
The locus of curriculum design varies depending upon the context:
— external imposition, where fitness to practice is entailed, drawing on the transdisciplinary nature of the working environment (Boud and Solomon, 2003);
— generic development of professional practice, designed for the individual company;
— subject-focused provision, clearly located within existing provision.

The underpinning philosophies for curriculum in all cases have synergies with characteristics described by Boud and Solomon (2003):

… learning opportunities are not contrived for study purposes but arise from normal work …

… learning tasks and work tasks are complementary …

… meets the needs of learners, contributes to the longer-term development of the organisation and is formally accredited as a university award …

A key to successful curriculum development was considered to lie in having a lead academic to ensure that it remains fit for purpose regarding the requirements of the employer and the standards of the university. This is confirmed by the CIHE/Exeter study (Bolden et al., 2009).

This aspect is covered within a sister Demonstrator Project led by the University of Hertfordshire, and published with the same series.
4.1 How is the curriculum developed and who is involved?

Each interaction will have a key driver. It is vital that this is identified and acknowledged by the development team and incorporated into a clear rationale for the development. Experience within the partnership notes that as the institution becomes more experienced and active in employer engagement, then the need to develop new curriculum decreases, as within particular subject areas there are key learning needs for all employers irrespective of sector. What does change is the specific ‘menu’ within the curriculum, and the wider context of the situation of learning.

In Derby, initial discussion takes place with the employer and the Business Development Manager and Workforce Development Fellow from the central team, to identify the range of learning needs. This may take the form of a formal training needs analysis or simply through discussion with the employer. The central team also retains a key account management role, to ensure that all aspects of the development and its subsequent implementation run smoothly. They act as a key interface between the University and client, as a single point of contact for the client.

One such example was with Healthcare at Home, a local and fast-growing private healthcare company, where discussion with the company training manager led to the outline development of a management development programme for first line managers that deals with managing and motivating people and managing change.

The initial outline programme was further enhanced by a development team from the faculty, led by a Workforce Development Fellow, working with the training manager to ensure that the context of learning was clearly identified and embedded within the curriculum. Consideration was given to existing in-house training and provision, to identify areas that could be utilised and built upon within the delivery schedule. The background and experience of the employees were also considered to ensure that there was a match for academic level.

Teaching and learning strategy was discussed with the employer to ensure that work-based learning opportunities were maximised and developed, to enable the learners to apply their learning, and for the employer to experience a direct impact of the learning on the business processes. For Healthcare at Home this involved both group and individual projects, as well as personal reflection on learning.

This programme’s core indicative content has also been utilised for a local authority, a large highly specialised engineering company, and a new and fast-growing healthcare company. This was possible as there was close discussion in the early engagement stage with the companies, to identify their requirements. A teaching, learning and assessment strategy was then developed that allowed these needs to be
met. Staff were mindful to keep the learning outcomes and curriculum focus generic, to enable reuse in other contexts. The focus was on socially situated individuals relating the familiar circumstances of their work contexts to the requirements of academic awards.

At MMU the Open Professional Development Programme has been designed with a variety of industrial partners, offering qualifications to meet the needs of large, small and medium-sized employers. Employers, the SCC and the GMSA have been involved in the development of this new academic programme and the engagement of employers is fundamental to the delivery of each unit by their provision of the work-based elements. The curriculum design process is facilitated by an institutional shell framework that draws on existing University procedures and quality management processes. This Open Professional Development Programme is founded upon placement learning being continual and integral, and will take place through work-based learning via the students’ role within a company. The programme allows for flexibility and aims:

— to advance students’ knowledge and understanding of studies within their area of employment;
— to stimulate enquiry into specific aspects of their employment;
— to provide coherent employer participation in their development;
— to provide a manageable and flexible learning experience that facilitates all of the above.

Those entering the programme will have varying experiences and will select units that either further develop their existing knowledge or develop new knowledge and skills in order to maximise their employability and strengthen their company’s business advantage. Therefore, irrespective of the origins of the candidates, everyone will benefit by adding value to their employability. Specifically they have joined forces with Liverpool Community College and Wigan & Leigh College to run a series of short courses for technicians and managers already working in fashion, clothing technology and other related professions. This collaboration has promoted stronger links between education and industry. Companies want to tackle particular issues or problems and these are often ‘personal’ to an organisation, so the University and their partners work with key personnel within the organisation to design courses that address such issues. These in turn help with staff development and long-term succession planning. They draw on their existing relationships in developing bespoke programmes for companies ranging from large British retailers to small and medium-sized enterprises.
in the North-West. A range of modules are offered, together with a choice of delivery sites, i.e. within any of the three institutions or on company premises, depending on the organisation's requirements.

At LJMU focus groups, CPD programmes, KTPs and research contracts are all used as the source of ideas for successful curriculum development. The most effective are small focus groups committed to a project over a defined timescale. The actual development process is firmly based in a faculty with minimal involvement of the central team, reflecting the locus of academic expertise. Employers are encouraged to bring ideas for inclusion and context, which are interpreted, analysed and translated into curriculum design by the school academics.

At Hertfordshire, the curriculum is generated in partnership through contractual arrangements with the employer. The employer provides the ideas and outcomes for staff, which are then worked on collaboratively to develop the ideas into a sound academic outline but offering an assessment that is related to real life/real workplace and relevant to the employee and employer. Representatives for the faculty and the employer work collaboratively to achieve this. For example, courses for NHS East of England are designed to meet specific workforce development needs driven by health strategy priorities and new practitioner roles within the health economy.

Chester reports the use of a variety of methods. The employer may come with a 'big picture idea' that can be honed in relation to integrating WBL approaches to delivery and assessment. At other times the academic team provide ideas, e.g. the foundation degree for Government.

They also use a variety of models for delivery. The University delivers the programme and facilitates aspects of work-based learning for the client.

Sometimes the employer delivers. This is not classed as collaborative provision, however, as the University appoints key facilitators from the employer as honorary tutors of the University and line manages this activity.

The University undertakes the QA processes, managing assessment, providing second marking, internal and external moderation. Curriculum design is generated by the employer and honed within the University in this model.

Aston University have focused their response in this area to the development of foundation degrees, where the FDC will respond to direct approaches from businesses, Sector Skills Councils, Trade Associations or other parties. Otherwise FDC would seek to market specialist FD proposals that fit with Aston's resources and strategy. The Central Team co-ordinate the development and liaison with employers
to ensure programmes are fit for purpose and fit with University regulations and QAA requirements for FDs and the relevant benchmark statements. The school and faculty then ensure that programme proposals meet academic requirements for content, learning outcomes and assessment strategies.

Employers are consulted at all stages of programme development and are actively involved in the validation events.

4.2 Other influences on curriculum development
Each institution within the partnership reported that due consideration should be given to relevant external reference points (NOS; PSBs; QAA benchmark statements). They noted that these were an integral part of the approval of any programme, as with more traditional or conventional provision, to ensure academic consistency and to facilitate the assimilation of academic practices and administration procedures. It was also recognised that the reference points can aid accreditation processes with professional institutions.

It was felt that the location of provision within The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ), by the ascription of credit and level, was fundamental to ensuring that the provision was clearly characterised as higher education, and thus distinguished from other training providers. Partners endeavoured to embed within provision either framework or programme learning outcomes.

The partners recognise that the QAA benchmark statements do not intend to prescribe the content of the curriculum, but to provide a sound basis on which to ‘hang’ key areas of study. These are the realm of the academic and it is important that those involved in the discussion with employers are able to explain the need to harmonise provision with these key requirements and HE characteristics.

Some partners reported that the use of credit level descriptors (Moon, 2002; Durrant et al., 2009) leads to greater consistency in approach to learning outcomes and standards of short course provision, thus ensuring that there is parity with other provision within the University and other negotiated WBL programmes across the country.

4.3 Designation of award titles
The titles of the awards are governed by:
— the cognate subject areas in which the learning resides;
— the employer needs;
— the parameters of university regulations e.g. provision is related to work in practice and can’t be confused with a professional qualification;
— market expectation, as the award must be appealing to students and employers, and may have the potential to gain recognition by professional bodies.

Awards are linked to the individual university’s award framework. The volume of credit that entitles the students to gain an award varies by institution. The smallest volume of credit that is award bearing that we are aware of is 30 credits (certificate of achievement), although within the partnership short courses that are credit bearing are seen as an intrinsic part of the offer.

MMU’s programme encourages learners to discuss their personal development plans with their academic adviser and with their company manager/mentor. Individual companies may have a strategy for personal development planning that can be incorporated into the programme plan. In response to this a wide variety of subject areas will be offered and the portfolio of units will be constantly evolving so that students will have no difficulty in finding subjects of benefit to their personal and professional advancement. Students will be able to accrue credits over a long period, switching on and off their registration. They may choose to study from a ‘pick and mix’ of units and levels appropriate to their needs and capabilities. It is not compulsory to progress across or up levels or to follow any set progression route. In time, it is envisaged that sufficient will be collected to enable a formal qualification of the University to be awarded.

The University of Hertfordshire similarly develop small components that students can collect together for an award, guided by the employer as to what titles they require.

5 Approvals mechanisms
All agreed that the key factors determining an approvals mechanism should be based on risk and proportionality – ensuring that they were fit for purpose when dealing in the business environment, where timescales can be crucial (cf. QAA, 2010, paras 28-35). The challenges faced relate particularly to credit-rated provision, and more so when they are linked to the achievement of an award.

A wide variety of approaches were adopted, with institutions like LJMU and Aston choosing to use the existing university processes.

Proportionality was evidenced in a tiered or differential approach in some institutions based on the volume of credit and the level of the credit (Derby).

Others utilise a preapproved set of generic learning outcomes or short course descriptors, which also addresses the issue of externality as part of the approvals mechanism (Hertfordshire).
Shell frameworks with delegated powers within set parameters were also used; MMU, Chester and Derby have clear and robust mechanisms for the approval of programmes and the associated title. The parameters vary between institutions. They are often related to the volume and level of credit, but also may relate to whether the provision is designated as collaborative (see QAA, 2010, para 38).

Chester’s Work Based and Integrative Studies programme (WBIS) facilitates a proactive response to employer requirements and forms part of the University’s special mechanisms to fast track employer engagement requirements. Provision falls outside the WBIS remit when it is heavily didactic teaching and input based. For example, their FD Mortuary Science draws largely on existing modules, combined with some accreditation of in-company provision, and with WBIS template modules for the WBL element. Similarly the foundation degree for Government programme was developed in conjunction with the Government Office and Skills for Government. It draws on existing University provision, utilises workplace education opportunities to develop professional standards and also draws on negotiated WBL modules.

Hertfordshire use a University-wide approval panel, by which all new modules accredited within the framework are considered. All corporately negotiated routes are submitted for approval, along with award title and CVs of associate tutors.

There are no limitations on level or credit volume that the panel can consider. Getting external advice can pose a challenge regarding timescale. Chester uses a preapproved pool of externals to review proposals. Others, including Derby, draw on the existing pool of subject externals within faculties as well as a central, work-based learning external from the lifelong learning scheme. LJMU do not involve externals in the approval of these programmes. At Hertfordshire, since external examiners were involved in the development of the generic short course descriptors, there is no subsequent external involvement in individual short courses. However, this may change as a result of a recent QAA Institutional audit.

Sample flow charts of approvals mechanism are attached as Appendix 1.

6 Quality assurance arrangements
When programmes have been approved and are implemented, there are key arrangements for their quality assurance that need to be considered as an integral part of the design and approval process, particularly regarding the timing of assessment boards and associated referral and deferral processes. We also need to consider how the external examining arrangements are co-ordinated.
Most of the partner institutions offer a pattern of assessment boards that sit outside that of the normal pattern of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, since the provision may not sit within the recognised academic year. Nevertheless it is important that students benefit from speedy and appropriate feedback on their performance after completion of each unit or module. The limitation is often where awards boards are held, as these often occur only once per year.

Hertfordshire and Derby report some ability to be flexible in assessment board arrangement.

At Derby if the development involves a major award of the University, then it will have its own programme assessment boards, which will be determined to meet the needs of the curriculum delivery schedule and could include the requirements of the employer. In such collaborative developments, the assessment board could be hosted alternatively between the University and the employer. The FD in Aviation Studies, a collaborative programme with the RAF, has four assessment boards per year, to facilitate learning, to consider the progress of the students and to ensure that operational availability is not compromised. The boards are held alternatively between the two sites of delivery and the University main campus.

At Hertfordshire credit awarded for short courses is confirmed through the Module Board of Examiners or Short Course Board identified on the Short Course Descriptor (SCD). Boards are held in February, June and September each year, alongside module Board of Examiners. However, with increased volume of activity it is anticipated that Short Course Boards will be established, which could in theory meet at any time (but the initial intention is to retain the February, June and September periods).

6.1 External examination

All partners report the use of external examiners in the ongoing quality assurance arrangements for the programmes in line with their wider university regulations (see QAA, 2010, para 89).

6.2 Tensions between employer perception of quality and institutional requirements

Some institutions report that employers have no preconceived ideas of HE quality requirements or what they might mean. The lack of understanding is most often linked to requirements for assessment and assessment loading. However, most agree that employers seem willing to leave assessment and other QA requirements to the
university, as they accept that this is outside the sphere of their knowledge. This is part of the reason that they are in partnership with a university, rather than with a private training provider.

It would seem that employers are reassured by the existence of quality assurance processes, but occasionally can see them as bureaucratic. The importance of having a clear, well-defined process, with key timelines is useful to support employer engagement activity. It is also important that this is seen as a year-round function and not predicated on the traditional academic term/semester. Where the expectation is clearly outlined to the employer from the outset then usually there is no problem.

7 Summary of key findings

7.1 People
Key staff are needed at both institutional and faculty management level, to ensure that the organisational infrastructure will enable employer engagement activity to work for employers. They are also needed at programme level to ensure that employer needs are genuinely being met, rather than repackaging existing provision for the convenience of the university.

It is important to employ and develop academics who are comfortable and familiar with working with employers, understanding their needs and the way that they work. These academics need to understand academic quality mechanisms and key benchmarks, and to be able to ‘translate’ and ‘harmonise’ between employers and academia in the development phase.

Academic tutors involved at individual engagement level need to ensure that the learners and employers needs are reflected in the curriculum and its implementation.

Key liaison staff should be identified within the support departments of the university (Registry/Quality, IT, Library, Student Records) to ensure that the infrastructure supports the needs of the employer engagement activity.

7.2 Principles
Employer engagement activity needs to be recognised and valued by the institution as being of equal standing to traditional UG and PG provision and research activity, rather than as a niche or peripheral offer.

The overarching principles of curriculum design are that:
— it reflects QAA level descriptors;
— it has intellectual rigour;
— it possesses the overarching characteristics of work at HE level.

Assessment strategies should be founded in work-based learning, reflecting the use of real-work activity, such as exploring business developments and development of professional skills that are relevant and fit for purpose. The latter should be reflected in the title of the award. There are key challenges here in evidencing the relevant number of hours of learning effort, given that these learners will bring to the programme a significant amount of experience and expertise and the learning is situated in the workplace.  

7.3 Practice

Staff development is essential for all involved in employer engagement activity on an ongoing basis. This will include discussion about best practice in curriculum design, assessment and quality assurance for all those involved in the employer relationship. This should be undertaken on an ongoing basis, regularly reviewing the provision to identify best practice to share across the institution and being involved in the dissemination of best practice to and from other institutions.

It is important to consider the needs of the non-academic members of the team, such as business development managers and marketing and operations staff who may often be the first point of call for employers.

Staff development for employers is equally important to ensure that they understand the requirements for facilitating learning in HE.

A Community of Practice in Negotiated WBL could usefully be developed (within the institution and nationally) and maintained, to exchange ideas on best practice, encourage innovation and share issues posed by the flexibility and innovation of the provision.

8 References


9 This challenge is tackled in a separate Demonstrator Project, led by the OU and Middlesex University, and published in this same series.


Appendix I: Three approval mechanisms

a) MMU approval mechanism

The approval mechanism is devolved to faculties.

Flowchart

The programme team determines that sufficient units are available within the OPP for a named award to be conferred. The Programme Leader completes form OPP-ANA and discusses plans with the Dean.

Form OPP-ANA submitted to OPP Programme Committee for approval.

Form OPP-ANA forwarded to Faculty Quality Officer who arranges for the details of the nomenclature of the award to be approved by the DVC Student Experience.

Once the proposed name of the award has been approved form OPP-ANA is forwarded to FADC for approval of the award itself.

The Faculty Quality Officer ensures the newly approved title forms part of the Supplement of Approved Named Awards, an appendix of the OPP Definitive Document, and that the appropriate central departments are informed.
b) The University of Hertfordshire: Accreditation of external providers of credit*

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**Process**

1. **Initial meeting**
   - Informal meeting with company to familiarise them with the process, identify their needs, and costs. This should allow the company to decide whether it is for the process.

2. **Agree the accreditation arrangements**
   - DAG, CEG & ADC approval

3. **Company submits agreed evidence & SCD(s)**

4. **Request more information if necessary**

5. **Audit undertaken – auditor completes the audit form**

6. **Audit form and evidence moderated**

7. **Recommendation for approval. SCDs signed off**

8. **Faculty sign-off. EAA sign-off**

**Notes**

**Initial meeting**
- DAG, CEG & ADC approval
  - Form AQ2a is prepared by the school or UH Ventures (whoever has dealt with the initial enquiry), for consideration by the appropriate DAG. Approval initiates the preparation of the EAA by UH Accreditation Office.

**Agree the accreditation arrangements**
- A meeting arranged by UH Ventures, with the UH school and the company. This includes:
  1. the proposed level and credit rating of the credit;
  2. the extent to which UH is involved in curriculum development, SCD production, delivery and assessment (govern the costing arrangements);
  3. agreement of costing arrangements (for EAA);
  4. content of External Accreditation Agreement template; and
  5. the audit process and evidence required from the company.

**Submission of evidence & SCDs**
- Evidence is submitted to the faculty, via UH Ventures or the school. All SCDs should be signed off by the company (an appropriate resource/training manager) and then the appropriate UH Head of School.

**Audit**
- The audit is undertaken by the faculty, using a centrally trained faculty auditor who has not been involved in the development of evidence. Completed audit is signed off by auditor and Head of School (to confirm school resource support) and then submitted to the Accreditation Office.

**Moderation**
- The moderation process is undertaken by the UH Accreditation Officer (or Director of QA/BE).

**Recommendation for approval**
- Approved submissions are signed off by the UH Accreditation Officer, and returned to the faculty.

**Sign-off**
- The faculty ADAQ should then sign off SCDs, and return to Academic Registry. The External Accreditation Agreement (EAA) needs to be signed off by the VC and company CEO, and a copy lodged with the UH Accreditation Office.

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*This process for the accreditation of external providers of stand-alone credit does not allow for approval of an award title (normal collaborative provision validation processes apply wherever an award is being validated).*
c) The University of Derby: Lifelong Learning Scheme academic approval process

**Life Long Learning Scheme**
**Academic Approval Process**

- Initiating developer
  - Notifies Administrative co-ordinator of development
- LLLS appoints scrutineers
- WDF and development team prepare documentation
- Academic Proposal submitted to co-ordinator for logging and distribution to nominated scrutineers
- Scrutineers Review and provide comments
- Developers respond and make any amendments to proposal
- Scrutineers accept academic proposal
- Academic Approval group agree proposal
- Approval logged by administrative co-ordinator
- Co-ordinator communicates approval to Initiator, QED and VASC
Supporting academic staff to facilitate workforce development provision

Jane Timlin, Business Development Manager (Lead)
Renata D Eyres. Head of Partnerships & Business Engagement
Paul Ward, Associate Head Business Engagement
The University of Salford

Contributing partners
The following institutions and individuals collaborate with us to develop this material:
— the University of Leicester. Elain Crewe, Director of Professional and Flexible Learning
— Teesside University. Laura Woods, Director Academic Enterprise

Institutions providing case-study material:
— the University of Leicester
— the University of Northumbria
— the University of Salford.

1 Introduction and context
The University of Salford was invited to investigate issues relating to supporting academic staff to facilitate workforce development activities. In particular we were asked to focus attention on the quality assurance issues of academic staff development provision dedicated to improving the capability of staff to effectively deliver workforce development and employer engagement activities. This report explores both current and best practice identifying the key issues and challenges as well as providing example case studies and recommendations.

The role of higher education in the provision of workforce development is rapidly evolving with Government expecting the sector to play an increasing role in the achievement of higher-level skills for those already in the workplace10.

10 For example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) Workforce development programme, which has provided in the region of £101 million to deliver 10,000 co-funded full-time equivalent places. The programme has two related goals – the design and delivery of higher education courses in partnership with employers, and to increase the number of learners in the workplace supported by their employers; it runs from 2008 to 2011.
While for many institutions this offers a welcome opportunity to innovate and grow, it also presents a significant challenge in relation to the requirement to develop the necessary skills and supporting quality assurance infrastructure to ensure effective delivery in this new context.

Specifically greater engagement by higher education institutions in the delivery of workforce development will require that the sector itself creates appropriate internal workforce development strategies, to ensure that academic staff are equipped with the appropriate skills and support to successfully deliver in this new and different context.

Provision of appropriate academic staff development is therefore a critical ‘enabler’, which underpins the sector’s ability to deliver on employer engagement and workforce development activities. Most, if not all, institutions are now in the process of addressing this matter, with (n48) 70% of those surveyed indicating that their institution is planning significant investment in this area in the next 12 to 24 months11.

Presently, because of the relative ‘newness’ of this agenda, there is currently little in the way of guidelines or occupational standards for either academic staff development itself regarding content and delivery, nor in relation to the quality assurance of such provision. Instead institutions have created solutions that are achievable within their own environment and that enable delivery against institutional strategic objectives and, where applicable, within project timescales. Most of those consulted agreed that the key priority in the short-term is on identifying the right types of content and delivery mechanisms12.

While such a ‘best-fit’ approach is appropriate in the short-term, in the medium-term the sector may benefit from a ‘best practice’ approach via the development of agreed principles and guidelines related to the quality assurance of academic staff development dedicated to workforce development activities. Our consultation reflected this view, with most of those consulted believing that the sector would benefit from further guidance in this area.

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11 See Appendix 1 for analysis of the survey.

12 The Association for University Research and Industry Links has developed a CPD framework for the continuing professional development needs of knowledge transfer (KT) practitioners. Development of National Occupational Standards for Engaging Employers in higher education is currently at consultation stage in early 2010. The Training Gateway also deliver a number of relevant CPD options.
Methodology
The University of Salford worked in collaboration with the University of Leicester and Teesside University. A number of representatives from a wide range of other higher education institutions and other key stakeholders in the workforce development and employer engagement area were also consulted.

The methodology used included:

— **Project design consultation.** We consulted with our partner institutions in the design of the project. Specifically we consulted with the University of Leicester via Elain Crewe, Director of Professional and Flexible Learning, and Teesside University via Laura Woods, Director of Academic Enterprise.

— **Desk-based research.** This was used to identify the range and types of activities available to academic staff either within their own organisations or externally. Further information on resources and research materials is available in the Key references section.

— **Sector-wide consultation via an online survey questionnaire.** An online survey questionnaire was developed using the ‘Survey Monkey’ tool, which was circulated via the Higher Education Academy, the Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL) and via the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC), as well as directly to other key individuals. The survey was completed by 48 participants.

— **Semi-structured interviews.** Following from the online survey, participants were asked if they would take part in a semi-structured interview to expand on their experiences and thoughts. Of those that expressed an interest to contribute, a further five individuals were identified and initially invited to participate in a more in-depth semi-structured interview.

— **Consultation via a workshop session.** A workshop session was delivered at the Higher Education Academy conference ‘Quality and responding to employer needs - Sharing good practice’ held in December 2009.

**Case studies.** A small number of more detailed case studies are included in this document, provided by a number of institutions. They are intended to be representative of the range and types of provision currently available across the sector and to enable practitioners to draw on them to meet their specific needs. These case studies provide exemplars of best practice in staff development for employer engagement and workforce development. The focus is on practical examples of activities that could be replicated by other practitioners, rather than on detailed analysis of institutional or organisational ‘approaches’. Therefore the case studies focus on one best practice
example of activity (i.e. one specific course/activity) rather than the institution/organisations wider programme of staff development.

3 Key findings
Currently (n=48) 63.6% of those consulted indicated their institution does provide dedicated academic staff development for workforce development (see QAA, 2010, para 77). In a third of cases this was available as part of a dedicated programme of staff development in this area, and in a further third respondents indicated that in their institution, provision was delivered on a more occasional basis.

The majority (n=48) 58% confirmed that there was currently no formal mechanism for quality assuring provision within their institution, with (n=48) 25% of respondents indicating that quality assurance of this area was assessed against the institutions overall academic quality assessment. Less than one in five (n=48) 16.7% indicated that their institution has a dedicated quality assurance framework for all staff development, and that this was used.

In response to short timescales for delivery and a lack of institutional infrastructure and sector guidelines, most indicated that their institution had opted to take a pragmatic approach based on ‘personal judgement’, recommendation and consultation with peers and key stakeholders.

Many expressed the view that what mattered most to them was that they were ‘comfortable’ with the decisions taken in relation to the design, content and delivery with most declaring that the contribution of senior key staff with relevant expertise in the process was in itself the central quality assurance mechanism undertaken (see QAA, 2010, para 4).

The involvement of others in the process was considered essential, with a significant majority (almost (n=48) 95%) of respondents agreeing that making this type of provision available to administrative staff was essential. Similarly (n=48) 72.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that involving employers in this type of provision was important.

Additionally the identification of impact measures for both the impact on participating academics and the impact on improving the quality and quantity of workforce development activities was considered an important next step. Just one respondent indicated they have impact measures for this area, with many others indicating they would find the creation of guidelines on impact measures helpful.

Finally the findings indicate that demand for support for academic staff to facilitate workforce development, and in particular for dedicated staff development, is rapidly increasing, with over (n=48) 70% of institutions planning what they consider will be ‘significant investment’ in this area in the next 12 to 24 months.
In conclusion the increasing demand for academic staff development in this area provides an excellent opportunity to develop relevant and appropriate quality assurance, approaches, principles, guidelines and exemplars from which both higher education institutions and employers can benefit.

4 Key issues identified

The investigation identified a number of issues the sector faces in order to effectively quality assure academic staff development for workforce development. The most significant of which were:

— Limited experience of delivering workforce development. While a proportion of institutions have always been more ‘employer focused,’ for most the workforce development agenda is a new one.

— Lack of awareness of the range and complexity of skills required. There is still a learning curve to be completed in gaining a full appreciation of the complex skills, quality assurance and infrastructure requirement of higher education delivering workforce development activities.

— Lack of sector-wide guidelines. Currently the sector lacks any principles or resources dedicated to best practice or guidelines for quality assuring academic staff development dedicated to facilitating workforce development activities.

— Limitations of existing infrastructure. The majority of higher education institutions have a quality assurance infrastructure dedicated to the assuring ‘traditional’ provision and do not perhaps have the flexibility required to support academic staff in the facilitation of workforce development activities.

— Capacity. The increased demand for academic staff development in this area is occurring at a time when the sector lacks the capacity to deliver. In particular, institutions awarded funding to deliver workforce development activities often have time restricted deadlines for delivering academic staff development. In practice this means that often the capacity cannot be found internally to either deliver the provision, or to allow for the inclusion of the provision into the overall academic staff development programme. These factors directly impact on the ability of institutions to formally quality assure provision.

— Capability. As stated throughout, this area is a relatively new one and many institutions do not have the capability and skills in-house to deliver academic staff development. Therefore many are, at least in the short-term, beginning the process of supporting academic staff to facilitate workforce development by either commissioning external consultants to develop provision or by
encouraging staff to attending courses run by external specialist organisations like the Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL) or The Training Gateway.

5 Key challenges

— Culture change. Embedding workforce development activities into core business for higher education institutions is essential in ensuring that adequate academic staff development is made available and that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are developed.

— Development of sector guidelines. Key stakeholders such as the Higher Education Academy, the Association for University Research and Industry Links and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education need to work together to identify appropriate quality assurance approaches and mechanisms, and to then develop and communicate ‘principles’ for quality assuring academic staff development in this area.

— Identifying the ‘ownership’ of this agenda. The design and delivery of staff development will generally be led by the institution’s staff development unit. How do we ensure that those that are charged with this staff development adequately collaborate at the design stage to ensure that what is developed is relevant and is quality assured? A way forward would be to suggest that this is done via all relevant stakeholders, including those representing quality assurance, to be engaged from as early a stage as possible.

— Timescales for delivery. Government policy and funding streams are requiring delivery of the workforce development agenda in a timescale that does not enable many institutions to develop academic staff development interventions that can be delivered by internal resources and can undergo quality assurance in the formal sense.

— Supporting staff. Support and guidance needs to be provided to those involved in quality assurance within institutions together with the academic and administrative staff involved in the design, delivery and learning.

— Feedback mechanisms. Thought needs to be given as to how to integrate feedback from academic staff, quality assurance experts, employers, employees and other key stakeholders, both internal and external, to ensure that provision is having a positive impact on both the confidence and capability of academic staff to deliver in this environment and also on the quality of the workforce development delivered to employers and employees.
Summary

The higher education sector is a diverse one and the findings of our consultation reflect this, with a range of approaches being taken by individual institutions both in relation to the delivery of support for academic staff undertaking workforce development activities, and in their approach to quality assurance of such provision.

The workforce development agenda is a new one for most institutions and indeed for the sector as a whole. There is currently a lack of guidance regarding quality assurance of academic staff development dedicated to enhancing capabilities for delivering workforce development activities.

Additionally the current requirement, whether because of project objectives or institutional demand to develop provision in relatively short timescales, inevitably means that what is developed often has to sit outside the formal quality assurance system.

In response to this institutions are developing solutions based on the direct relevance to their own strategic objectives, capacity, capability and ability to deliver, and at this moment in time the quality assurance aspects of dedicated staff development in this area are considered by many not to be a priority.

In particular many expressed a view that in the context of increasing demand and short timescales for delivery it was more important to prioritise the practical elements of provision, to ensure that staff would be capable of successfully and confidently delivering workforce development activities to the end client, as opposed to in the short-term at least ensuring that provision undergo formal quality assurance.

In response to issues of timescales and lack of existing guidelines for this area, most institutions have developed their own ‘best-fit’ quality assurance processes, mainly involving key staff in the design, content and quality assurance.

Most of those consulted indicated that they believed it was important, when considering quality assurance, to involve others in the process; in particular, academic, administrative and professional staff involved in employer engagement and work-based learning should work in collaboration with colleagues from the staff development and quality assurance areas to develop appropriate and flexible quality assurance mechanisms.

Effective quality assurance of staff development is essential in order to maintain institutional and sector quality standards, with a balance needing to be found between providing the practical skills and advice necessary to deliver workforce development in the required timescales with the need to effectively quality assure provision.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) “is keen to stress that, while it is essential that all UK HE awards meet the relevant standards set out in the Academic Infrastructure, irrespective of the way in which learning is achieved and
assessed, quality assurance arrangements should be proportionate to risk, relevant, and meet a reasonable ‘fitness-for-purpose’ test’.

Staff development related to workforce development, presents different issues from most staff development in that it encompasses a wide range of skills, including effective engagement with employers, the creation and/or adapting of curriculum to make it relevant for employers, and skills for workplace and work-based learning. These externally focused elements add complexity to the quality assurance process.

Finally there is significant appetite for development of best practice in this area, with most of those consulted of the view that the sector, individual institutions and individual practitioners would benefit from the opportunity to share best practice with others and from the creation of guidelines and best practice approaches for quality assurance in the workforce development context. Over (n=48) 77.3%, of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities to share best practice, experiences and creation of ‘best-practice principles’ would be helpful.

Areas for further consideration

— Development of quality assurance guidelines. Given the current lack of guidelines and advice, there is a role for the relevant agencies including the Higher Education Academy, to work towards providing best practice guidelines and exemplar approaches.

— Development of professional frameworks. Given the current lack of guidelines on academic staff development in this area, there is a role for relevant agencies including the Higher Education Academy, HEFCE, JISC and AURIL to work towards providing best practice guidelines and professional frameworks. In particular it would be helpful to explore the possibility of accrediting provision in this area, whether via inclusion in the postgraduate certificate, or via institutional or sector-wide provision from other groups, e.g. AURIL.

— Provision of opportunities for sharing best practice. Given the emerging importance of staff development as one of the key enablers for successful delivery of employer engagement and workforce development, the majority of those consulted believed the sector, as well as individual practitioners, would benefit from opportunities to share experiences and best practice.

The Academic Infrastructure provides a set of reference points for establishing and assuring the quality and standards of UK HE programmes and awards (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure).
— **Focus on developing guidelines and frameworks that enable better practice.** Staff development needs to be practical and have the ability to ensure that colleagues gain in confidence and acquire the skills to enable them to effectively work with and for employers.

— **Guidelines and approaches need to be relevant at an institutional level, as well as a sector and individual practitioner level.** Recommendations and guidelines need to be relevant to each institution’s needs and be aligned with the institution’s strategic goals for employer engagement and workforce development.

### 8 References


### 8.1 Further resources


QAA (2008) *Statement on quality assurance and the HEFCE priority for higher education learning linked to employer engagement and workforce development*. Available from: www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/QAAstatement.asp [01/06/10].
Appendix I: Case Studies

Case study 1: University of Salford

Renata Eyres, Head of Business and Partnerships & Business Engagement
Paul Ward, Associate Head of Business Services

Contextual overview
The University of Salford has a history stretching back to 1896 and enjoys a reputation for being one of the UK’s most enterprising and employer-focused higher education institutions.

The University has four faculties: Business, Law & the Built Environment; Arts, Media & Social Sciences; Health & Social Care; and Science, Engineering & Environment. It employs over 2,500 staff and has nearly 20,000 students, approximately a quarter of which are part-time students.

In 2007 the University was awarded £2.9 million as part of a Higher Education Funding Council for England drive to explore new and innovative ways to enhance higher education’s ability to deliver employer engagement (EE) activities.

The successful bid the University of Salford submitted identified six key enablers that would be developed as part of the funded project, all of which were focused on improving people, processes and systems to enable more responsive and higher quality employer engagement.

Staff development was one of the six key enablers, which also included:
— costing and pricing employer engagement/work-based learning;
— responsive QA and work-based progression;
— IT systems and CRM;
— employer support;
— marketing and communications.
Brief introduction
Six half-day workshops delivered face to face and open to all members of staff were developed.

Following internal consultation and sector research a decision was taken to develop a suite of workshops focused on two key areas:

— working with the curriculum for employer engagement and work-based and workplace learning. This tranche of workshops focused on providing the underpinning knowledge of academic and QA issues relating to the development and delivery of employer-led learning;

— creating and managing successful partnerships with employers. The three workshops making up this element of the programme were designed to provide staff with the skills and knowledge for engaging with and managing employer relationships.

The six workshops delivered were:
I. Working the curriculum: approval, delivery, assessment. Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement;
II. Working the curriculum: approval, delivery, assessment. Quality assurance for work-based learning;
III. Working the curriculum: approval, delivery, assessment. Assessment in the workplace;
IV. Engaging employers: building your market. Understanding your market and planning for employer engagement;
V. Engaging employers: building your market. How to make successful contact with employers;
VI. Engaging employers: building your market. Relationships with employers: practice that works.

Rationale for adopting this approach
Having taken the decision to invest resources in the development of a strategy for increasing the level of employer engagement activity across the institution, the University recognised that staff must be fully supported to build the overall capacity and capability of the institution in this ‘new’ area of work. In order to achieve this they would have to understand the quality assurance aspects of workforce development (WFD) and employer engagement.

Consequently, the development of a staff development programme was identified as a priority in light of the fact that:

— staff are the University’s most important asset. We need to enhance their
confidence and capability to deliver workforce development activities in order to succeed in expanding workforce development;

— it is critical to ensure and enhance the quality of workforce development provision and the related services as delivered to the end client of employee and employer groups, and effective staff development can achieve this;

— it is important that, as an institution, we ensure that any staff development delivered in this area is in line with the institution's quality assurance ideals;

— it is essential to educate academic staff on the relevance of the quality assurance process and guidelines when considering workforce development activities;

— it is crucial for academic staff to understand the flexibility and at times the restrictions of the quality assurance process and ethos of the University before embarking on workforce development activities, so that they do not misrepresent the University;

— as an institution we wanted to create a high-level and standardised approach to staff development in this area, to provide academic staff with a superior in-house option tailored to the institution's infrastructure, goals and objectives, which would provide a baseline for all academic staff as well as opportunities for networking and exchange of best practice and problem sharing.

After consultation with key academic and administrative staff including the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic, the Head of Business and Community Partnerships, the Head of the Learning Development Unit and Associate Deans Enterprise, together with other academic and administrative staff already engaged in employer engagement and workforce development activities a set of six workshop themes were identified that focused on two key areas:

1. working with the curriculum for employer engagement and work-based and workplace learning;

2. creating and managing successful partnerships with employers.

Target audience for the staff development
All academics and administrative staff involved in employer engagement and workforce development activities were invited to attend the programme.

Particular emphasis was placed on supporting academic staff via dedicated sessions relating to working with the curriculum for workforce development, which was very much an underexplored area of direct relevance to academic staff, as well as sessions on partnerships.

Additionally the sessions enabled academic staff to learn more about the
resources available to support them in developing workforce development, in particular
dedicated professional and administrative support staff who could support them. They
also learned more about supporting infrastructure, such as the institution’s work-
based learning framework, short course approval process, and customer relationship
management system.

It was important that the programme also supported non-academic staff, as they
also have a key role in providing customer-focused administrative support throughout the
engagement process, and therefore needed to be aware of the different needs of employers.

We wanted to bring different types of staff together, from those who had never been
involved in EE, to those champions who wanted a forum to share experiences with others.

Finally we wanted to create a new and institution-specific ‘starting point’ and
baseline for staff development for employer engagement and workforce development.

Marketing and promotion
The provision was marketed to the intended audience in the following ways:

— The sessions were marketed through a number of different routes including
  internal champions, in particular Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members of the
  Employer Engagement Steering Group and personal recommendations from a
  number of key staff, including Faculty Associate Deans Enterprise and Faculty
  Business Development Managers.

— The workshops were also publicised through targeted emails, the University’s
  message of the day and websites.

Quality assurance of the staff development
The employer engagement programme of staff development is not at present subject to
the University’s formal QA policies and procedures. This reflects the time constraints
placed on delivery of the staff development, as both a result of project delivery and also
the increasing demand from internal staff for provision in the academic year 2008-09.

As the programme was developed through the project, which was time-bound,
the initial aim was to work in conjunction with key internal staff (including the PVC
Academic and Head of LDU) to develop a programme that met the immediate need of
staff undertaking employer engagement activities, but also ensure that the quality of the
programme was aligned to existing staff development guidelines, in order to facilitate a
smooth integration into the core programme at the appropriate time. The inclusion of
clear learning aims and outcomes for each of the workshops proved useful in aligning
the programme to the University’s wider learning provision.
In summary, the initial stage of the programme’s development was designed to strike a balance in ensuring that project outputs, regarding number of staff trained, could be met, while at the same time ensuring that the content and quality of the programme would allow for further work post-project, to accredit and integrate into the University’s core staff development programme. This approach was considered and supported by the project steering group, which was chaired by the PVC Academic and included five members of the SLT.

The clear intention is to ensure that future provision, where possible, is quality assured against the institution’s guidelines for assuring staff development and, where appropriate, for assuring accredited provision.

Consultation is taking place with key internal stakeholders to ensure that employer engagement staff development will form part of the University’s core staff development offer, and consideration is also being given as to how this area should be included in the postgraduate certificate for academic staff. Additionally consideration may be given to accrediting staff development in this area.

Motivations: the drivers behind participation
A range of both academic and administrative staff participated, with various motivations, mostly focused on enhancing their understanding of and capability to deliver employer engagement and workforce development.

Some were staff with enthusiasm and experience in this area and were motivated by the opportunity to meet other staff with an interest in this agenda to network and share best practice. Others were new to the area and wanted to know more. They used this as a starting point to learn about this area and whether it was one they wanted to engage with. Some staff were encouraged to attend by line managers, due to the increasing demand from industry in relation to their subject area for this type of provision.

It is clear that if the staff development programme was fully accredited, then this may encourage more staff to undertake the training. Feedback has also demonstrated that the inclusion of success in employer engagement in promotion criteria would also be a key factor in motivating staff to undertake this training.

The growing impact and success of the employer engagement and workforce development agenda across the institution will require more staff to develop awareness and skills in this area. As such it is expected that over time this will be reflected in core staff performance and reward and recognition processes.
How does the staff development improve quality assurance for EE/WFD delivery?

Key impacts are that staff development in this area:

— creates a more skilled workforce capable of being confident and assured in its dealings with employers;
— provides a standardised, consistent approach to communicating quality assurance for workforce development and employer engagement across the institution;
— enables understanding of employer engagement and workforce development agenda and its benefits and issues, particularly in relation to quality assurance issues;
— enhances staff abilities to understand the needs of the employer and the quality and other requirements of the University;
— enables staff to understand better the ‘professional’ protocol for engaging with and developing and maintaining relationships with employers;
— ensures that staff are better equipped to be flexible with the curriculum to meet workforce development requirements, and more fully understand how this may relate to the University’s existing quality assurance requirements. Equally importantly, it demonstrates to staff that although employer engagement activities are different to standard provision, the same academic rigour and quality assurance still applies, although it may look slightly different.
— enhances staff understanding of the broader support for employer engagement and workforce development, such that staff know there is support for them, both in relation to resources and people. In particular there are Faculty Business Development Managers and central resources in support of WBL, as well as processes (such as a work-based learning framework, customer relationship management system and fast-track approval process).

Content

The provision takes the following format:

A programme of six linked workshops, focusing on two key areas:

— working the curriculum;
— engaging with employers.

The six sessions delivered were:

I. Working the curriculum: Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement;
II. Working the curriculum: Quality assurance for work-based learning;
III. Working the curriculum: Assessment in the workplace;
IV. Engaging employers: Understanding your market and planning for employer engagement;  
V. Engaging employers: How to make successful contact with employers;  
VI. Engaging employers: Relationships with employers: practice that works.

Initial delivery of the workshops focused on half-day sessions, delivered face to face. It was felt important to ensure the deliverers of the programme were on hand to answer questions from delegates and facilitate debate on key issues that arose from the workshops.

Creation of supporting learning materials also became a priority. After the initial delivery and positive evaluation of the workshops, work commenced on making the staff development programme available online via the University’s website/intranet. The online provision is interactive, provides staff with greater flexibility to access the support at any time and enables the University to monitor the volume of staff who are undertaking the training.

**Development and delivery**

The sessions were developed and delivered via a collaboration and consultation between key staff within the University’s Business Services Unit, including the Head and Associate Head of the unit, as well as key academic and administrative colleagues, combined with the expertise of a number of external consultants with proven experience in this area.

This enabled us to balance the skills and requirements we had internally with external expertise. It allowed us to develop and deliver the suite of courses quickly and in a timescale that would have been impossible if we had been solely dependent on internal resources.

Issues around workload allocation, the need to deliver provision within the time frame of the HEFCE project and the changing structure internally of the University’s staff development unit meant that we needed to think creatively in order to deliver, and this partnership of internal and external input was ideal. The selection of consultants was influenced by recommendations from both internal staff and external peers throughout the sector. Initial searches for suitable providers highlighted the fact there was a very limited supply of expertise in this area.

A key factor that influenced the appointment of the consultants was the fact that they were able to demonstrate successful experience of delivering similar provision to HEIs and also had past experience of managing an employer engagement project within a university. They were therefore familiar with the issues and challenges of designing and delivering this provision within higher education.
Format
The delivery format was face to face, including scenario- and problem-based learning. Learning materials were created that participants could take away in support of each of the sessions. Later, interactive e-learning materials were developed to enable those who could not attend in person to benefit.

To enable the promotion of the agenda and to allow colleagues to meet each other and share experiences, problems and best practice through the sessions and through the networking informal networks arose, and eventually led to the creation of a Community of Practice for Work Based Learning.

Issues and problems that emerged during development and delivery
Quality-related:
— The required timescales for development and delivery meant that formal quality assurance processes could not be followed.
— Specifically, timescales required that external consultants were employed to lead on the delivery of the programme of workshops, although internal staff advised and collaborated in the design and development. As such we had to assure the quality of their contribution via their reputation and previous work and could not formally engage them in the internal quality assurance process.
— Quality assuring staff development for workforce development and employer engagement is a new area and as such there is a gap in guidelines and policy addressing this agenda at both an institutional and sector level.
— A significant number of academic staff had a lack of understanding of the University’s quality assurance and other support mechanisms for ensuring the quality of workforce development and employer engagement activities. This ranged from colleagues who believed (incorrectly) that quality assurance was an automatic barrier to engaging in workforce development activities, to those colleagues who were active in workforce development activities but did so on an ad hoc basis, which was perhaps not allied to the institutional quality assurance processes.

Non-quality-related:
— introducing new ideas and concepts;
— developing a programme capable of bringing out the best in those colleagues with experience while creating a safe environment for those with little experience in this area;
— getting over the ‘we know how to do it, why should we attend’ and/or the ‘it’s not relevant for my role’ barrier;
— being sensitive to the needs of a range of colleagues – ensuring that existing staff with expertise felt they were made to feel valued, didn’t want to reinvent wheels or come across as imposing one view
— identifying the key areas we needed to address;
— identifying the collaborative ‘team’ to work on the development and delivery;
— creating long-lasting learning materials that are relevant to the University;
— building in opportunities for development and growth;
— the University’s staff development function was undergoing a restructure;
— staff workload balance.

How issues and problems were overcome
— an inclusive approach that was respectful of sensitivities and consulted with staff;
— looked at practical issues;
— tried to identify champions.

What has been the learning from this project?
Quality-related:
— Lack of formal guidelines for quality assuring staff development for workforce development and employer engagement combined with timescale factors and institutional restructuring meant that we could not quality assure the staff development programme in a more formal sense. However, we believe that by consulting with key stakeholders internally, most notably the PVC Academic, Associate Deans Enterprise and Head of Learning Development, and with experts from across the sector, we were fully able to ensure the staff development we designed met the highest quality assurance standards on both an institutional and sector basis.
— Key staff from the University’s Business Services Unit, most notably Renata Eyres, Head of Partnerships and Business Engagement, Paul Ward, Associate Head Business Services, and Jane Timlin, Business Development Manager, were fully engaged in the management of the design, development and delivery of the programme of staff development, in order to ensure the quality assurance of both the teaching and learning outcomes as well as the smooth running of the sessions.
— Lack of understanding by staff of the significance of the quality assurance aspects of workforce development and employer engagement was a key driver for the creation
of the staff development programme, and we believe we achieved significant success in overcoming this issue, via both the content of the workshops and also the opportunities they provided for sharing best practice. In particular the sessions helped to dispel some of the ‘myths’ regarding the inflexibility of QA and programme approval processes.

Non-quality-related:
— A surprising outcome was awareness of the growing importance of workforce development and employer engagement for many academic colleagues who used the workshops to address this and learn new skills they believed would help them develop their careers.
— Staff development in this area needs to address the practical needs of staff to enable them to ‘better do their job’.
— Staff development also needs to be relevant and enjoyable, providing opportunities for staff to network.
— Regarding content, it is beneficial to include both face-to-face and online aspects, and to ensure that provision is reviewed and improved in line with staff requirements.
— The sessions unearthed many champions and enthusiasts of workforce development and employer engagement.
— Promoted benefits of interdisciplinary working across faculties and also support divisions.
— The staff development sessions provided a mechanism to build capacity and capability across the institution, spreading the expertise.

Supporting mechanisms available in the institution
— Business Development Network;
— Work Based Learning Community of Practice;
— central support through Business Services Team.

Perceived benefits and impacts of the staff development for
1. The individual participant:
— knowledge;
— skills;
— confidence;
— networking;
— career development.
2. The institution/organisation/unit:
   — greater capacity and capability;
   — access to new student markets, i.e. employees;
   — increased profile and recognition throughout the sector;
   — enhanced reputation among employers;
   — improved confidence and capability for staff.

3. The end recipient of EE/WFD, the employer and employee:
   — platform to promote employer engagement and our new work-based learning framework.

4. The sector (i.e. how does staff development enable us to upskill the sector):
   — enabled communities of best practice
   — key mechanism for changing culture.

Who attended/participated?
Over 80 individuals have attended at least one of the workshops, with many attending the full programme. Sixty per cent of attendees were academic, with 40% representing administrative and support staff.

Evaluation
An initial evaluation based on participant experience of the workshops has been undertaken. This was primarily undertaken through the completion of evaluation questionnaires on the content, delivery and value of the workshops by attendees.

Testimonials
Feedback was extremely positive with participants recognising both the relevance of workshop content and the quality of delivery.

Initial evaluation of the programme demonstrated a high level of satisfaction (average 80%) with the content, format and delivery of the workshops: “The workshop [was] an excellent balance of effective group activities and interesting anecdotes/experience from the workshop leaders. It has given me lots of food for thought.”

Across all the workshops, the evaluation indicated that 90% of respondents stated that the workshops would make a positive difference to the way they approached employer engagement. Comments included: “More confidence on issues to consider … early on in the development process” and “Given me more confidence when speaking to academics in the faculty planning new programmes ….”
Opportunities for further developments

— Accreditation of staff development programme (or elements of) in to PG Certificate and integration into core staff development programme.
— Additional areas of staff development in relation to employer engagement have already been identified (including CRM and costing) and new workshops are under development.
— Existing workshops will be refined incorporating case studies of new EE/WFD programmes.
— Further enhancement and development of online resources.

Case study 2: Northumbria University, Developing Work-based Learning module

Garth Rhodes, Head of Flexible Learning, School of Health, Community and Education Studies
Sue Graham, Work-related Learning Manager, Academic Registry

Overview of provision

This is a 20-credit module at postgraduate level as part of the University’s CPD Academic Practice programme. The module is entitled ‘Developing Work-based Learning’.

This module is part of the Academic Practice Programme, which provides continuing professional development for Northumbria staff. The module can be taken either on a freestanding basis or as part of an award in Academic Practice (PG Certificate, PG Diploma, MA and Professional Doctorate). Participants do not need to decide at the point of enrolment in what capacity they are taking the module. However, if they intend to gain 20 credits at level 7 for their work on the module, they need to complete the summative assessment.

This is a key priority to support the need for further academic staff to undertake development in this area because the University sees work-based learning as a major methodology for employer engagement and higher-level skills development for those in the workforce.

Details of the provision

This module plays an important part in exploring the nature of work-based learning from several perspectives. Besides encouraging the participant to map its development over
time by considering different educational ontological and ideological paradigms, it also enables the participant to consider its value as a learning and teaching methodology. It therefore operates at both theoretical and practical levels and provides opportunities for a wide investigation of the issues surrounding work-based learning from several viewpoints.

Seminars and workshops are the main modes of delivery; however, staff are required to reflect on their own experience. Participants are encouraged to share experiences in focused workshops to develop their understanding and skills. The formation of supportive groups generated from the workshops encourage the development of an active learning community.

Summative assessment includes the critical analysis of either the potential of work-based learning within the participants’ area of expertise or its present use.

Module programme
The module runs over six sessions.

Session 1: An overview of work-based learning in higher education
— national/regional/institutional drivers and perspectives;
— the work-related learning–work-based learning continuum;
— brief introduction to work-based learning activity at Northumbria and institutional infrastructure.

Session 2: Identifying and responding to work-based needs
— role of the academic as consultant;
— needs-based approaches;
— organisational and learner needs;
— case studies of existing learning partnerships/employer contracts.

Session 3: Developing a work-based learning programme:
— from initial concept, through design and to validation

Session 4: Learning, teaching and assessment strategies

Session 5: Employer organisation and learner perspectives
— employer and learner/student reps to share experiences and identify issues through small group discussions.
Session 6: Measuring the impact of work-based learning
— approaches to measuring impact;
— evaluation methodologies;
— module evaluation.

Roles and responsibilities
The module was developed and is delivered by a cross-institutional team of academic and support staff, led by Garth Rhodes and Sue Graham. The team has a broad range of expertise and experience in implementing successful WBL programmes.

The administration of the programme is the responsibility of the Academic Practice Programme within the University’s Learning and Teaching Academy.

Quality issues
This is a validated module approved through standard University approval procedures and subject to normal HE quality assurance mechanisms (evaluation, review, external examination, etc.). No significant quality issues have been identified.

Incentives and motivation
Institutional: The University wishes to increase the numbers of WBL practitioners in order to develop and deliver new employer-responsive curricula in line with Government policy direction and in order to support this growing area of business.

Participant: While some participants attended with the intention of gaining credits towards the achievement of the Academic Practice postgraduate award, all saw it as useful in developing and sharing practice.

Key benefits:
— increase in number of informed academics and support staff competent to develop and deliver new WBL programmes;
— development of a community of practice – enabled staff to share good practice and provide ongoing mutual support;
— as the assessment focused on new pedagogical approaches to curricula, participants actively are engaged in the production of a range of innovative programme materials and documentation.
Current and future developments
The University, through its HEFCE SDF Employer Engagement Project Staff Development task group, is actively engaged in the development of a University-wide staff development and training programme for academic, support, business development and administrative staff. The module described above will inform and be incorporated into the wider programme.

Case study 3: University of Leicester, Institute of Lifelong Learning

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Contextual overview
The University of Leicester is a research-intensive university and a member of the 1994 Group of institutions. The University is committed to widening participation, which sits alongside the other core activities around research, teaching and innovation. The Institute of Lifelong Learning is a thriving and active department that engages in the delivery of a wide-ranging suite of part-time, flexible courses aimed at the mature and working learners. Its other remit is to engage in innovative activities, projects and research that support widening participation and lifelong learning. As such the department hosts the Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network, the HEFCE Employer Engagement project and the University of Leicester Colleges Network (CULN). It also manages regional-based research and other projects around a wide range of lifelong learning and associated topics such as progression, enterprise and economic development.

Brief introduction
There are two stages to our work in this area:

1. External consultants delivered a series of training sessions covering all aspects of employer engagement, including the academic aspects (such as developing a flexible
curriculum) and business development aspects (such as marketing to employers). Attendees included academics and central services, including Marketing, Registry and Academic Office, as well as staff development.

2. Following the sessions, the Staff Development team looked at the University’s current programme of development for staff and are developing a revised programme that includes aspects of employer engagement where relevant, or adds additional training sessions on employer engagement. Academic Office are also working to develop additional support to staff through revised guidelines and procedures on issues such as work-based learning and APEL. The inclusion of this latter stage helps to ensure that the learning from stage one is embedded.

Rationale
The University of Leicester has vast experience of working with employers, particularly in relation to research and knowledge transfer activity. Particular departments traditionally work with employers (such as the Centre for Labour Market Studies and the School of Management), but employer engagement was not embedded across the institution, and there was no common understanding of how to respond to employers’ needs through flexible and tailored courses.

The external consultants helped to give initial input and raise the profile of some of the issues associated with employer engagement. Crucially the consultation sessions provided a forum in which all staff could debate and discuss employer engagement, their views and training needs. They also helped central departments such as Academic Office and Registry explore some of the issues alongside academics who would be responsible for course development.

It was always the intention to involve staff development in this process and the intention to develop core staff development options as part of the University’s offer. This was how we could begin to embed employer engagement more fully at institutional level.

Target audience
The provision is aimed at academics, staff from Academic Office, Registry, Marketing, Enterprise and Business Development; in other words people who each had a stake either as developers and deliverers of employer-led courses or as gatekeepers to quality etc. The opportunity for stakeholder discussion on key issues was as important as the learning.
**Marketing and promotion**

This was carried out in various ways:
- through heads of department;
- e-bulletin;
- advertised through staff development mailouts and website;
- plus ringing staff who it was felt would benefit.

**Quality assurance of the staff development**

The initial external provision was not subject to QA in the usual sense. The consultants were used on recommendation from other HEI colleagues and the sessions were evaluated through delegate evaluation forms.

The subsequent University staff development will be evaluated for delegate reaction, knowledge/skills gain and benefits using the University's standard evaluation process. Key performance indicators on employer engagement are also being developed, which, when confirmed, will give an indication on the effectiveness of the training and other support activities.

**Motivations**

The crucial motivator seems to be that, by participating, staff are able to get something out of it that will help them to do their job better or more easily, i.e. help them to recruit to courses, to access potential links or partners for research activity. For ‘support’ staff, i.e. Academic Office and Staff Development staff, the motivator will be a need to understand so they can best support and guide academic staff.

Increasing motivation to become more involved in the agenda in a research-intensive HEI is challenging. If employer engagement were to be a priority equal to research motivation would increase. However, this is unlikely ever to be the case. Another motivation that may have improved participation could be clear and visual support from senior staff. While senior staff are very supportive of employer engagement, we did not utilise this in recruiting to the staff development sessions.

**How does the staff development improve QA for EE/WFD delivery?**

This exercise prompted the inclusion of staff development around employer engagement within the core offer to staff. As such, new provision will be subject to existing QA processes and mainstreamed to provide a cohesive quality offer to our staff.
Content
The key elements and/or themes of the provision are developing a flexible offer for employers and developing a market with employers.

Development and delivery
Consultants were invited to deliver the staff development sessions for a number of reasons:
— the sessions were also to be used as a discussion forum and an external, impartial and experienced consultant was best placed to facilitate this discussion;
— external consultants offered a broad and deep experience of all aspects of employer engagement that could not have been feasibly delivered in-house at that time.

The consultants were chosen through recommendation, but the crucial additional factor was that the chosen consultants understood fully the culture of the University and were able to offer the programme with sensitivity and in context of our HEI environment. This was crucial, since the wrong approach would have resulted in a lost opportunity to embed and further develop employer engagement within the institution.

In ensuring quality, we were able to view the content of each session, how it would be delivered and the outcomes, and assess these against our expectations. We were also able to seek external recommendation from other HEI colleagues, including issues around quality.

Format
The initial sessions were delivered face to face in a workshop format. The subsequent provision offered by the University will be delivered in the same format, but may also include some online resource for staff.

The opportunity for a discussion forum was a key requirement of this programme.

Issues and problems
Main issues for delivery were the very varied experiences of attendees, which was challenging in relation to delivering at the most appropriate level. The consultants expertly utilised the experience of all members and had a 'solutions'-based approach so delegates could see how to do it.

Learning outcomes
Having cross-institution delegates was really helpful to get the debate started.
Supporting mechanisms:
Within the institution we have a Distance Learning Forum. As yet we have no networking forums specifically dedicated to employer engagement.

Benefits and impacts of the staff development
1. The individual participant:
   — increased understanding of 'how to do employer engagement';
   — informal links with colleagues in other departments to share ideas.

2. The institution/organisation/unit:
   — more strategic approach to staff development around employer engagement ensuring this is mainstreamed in future and not isolated within the employer engagement central team;
   — the opportunity for key quality gatekeepers to discuss and explore with academics the challenges of employer engagement and, crucially, how we might address these together.

3. The end recipient of EE/WFD, the employer and employee:
   — a more flexible approach to employers’ needs, since the staff development learning has been embedded;
   — access to academics who have a better understanding of their needs and how to meet them.

4. The sector (i.e. how does staff development enable us to upskill the sector?):
   — at the moment the staff development undertaken is having most impact within our institution. The best scenario would be that academics discuss employer engagement as part of their networking around their academic discipline area and that central support staff discuss these issues with other HEI colleagues at relevant sector forums. This may be beginning to happen.

Evaluation
At the end of each session, delegates were asked to complete an evaluation form. Additional discussion took place with staff from the central University Staff Development Unit to take their views and discuss how to address such issues in the future.
Any other comments
Such staff development initiatives attract generally those people who either have to be there or who have an interest. This is a longer-term and more complex strategy for engaging those who would chose not to attend because they are either not interested or do not know enough to wish to engage. However, this initiative contributed to a more strategic approach to staff development around employer engagement.

Case study 4: The Training Gateway

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Contextual overview
The Training Gateway is the UK universities and colleges skills brokerage organisation. The Training Gateway helps UK and international public and private sector organisations address their skills needs by providing a free single point of contact through which to source corporate, vocational and executive training and educational partnerships from UK universities.

Allowing easy and direct access to over 2,000 named co-ordinators in every UK university and around 50 colleges, The Training Gateway provides the most comprehensive access to university-level corporate, vocational and specialist training in the UK.

As well as providing access to training courses, The Training Gateway helps businesses identify universities that can accredit their own in-house training programmes, develop bespoke packages and online or work-based learning programmes.

The Training Gateway also works with overseas educational institutions who wish to partner with UK universities and colleges for UK recognition, joint degrees, Foundation Degrees, professional training for staff in universities or colleges or other types of educational partnerships including the development of joint programmes.

Brief introduction
The Training Gateway has developed a wide range of CPD programmes for staff in universities and colleges who have a remit for developing, managing or delivering CPD courses for public and private sector clients.
One example is the Commercial Development Programme (CDP) designed to address many of the identified skills needs of CPD professionals.

**Rationale**
The CDP programme was designed after consultation with staff from around 60 universities who came together to discuss their skills needs. There was an understanding that there was lots of generic training available and also some training specifically designed for technology transfer officers, but nothing for staff selling commercial training programmes.

**Marketing, promotion and quality assurance of the staff development**
The courses are marketed through The Training Gateway website and emails to members. They are also endorsed by the Institute of Knowledge Transfer and Association for University Research and Industry Links, who also market and promote these courses on our behalf.

**Motivations**
Participants see a skills need, and the fact that the course is tailored specifically to their role means a high-level of relevancy. Attendance is good and class sizes kept small to maintain quality.

**How does the staff development improve QA for EE/WFD delivery?**
Quality assurance of employer engagement/workforce development delivery is improved by teaching required skills.

**Content**
The key elements and/or themes of the provision are outlined at: www.thetraininggateway.com/events/Availabletrainingcourses/CommercialDevelopmentProgramme?preview=true&draftsection=pages_draft.

**Development and delivery:**
A consultant for the Leadership Foundation was used, in collaboration with the Training Gateway director. Both had the relevant experience and understanding of the sector through current and previous roles. The LFHE is a well-regarded institution within HE, and The Training Gateway director had worked with the consultant on a number of occasions.
Format
A very practical course with group working, which lent itself to face to face. Also delegates really appreciate the opportunity to network with one another and learn from each other in a face-to-face setting.

Learning outcomes
The course has now run three times in the last year, and two more deliveries are planned for the first six months of 2010. Marketing through The Training Gateway, AURIL and IKT has worked well as it targets potential delegates. Word of mouth is also very useful.

The name of a couple of the modules has been changed to provide a better indication of content and relevance. Following evaluation of each course, small modifications to the programme have been made, but basically people keep coming back so we will keep running it.

The Training Gateway runs a number of workshops and events to help members network.

Benefits and impacts of the staff development for
1. The individual participant:
   — a wide range of skills development that can be directly applied.

2. The institution/organisation/unit:
   — within their institution they are more responsive to business needs and so hopefully will win more business.

3. The end recipient of EE/WFD, the employer and employee:
   — businesses will receive a more professional service.

4. The sector (i.e. how does staff development enable us to upskill the sector?):
   — a more professional sectoral approach to employer engagement.

Who has attended/participated?
So far there have been 70 participants.

Evaluation
Feedback from participants following the modules include relevance, quality of trainer, quality of material, direct ability to apply to the role and opportunity to network as the most frequently cited responses.
Testimonials

How has it helped you?

I have attended the first of the series of events: ‘Strategic Relationship Management: Key Clients and Client Relationship. I found the session inspirational. Dr Kennie is a brilliant and well-informed presenter and facilitator. His session was highly relevant and clearly identified how as an institution/school we need to approach the management, ongoing care and development of our client base in a more professional and structured way. The toolkit which is provided with the programme is brilliant. It provides us with a host of ideas, procedures and templates by which we will be able to effectively review and manage our key client relationships.

How has it benefited your institution?

I attended the first session of the programme only very recently. However I have already recommended that as a school we undertake an audit and health check of our client relationships – utilising the CRM toolkit provided by the course – with a particular focus on existing and new business. This is a highly pertinent activity at a time of recession.

There are a number of participants on the programme and as part of our HEFCE SDF Employer Engagement project we have been asked to disseminate and cascade the learning gained to other staff across the institution. We are keen to do this as we feel that it will make a valuable contribution to the business excellence of the University.

Why did you pick the course for your institution?

It was highly recommended as a programme that was highly relevant and attuned to the needs of HEIs by Prof Oisin McNamara our Director of Research, Regional and European Affairs, who had attended a previous programme delivered by Dr Tom Kennie of Ranmore Consulting.

I was particularly interested as my role within the School of Health, Community & Education Studies is expanding with respect to the business and enterprise responsibility for our Workforce Development and Employer Engagement provision, with a particular focus on new business and clients.
Supporting employer-based staff who contribute to academic awards through design, delivery and assessment

Dr Sarah Fielding, University of Portsmouth

Contributing partners
The HEIs presenting exemplar case studies (which represent a range of professional contexts) include:

The University of Portsmouth: Foundation Direct is one of two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University. The remit of the centre is to support Foundation Degree (Fd) students and their workplace mentors through evidence-based practice. Sarah Fielding is the Lead Developer (Mentoring) and Learning Support Tutor in Foundation Direct.

De Montfort University: The School of Nursing and Midwifery, is in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. Abigail Moriarty is a Principal Lecturer, Teacher Fellow and Chair of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) define Standards for mentorship; to perform the role individuals must have undertaken an approved mentorship preparation programme or equivalent, attend and record an annual Mentor update, and be registered for at least one year before taking on this role.

Staffordshire University: The University offers a foundation degree in Education (Teaching Assistants), which is delivered in partnership with local colleges within the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) partnership. Jim Pugh is a Senior Lecturer.

Bradford College: The College has been involved in two projects relating to supporting learning in the workplace: the Bradford Pathfinder project is the development of a conceptual model for the development of e-learning in Fds, while the SPaCE-Fd project (Supporting Personalised and Collaborative E-learning in Foundation Degrees) aims to make more effective use of the workplace as a learning environment, by encouraging employer/supervisor/mentor engagement in work-based learning. Ronan O’Beirne is the Assistant Director of Learning Development.
The University of Wolverhampton: The University has implemented a staff mentoring scheme as one of its measures to support people in achieving professional development in the workplace. The scheme provides holistic, dynamic, medium- to long-term mentoring. All members of staff within the organisation are offered the opportunity to develop skills or explore career advancement through peer and hierarchical mentoring relationships. Debra Cureton is the Mentoring and Coaching Development Co-ordinator, a Research Fellow and Chair of the University's Research Network in Coaching and Mentoring.

Methodology
This publication comprises two main sections. The first (based on existing literature) provides a brief background to the nature of employer-based staff contributing to academic awards by mentoring students undertaking work-based learning, and presents a review of the key issues and challenges surrounding the support of these staff. The second section (comprising current good practice) presents scenarios, based on some of the topics in Section A, for staff developers and offers exemplars of how these scenarios are currently being addressed by higher education institutions (HEIs). Full case studies contributed by partners can be found in the appendices.

1 Issues and challenges

1.1 Mentor support for work-based learning
Models or types of mentoring can be broadly grouped by purpose as ‘youth’, ‘academic’ or ‘work’ (Allen and Eby, 2007). Youth mentoring evidently refers to schemes, usually with the purposes of role modelling and aspiration-raising, for young people. Mentoring for ‘academic’ purposes may be carried out by peers or staff and has the mentee’s (learner’s) journey of self-discovery at the heart of the relationship. Mentoring at work is typically concerned with career functions and skills development. However, mentoring to support the blended nature of work-based learning requires a similarly blended approach.

Characterising work-based learning to begin with is troublesome; the main reasons being vague definitions and additional confusion caused by the interchangeable use of a number of similar but different terms (Beaney, 2005; Nixon et al., 2006). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) define work-based learning as “a self directed, work-based process leading to increased adaptive capacity. Individuals ‘learn to learn’ and possess the capabilities that enable them to do so … to
help to build and retain competitive advantage” (CIPD, 2009, para 2). More specifically in connection with higher education, work-based learning is differentiated from the conventional model of modularised education through the development of a negotiated and contextual curriculum driven by the needs of an employer or learner (as the employer’s representative), and linked to the professional standards of the field (Boud and Solomon, 2001); with the result that the learner is fundamentally, and necessarily, self-directed (Ramage, 2003).

Students undertaking work-based learning are frequently balancing the demands of work, family and a new educational experience, which requires cultural acclimatisation and identity shifts for the learner. In addition, the learner can be seen as being positioned in the ‘eye of the storm’ with regard to the differing expectations and needs of so many stakeholders involved in work-based learning (the learner, the awarding institution, the employer and the professional body as a whole).

The benefits of mentoring for both academic and work purposes include cost-effective ways of increasing recruitment, engagement and familiarisation with new cultures, raising aspiration and skills levels, thereby reducing attrition rates and stress levels (Campbell and Campbell, 1997; Jossi, 1997; Johnson, 2007; Garvey et al., 2009). Therefore the support of an effective and experienced mentor, who can “help the student to identify their individual learning needs, apply knowledge to practice and act as a resource for the student’s development” (Wilson et al., 2005, p. 119) can be essential to the success of a work-based learning programme (Benefer, 2007), but mentors themselves also need support in guiding learners, managing responsibilities and meeting stakeholder expectations.

1.2 Mentor nomenclature

A common issue associated with the provision of mentor support is the lack of consensus around what constitutes true mentoring, leading to a wide range of names applied to a fluid role (Andrews and Wallis, 1999). It is difficult to achieve consistent use of an encompassing term such as ‘mentor’ across professional settings; variously students may encounter critical friends, preceptors, ‘links’, supervisors, ‘buddies’ and mentors, all of whom employ mentoring techniques or practice to some extent. Regardless of the actual title used, the importance of transformative, developmental relationships such as mentoring is accepted (Connor and Pakora, 2007) and despite a proliferation of definitions, different models of mentoring for varying purposes can be implemented using some common principles of good practice; as outlined in this document.
1.3 The role of the mentor in reflective dialogue

Regardless of the nomenclature applied, or the degree of formality of the scheme, mentors have a vital role to play in engaging students in learning through reflective dialogue. Learning occurs in social contexts (Bandura, 1977; Kerka, 1997; Lave and Wenger, 1998) and mentoring is a social practice (Garvey et al., 2006). Skilful mentoring practice challenges and supports students in generating new perspectives and understandings, through the externalisation of ideas. As alluded to earlier in this document the negotiated, contextual, learner-driven content of work-based learning makes the role of a mentor pivotal in “making implicit knowledge explicit and tacit by engaging and guiding students in dialogic learning and reflection” (Garvey et al., 2006, p. 86). Research by Eraut et al. (1998) indicates that employees consider workplace mentoring as instrumental in how they learned at work.

1.4 The role of the mentor in assessment

In being ideally placed to help ‘bridge the gap’ between the HEI and the workplace, mentors also have an important but somewhat controversial role in the assessment of the work-based learning that takes place. The practice of using mentors as formal assessors is controversial because of the inherent tension between the role of judgemental assessor and the facilitative, empowering role of the mentor (Burns, 2002). Yorke (2005) reports that students may fear appearing incapable in front of, or seek help from, a mentor who is also an assessor. Moreover, the nature of the mentoring relationship is a potential source of bias when assessing students’ performance (Watson et al., 2002; Hounsell et al., 1996). As either the employer or another employee, the mentor must not only provide access to appropriate learning opportunities to meet the awarding institution’s validation requirements, but also ensure that students’ learning “addresses the occupational requirements of the organisation” (Ramage, 2003).

Nevertheless, mentors are necessarily involved in providing students with continuous, and developmental, formative feedback through reflective dialogue. Holt and Willard-Holt (2000) argue that “assessment and learning are … inextricably linked and not separate processes” and view assessment as a dialogic, two-way process. Mentors will therefore inevitably be involved in some form of assessment, whether formative or summative, and should be provided with basic training, not just those with “a designated role in the assessment of the student’s work-based … learning” as described by the QAA Code of practice for work-based learning (2007, p. 11). Both formal and informal assessment roles require mentors to be adequately briefed in understanding the limitations of their roles and assessment procedures (so
that formative feedback is not mistakenly applied as summative assessment, and that summative assessment is appropriately managed). QAA recommends that the awarding institution provides training for employers and/or staff supporting work-based learning.

1.5 Formal vs informal mentoring

Mentor support may be facilitated either informally or formally; there are merits and disadvantages to both approaches. Formal programmes are initiated and managed by the host organisation (Clutterbuck, 2004), while informal mentoring occurs spontaneously between individuals (Kram, 1985) who find the relationship beneficial. Both Clifford (1996) and Clutterbuck (2004) argue that informal mentoring is superior to formal mentoring as it leads to more rewarding, long-term relationships, but Byrne (1989) warns that informal mentoring is not always available to all those who require it and, therefore, formal mentoring programmes should be supported. Informal programmes can be scaffolded to a certain extent by the host institution, through allowing mentor/mentee self-selection, but offering more formal training or contact lists of approved mentors, for example. The following questions are useful to consider when planning any mentoring scheme, while Tables 1 and 2, respectively, list features and further questions to consider in the management of informal or formal schemes:

— What is the specific purpose of the mentoring?
— Who will be mentors?
— How will you recruit mentors?
— How will you train mentors?
— How will you prepare mentees for mentoring?
— How will mentors know when to refer their mentee for appropriate support?
— How will you acknowledge/reward the work of mentors?
— How will you evaluate the success of the scheme?
— Have you considered ethical/confidentiality issues?

Formal mentoring programmes can exist concurrently with informal programmes and are potentially very effective, but require careful management (Ehrich and Hansford, 1999). The purposes of such a scheme should be determined by a needs assessment exercise (O’Brien et al., 2007). Ehrich et al. (2004) provide an excellent review of the literature regarding formal mentoring programmes in a number of professional contexts and this should be considered essential reading for anyone considering implementing such a scheme. In a formal framework it is important to allow for flexibility in order to acknowledge uniqueness and individual styles of each mentoring pair. It may be helpful to
suggest minimum expected activities/duration frequencies of session in order to ensure a basic equitable experience for all participants (Harley and Smith, 2004). There are a number of recommendations for the implementation and management of mentoring programmes (Ragins, Cotton and Miller, 2000; Clutterbuck, 2004; Ehrich, 2008). These recommendations are outlined in the sections that follow and many are equally applicable for supporting staff involved in informal, in addition to formal, mentoring.

Table 1: Questions to consider for scaffolding an informal mentoring scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Questions to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous development</td>
<td>Will all mentees have equal opportunities/access to mentors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual selection by individuals</td>
<td>How will you support students who cannot find a mentor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Critical friend’ model of support</td>
<td>How will you align the expectations of mentees and mentors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals of relationship not always clear</td>
<td>Will you have direct contact with mentoring pairs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration down to individuals; typically long lasting</td>
<td>Will you specify minimum requirements for frequency/duration of meetings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Questions to consider when implementing a formal mentoring scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Questions to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiated and managed by third party</td>
<td>How will you assess the quality of mentors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined purpose of relationship</td>
<td>What criteria will you use to match pairs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor role may incorporate some coaching/supervision/formal assessment</td>
<td>Will your mentors be involved in assessment or supervision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed duration</td>
<td>Will you require evidence of meetings/practice? Have you allowed for flexible practice between mentors and mentees?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 Recruitment, selection and matching

Following a needs assessment to determine the purpose of a mentoring programme, consideration needs to be given as to how mentors (and possibly mentees) will be recruited and selected before being matched. Although many mentors may see mentoring
as a natural extension of their normal working role, any participation as either mentor or mentee in a scheme should be voluntary, not forced (Clutterbuck, 2004).

Depending on the purposes of the mentoring, not all individuals who express a desire to act as a mentor will be suitable for the role after initial training. They may still not have sufficiently well-developed personal qualities or interpersonal skills essential for effective mentoring. A requisite level of professional experience and practice is important to ensure that mentors do not prejudice the quality of the academic award, for example in giving students the impression that they should ‘forget what you are taught at college; this is the real world’. A similar educational experience to the mentee is especially helpful, but not essential in supporting work-based learning, unless the mentor is also undertaking a more formal role in assessment. Transparent criteria for mentor selection should be used (Bochner, 1995, in Ehrich and Hansford, 1999) and made available to those who apply.

Once a pool of appropriate mentors has been formed and the mentees identified, the matching process can occur. Informal mentoring occurs as a result of mutual selection by individuals, whereas the formation of formal mentoring pairs usually occurs at the discretion of a third party: the employer or awarding institution. A disadvantage of entirely mutual selection on the part of the individuals is that students may not seek out mentors with a sufficiently different skill set or personal characteristics that would mean they can offer adequate challenge. Equally, mentors and students who are simply allocated with no personal choice are less likely to develop a rapport and successfully achieve their aims (Clutterbuck, 2004). Whether formal or informal, the success of the mentoring is intrinsically linked to the selection process (O’Brien et al., 2007), which should be based on reciprocal trust and security in the personal relationship between the individuals involved (Wilson and Elman, 1990; Rodger, 2006). An optimal compromise therefore is one of guided choice for students and mentors where more than one suitable pairing is offered (Ehrich and Hansford, 1999; Ragins, Cotton and Miller, 2000; Burns, 2002).

Where possible, mentees should not be matched with a mentor who will also be their line manager, as this can lead to similar conflicts when mentors are involved in formal assessment. Peripatetic mentors (those based in similar, but not the same workplace as the student) may increase the pool of potential mentors to reduce such conflicts. However, extra consideration must be given to the resources available to these mentors, how they will contact mentees, and how any inter-organisational conflicts will be managed. To further aid in aligning the expectations and aims of both individuals, Wilson and Elman (1990) advocate the drawing of contracts to formalise the arrangements. The content of such a contract may offer some guidelines from the organisation, but should also allow for negotiated arrangements between mentor and mentee.
1.7 Training
QAA (2007) advise that the responsibilities of staff undertaking a mentoring or supervising role in a work setting must be clearly identified, and that any training required for this role should be provided prior to any mentoring activity. Given the nature of work-based learning, and particularly in mentoring programmes where students self-select a mentor, mentor training prior to practice is not always achievable but should be offered as early as possible. The Code of practice also indicates that shared responsibilities between the awarding institution and the employer (or the mentor as the employer’s representative) can be successful, but clarity regarding each of these responsibilities is essential. Training should be provided for both mentors and mentees (Clutterbuck, 2004) and could occur separately or together if appropriate. Any training should include the responsibilities of all stakeholders, not just those of the individual mentors, in addition to an explanation of the purpose or aims of the mentoring, ethics, and boundaries (Burns, 2002; Clutterbuck, 2004; Ehrich, et al., 2004). Training should also raise the awareness of, or develop, core interpersonal skills relevant for mentoring such as active listening, giving helpful feedback, and using questions effectively (see QAA, 2010, paras 75 and 77).

1.8 Ongoing support and evaluation
If mentors are to role model lifelong learning and professional, reflective and reflexive practice for students, they need to be engaged in a continuing support network of their own. Smith et al., (2005) propose that after a full induction, mentors should be involved in a structured training scheme that continually develops them as individuals. Formal programmes require significant buy-in and support from all stakeholders, particularly employers/senior management in allowing mentors access to resources such as time (as part of their regular workload) and space for mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2004). The European Coaching and Mentoring Council (2004) recommends supervision for practising mentors.

1.9 Recognition
Mentors undertake a vital role, ideally on a voluntary basis, but not without cost to themselves. Where possible the benefits to mentors, of which there are several, should be made tangible. Clutterbuck (2004) contests the practice of paying mentors as a form of reward, arguing that doing so jeopardises the development of the personal relationship between mentor and mentee. However, recognising mentoring practice in APEL claims (providing clear guidelines on how this can be evidenced) or offering bitesize accreditation for the completion of mentor training may be suitable options.
2 Scenarios for staff development

2.1 Scenario one
A post-1992 HEI offers a range of work-based learning courses. All of the courses use mentoring in slightly different ways to support students, and each has variable methods of recruiting, training, and managing the mentoring relationships. A central support department is able to provide support to course teams, who wish to retain some measure of control over their respective mentoring programmes. Mentors are geographically and professionally disparate. Shift work and childcare arrangements ensure that attendance at non-compulsory training events remains low. The University wishes to ensure equitable student experience and support across courses.

Consider: possible solutions, and the roles/responsibilities of support centre, mentors, students, course teams and anyone else.

The Foundation Direct CETL at the University of Portsmouth (UoP) has produced a generic mentor handbook, supplemented with specific guidance notes for each course, in addition to new, generic online training materials for mentors. These interactive materials supplement existing course training programmes and offer training where there was no existing provision. Training can be undertaken at more individually convenient times.

The Bradford College SPaCE-Fd project (Supporting Personalised and Collaborative E-learning in Foundation Degrees) encourages employer/supervisor/mentor engagement in work-based learning through the use of learning contracts (LCs) and e-assessment and repurposing a range of generic work-based learning materials – drawing on Individualised Support for Work-based Foundation Degrees (SURF WBL JORUM) outputs. The technology will enable the curriculum to have interaction with any population or support group, allowing direct input to the themed-area of employer engagement, and will enable supporting the review and evaluation of the curriculum in ‘real time’ as well as its curriculum and delivery.

2.2 Scenario two
A placement setting uses a formal mentoring model that involves elements of supervision of practice for students. Rising allocations of student numbers are causing the workplace mentors to feel overwhelmed, while the students have expressed concerns that their learning needs are not being adequately met by the practice placement.

Consider: additional support mechanisms for mentors, student needs, and more effective ways of integrating mentor support, the HEI, and work-based learning.
Bradford College has developed and extended the role of an Industrial Support Group (ISG) – building on the experience of a Metallurgy and Materials ISG – which facilitates interaction between employers, industry, students and academic staff, along with interested supporters and partner agencies.

The School of Nursing and Midwifery (De Montfort University) utilises a practice learning team (PLT) led by a link lecturer from the HEI, along with mentors of student nurses from the area. Using action learning the PLT find solutions to problems, and in doing so, it develops individual members of the group and the organisation as a whole. The development of this PLT has elevated the profile of partnership working and has subsequently raised the standards of the placement experience for learners, and support mechanisms for mentors.

The University of Wolverhampton provides its mentors with monthly supervision sessions and mentors are expected to attend at least four sessions during their 12-month mentoring contract. A peer group approach is used for cost-effectiveness; however, individual supervision is available upon request. Supervision is facilitated by two qualified counselling supervisors, one of whom is a practicing coach.

2.3 Scenario three

Students in an informal, self-selecting scheme have voiced concerns that they are unable to find willing mentors. Some mentors have taken on multiple students to cope with the shortfall. On further investigation employers appear to have inconsistent views regarding the role and the time needed for mentoring, and have passed these views on to potential mentors. Some employers report that they cannot afford to release staff for training. Staff members who are acting as mentors offer the opinion that while they enjoy helping their mentees develop, the importance of their impact and extra workload as mentors is not acknowledged by their employers.

Consider: ways of acknowledging the work of mentors, formalising mentor training as CPD for staff, the support needed for mentors of multiple students, and how to improve the culture of mentoring in the workplace.

Bradford College is designing an online credit-bearing module that could be used as a ‘stand-alone’ continuing professional development module for work-based mentors, which would provide both employers and mentors with links between the requirements of academic study and the needs of the workplace. The college is also exploring an associate scheme where mentors are given college status through associateship.

Foundation Direct currently offers a non-accredited certificate of completion for its online mentor training. However, the online activities (and prompts for reflection)
can be used as portfolio evidence towards APEL claims for other qualifications. The 
online training also forms the basis of accredited mentoring units for courses at the 
UoP, preparing graduates to act as work-based mentors.

The University of Wolverhampton’s staff mentoring scheme embraces a wide 
range of occupational roles and levels. This form of cross-institution mentoring, which 
incorporates all occupation groups, is unusual in universities. However, it can raise 
awareness across disciplines and help to break down institutional ‘silos’.

De Montfort University arranged regular ‘Link-Up’ meetings, which raised the 
profile of the Link Lecturer leading a Practice Learning Team in the workplace.

2.4 Scenario four

A scheme of formal mentoring was initially piloted in a support department that 
employs a wide range of occupational roles and levels. Following an evaluation of 
its effectiveness, the scheme has been expanded cross-institutionally. Mentors and 
mentees are contracted to work together for 12 months, for a total of ten hours of 
face-to-face meetings. The criteria used matches mentors and mentees based on the 
type of development required and work location. As personality tests are not used the 
decisions about matches are derived from initial assessment interviews.

Consider: the pros and cons to this type of mentoring; what other criteria for 
matching could be used?

The University of Wolverhampton offers mentees who require more focused, short-
term support up to four sessions with independently trained coaches from within UoW.

“JCB is developing its own in-company formal mentoring scheme for all 
employees studying for a degree or professional qualification. Typically, at the 
start of the programme, the mentor sits down with the college tutor, the student 
employee and JCB training manager to plan three-month placements within 
various sections in the company. The mentor can also schedule in assignment 
dates, and ensure that the assessment tasks are matched to the employee’s 
day-to-day work activities.”

—Benefer, 2007

3 Summary

In Section A this publication outlined some of the widely acknowledged elements 
of best practice in supporting employer-based staff who contribute to academic 
awards, through providing students with mentoring support. The scenarios
presented in Section B offer opportunities for discussion of these best practice elements and how they may be used flexibly by staff developers to support different mentoring contexts, such as informal and formal. Drawing on the case studies from contributing partners, the following common key benefits, recommendations and challenges can be identified.

**Key benefits:**
- increased employer engagement;
- improved student experience;
- additional workforce CPD opportunities;
- review and revaluation of curricula and policies;
- strategic management of support for increasing student numbers.

**Key recommendations:**
- generic mentoring resources have wide-ranging applications;
- use of ‘toolkits’ to support mentors;
- evaluation of scheme by both mentors and mentees, employers and developers;
- utilise a facilitator to co-ordinate and oversee the process/scheme;
- online, asynchronous training reaches more disparate groups than face-to-face sessions;
- continued strong partnership working is essential to the success of schemes.

**Key challenges:**
- time constraints;
- physical resource implications (stationery, room bookings, teaching equipment);
- funding sources;
- mentors maintaining impartiality within assessment processes (if involved).

One of the greatest strengths of mentoring as a learning support tool is its flexibility and individualised nature. However, its flexibility also means that common understandings and goals are required in order to be consequential for all involved (Ehrich and Hansford, 1999). Once this is achieved, successful mentoring can be pivotal in retaining students on work-based learning awards and to involving employers (Benefer, 2007).
4 Useful links and recommended reading


The European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC) promotes good practice in mentoring and coaching across Europe: www.emccouncil.org

For the 2nd edition of the National Midwifery Council mentor standards visit: www.nmc-uk.org

5 References


Appendix

Case study: The provision of online mentor training and cross-departmental management of mentoring resources

Institution – The University of Portsmouth, Foundation Direct
Contributor – Dr Sarah Fielding, Lead Developer (Mentoring)
Themes – Online training, Mentor support

Project overview
The University of Portsmouth offers a number of Foundation Degrees in a range of professional fields including education, justice, government, business and management, and healthcare. Workplace mentoring is used to lesser or greater extents in supporting students pursuing these qualifications. In healthcare the mentors also fulfil a supervision/assessor role that requires formal training, whereas in education an informal model is adopted with students selecting their own mentors who fulfil a psychosocial function. The provision of mentor training, ongoing support and recognition (and therefore efficiency) was very variable between the course departments. Foundation Direct is the only CETL in the UK to have the specific remit of supporting Foundation Degree students and appointed a mentor developer with the aim of helping course teams to identify, and to directly develop, improvements to mentoring for the Foundation Degrees offered by the University.

Individual course teams are responsible for deciding which model of mentoring they wish to employ; they also retain control over recruitment and selection (with only advisory input from the Foundation Direct mentor developer) if appropriate, although most allow students to self-select mentors. Many course teams offer their own face-to-face in-house training, which is often delivered with input and assistance from Foundation Direct; however, historically attendance at such events has been poor owing to the geographically disparate nature of the mentors and the need for managing work/childcare commitments. Distribution of paper-based support materials, whether produced in-house or by Foundation Direct, remains the responsibility of course teams.

Foundation Direct produced a generic mentor handbook, supplemented with specific guidance notes for each course. A project team of course representatives and mentors was created to inform the development of new, generic online training materials for mentors. These interactive materials were designed to supplement existing in-house training programmes and to provide mentors (and mentees) with
training where there was no existing provision. Training can be undertaken at more individually convenient times. Completion of the online training entitles individuals to a certificate of completion in recognition of their effort. Foundation Direct is also exploring possibilities for bitesize provision of this training as workforce CPD and its potential in increasing employer engagement.

Known as Mentor Direct in its pilot phase, the online project is moving into a new phase as ‘Mentoring@Portsmouth’ providing mentor training, support and recognition beyond its original remit to support further mentoring schemes across the University.

Key successes
The key benefits derived as a result of implementing Mentoring@Portsmouth and its associated materials include:
1. the delivery of asynchronous, tailored mentor training that reaches a wider target group than previous face-to-face sessions;
2. the development of generic mentoring resources that can be used in a number of mentoring contexts at the University, including peer mentoring for both staff and students;
3. identifying existing good practice in mentor support in departments and disseminating the results to other course teams;
4. increased employer engagement and staff CPD through South Central Ambulance Trust directly contributing to the development of new mentor training resources;
5. increased evaluation of in-house departmental mentoring schemes by course teams;
6. re-evaluation of the University’s VLE policies.

Lessons learned
1. The input of the project team proved to be invaluable in developing resources that would be applicable to a wide range of contexts. Although this lengthened the initial development time, the resources produced as a result were far more reusable.
2. Clear guidelines as to the responsibilities and arrangements for updating, printing and distributing materials were needed. Some course teams added further materials to the packs of paper materials but did not send an updated copy to Foundation Direct.
3. Training for course teams supporting mentoring schemes is equally as important as training for mentors and mentees themselves.
4. Initially workplace professionals were not able to access the University’s VLE as they were neither staff nor students. This presented problems in acknowledging
their contribution in supporting students and also in finding effective methods of online communication.

5. The lack of a central provision of mentoring advice meant that several mentoring schemes for varying purposes and individuals developed in silos across the University; the extent of which was not identified until the arrival of Foundation Direct.

Recommendations
1. Accurate records of mentor and mentee contact details should be held in a central database if possible to maximise efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
2. A centrally co-ordinated programme of dissemination and action learning groups for mentoring can improve the efficacy of such schemes in reducing training costs, improving mentor support networks and sharing good practice among departments.
3. Just as mentoring is effective as flexible practice within a formal framework, the same model should be used for central provision to reflect the varying purposes of mentoring within an HE context, e.g. staff and student peer mentoring, academic and work mentoring.

Case Study: The development, implementation and evaluation of Practice Learning Teams to support mentors

Institution – De Montfort University, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Contributor – Dr Abigail Moriarty, Principal Lecturer, Teacher Fellow and Chair of Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee
Themes – Practice learning, Mentor support, Action learning

Project overview
Pre-registration nurse education and clinical practice clearly rely on close working partnerships. This was the foundation for the development of a Practice Learning Team (PLT) using action learning. Action learning is an educational approach developed by Revans (1983, p. 54) based on the premise that, “There can be no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning.” Revans (1983) suggested that organisations like the National Health Service (NHS) and higher education institutions (HEIs) cannot flourish unless the rate of learning is equal to, or greater
than, the rate of experience to change. The rationale for the formation of the group was due to concerns expressed by both student nurses and mentors in practice. Literature identifies that there are numerous influences that limit and hinder the development of the learner (Clarke et al., 2003; Pearcey and Elliott, 2004). These students expressed apprehension with this particular practice placement not addressing their learning needs, whereas, the ward-based mentors felt bombarded with the rising student numbers allocated to this placement area. Alongside this, the clinical area was in the process of identifying additional support mechanisms for mentors, so addressing improvements to the placement experience for both student nurses and mentors seemed a natural starting point for the development of a PLT.

This PLT is led by a Link Lecturer from the HEI, along with mentors from the area who are all committed to enhancing the learning opportunities for student nurses. Link Lecturers are allocated to a set of clinical areas to monitor and develop the student’s learning (Smith and Gray, 2001); in this scenario the Link Lecturer related the academic context to the practice arena. This successful relationship between practice and education facilitated opportunities for personal and professional development, but this needed commitment from both clinical staff and academic staff for this success to come embedded for wider dissemination.

Action learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection, and it supports the mentor with the intention of ‘getting things done’. Therefore through action learning the PLT find solutions to problems, and in doing so, it develops individual members of the group and the organisation as a whole.

This PLT has the following intentions:

1. to undertake work on issues that has occurred. Due to the nature of the collaboration, the focus of this PLT is only pre-registration student nurses;
2. the commitment to the group is voluntary but there is a willingness within the group to see things to an end;
3. to work on real problems with which all are actively engaged;
4. to work together to check individual perceptions, clarify (and render more manageable) the problem and to explore alternatives for action;
5. to take action in the light of new insight to begin to change the situation. An account of the consequences will be brought back to the PLT for further shared reflection and evaluation;
6. to focus on learning, not only about the problem being tackled but also on what is being learned. This will be a constant cyclical process.
This PLT base their foundation upon three stages of an action learning set:
1. identification of a 'project' (problem, issue, concern);
2. identification of all possible actions;
3. identification of specific actions (Revans, 1983).

Key successes
Action learning has been utilised to develop this PLT to maximise student learning opportunities and to support mentors. The development of this PLT has elevated the profile of partnership working and has subsequently raised the standards of the placement experience for learners, and support mechanisms for mentors.

The tangible improvements from the PLT that have supported mentors include:
1. resource folders;
2. exit questionnaires that evaluated the students experience; planned student induction programme;
3. rolling student teaching sessions;
4. student noticeboard for dissemination of information and student-led teaching;
5. ‘Link-Up’ meetings raising the profile of the Link Lecturer;
6. local ‘mentor toolkit’, which provides all the information and ‘tools’ to help mentors support student nurses on a day-to-day basis;
7. ‘buddying’ system, a strategic development of managing the increase in student numbers and supporting mentors with this through ‘buddying’ senior and junior student nurses together.

Lessons learned
The PLT recognised that in order to promote its initiatives (buddying, induction and Link-Up meetings) across a wider remit, a facilitator would be required to oversee the process. It was extremely time-consuming for the Link Lecturer to oversee all activities. Therefore members of the PLT were allocated to focus on specific projects; this enhanced the collaboration and ownership of projects and actions of the PLT. However, apart from time constraints there were other resource implications, any physical resources (stationery, room bookings, teaching equipment) were given by goodwill. The continuation and further development of the PLT cannot rely on this generosity; however, the PLT has now been recognised as an exemplar of good practice by a professional body (The Nursing and Midwifery Council) and this will hopefully influence the direction of future resources.

A rudimentary exit questionnaire evaluated the student’s experience of the PLT and a similar document was used for mentors. Both evaluations of the PLT suggested
that the support offered through this initiative was a worthwhile one. The PLT recognised, however, that without continued strong partnership working this potentially would not be feasible.

The macro development and dissemination of a PLT to other sites are a priority, the Link Lecturer and other members of this PLT plan on assisting on a practical level, with the anticipation of using evaluative findings to direct mentors of the most effective ways in supporting student nurses.

Recommendations
1. Since the origins of the initial group, membership of the PLT should reflect the clinical and academic staff that are responsible for student support, with all members sharing the underlying philosophy of taking a proactive role in relation to nurse education. According to Brooks and Moriarty (2006) groups like the PLT bring together small groups of professionals using an identified framework of student support that encompasses collaborative triangulation in which all stakeholders actively participate.
2. The benefits of a tripartite relationship to support mentors and students within practice need to be front-loaded regarding resources of time and opportunity to gain actual tangible benefits. Otherwise members of the PLT can ‘give in’ before the benefits are seen.

References
Case study: The development and early implementation of industrial and work-based mentors using e-learning technologies.

Institution – Bradford College
Contributor – Ronan O’Beirne, Assistant Director Learning Development
Themes – Personalised learning, Industrial mentor support, work-based learning

Project overview
This case study looks at the development of a work-based mentor (WBM) and an industrial mentor approach within Bradford College. Arising from three different strands of activity the development of work-based mentors is traced, the benefits are identified and future directions are suggested. During the past couple of years the use of technology within FE and HEIs has been the focus of much innovative activity. While the application of technology to established practices is commonplace the development of new practices in the light of innovative use of technology is less common.

Through an exploration of how technology might impact on the dynamics of learner, tutor and work-based mentor, a novel approach to this relationship was developed as a conceptual model. A formal project to extend this activity was proposed to the Higher Education Academy as part of the Bradford Pathfinder Project. The approved project was funded for one year and had as its main aim: to develop a conceptual model that incorporates employer engagement, workforce development, and work-based mentoring for the development of e-learning in Fds. The Foundation Degree arena was seen as a good test bed in which to plant the seeds of employer engagement, while the use of technology, in this instance termed ‘e-learning’, was seen as an enabling device to ensure growth.

At the same time a similar project albeit with a stronger emphasis on collaborative learning and personalisation was being developed, this time with funding from the JISC e-learning capital programme. The SPaCE-Fd project (Supporting Personalised and Collaborative E-learning in Foundation Degrees) sought “principally to significantly improve opportunities for foundation degree students to achieve formal


15 See: www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningcapital/heinfe/spacefd.aspx.
qualifications through the further development of blended learning approaches. Such approaches will allow them to develop their skills and knowledge, and to gain formal accreditation for this through a personalised learning experience (PLE). The proposal also seeks to establish a more seamless link between students, College tutors, and work-based mentors (WBMs), and to open up opportunities for greater collaboration in learning.”

The SPaCE project had the following deliverables which are pertinent to this case study:

a. to evaluate and repurpose a range of generic work-based learning materials – drawing on SURF WBL (JORUM) outputs in particular – for use by tutors, students and work-based mentors (WBMs)16; (3)

b. to make more effective use of the workplace as a learning environment, by encouraging employer/ supervisor/mentor engagement in WBL though the use of learning contracts (LCs) and e-assessment; this process will be further supported by the development of an Industrial Support Group (ISG);

c. to redesign the criteria associated with the role of WBMs; by designing an online credit-bearing module that could be used as a ‘stand-alone’ continuing professional development module for WBMs, and will provide both employers and WBMs with links between the requirements of academic study and the needs of the workplace.

A third aspect was the development of a new foundation degree award in Casting; the relevance of this being that the technologies that had reached ‘proof of principle’ and were piloted in the funded projects mentioned above, were embedded in the thinking, development and subsequent delivery of the Casting Fd. Of significance in the development of this Fd has been high levels of engagement with the employer-representative bodies such as: UKCME (UK Centre for Materials Education, a subject centre of the Higher Education Academy), based at the University of Liverpool; current employers and learners on the foundation degree in Metallurgy and Materials, including Bodycote Heat Treatment; Namtec; the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining – IOM3; and the Institute of Cast Metal Engineers – ICME.

See: www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/x4t/surfwbl.aspx.
Key successes

The benefits are:

1. designing an online credit-bearing module that could be used as a ‘stand-alone’ continuing professional development (CPD) module for work-based mentors;
2. developing and extending the role of an Industrial Support Group (ISG) – building on the experience of the Metallurgy and Materials ISG – which facilitate interaction between employers, industry, students and academic staff, along with interested supporters and partner agencies;
3. the technology will enable the curriculum to have interaction with any population or support group, allowing direct input to the themed area of employer engagement;
4. the technology will enable supporting the review and evaluation of the curriculum in ‘real time’ as well as its curriculum and delivery;
5. employer body and professional association engagement in FD development and delivery;
6. the electronic version of a learning contract allows wider input including input from industrial mentors;
7. a place for electronic discussion of issues associated with mentoring;
8. development of a toolkit to support industrial mentors;
9. mentors involved in the assessment of work-based learning.

Lessons learned

Two issues:

First, there is a need for the WBM and Industrial Mentors to be part of the College's overall quality framework, to ensure compliance with various regimes of quality. How should this be achieved? Currently we are looking at an associate scheme where WBMs are given college status through associateship.

The second surrounds assessment with the WBM involved in assessment, e.g. the reflective blog aspect, how might impartiality be maintained within such assessment processes? Currently we are looking at resources for assessment support.
Case study: The development, implementation and evaluation of an organisation-wide staff mentoring scheme

Institution – The University of Wolverhampton, Institute for Learning Enhancement and Equality and Diversity Unit
Contributor – Dr Debra Cureton, Research Fellow in Mentoring and Coaching Development, Chair of the Research Network in Coaching and Mentoring
Themes – Mentor support, Staff development, Organisation upskilling

Project overview
The University of Wolverhampton has implemented a staff mentoring scheme as one of its measures to support people in achieving professional development in the workplace. The scheme responds to the differing individual needs of people by offering an opportunity for holistic, dynamic, medium-to long-term mentoring. All staff within the organisation are offered the opportunity to develop skills or explore career advancement through peer and hierarchical mentoring relationships, which envelops developmental (Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garrett-Harris, 2005) and sponsorship (Kram, 1985) relationships, where appropriate.

Formal mentoring has been implemented in order to ensure maximum ‘mentoring benefits’ are maintained while also guaranteeing that ‘mentoring costs’ are controlled or mediated (cf. Cost/Benefit Analysis, Ragins and Scandura, 1999). The scheme was initially developed and piloted in a support department that employs academics, administrators, researchers and PhD students. Through an audit of the needs of these groups, the development of mentoring to meet them and the process of evaluation, the scheme has developed to embrace a wide range of occupational roles and levels. This form of cross-institution mentoring, which incorporates all occupation groups, is unusual in universities. The majority of mentoring schemes in higher education that are discussed in the literature, focus on academic staff alone.

The scheme provides cross-academic school/departmental relationships that offers mentees a level of externality to the mentoring they receive, while allowing the mentor to understand the demands of the organisation. The cross-organisational approach is considered especially important as work often takes place in department and subject-related silos, which rarely encourage multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Mentors and mentees are contracted to work together for 12 months, during which they spend ten hours in face-to-face meetings. However, the previously mentioned audit identified that some mentees required short-term, solution-
focused sessions (de Shazer, 1988). These people are offered up to four sessions with independently trained coaches from within the University. A face-to-face approach has been identified as the most appropriate method as it helps generate rapport, maintaining boundaries and managing the expectations of the mentee.

As matching processes are inherent to the success of mentoring (Gibbs and Telfer, 2008; Cox, 2005) a formal matching process is used. The criteria used matches mentors and mentees based on the type of development required and work location. In addition some matches were based on personality similarity. As personality tests are not used the decisions about matches are derived from initial assessment interviews and have proved to be successful to date.

A two-day training programme is provided so that all mentors understand the aims and expectations of the programme and to improve the success of mentoring relationships (Noe, 1988; Single and Muller, 2001). The training aims to shape mentors’ behaviours and knowledge and improve the match between capability and successful mentoring (Choa, 1990). The training programme explores assumption making, rapport building, verbal and non-verbal communication, listening skills, posing questions, the stages of the mentoring relationship and mentoring tools and techniques. These skills and knowledge are explored further in continuing professional development (CPD) sessions, which run every month, of which mentors are expected to attend at least four annually.

The importance of supervision in mentoring is now recognised and this area is undergoing significant growth (cf. Merrick and Stokes, 2003). As an ethical standard (EMCC, 2004), the scheme provides peer group supervision for all mentors to ensure quality (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995) and to provide mentors with a normative, formative and restorative experience (Proctor, 2000). Supervision sessions are provided once a month and mentors are expected to attend at least four sessions during their 12-month mentoring contract. A peer group approach was decided upon, as individual supervision was felt to be time-consuming and costly; however, individual supervision is available upon request. Supervision is facilitated by two qualified counselling supervisors, one of whom is a practicing coach.

**Key successes**

The implementation of mentoring within the organisation has been successful. There has been widespread take up of the scheme from most occupation groups within the organisation. Evaluations of the scheme indicated that mentoring is valued by staff and considered to be helpful to their careers (Cureton, 2009). The evaluations have also
highlighted that mentoring provides a number of anticipated and unexpected outcomes. These are outlined below.

1. Professional development: Professional development as a result of mentoring was evident. Many staff report improved management skills, communication with colleagues and feeling more skilled in their teaching practice. Greater engagement in writing peer review publications, in research and bidding for external funding are also evident.

2. Contact with others: Many who work in higher education, do so in isolated conditions across several locations. This provides few opportunities for contact beyond their immediate colleagues. As a result staff may not have many opportunities for peer support. Mentoring has provided staff with wider contact to other staff, which can bring a wider perspective of working styles.

3. Emotional support: Mentoring also provides emotional support in the workplace and is reported to impact on response to stressors and promote an increase in confidence. Also staff report feeling equipped to support students and other colleagues as a result of the training mentors receive and the role modelling of the support mentees receive from their mentors.

4. Reflection: Being involved in mentoring provides people with the opportunity to reflect. This is valued by both mentors and mentees, some of whom report that reflection improves their strategic view.

Lessons learned

From very early in this programme, it became apparent that mentoring means different things to different people. Often a person’s approach to mentoring is defined by their occupational or academic background. Disciplines such as teaching and nursing, who use mentoring as a tool to support and develop students in the workplace, appear to adopt hierarchical and directive approaches to mentoring. This is necessary, as in these professions the mentee is in a position of power; where mistakes can be critical. Thus, the mentor has a responsibility to ensure the good practice of the mentee, which can lead to the belief that a mentee should do as the mentor does and says. When providing cross-institution mentoring, this can lead to difficulties in formation and progression of mentoring relationships, especially if the mentors’ and mentees’ expectations of the process do not overlap.

The accessibility of the scheme is also important. Mentoring may be offered to some staff and not all. The available literature on mentoring in higher education mainly focuses on benefits for academic staff; however, mentoring has been shown to be useful for staff in other occupations (Cureton, Green and Meakin, 2009). It is important to ensure that the scheme is accessible to all staff.
For a successful scheme the training of mentors is essential. This allows people to advance their skills and provides the opportunity to clarify definitions of mentoring and the mentoring role. This also helps induct the mentor into the specifics of the scheme while improving the quality of mentoring provision.

The provision of supervision for mentors is an area of debate; however, this scheme has found supervision to be extremely valuable. In addition to the normative, restorative and informative experience provided by supervision (Proctor, 2000), supervision provides a space for reflection to take place. This has been greatly valued by mentors as a protection against the stresses of the academic environment (Cureton, Green and Meakin, 2009).

**Recommendations**

1. Mentoring for staff development in higher education should be available to all in the institution. This initiative has found benefits from mentoring for all occupations groups and all levels of staff.
2. Mentoring for staff development in higher educational settings should be a formalised process. This enhances the benefits that mentoring provides for all stakeholders.
3. Supervision and CPD are essential to the process of mentoring. Supervision and CPD not only provide continued support for the mentor, it also aids the quality of the programme.
4. Continual evaluation and the related modifications to the programme are essential to the success of the programme

**References**


strategic concerns in mentoring schemes. The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching. 6 (1), 02/2008.


Case study: The development, implementation and evaluation of an organisation-wide staff mentoring scheme

Institution – Staffordshire University
Contributor – Jim Pugh, Senior Lecturer
Themes – Teaching Assistants studying foundation degree programme

Project overview
The foundation degree in Education (Teaching Assistants) (FDED) is to provide an opportunity for those working with children and young people to build on their knowledge and experience through study at higher education level in order to enhance understanding of their current professional roles.

Employer involvement has been central to the development of this programme. Local schools, education providers and local authorities fully support the nature of the
award and have contributed to its development. Furthermore, employer support for participants on the course in the form of mentoring and the provision of appropriate work-based experience is a requirement.

Partnership and collaboration have been central to the development of this award and are central to its delivery. The direct involvement of employers (headteachers and local authorities representatives) in the development of the award has been an important in ensuring that it will meet the needs of the sector and the ongoing involvement of employers (headteachers or their representative) as work-based mentors will ensure the provision of an appropriate and supportive work-based learning environment. Representatives of colleges in the partnership have been involved in all stages of development of the programme and will be responsible for the delivery of the programme.

The programme is designed to emphasise and underpin, by rigorous and broad-based academic learning, all appropriate technical and work-specific skills as well as key skills in communication, team working, problem solving, application of number, use of information technology and improving own learning and performance, and generic skills such as reasoning and work process management. Provision is also made for participants to create their own personal development plans and record learning in validated transcripts, through a personal development portfolio.

Work-based tasks require participants to demonstrate their skills in the workplace and bring evidence to study sessions. Participants are required to be working within an educational setting, equivalent to at least ten hours per week, and this work will form an essential part of the programme experience and assessment. Entry requirements are flexible to allow for credit to be given to work-based learning.

Key successes
Students graduating from the FDED will have a high level of knowledge and understanding of wider educational issues and how they impact upon the day-to-day support associated with teaching assistant duties. Graduates will have also demonstrated a range of work-based tasks, providing them with a broad experience and application of learning.

Students graduating from the course will have the potential to be a highly qualified and motivated teaching assistant. They will also have the opportunities for further learning and vocational training e.g. Initial Teacher Training through RTP or GTP/PGCE once ‘topped-up’ to BA (Hons) Education.

Graduating students from the previous course (foundation degree in Teaching Assistants) have not only found themselves personally growing in confidence,
knowledge and understanding, but have found themselves being promoted, taking on more responsibility and being further valued by colleagues within the workplace.

The mentoring aspect of the programme within school provides a clear line of communication between: partner college, University and the school work placement. This also allows mentor and mentee to work closer together on directed tasks, forcing further collaboration within the workplace and promotes workplace relations.

Lessons learned
Overall lessons learned from the experience are the invaluable nature, support and guidance mentors provide to students upon the foundation degree in Education (Teaching Assistants). The partnerships that develop, in many cases, provide not only sound working partnerships, but strong friendships. When students wish to ‘top-up’ to an Honours level qualification at Staffordshire University, no mentor is required – however, many of the students who enter the programme from the FDED (Teaching Assistants) ask that their mentors carry on this role, even when it is superfluous to the BA (Hons) Education course requirements.

Mentors also should be included in communication between university, partner college and student. Those mentors who attend mentor training find the processes very useful and informative. This forum provides mentors with discussion time for questions and queries. Mentors who don’t attend this training are provided with a synopsis of the training and materials with the workplace.

The University is now developing further ways to promote mentor/student collaboration, by offering a series of mentor drop-in sessions at the University. These sessions are still under development, but should hopefully add to the mentor experience.

Recommendations
1. Continue to develop mentors by initial training.
2. Further develop mentor collaboration sessions, where mentors can access a line of communication with partner college, university and other mentors from schools.
Quality assurance, enhancement and risk management in employer engagement – bitesize demonstrator project

Don Knibb, University of Hull

Edited by Jenny Shaw and Tony Wall

Contributing partners

Jenny Shaw, the University of Hull
The University of Hull is a progressive and friendly institution that combines world-class research with highly rated teaching. The University’s Centre for Lifelong Learning offers short modules to those in the community and workplace either as stand-alone learning or building up flexibly into an award.

Tony Wall, York St John University
York St John University was founded in 1841 and received university title in 2006. It is a relatively small institution that has a strong history in inclusive higher education and employer engagement, so it has a relatively high proportion of mature learners. Bitesize HE at York St John offers a cluster of options in a range of employer engagement and inclusive access provision.

Chris Fry, Kimberly-Clark Ltd
Kimberly-Clark’s manufacturing plant at Barton-on-Humber has worked for a number of years with the University of Hull’s Centre for Lifelong Learning to provide work-based bitesize staff development modules. Most recently the two organisations have worked together to deliver a middle management programme in Lean Manufacturing as part of an overall drive towards Lean in the plant.

Karen Quine, Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network
The Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network (YHELLN) was part of the HEFCE-funded LLN programme in England. YHELLN’s mission was to increase opportunities for vocational learners in higher education. One of its key projects was the franchising of bitesize HE through its eight FE college partners, allowing them to offer stand-alone modules, which they were unable to do via their direct HEFCE funding.
Rebecca Dodgson, the University of York

The University of York is a research-intensive institution and its employer engagement strategy builds upon its central mission of research and teaching. Employer engagement in the University is lead by the CPD unit within the Research and Enterprise Office. The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Unit is responsible for managing and reporting on the training provided to businesses or for those in work.

Debbie Evans, Birmingham City University

The School of Engineering, Design and Manufacturing Systems (EDMS) at Birmingham City University is recognised as a leader in the provision of education, training and business solutions. It offers a range of programmes at undergraduate, postgraduate and at professional development level. Staff and partners have worked with numerous companies in diverse markets and provide support to small, medium and large organisations operating in sectors such as automotive, aerospace, manufacturing, ICT, environmental and health. The School also works actively with leading international technology and engineering solution partners such as PTC and Technosoft, who provide industry-standard computer-aided engineering (CAE) tools.

Angela Lupton, the University of Chester

The University of Chester has over 20 years’ experience of developing and accrediting learning that occurs through the workplace. The development of an accreditation framework (WBIS Framework, 1998) for work-based and work-related learning, aimed at adult learners in the workplace, has enabled the University to engage with employers both locally and nationally.

1 Introduction

This resource has been developed to support staff in higher education institutions and further education colleges who are developing small units or ‘bitesize’ accredited higher education (HE) provision for an employer/employee market. It was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy in June 2009 and was developed by a working group of institutions represented a cross-section of institutions active in the field of bitesize HE. Development of the resource mostly took place between June and October 2009.

The approach to bitesize HE taken by the group was that it is based on a three-way relationship between employers, learners and HE partners. The resource will explore quality issues in relation to each of these stakeholder groups. Questions and
discussion scenarios have been provided to allow staff to discuss and explore issues within their own institutional contexts. As well as a synthesis of experiences illustrated by case studies, the resource also provides opportunities for the reader to reflect on their own practice and think through their own response to commonly encountered quality issues. QAA's general principles of quality will help structure these questions:

— clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
— clear and accessible information;
— staff competence;
— policies and practices that are clear, consistently applied and underpinned by fairness and equality;
— monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices.

The resource is organised into three sections:

— institutional issues;
— learner experience;
— engaging with employers.

1.1 Methodology

A working group was established to co-ordinate the development, preparation and circulation of two questionnaires, the first of which asked for some general contextual background and sought comments on areas of excellence and learning points that the institution wanted to highlight. The second sought more detailed information on six thematic points, each individual participant selecting three or four topics from the following:

— clarity of purpose;
— academic development and culture;
— learning, teaching and assessment;
— student experience;
— partnerships and relationships;
— economic issues and delivery models.

A synthesis of the questionnaire material was discussed by a focus group of contributing institutions in order to tease out the implications for practice. Finally, these were benchmarked against the QAA reflective report on employer-responsive provision (2010).
2 Institutional issues

Bitesize HE as a response to the employer engagement/workforce development development agenda is relatively new territory to most UK HEIs and as such it is unsurprising that it raises a number of practical questions and challenges. This section looks at three interrelated issues internal to the HE institution, both strategic and operational:

— drivers for involvement in bitesize HE;
— the degree of integration with mainstream provision;
— resourcing issues.

2.1 Drivers for involvement

The reason an institution becomes involved in the development and delivery of bitesize HE underpins virtually everything about the provision itself. More specifically, for the purpose of this resource, it dictates how this kind of provision is viewed and valued as a legitimate academic offering, how quality issues are approached both conceptually and practically, and on a more prosaic level how the provision is resourced on the ground.

Whether or not a university embraces bitesize provision will depend largely on its ethos and central priorities. For example, an institution with ambitions to be among the leading research universities in the country was thought unlikely to diversify into this sort of short course provision – though the inclusion of the University of York in the development group for this resource demonstrates that the two are not by any means mutually exclusive. Where bitesize is being carried out as a ‘fringe’ activity that runs counter to the prevailing institutional culture, there may be obstacles all along the way.

_It’s interesting, it’s cutting edge, working with people who are very keen and who want to make changes, but it gets stuck in university bureaucracy much of the time … it doesn’t fit any standard models of the university at all. So you’re breaking new ground with each step of the way._

—Member of academic staff

Specific drivers for involvement in bitesize HE among the institutions represented in the working group included:

— continued requests from industry for technological upskilling;
— the gap in educational provision not tied to three-year traditional programmes;
— extending higher education to a wider audience and offering enhanced progression pathway – in line with the findings of the Leitch report (2006);
— students seeking to specialise in specific subjects and/or technologies that may not
be covered by their degree;
— results of industry benchmark audits carried out within the university that identified specific developmental areas to assist business clients;
— full modularisation of all postgraduate provision;
— the beneficial influence of ‘third-stream’ funding (defined as “interactions between HEIs, business and the wider community. It assumes that some knowledge or expertise flows between HEIs and users through these interactions” (PACEC, 2009)).

These all have the potential to be strong drivers for engagement in this type of provision. How this works in practice, however, depends very much on the institutional culture, and whether these drivers are sufficiently strong to make an impact at the institutional level rather than in an individual department or unit.

York St John is a relatively small institution that has a strong history in inclusive higher education and employer engagement, so it has a relatively high proportion of mature learners. Bitesize HE is a cluster of options in a range of employer engagement and inclusive access provision. Bitesize HE directly links to the institution’s strategic aims, and particularly supports the following strategic priorities:
— expand/enhance access to high-level skills through continuing professional development/work-based learning;
— expand flexible learning opportunities;
— provide distinctive provision that is responsive to students and society;
— contribute to the consolidation and strengthening of the local Lifelong Learning Partnership;
— facilitate knowledge exchange, collaboratively, with organisations;
— manage risks, quality and respond rapidly to opportunities.

Underpinning this, however, is the belief that it can contribute to the financial stability and security of the University in a context that is increasingly competitive and uncertain.

In order for bitesize HE to have the best chance of success, it needs to be developed in a way that taps into compelling drivers for the institution, and makes best use of existing structures.

At the University of York, the infrastructure was set up around the core missions of research and teaching – teaching in the traditional sense, rather than to businesses/people in work. This meant that developing a more flexible approach to credit-bearing
short courses resulted in a number of challenges. The main challenge was to promote and exemplify the need for a more flexible approach to CPD within the current University teaching structure and strategy. Working alongside the Academic Support Office was crucial to the success of the project since they were responsible for all policies relating to any form of teaching and learning. Within this a significant challenge has been agreeing how to ensure the quality of teaching while simultaneously ensuring flexibility and an ability to respond rapidly to employer needs.

As subsequent sections will demonstrate, the way in which bitesize provision is viewed and organised within an institution has far-reaching consequences for the quality of the provision and how quality issues are addressed.

### QAA quality principles

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<tr>
<th>Information: clear and accessible</th>
<th>Some questions for reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Is there a shared understanding of the strategic priorities of the institution? How are institutional priorities communicated and shared regarding employer and bitesize HE provision?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices</th>
<th>What arrangements are in place to monitor drivers, and ensure that policies, procedures and practices are appropriate to these?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined</td>
<td>Is it clear ‘who’ is doing the above activities?</td>
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### 2.2 Degree of integration

The degree to which bitesize HE embeds with an institution’s existing systems, structures and practices is a key factor in determining how quality issues are viewed and dealt with in relation to its delivery. Within some HE institutions, bitesize HE has, over a period of years, grown to be an integral part of the institution's business, fully integrated into its policies, systems and procedures and sustainable in the medium to long term despite normal changes, for example to personnel or to the client base. Other institutions have only recently entered the field and are still at the stage where they closely reflect the characteristics of a pioneering organisation – that is to say that people find their own way forward, they improvise, show high levels of flexibility and commitment and develop strong relationships with individual clients. However, pioneering organisations also tend to rely heavily on one or two key individuals for whom there may be no obvious replacement should they leave, may not fit in well with any parent organisation’s systems and procedures and often expend huge amounts of
effort for limited short-term returns. Organisations in this position often recognise that their goal is to progress to a position where their objectives and activities are well integrated with those of their parent organisation, but to do so in a way that fosters rather than hampers their new and innovative activities.

The roots of quality issues around bitesize higher education can often be found in the genesis of bitesize as a project or initiative within the institution. Our working group tended to reflect a journey from peripheral unit to fully integrated department of the parent organisation. Some members had many years’ experience of providing bitesize higher education, and spoke confidently of its prominent place in their institution’s structure. Other members recognised that their institutions were at a much earlier stage of the journey to full integration of bitesize HE within their organisation, and were therefore more likely to come across actual or perceived challenges to the quality of provision delivered in this way. These ranged from philosophical questioning of how far it was appropriate for a university to engage in this area at all, to practical issues such as the unavailability of IT, library or even catering facilities for students on bitesize courses – all with quality implications.

Reflective question: How could an HEI develop a whole institution approach to bitesize HE? What would be the features of such a model?

The University of Chester has established an in-house Professional Development Unit in order to offer direct delivery of bitesize HE. This unit brings in associate and external lecturers for specific areas of expertise, and involves employers as co-tutors.

The University of York’s Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Unit facilitates the delivery of bitesize HE and other CPD by academic departments of the University. One function of the CPD Unit is to lobby other central University support departments on behalf of academic departments to ensure that University policies and procedures accommodate the needs of bitesize and other CPD offerings.

York St John University enables bitesize HE provision to be approved at the faculty level in monthly cycles, which then may fit into an existing awards, or within a flexible ‘shell framework’.

One solution could be a ‘shell framework’. This is essentially a generic, subject-content-free framework and set of procedures that is formally validated once and reviewed periodically, but without specific content or learning pathway. This detail is agreed and approved on demand. This facilitates:
— an agile response to employers for bespoke and/or workplace provision;
— an agile response to organisations wanting university recognition or accreditation;
— a managed, structured approach to cross-faculty, multi-disciplinary flexible learning;
— credit accumulation;
— inclusive access;
— a professional development framework for internal staff.

Shell frameworks incorporate generic aims and outcomes that are instrumental in enabling the flexibility and responsiveness to negotiate with employers – or even individual students – about constructing suitable academic pathways.

As well as providing an individualised coherent learning pathway for those accumulating credit through bitesize learning, the concept may be taken down to the module level, allowing for ‘framework modules’ in which the content is dictated by the student. This is often used as a method of recognising credit for a work-based project, for example.

**Shell award**

York St John University has developed a system of ‘shell awards’ that can be utilised by all faculties, when the provision is demand-driven rather than mainstream. A suite of shell awards is validated once from levels 0 to M (foundation certificate to Masters degree), with generic level and programme outcomes, and opportunity to agree additional specific outcomes as appropriate, at award level. Learning contracts are then created with individuals or organisations, outlining the negotiated award, award title and the modules chosen.
QAA quality principles | Some questions for reflection
---|---
Policies and practices: clear, consistently applied, underpinned by fairness and equality | The principles of quality assurance and levels of scrutiny may be the same for all provision, but the processes may need to be modified to ensure fitness for purpose (see QAA, 2010, para 15). What arrangements are in place to achieve this? In an integrated model, what mechanisms are in place to ensure consistency of practices across units/faculties? In a ‘focused organisational unit’ model, to what extent are policies fit for purpose? Learning opportunities should be aligned to learning outcomes, rather than securing equivalence for each learner (QAA, 2008; also see QAA, 2010, para 42). To what extent does the approach adopted achieve this? QA arrangements should be proportionate to risk, relevant and meet a reasonable ‘fitness for purpose’ test … HEIs should not over-elaborate their quality assurance procedures (QAA, 2008; also see QAA, 2010, para 5). What arrangements are in place to achieve this?

Information: clear and accessible | To what extent are the approaches above, clear across the institution? To what extent are the opportunities for bitesize or employer provision clear – internally and externally?

Staff competence | To what extent are current ‘mainstream’ staff ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience) to design, deliver and assess bitesize HE provision, in a way that builds relationships with clients? What staff development opportunities are provided within the institution to maintain and build these skills sets? To what extent are the existing external advisers and examiners involved in bitesize HE provision ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience)?

Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices | What mechanisms are in place to review the fitness for purpose of the model chosen, in addition to reviewing the quality of provision? What arrangements are in place for sharing practice across organisational units?

Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined | Is there institutional clarity about who is involved in what elements of quality assurance, enhancement and monitoring at different levels?

2.3 Resourcing issues
How bitesize HE is resourced – for example, the price charged to the employer, the budget available internally for its delivery (the two are not necessarily linked!) and the nature and background of the staff available to deliver it – are all closely related to the quality of the provision.

At present, most HEIs use some variation on the standard unit of resource set by funding councils to price their accredited bitesize provision. This approach, though, does not acknowledge that the basic assumptions that underpin the costing model often
do not hold good for bitesize education. For example, employers may be contributing to the development and delivery of curriculum, and students who are remotely based will not make use of the institution's facilities in the same way as those based on the campus. Unless such issues are tackled employers will inevitably query the charges being levied. Several universities in the working group commented on how far their provision was designed afresh with each new venture, and how far they relied on a menu of opportunities that could be provided. Most based what could be offered on a menu, thereby avoiding repeated development costs, but many also sought to retain some flexibility to meet specific needs. Shell frameworks were seen as useful in this context (see above).

Typically, institutions in the group were responding to these challenges by trying to get closer to the employer in an equal relationship that focused on the employer's needs. This is often more of a partnership than a customer/supplier relationship in that the university's principal purpose may be seen as promoting relevant learning rather than selling a product. Nevertheless there are marketing assumptions within this approach.

York St John University’s approach to partnering with employers for the delivery of bitesize HE incorporates the following elements:
— focusing on organisations, their needs, and ways in which the University can impact their aims (i.e. focus on benefit rather than features and processes);
— focus on questions and choices, rather than a full discussion of flexibility and options;
— using a shell, or outline, framework to promote negotiated and responsive provision;
— restructuring internally with a more dedicated function for external community engagement;
— moving towards a clear menu of opportunities;
— moving towards a single pricing strategy, with flexibility for different arrangements and provision;
— learning from each example and applying to future cases.

Of course these issues are not confined to bitesize HE but might be said to hold for any form of employer-engaged provision; nonetheless, as already mentioned they become of great urgency when the provision in question is of short duration. Again, any issues must be resolved quickly and efficiently if the bitesize provision is to be viable and of good quality.

A common resourcing issue in relation to bitesize HE centres around the deployment of staff. With provision being less predictable and less likely to fall within
the standard academic calendar, normal academic planning procedures do not apply, and it can be difficult to ensure that suitably qualified and experienced academic staff are available to teach bitesize. To compound this issue, the skills required of those teaching bitesize are demanding and may rule out a proportion of the institution’s existing staff. As well as satisfying normal quality requirements in relation to subject specialism and teaching qualification/experience, staff teaching on bitesize programmes for employers also need the skills to work with what could be a highly diverse group of students. They also require the experience and skills to identify and work within the employer’s organisation culture – and to challenge it in a non-threatening way if required by the learning needs of the students. Furthermore, they are likely to require commercial acumen – as the representative of the institution they may at the very least be required to signpost senior staff from the employer organisation to sources of further information within the institution.

At Birmingham City University, academic staff involved with short courses were as far as possible timetabled with a free day that could be committed to supporting short course programmes. They also employed a number of staff whose primary role was with business support and consultancy, and who could deploy their commercial and industrial experience in delivering guest lectures, master classes and employer-based short courses.

What other approaches could an institution take to ensuring bitesize provision is properly staffed?
Some institutions have addressed this issue by bringing in outside staff to teach or facilitate bitesize provision. Traditionally this is done by employing sessional or visiting lecturers. More recently, institutions have been willing to try other approaches such as partnering with private training providers and FE colleges, or working with an employer’s in-house trainers. However, for quality purposes institutions must be confident that staff from partner organisations are suitably qualified and experienced.

The University of Chester has sub-contracted the delivery of some of its bitesize provision to a private training company with which it has developed a long-term relationship. The University retains overall responsibility for the quality, and has a dedicated programme manager to take an overview. The expected level of qualification and experience of individual tutors involved in delivery is set out in the contract between the University and the training provider.
The challenges of delivering bitesize provision within quality systems developed for longer-term programmes can give institutions an opportunity to rethink their approach and to innovate around the way in which learning and teaching is resourced and delivered.

York St John University has a flexible approach to delivery of bitesize provision, which included:

— developing a wide range of possible co-operative relationships and collaborative provision opportunities. This creates options including: signposting to APEL processes; APEL agreements; access agreements; credit recognition; and full accreditation agreements;

— use of a shell framework (see above), to promote negotiated, responsive, partner provision, which provides:
  a) a common structure, to ensure consistency in the level of learning outcomes;
  b) all bitesize provision with a variety of progression routes;

— recruiting experienced professionals as lecturing staff, with capabilities to deliver such provision;

— recruiting associate tutors or casual tutors for specific client projects, on-demand.

The working group that developed this resource also suggested more radical ways of rethinking the curriculum for bitesize delivery. If universities do not necessarily have to carry out the teaching themselves, as in the example above, they may instead take the role of resource base – or ‘hub’ – rather than direct provider, a role that could also include:

— offering access to books, archive materials, blogs etc.;

— offering assistance to employers with APEL issues regarding individual students;

— promoting reciprocal arrangements between universities, for example for the acceptance of credits;

— establishing links with others in the field such as Business Link or Sector Skills Councils;

— establishing groups of employers with similar needs, or working with professional associations and others who already dealt with employers in groups;

— conducting training needs analyses across groups of employers and proposing solutions;

— brokering services offered by other organisations;

— extending the influence of bitesize education to new and untapped markets.

Although there was no example of this model working in practice, nonetheless some of the group felt this was a viable way forward, drawing on the strengths and resources of a HEI within a network of local and regional partners. In some ways,
this would build on the direction of travel set out by the Lifelong Learning Networks programme in England.

FE colleges are not able to draw down direct funding for accredited programmes shorter than 120 credits, even though they may in some cases be better placed to reach employer markets. FE colleges may, nonetheless, work collaboratively with HEIs to delivery bitesize HE, for example on a franchise model. This may provide benefits for both parties. Through the Yorkshire and Humber East LLN, the University of Hull worked with a group of eight FE colleges to develop a model of ‘staged engagement’. This offered a means of encouraging people to try out higher education through a bitesize opportunity, initially through a short module or even a single session, with a view to whetting their appetite for learning and enabling progression to further study. Although this initiative was not without its challenges, it proved effective both in widening participation and in engaging with employers, and approximately one third of those taking part in bitesize HE then progressed to further study.

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<tr>
<td>Staff competence</td>
<td>To what extent are those involved in bitesize HE ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience) to design, deliver and assess bitesize HE provision within an external relationship context? What staff development opportunities are provided within the institution to maintain and enhance these skill sets?</td>
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<td>Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined</td>
<td>Is there departmental/institutional clarity about who is involved in what elements of quality assurance, enhancement and monitoring at different levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices</td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place to review the fitness-for-purpose of the above arrangements?</td>
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3 Learner experience

Learners undertaking one or more bitesize modules while in the workplace raise a number of complex quality challenges. While these are not necessarily unique to bitesize HE, this type of provision results in a unique combination of issues.

This section will consider three quality-related challenges:
— ensuring coherence for learners;
— meeting learner support needs;
— preserving the ‘HE-ness’ of the provision;

3.1 Coherence

A challenge provided by the flexibility of bitesize HE is the issue of coherence. When students have a wide choice of bitesize modules of which they can take one or many, there is not necessarily a concept of a coherent programme that becomes inherently more demanding as the student progresses. Indeed later modules could be related to the learner’s immediate needs rather than developed as a logical progression from earlier ones. Furthermore, credit transfer and accumulation systems make it easier for learners to undertake a collection of modules without ever acquiring an appreciation of a unified programme with an overall direction.

However, there is more than one way to view programme coherence, and in some ways the notion of bitesize HE, coupled with the ability to accumulate credit, challenges the view of the HE institution as the ‘expert’ on coherence.

Another form of coherence is experiential coherence – where the sense-making is drawn from the particular personal and/or professional context of the individual and their motivations, and progression is in terms of the level-ness of the thinking (and it’s articulation) a learner engages in. This is a more inclusive construct of coherence, which draws upon the pedagogies familiar to action learning, reflective and experiential learning, and enquiry/inquiry-based learning.

— Tony Wall, York St John University

This approach, though, has its own risks.
What risks may be attached to the above view of programme coherence, and how might these be addressed?

One is that without a clearly laid out programme learners may not recognise the assumptions underpinning their learning, which may make it much harder for them to achieve outcomes at the specified level. Tackling this issue involves adhering to principles important in all higher education provision, but which become especially relevant in bitesize:

— learning outcomes must be clearly linked to higher education level outcomes;
— learners need to be very clear about the (levelled) outcomes expected of them;
— learning strategies must ensure the achievement of these particular levels;
— assessment strategies must assess at the particular level.

Another risk is that staff involved in validating bitesize higher education may be either unaware of this learner-centred form of coherence or simply do not believe in it. Either problem can hinder validation processes for bitesize provision and limit its development.

Those involved in validating bitesize need to be clear about the various concepts of coherence, especially in the contexts of shell frameworks. They need to ensure that the learner can achieve the specific level outcomes (and hence the learning activities to do so), and that the learner understands that this is an important feature of their ‘customised’ learning. This is not a quick process, as staff need to feel confident in designing bitesize provision. Involving staff in the accreditation of external training provision, with experienced bitesize curriculum designers, is a useful exercise.

—Tony Wall, York St John University
### QAA quality principles and Some questions for reflection

| Policies and practices: clear, consistently applied, underpinned by fairness and equality | To what extent is the approach to programme approval explicit about understandings of coherence, and subsequent fitness-for-purpose?  
To what extent do the notions of coherence align to the programme/award aims, objectives and overall structure? |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Information: clear and accessible | To what extent is it clear how the subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications* have been used to develop any provision, including modules and/or exit awards?  
How clear is the institutional/programme team interpretation of ‘coherence’?  
How does that interpretation relate to the subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications* (see QAA, 2010)? |
| Staff competence | To what extent do those involved in designing, delivering and assessing bitesize provision understand by ‘coherence’?  
What staff development opportunities are provided within the institution to maintain and enhance this understanding? |
| Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices | What arrangements are in place to review the monitoring, evaluation and enhancement activities related to students on bitesize HE provision, and subsequent exit awards? |

#### 3.2 Support needs

All students need to be supported as individuals when undertaking a programme of study. However, for bitesize learners who are also employed, there may be additional needs relating to the type and mode of their study. For example, on a practical level they may do courses in several departments, so the challenge is to ensure they have continuity of consistent support while ensuring they have an understanding of their learning journey, which may be highly relevant to their career, but not a commonly taken route.

There are also issues around signposting and guidance, given that there is not a pre-mapped programme of study. Even where a student has taken a single, stand-alone module, they need to know the value and currency of the credit they have achieved and how they can use it to build up to a larger award should they choose to do so.

What systems, structures and procedures could be put in place to ensure that students are effectively supported through their bitesize study and beyond?

The answer to the question very much depends on the current systems and structures of the institution. For example, if bitesize learning is embedded throughout the institution, it may be a question of ensuring that a thorough understanding of the specific support needs of these learners is also embedded, perhaps with oversight from a central point of reference such as student services. Where bitesize is managed by a stand-alone unit, this unit will probably take responsibility for ensuring support.
and guidance needs are met, in liaison with the appropriate services and academic departments.

The case study below illustrates how one university met the challenge.

The University of York has put the following in place to meet the challenges of supporting work-based bitesize learners:

— developing a CPD framework to allow more flexibility in our provision so learners have the opportunity to develop a tailored programme of learning within these frameworks that meets their needs and the needs of the organisation in which they are employed;

— developing sector-specific portfolios of CPD programmes within specified frameworks and marketing these effectively. In this way our marketing efforts are focused and relevant to the individuals and businesses for whom we are tailoring them;

— developing an effective student support structure that ensures that learners are supported throughout their learning journey. A number of models can be adopted depending upon the needs of the learner;

— providing guidance and support to staff involved in the delivery of CPD through online resources, network meetings and informal discussions. The development of effective marketing materials for both internal and external use will help ensure a clear understanding of the University’s portfolio;

— improving the website to allow easy access to the full CPD portfolio.

Because course development at this University is ongoing these solutions haven’t all been fully realised yet. However, implementation will predominantly be through:

— clear marketing externally through the University's website;

— guidance available internally through the website;

— continuous communication with the student support unit and academic departments delivering CPD.

There may also be an issue around supporting the learning of students who are in the workplace with very limited access to the campus and its resources. This may be exacerbated by the learners' working patterns.

The University of Hull’s collaboration with Kimberly-Clark had to be made to work within a complex shift system. It was very difficult to gather students as a group for taught sessions, so the University piloted the use of PebblePad to supplement monthly workshop sessions. PebblePad is a personal learning system that enables students to aggregate records of learning and achievement into e-portfolios to be used for
professional purposes, including professional accreditation and academic qualification. It also enables them to store and reflect upon evidence of their development. The students found it useful not only for recording and reflecting, but as a gateway to online resources held by the institution, and as a communication tool within the group.

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<td>What arrangements are in place to ensure that students are given adequate learning development to achieve the learning outcomes at the right level?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information: clear and accessible</td>
<td>To what extent are these arrangements communicated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined</td>
<td>To what extent are staff roles, including learning and e-learning development and learning resources staff, clear in this provision?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff competence</td>
<td>To what extent are staff, including learning and e-learning development and learning resources staff, prepared to support and/or contribute to bitesize HE provision?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices</td>
<td>What arrangements are in place to review the monitoring, evaluation and enhancement activities related to ‘supporting’ students on bitesize HE provision?</td>
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3.3 ‘HE-ness’ or demonstrating appropriate level

A challenge for institutions offering bitesize learning to employers is to demonstrate clearly that the criteria for higher-level courses demanded by universities are met, while at the same time fulfilling the requirements of employers. While this is an issue common to all accredited programmes offered in and through the workplace, it is arguably more acute in the case of bitesize HE because the short length of the provision can make it more of a challenge to ensure that they result in deep learning such as reflection, synthesis and analysis.

There is also the challenge of employers’ expectation and what the market demands. For example, employers used to commissioning training courses from private providers could have expectations about approach, length, price and their level of involvement that may not hold true for bitesize HE. This may require a period of negotiation with the employer in order to arrive at a programme that meets their needs without compromising the quality of the provision. On the other hand, some employers will welcome an opportunity to commission a deeper level of learning, especially if they have been disappointed by the impact of training in the past.
The University of Hull was commissioned by Kimberly-Clark Ltd to provide a leadership programme incorporating the principles of Lean Manufacturing for middle managers at its Barton-on-Humber plant. The work was commissioned by the employer’s training manager who was keen to bring in accredited provision through a university to ensure that deep learning took place. At the same time, speed was of the essence and the employer was keen to move quickly to develop and deliver the programme. After a period of negotiation, in which off-the-shelf programmes were examined and rejected, the employer and an academic in the institution’s Lifelong Learning Centre agreed on a flexible, bitesize programme that could be built up to a university certificate or taken as individual modules. The programme syllabus was fully co-developed between the academic and the training manager who looked at good practice elsewhere and existing published material, but built the programme around the needs of the company. Although external commentators (potential external evaluators) wanted more theoretical content or more IT-based content, the two developers stuck to the principle of creating a programme that allowed for both critical reflection and practical application. This programme was successful in meeting the employer’s need, though it should be noted that it was expensive to develop and relied on a great deal of goodwill between the two developers.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information: clear and accessible</td>
<td>To what extent is this approach clearly communicated within policies and procedures? To what extent does the public information about bitesize HE and employer provision communicate the expectations and standards of ‘HE-ness’?</td>
</tr>
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<td>Staff competence</td>
<td>What arrangements are in place to ensure external advisers and examiners are appropriately ‘qualified’ to make informed judgements about bitesize and work-based learning in HE? What staff development is in place to maintain and enhance skills and knowledge of designing, delivering and assessing bitesize HE?</td>
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<td>Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined</td>
<td>To what extent are those promoting bitesize provision clear about the expectations and standards of ‘HE-ness’?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices</td>
<td>What arrangements are in place to monitor and review the above arrangements? To what extent to monitoring and review arrangements encourage enhancement and innovation?</td>
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4 Engaging with employers

There are a number of elements to consider to engage and collaborate effectively with employers. This section considers the following challenges:

- creating a shared expectation;
- flexibility in quality assurance arrangements;
- recognition of the workplace as a site of knowledge generation;
- ensuring assessment has value in the workplace.

4.1 Shared expectations

Bitesize HE is, in most areas, a relative newcomer to the education and training marketplace and as such is not well understood. As a product that is neither 'management training' nor a traditional university offering such as an MBA, it is important for institutions offering such programme to be clear about the unique selling points of their offer, and to manage expectations throughout the process. Employers may be sceptical of the value of mounting bitesize courses in conjunction with a college or university (why go for higher education at all when you can get other similar training much cheaper?). They may query the costing models employed by universities, especially where the employers themselves deliver much – or even most – of the training, or where remotely based students enjoyed far fewer of the universities resources than those based on campus. In the experience of the working group who developed this resource, employers may raise fundamental – and legitimate – questions about what they were expected to pay for and why. This suggests that the quality role played by the university was not understood or recognised by employers in the context of shorter provision, but may also suggest that traditional ways of ensuring and enhancing quality need to be rethought to suit this context.

Speed of response is a perennial issue when business–university interactions are under discussion. Bitesize modules, especially those that are bespoke, have to be produced and validated quickly if they are to meet the requirements of an employer who is not prepared to wait while a lengthy and painstaking validation process unfolds. For those new to bitesize, it can test the capacity of the institution’s processes and procedures to adapt to change. It is widely acknowledged that higher education culture, value systems and expectations are somewhat different to those of employers. There is a risk that the institution will not be agile enough to respond in a timely manner to requests for non-traditional training/education, and that the systems and processes will not be able to cope with delivery outside the traditional academic calendar.

There may also be an issue about language. Words such as ‘credit’, ‘level’,
'award', 'programme' and 'outcomes' may have different meanings for employers and educationalists or may not be properly understood at all by one or other party. It can be a difficult balance between on the one hand oversimplifying, and on the other hand overfacing the employer with too much jargon. While this holds true for any university–business interaction, it becomes more of an acute issue when the learning 'transaction' is likely to be shorter. Neither party can afford to be inefficient with its transaction costs and so clarity of communication is paramount.

Course content needs to be expressed in terms that meet the company's needs, although this raises issues as to how far bitesize provision is genuinely demand led. Employers may want at least some guidance and debate in formulating objectives and plans of action, such that the outcome might be a blend of bespoke and standard elements in order to meet requirements. Of course the degree of customisation will alter the cost of the provision, and should in turn have an impact on the price.

York St John University has developed a menu of options for working with employers and other partners. Options are priced transparently and are designed to cater for the different requirements of client organisations. These can include:

- full accreditation agreements – usually common with further education institutions;
- joint delivery arrangements (shared teaching, assessment, and/or assurance) – to ensure confidence in the competences of partnering staff;
- credit recognition agreements – where bitesize provision is assessed with a credit value and level;
- access and articulation agreements – where no credit is automatically given, but access to other courses is;
- recognition of prior learning agreements – again, where no credit is automatically given, but the bitesize provision is wrapped within a higher education assessment for negotiated credit value and level.
The principles of quality assurance and levels of scrutiny may be the same for all provision, but the processes may need to be modified to ensure fitness for purpose. What is the variety of arrangements in place to achieve this? Learning opportunities should be aligned to learning outcomes, rather than securing equivalence for each learner (QAA, 2008; also see QAA, 2010, para 42). To what extent does the approach adopted achieve this? QA arrangements should be proportionate to risk, relevant and meet a reasonable ‘fitness for purpose’ test … HEIs should not over-elaborate their quality assurance procedures (QAA, 2008; also see QAA, 2010). What are the variety of arrangements are in place to achieve this?

Information: clear and accessible
To what extent are the variety of approaches, as outlined above, clear across the institution?
To what extent are the expectations of ‘HE-ness’ clearly communicated to external stakeholders, such as clients and students?

Staff competence
To what extent are current ‘mainstream’ staff ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience) to adopt the variety of approaches outlined above, and maintain or build relationships with external clients?
What staff development opportunities are provided within the institution to maintain and build these skill sets?

Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices
What mechanisms are in place to review the fitness-for-purpose of the variety of options available within the institution?
What arrangements are in place for sharing practice across organisational units?

Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined
Is there institutional clarity about who is involved in what elements of quality assurance, enhancement and monitoring at different levels?

4.2 Flexible quality assurance
Processes used to assure quality of standard provision – even longer programmes of study aimed at employers – may not be fit for purpose when applied to bitesize HE. This may require a review at the institutional level about how quality can be properly assured in a way that does not compromise either the academic rigour of the programme or the relationship with the employer. The case study below illustrates some of the day-to-day issues that may threaten to derail a promising business relationship if quality assurance procedures are not carefully thought through.

In working with a large local employer, one university encountered a number of obstacles with the institution’s own quality assurance team. For example, the programme was to be delivered at the employer’s premises. Normal procedures
dictated that a full site visit should be carried out, which could not be scheduled for several weeks and seemed not to be cost-effective for a bitesize programme. Ultimately, it was agreed that photographs of the training room could be provided in lieu of a visit. Another issue arose when the employer’s in-house tutor was proposed as a co-deliverer of the programme. As he was not a member of university staff, he could not be given access to library facilities in order to support his students. This was ultimately resolved by the university employing him for a nominal amount of time, thus allowing him access to the library and its online facilities. Again this took some time to resolve. However, having gone through these experiences, the institution was better equipped to expand its bitesize portfolio and to set up processes and procedures for the future.

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4.3 Workplace as a site of knowledge generation

The working group who produced this resource had all gone through a number of challenges within their own institution in developing bitesize HE as a recognised approach to higher education. A common issue was the challenge it represented to the HE institution as the source of valid knowledge. By opening the door to learning in and through the workplace, bitesize HE recognises that knowledge is generated as well as synthesised in a variety of settings, including the workplace and through professional reflection. In turn, this challenges the concept of a curriculum set by the institution, in which students are guided in the content of their studies by academics. Through their own professional reflections, most of the working group had had to think through this issue and formulate a response.

If the workplace is recognised as a legitimate site of knowledge generation, how might a HE institution respond to this through its curriculum?

One solution is a ‘shell award’ with a focus on work-based learning. An example of this is the Work Based and Integrative Studies programme (WBIS, see below), which is a flexible mechanism for the accreditation of work-based and work-related learning in which learners are expected to use their workplaces as sites for experiential learning. Taught modules can also be integrated into the programme to aid personal and professional development. Some WBIS students undertake a programme that has been in large part negotiated in advance with their employer. Others negotiate their own pathway of learning related to their area or areas of working practice. The WBIS framework allows for bitesize academic development and structures to be developed and delivered quickly and flexibly to suit individual needs, and allows for credit to be easily moved around.

Work Based and Integrative Studies framework

The development of an accreditation framework for work-based and work-related learning, aimed at adult learners in the workplace, has enabled the university to engage with employers both locally and nationally. This framework:

— recognises the workplace as a source of knowledge itself;
— widens access and participation in HE courses;
— awards academic credit for work-based and work-related learning;
— enables negotiation between employer and learner of a learning programme from a single module (20 credits) to a Masters degree;
— accredits prior learning (APEL, APCL) – likely to be the norm in work-based
learning studies;
— accredits work-based training programmes delivered in-house;
— can be accessed by all faculties and departments within the university who require a flexible mode of delivery.

The framework’s programmes have a modular structure designed to enable participants to gain credits for current and future needs at times to suit both themselves and their employers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QAA quality principles</th>
<th>Some questions for reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies and practices: clear, consistently</td>
<td>To what extent do the aims and outcomes of awards align to the learning opportunities, and particularly approaches to learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applied, underpinned by fairness and equality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information: clear and accessible</td>
<td>To what extent are the approaches and expectations of HE learning opportunities clear – internally and externally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff competence</td>
<td>To what extent are current ‘mainstream’ staff ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience) to design, deliver and assess bitesize HE provision, in a way that builds relationships with clients? What staff development opportunities are provided within the institution to maintain and build these skill sets? To what extent are the existing external advisers and examiners involved in bitesize HE provision ‘qualified’ (qualification and experience)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and review of policy, procedures</td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place to review the fitness-for-purpose of the awards, in addition to reviewing the quality of provision? What arrangements are in place for sharing practice across organisational units?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities: clearly defined</td>
<td>Is there institutional clarity about who is involved in what elements of quality assurance, enhancement and monitoring at different levels?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the challenges and solutions discussed above are captured in a case study one university supplied concerning its work with a large defence company. This involved providing a series of taught modules to 200 or more employees. Details of this case study appear below.

4.4 Ensuring assessment has value in the workplace

In addition to the issues raised earlier in this publication, there may be issues around the perceived value of assessment activity to employers. Essays and critical essays, for
example, may not be seen as appropriate or desirable in a working context. Indeed, work in one Centre for Excellence for work-based learning in practice settings found that the use of mobile assessments may also be seen as leisure activity rather than learning activity. At the same time, there is a recognised need at the HEI to adhere to assessment policies set at institutional or departmental levels. The role of assessment does need to be clearly articulated with employers, and notions of 'assessment for learning' are very relevant to bitesize HE provision – there may be limited time to engage in activities other that what will be assessed.

York St John University is accrediting child-mentoring training in a voluntary organisation and based a significant proportion of its assessment around the evaluation already in place in the organisation. This contributed to certificate and diploma awards at NQF levels 3 and 4. The assessment included a portfolio constituted of:

— participation and role play within the training sessions;
— evaluation from two experienced mentors;
— the trainee’s ongoing reflective log;
— reflections from the mentees.

This was supplemented by a critical commentary (reflection) from the learner to synthesise key themes from the experience.

A useful starting point is to engage in dialogue around how the employer is currently judging the impact of training or job roles. This can usefully link in to assessments, for example, short reports, structured appraisals, performance data. Subsequently, the value of assessment can be strengthened through:

— clarifying what specific outcomes the organisation wants;
— focusing learners attention and development on making impacts in the workplace, aligned to organisational goals;
— developing communication skills;
— creating evidence of any impacts of learning activity.

In addition, there are number of key points:

— learning outcomes must be clearly linked to higher education level outcomes;
— learners need to be very clear about the (levelled) outcomes expected of them;
— learning strategies must ensure the achievement of these particular levels;
— assessment strategies must assess at the particular level.
To what extent can curricula designers integrate current work-based activities into modules/awards? To what extent is it clear how the subject benchmark statements and The framework for higher education qualifications have been used to develop any provision, including modules and/or exit awards?

To what extent is the approach above clear to external stakeholders? What staff development is in place to maintain and develop skills and knowledge to deliver the approach above?

What arrangements are in place to review the monitoring, evaluation and enhancement activities related to students on bitesize HE provision, and subsequent exit awards?

5 Summary of key findings

It was surprisingly difficult to reach a consensus on the definition of 'bitesize' higher education (HE) as each institution had its own in-house definition. However, the majority view was that it represented higher education provision that could be accessed in 'bitesize chunks', shorter than a full qualification, that in some way could be accessed as stand-alone continuing professional development (CPD). While some institutions tended to offer such provision in a way that meant it was usually used to build up to a full qualification, there was a level of flexibility within the modular structure and often the mode of delivery that was not found in the institution’s more standard offering.

Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the definition of bitesize HE is somewhat ‘fuzzy around the edges’ and in some ways represents a movement that is innovating at the boundaries of accepted practice in learning, teaching, assessment and academic structure in the HE sector. In considering the collective experiences of the working group, for example, a number of key words spring to mind – variety, originality, creativity, flexibility, responsiveness, pathfinding, pioneering. There is only an outline framework for the development of bitesize HE, and no detailed manual or guidelines. Institutions have developed provision in their own way, often in line with wider institutional policies and objectives, perhaps as little more than a one-off experiment to meet a particular request.

As with all employer-engaged HE provision, bitesize HE represents a three-way partnership between the employer, the individual learner and the institution. The nature of bitesize provision as outlined above means that any issues surrounding this relationship tend to be thrown into sharp relief. For example, it may be acceptable to an employer to wait a period of some months before a co-developed foundation degree
is ready to accept students, but probably less acceptable to experience a similar delay before a 10- or 20-credit module is available. Yet for the HE institution, the systems and mechanisms surrounding the development and validation of the programme may follow an identical time frame. It is undoubtedly for reasons such as this that the innovation noted above has developed.

Given that bitesize HE for employers is a new activity for all but a small handful of institutions, it raises a number of key challenges for quality assurance, many of which are explored throughout this resource. For example, there are issues around programme coherence, fundamental questions about who ‘owns’ knowledge, and challenges arising from innovative methods of assessment. Moreover, the methods used to assess the quality of HE provision were originally designed to suit a particular kind of learning experience – a curriculum taught by HE academics within a pre-defined programme of study in which the components are pre-designed to follow on from one another. Bitesize HE delivered for and with employers challenges this system of measurement as well as raising substantive issues about quality and ‘HE-ness’ per se.

Given the level of variation even in the comparatively small sample represented by our working group, it is unsurprising that a comprehensive set of quality standards for bitesize HE for and with employers has not yet been drawn up. Although quality assurance systems do need to be developed from the experience of those working in the field, their activities vary significantly in response to differing needs and academic infrastructures locally, are sometimes experimental, and providers will necessarily come across problems and issues to resolve. Not all experiments can be successful, but all should result in lessons to be learned and applied to future developments. Through forming the kind of community of interest represented by our small working group those lessons can be disseminated to a wider audience and a platform can be built for the creation of commonly accepted quality assurance measures.

6 References
Case study 1: The University of Chester

Professional Certificate developments for Pets at Home
Pets at Home is an expanding company wishing to drive forward market leadership with both sale of products and an educational/information giving strategy, the essence being to deliver a service to customers while at the same time enabling best care for pets. Part of this strategy is the upskilling of the workforce in aquatics and animal behaviour together with the management and leadership capabilities and culture to enable this to develop.

The WBIS framework is being used to develop three professional certificate qualifications:
— Professional Certificate in Aquatic Management;
— Professional Certificate in Small Animal Management;
— Professional Certificate in Management.

The three professional certificates may be accessed by one individual, therefore they are being designed with modules available at levels 4 and 5 to maximise the use of the credits against completing a Foundation Degree. This is to meet the employer’s requirements while enabling the employee to complete a Foundation Degree if they so wish negotiating an individual pathway via the WBIS framework. However, in working with Pets at Home a staged approach is being taken by both the University and the employer as the effects of the professional certificates on the employer will need to be monitored before a final Foundation Degree is formulated. Students registering on their first and second professional certificates will be assessed at level 1 thus allowing completion of that level prior to progression onto level 2 study.

Professional Certificate in Aquatic Management
This contains a suite of eight modules written at both levels 4 and 5. Currently Pets at Home has indicated that an employee would normally follow the marine management module route or the fresh and brackish water management route as detailed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Level and credits</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marine aquatic management</td>
<td>Fresh water management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish health and welfare</td>
<td>All available at levels 4 and 5, each being 20 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service in the aquatic</td>
<td>(single module)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sector/industry or Option module</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The professional certificate is seen as appropriate for other fish-related businesses hence writing in an option module for the third module.

The work on the other two elements, Professional Certificate in Small Animal Management and Professional Certificate in Management of Pet Based Services, is ongoing at a pace to fit the employer’s plans.

Case study 2: Birmingham City University

Example of developing relationships with a large company

The challenges:
— to provide a series of taught modules to 200+ employees, demonstrating that university provision was relevant to their needs;
— to ensure the availability of sufficient resources – especially time and funding – for successful completion;
— to manage the assessment process efficiently
— to manage risks, especially those associated with the agreement and timely payment of fees, the suitability and previous attainment of students, and the operation of standard university procedures.

Meeting the challenges

Challenges were overcome by:
— good and regular communication between the University and the company, including at senior level, dealing especially with fee structure and payment and with guidance for managers on release of students for study;
— a dedicated member of staff in the company to plan course details and act as project champion with line managers;
— setting assignment tasks that were relevant and credible;
— celebrating success with presentations.

Lessons learned
— The company was closely linked to the Ministry of Defence. Their systems – for example, for gaining approval for the course – were also slow and cumbersome. Good communication helped engender understanding and tolerance on both sides.
— It was important to gain the support of front-line supervisors and help them understand who would benefit and how.
— Feedback should be used not only to keep the partners informed – especially the project champion and relevant line managers – but also to improve provision.
— The project champion was best placed to lead change in the company, while the University could use kaizen techniques to drive continuous improvement.

In the event, feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, averaging a score of four on a scale of zero to five. Success factors included:
— well-qualified, enthusiastic, experienced delivery staff;
— significant number of interactive class-based exercises;
— pacing material correctly;
— sufficient, well-structured and clear course notes;
— suitable environment with good catering and professional presentation equipment.
Institutional Frameworks for Work-Based Learning Assessment

Anne-Marie McTavish and Vida Bayley
Coventry University Business School, Coventry University

Focus of the Project
This demonstrator project evaluates institutional frameworks for work-based learning assessment in terms of assuring quality. The overall aim of the project was to identify, categorise and evaluate the types of assessment of work-based learning that may require special attention in order to assure quality. Included would be aspects such as suitable modes of assessment (including e-assessment/moderation as appropriate), external examining, assuring comparability across negotiated learning, managing assessment boards.

Contributing partners

Lead University

Coventry University was one of the first to obtain a HEFCE project for Employer Engagement. It has created much business facing provision.

Partner Universities

Open University has two CETLs which support the development of work-based learning and continuing professional development programmes.

Warwick University specialises in the provision of business facing post graduate programmes and continuing professional development.

Acua a private sector organisation providing customised learning programmes for a wide regional and national client base.
Methodology

The intention was to investigate key elements related to work-based learning assessment content from an institutional perspective, and to identify the mechanisms by which institutions assure the quality of work-based learning assessments across levels (undergraduate/postgraduate) and years/modes. Particular attention was paid to the range of structures within which assessments are organised, delivered and provide feedback, e.g. action learning sets in conjunction with live consultancy projects.

The project seeks to provide insights on areas such as peer-to-peer evaluation, as well as the role of formally situated supervisors and mentors and external examiners. It provides information on how institutions manage assessment boards and gives a perspective on the key factors within institutions for assuring comparability across negotiated learning.

A qualitative methodology was employed in this investigation, using semi-structured interviews and discussions with key personnel involved in the development and/or management of work based programmes at a number of educational institutions.

Documentary material related to institutional WBL policies, as well as documents relating to the curriculum of workbased learning programmes and associated assessment methods, quality criteria and standards, were examined in each of the institutions. Documents such as those published by QAA (2006, Section 6), HEA and other Government White Papers were also accessed and examined.

In addition a one-day workshop with partner educational institutions focussed discussion on factors associated with ensuring the quality of workbased learning assessment.

Outputs include:

— Best practice guidelines and principles for use by institutions in evaluating work-based learning assessments.
— Institutional exemplars – case studies – which will illustrate effective standards, consistency and criteria in assessments for work-based learning and key implications for best practice in the quality assurance of assessments for work-based learning.

One of the outcomes of the project investigation was an identification of four distinct approaches to the provision of both workbased learning and assessment programmes.
— The presentation by an HEI to work organisations of a workbased programme, with, a ready-formed curriculum and a range of assessments, based in the main on ‘traditional’ methods of assessment such as examinations and written essays, (Usually for part-time students sponsored by work organisations).
— Provision by HEIs, based on the requirements and standards of professional
organisations for both content delivery and assessment, which involve a range of assessments including practice-based evaluation. (e.g. CIPD programmes, Warwick’s Post-graduate diploma provision for H&S Inspectorate).

— WBL programme focuses on the individual learner as ‘an agent of change’ for the organisation. It seeks to enhance their theoretical knowledge and understanding primarily through
— the construction of a learning agreement,
— reflective practices,
— peer-to-peer interaction
— application of learning through work-based projects chosen by the individual
— assessment remains within the educational sphere (e.g. Coventry University Master’s programme in work-based learning).
— the HEI, to a greater or lesser degree, engages with the work organisation in order to develop customised programmes that meet the needs of both the organisation and the individual learner, and in which the assessment involves the active participation of the work organisation, the educational institution and the learner themselves (e.g. Open University, Acua Ltd).

Introduction

Work-based learning has evolved through a combination of higher education institutions adopting learner-centred and experience-led learning perspectives and industry’s requirements for developing market retentive and reactive on-the-job training (Boud and Solomon 2001; Light and Cox 2001). Smith and Preece restated Boud, Solomon and Symes’ identification of the six characteristics of WBL which emphasise the unique nature of the learning environment, with the workplace at the centres of study. These characteristics include that:
— level of participation in the programme is based on the assessment of competencies and learning needs
— The assessment of learning outcomes is undertaken by the educational institution with reference to a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels.

Different paradigms of learning have been reviewed and discussed by Lee, et al (2004) and point to distinctive approaches within which learning as knowledge acquisition and learning as participation have been informed by discussions around formal and informal learning. These approaches have direct bearing on assessment frameworks and the methods by which they attempt to assure quality of the assessment
process. Formal learning is conceptualised as a ‘standard paradigm’:
— a form of learning within traditional ‘educational’ pedagogical frameworks,
— based on didactic interaction
— usually within an institutional setting
— including the characteristics of a prescribed learning framework
— with organised learning events which involve external specification of outcomes,
— the presence of a designated teacher or trainer
— results in an award of a qualification or credit.

Informal learning, on the other hand, is conceptualised as organised along four broad principles: context, cognisance, experiential, relationship. These principles are “seen to be central features of work as a practice, the workplace as an environment and workforce/individual development.” In addition they point out that Billett (1999; 2002) argued “that attention should rather be paid to the structures, norms, values and practices within workplaces and how these structure opportunities for, and participation in, learning”…and that this “…is key to understanding both the quality and distribution of learning within the workplace.”

Various assessment strategies, evaluation instruments and good practice indicators have been developed as a response to organisation-situated learning. This in itself poses considerable challenges to evaluation of learning and certification of achievement (Gray 2001). Therefore, the following sections will give an indication of the types of WBL assessment methods available in general, associated quality issues and review the current cross-institutional frameworks in line with the general policy guidance for assessment and evaluation to ensure quality in design and delivery of work based learning programmes.

What does the literature tell us about the issues?
A synergistic relationship between academic knowledge and work based practice is one of the key objectives of work based learning programmes – a relationship characterised by pedagogic considerations underpinning work based learning assessment (Major 2005). As part of this, WBL assessment defines learning outcomes that are competency based, and employment related, positioning the problem centred approach as central, given that work-based learners are in general self directed and bring personal skills, knowledge and attitudes to the teaching and learning environments and are able to demonstrate achievement of skills, rather than merely writing about them (Gonczi 1999). Therefore, Gray points out that “assessment becomes not merely a means of judging knowledge and performance, but an integral part of the learning process itself” (Gary 2001: 6). Gibbs (1999:47) noted that
assessment needs to be of a type that ‘generates appropriate student learning activity’ (c.f. Employer Responsive provision, QAA, 2010, para 80). Brodie and Irving (2007) have also argued that assessment tasks should require students to demonstrate learned components by using principles of learning, and to validate their conclusions by reflecting, critically and effectively, upon their experiences throughout learning. Costley (2007: 6) argues that “engaging in critical reflection is an important learning strategy for work-based learners to change and develop themselves as they are enabled to critique knowledge that has been applied at work and in their academic work and so extends the conventional notion of critical thinking expected of higher level learning”.

The curriculum is predominantly derived from application of the learning context (i.e. the workplace) as well as learners’ current knowledge and experience. The pedagogy is also experiential in nature, centred on the application of learning in the workplace and evidence-based assessment of progress and achievement. This makes sure that the workplace - the primary site of learning – provides an opportunity for the practical application of knowledge and skills through action or problem-based projects.

“It is simply not possible to drop a body of disciplinary knowledge into a workplace and expect to sustain the same boundaries around it. Similarly, it is not possible to drop a body of workplace knowledge into a disciplinary culture and leave that unchanged…. Instead the workplace, the individual learner and the university have to work together to produce and validate a non-disciplinary yet still 'legitimate' knowledge.”

—Baud & Solomon, 2001

One of the issues that arises in trying to understand assessment of work-based learning is to what extent do the learners themselves see ‘being a learner’ and ‘being a worker’ as two separate spheres of knowledge, competency and capability. Positioning oneself as a learner can be understood and experienced as an indication that “one is not an adequate worker”.

“Learning and being a learner can be understood as a strength for the organisation and for the individual, when this is seen as adding value to one’s work. However, the process of learning and being identified as a “learner” creates professional and institutional tensions and associations of being a novice or a person who has yet to be accepted as a fully functioning worker. It can present a challenge to existing relationship and image. Being a learner is a risky business …”

—Boud and Solomon 2003
Assessment is central to learning, ‘drives’ learning outcomes (CHSE, 2007) and needs to be aligned to planned outcomes. It provides a method of evaluating and certifying learner achievement and facilitating learning by providing feedback to learners on their progress and so enables them to judge what needs to be done effectively in order to obtain a particular level of knowledge and standard of competency. It is therefore important to make assessment criteria specific, clear and transparent for learners. The links between engagement with and understanding of concepts – metacognitive skills – and performance - both academic and professional need to be made visible and an explicit element of the learning process as a whole, including the parallel and concomitant assessment process.

Assessment should promote analytical and problem-solving skills, encourage personal development and enhance communication skills. Workplace assessment tasks need to enable learners to demonstrate higher level thinking and knowledge by deploying a number of suitable assessment tools such as journals, learning plans and contracts, work performance portfolios and live projects in conjunction with academic assessment such as examinations and essay writing (c.f. Employer Responsive provision, QAA, 2010, para 80)

This enables students to graduate with a validated record of their performance in the program in which they have participated. Certification is used by employers and by educational institutions, typically to make judgements about acceptability for employment and further study.
—Boud & Solomon 2001

As assessment forms a major component of any qualification, assessment in the workplace challenges the traditional methods and quality assurance arrangements in higher education. Dilworth, as long ago as 1996, pointed out that the workplace as a locus of learning requires HE academic institutions to address the ways in which academic and workplace domains inter-relate and how they can be bridged while maintaining quality in both content and assessment design.

“The educational argument for integrating teaching, learning and assessment is powerful. We know that assessment drives learning and it is therefore imperative that workplace-based assessment focuses on important attributes rather than what is easiest to assess.”
—Chana, N. 2008
“What is assessed strongly influences what is learned. If assessment only measures factual knowledge, then learners will concentrate primarily on learning facts.”

—Baartman et al, 2006

Therefore adequate assessment methods and quality criteria need to be developed and implemented if work-based learning is to be evaluated and aligned to the type of quality assurance systems already in place within the academic sphere of HE institutions. An appropriate blend of learning and assessment from the interaction and engagement of both the HE and workplace setting needs to be addressed and implemented so that standards, levels and criteria parameters are not only made explicit but are seen to be relevant to the tri-partite relationship between learners, the HE institution and the organization.

Considering the construction and implementation of Foundation degrees, the QAA (2004) benchmarks stated that these degrees should integrate work-based and academic learning and this learning “be a two-way process where the learning from one environment is applied in the other.” The implication for assessment is quite clear. Both the workplace and the academic domains require an interleaving between conceptual/factual knowledge and competency/organisational praxis. The quality assessment frameworks and standards from both of these domains (QAA and individual HEI) (organisational/professional quality standards and rubrics) need to be applied to assessment instruments within the context of workplace learning. In this situation the individual learner becomes the pivotal point of the learning process and in the assessment of their achievements resulting from the process will produce an impact on the learning cycle involving all of the major stakeholders.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2004, 2006) and Gibbs and Simpson (2004-5) have provided frameworks to assist audit of assessment practice. Their conditions are summarised in Gourley et al (2008):

— Assessment should encourage a strong and consistent level of engagement in learning activities
— Assessment should encourage student effort that is at an appropriate level and intensity
— Feedback should be provided in time and in sufficient detail to affect learning
— Feedback should be insightful and appropriate in its focus
— Feedback should prompt an active response from the student.

There are a number of key attributes associated with assessment quality that have been evidenced in research and investigation related to both academic and work-
related assessment instruments. These include clarity of purpose and close coupling to learning outcomes, as well as the attributes of validity, reliability, feasibility, acceptability and educational impact. Van der Vleuten’s utility model provides a useful framework for quality assurance in competency assessment programs from a perspective of ‘fitness for purpose’. (2006, van der Vleuten, Cees et al) It is expressed in the ‘wheel of competency assessment’ framework through a set of quality criteria which include the commonly used ones of comparability, reproducibility, acceptability; but in addition, they have incorporated authenticity, cognitive complexity, meaningfulness, fairness and fitness of self-assessment.

To perform quality work-related assessment, instruments such as examinations and essays which form part of ‘traditional’ university assessment methods need to be expanded to take account of work-place contextualised tasks, activities and outcomes, organisational quality assurance systems and the impact of the learners on workplace peers and colleagues. Winter (2001) has even argued that quality management parameters such as quality assessment/ control/audit do not stem from an educational context but belong to an industry and commerce setting. Rather than viewing the workplace as alien territory and the assessment of learning activities as highly problematic, “… real quality assurance problems” may well reside “…as much with the traditional format of higher education courses as with arrangements for work-based learning.” Therefore, it is essential to ensure that work based assessment does not simply ask learners to demonstrate what they already know or can do. Assessment in the workplace should also be a developmental experience.

Live-project assessments can allow tacit and work-based knowledge to be examined and enable learners to contextualise their learning and understanding. For example, problem solving activities, workshops, learning packages and literature synthesis can enable them to develop practical capabilities and reflective practice, which can result in a positive organisational impact.

Quality of assessment is dependant on the development of appropriate learning outcomes, a comprehensive set of descriptors associated with the outcomes and a set of assessment criteria that is transparent and readily accessible. “The issue for assessment revolves around what is assessed, who assesses and whether the assessment is valid and reliable.” – it therefore takes account of what Brodie and Irving (2006) noted as the three components of assessment: the learning that takes place, critical reflection and capability.(Nixon, I et al. 2006).

With regard to assessment frameworks in work-based learning, HEIs need to engage more collaboratively with employers and learners in developing appropriate assessment instruments and sets of criteria which would evidence not only an individual learner’s knowledge, but also be able to assess performance and the consequent impact on the
organisation and their colleagues. This poses certain difficulties, particularly in making judgements about the nature of the impact within a given timeframe. The dynamics of learning wherever it is situated involves a reflection of “local priorities and value” and that assessment “criteria development should…be seen as a process of negotiation rather than as static reifications of beliefs about the quality of a particular product.” (Dysthe et al., 2008)

Difficulties arise in assessment strategies for work-based learning due to tension between specifying in detailed terms what employees might be expected to do in the workplace – competencies – and the process-based professional activities that take place underpinned by appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes – capability (Hanney, R. 2005).

Learning that takes place outside of an HE setting is already formally recognised via a process of accreditation.17

Quality of the teaching, learning and assessment is assured through the HEI’s own internal quality processes and mechanisms as well as by the QAA through its audit and review processes.

However the KSA study on work-based learning also highlights that assessment remains firmly within the domain of academic staff. (Nixon et al, 2006)

“Equity and quality assurance issues militate against the involvement of employers in the assessment of learning, even though they could (and, in some instances, do) contribute. Where employers are engaged in the assessment process their role tends to be in mentoring students on the technical aspects of work-based projects and providing feedback on the performance (or ‘capability’) of the student to the academic staff.”

This is certainly the situation in the case of both Acua and Coventry University, where the University as the degree awarding body has placed a number of obstacles to the participation of employers in the summative, if not the formative, assessment process of employees.

Not much of the literature which is available about employer engagement refers to specific involvement of employers in the assessment process. The established norm appears to be that of academics being the primary assessors of work-based learning and capabilities (c.f. Employer Responsive provision, QAA, 2010, para 84). Rainsbury et al (1998)

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17 See sister demonstrator projects, published in this series, which cover APEL and the Accreditation of In Company Training.
found in a study of student placements that employer’s involvement in the summative assessment of work-based learning courses would be a valid and important input within the assessment process because “they would be in a better position to assess the student than the academic…their lack of experience in assessing students, does not mean that they lack the ability to undertake this role. Most would be involved in staff appraisal and thus would possess skills useful and able to be applied in the assessment of students in the workplace”.

Other research suggests that, even though good collaboration between employers and HEIs is established, the intended goal of making ‘an immediate contribution to the workplace and an early impact on the “bottom line” (DfES, 2004) may result in inequities within the learning programmes due to some employees having “better access to learning experiences than others, as a result of the differing levels of involvement by their employers” (Hillier 2006). For example, the QAA (2002) benchmark for Foundation Degrees stated that employers could be involved in every part of the programme, including ‘development, monitoring and delivery’ including the assessment of learning outcomes. However, Gleeson and Keep (2004) sounded a cautionary note with regard to employer involvement in educational provision and indicated that policy discourse in this area would necessitate more “…explicit debate about, and clarity upon, the respective rights, responsibilities and roles (the three ‘Rs’) of the different actors in the VET (Vocational Education and Training) system”. Employers involved in summative assessment of work-related skills need careful nurturing (c.f. QAA, 2010, para 83), and there must be effective collaboration between all of the stakeholders in this process, since there is variance in the degree to which employers are willing or able to participate and engage in these areas. In particular there is a need to address long-term, ‘over-arching’ organisational structures and practices, in view of both occupational mobility within industry sectors and changing perceptions of ‘cost/benefit’ in terms of organisational impact (i.e., achievement of organisational goals and business objectives) by active employer participation in and support for learning programme provision, delivery and assessment. There needs to be collaborative dialogue between HEI course/programme team members and sector employers in order to establish and agree organisational aims in relation to outcomes (personal and organisation), assessment instruments and their criteria, credit value and level of work based learning programmes.

What this study and investigation has shown is that quality assurance of work based assessment frameworks need to consist of an appropriate ‘blend’/‘meshing’ of workplace competencies, rubrics and organisational impact considerations with academic theory and knowledge, so that the end ‘product’ is a learner who has developed comprehensive personal and professional attributes and who can be a more effective participant in relation to their organisational environment.
Case Studies

Acua Ltd/Coventry University

This organisation is a corporate trading subsidiary of a Higher Education Institution. It provides organisations with development and capability improvement programmes and works alongside organisations to imbed higher level skills and qualifications into learning programmes which address the requirements of both the learners and their organisation. These programmes are accredited by the HEI.

The approach that this organisation has adopted is to work closely with industry and develop tailor-made programmes for specific organisations. Thus, for example, their foundation degree programme is a flexible work-based course contextualised to the client business and industry sector. It is based on a set of core modules with optional modules geared to cover a wide range of competencies. Delivery is staged to meet the workplace learning

‘Starting at Certificate level, the qualification route can build through Foundation Degree to full degree and potentially beyond.’

—Acua website

Assessment framework: Aim of the framework was to provide pre-approved flexible matrix of assessment of work-based learning programs at HE levels 1 and 2. This enables module leaders to select items that make up the total number of credits required for the module/course concerned. It is intended to also allow due cognisance of the learners’ learning style. The assignments are designed to enable students to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge, aptitude and attitude against specific criteria in order to provide a measure for achievement and a mechanism for feedback.

Assignment content is based around a current task, challenge or change with which the learner is involved within their workplace (topic area) and is agreed between the learner, the learner’s line manager and the Learning Development Consultant (LDC) to ensure that all the requirements of the assignments can be met. The types of assessment used include:

— online forums,
— individual reports which may include artefacts,
— tutor observed oral tests with documentary evidence,
— tutor observed and peer marked individual presentations,
— group presentations with document support (handouts)
— individual reflection detailing learning outcome achievements,
— tutor marked organisation specific case study.

A major element of the assessment process is the production of an in-depth 'live' project oriented to addressing a specific work-based issue based on academic research, situational analysis and problem-solving application. The outcome is an agreed action plan and implementation timetable approved by management and communicated to staff.

Acua’s approach is a closely coupled link between programme content and its assessment, via clearly identified learning outcomes which cover knowledge and competencies, and related assignments which adhere to align with quality assured HE guidelines and marking criteria, to ensure validity, reliability and consistency. In addition, close engagement with work-based practice and provision for input from management staff to the learning process means that the quality assurance systems of the workplace provide a parallel quality measure of the learning experience. The recognition that learning takes place in the workplace and that the process of assessing that learning needs to involve the key work-based stakeholders – the learner, their colleagues and the organisation – has informed not only the range of assessments within Acua’s programmes but also consideration of how the rubrics of quality can be embedded.

Open University: Work based Learning Programmes
Open University offer a variety of work-based learning programmes and practice-based professional learning programmes through a number of established centres such as COBE (Centre for Outcomes Based Education) and the PBPL (Practice-based Professional Learning) CETL (Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning). These programmes of study are oriented towards learners in the workplace or learners who have experience of learning in the workforce and could benefit from these types of programmes. The OU also works with individual organisations to provide customised learning solutions for employee development and progression both in occupational terms and in the attainment of academic qualifications. The orientation is around producing reflective practice along side knowledge and evidence of both higher level cognitive skills and occupational competencies. Course teams liaise with professional/occupational representatives in order to agree the appropriate skills and learning outcomes. In practice they are members of the course team, and can also be members of programme committees. Course teams need to select the most appropriate support framework that complies with the occupational/professional bodies and organisations, as well as providing a support framework for academic study and achievement.
In line with QAA guidelines, OU courses have defined learning outcomes linked to modes and types of assessment. Assessment methods on individual courses are part and parcel of the triad of teaching, learning and assessment. This is also the case in their work-based learning courses, where a key element in assessment is the learning log which is in effect a reflective learning journal. On the course on developing effective performance at work, for example, learners participate in a tutor group forum and are encouraged to innovate and evaluate work practices. They are required to post short excerpts of their reflections on the Tutor Group Forum and contribute to the discussions. The purpose of the course is to use current and past experiences of work as a basis for further study and to make changes/improvements in their working life by enabling them to reflect on the learning process and thereby review their own personal and professional knowledge and skills. The first step in this process is the development by the learner of a Learning Contract for work based learning, using the online resource of the LCW (learning contract wizard). This learning contract is expected to be reviewed, revised and expanded during the various stages of the course. Support for learning is given by the course tutor, the work-located mentor/facilitator, the regional centre and fellow students. Learners are encouraged to benchmark their evidence portfolio against the relevant occupational/professional standards. This tri-partite engagement underpins the quality assurance process of the course.

Within this context, assessment strategies which allow students to demonstrate both academic and work-related outcomes need to be implemented and, where appropriate, should be integrated within the programme as a whole, not just in relation to specific courses. Assessment is by continuous assessment via tutor-marked assignments (submitted online) and an end of course assessment instead of a formal examination. Feedback from the tutor marked assignments is geared towards improving performance on the end of course assessment. The ECA consists of the Learning Log/Journal, a reflective report and the Learning Contract.

Coventry University: MA in Management by Work-based Learning
This HEI offers a course of study at postgraduate level aimed at a management audience in industry. The programme consists of three courses which are specifically designed for busy managers with demanding careers who wish to improve their managerial effectiveness. Entry to the course requires the learner to have the support of their employer, including the provision of a workplace mentor.

The delivery of the programme is based on an innovative ‘blended learning’ pattern, which allows the combination of part-time study with a professional working
life deemed acceptable to both the learner and their employer. The courses are
delivered by a number of permanent academic staff at the institution in conjunction
with a wider associate lecturer support network – a system termed as a ‘lean hub
and spoke’ structure which has the capability to respond more flexibly to the needs
and requirement of clients. The programme involves partner organisations within the
public, private and voluntary sectors, and aims to equip students with the qualities for
performing effectively in complex, unpredictable, professional environments. It focuses
on providing the individual learner with the opportunity and tools to:
— develop their ability to blend theory and practice,
— integrate critical awareness and understanding of management and organisations
  for strategic level performance
— enable the learner to work with self-direction and originality.

The programme is consistent with the Framework for Higher Education
Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and meets the QAA benchmark
statements for Masters awards in Business and Management as well as the university’s
code of practice for academic and professional skills development. The learning
outcomes of the programme are related to the four categories of knowledge and
understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills and transferable skills. Teaching and
learning is based on workshops, action-learning sets, tutorials, short residential sessions
and the online course web – methods which provide extensive learner interaction
and opportunities for formative feedback via peers and the course team. Formal-style
teaching is kept to a minimum and emphasis is on the learning process rather than
the course content. This process is student-centred, with tutors taking the role of
facilitators of learning within a learning community which forms on the basis of social
interaction between students, tutors and others within a face-to-face and online
environment. The learning content of the course is defined by the learner, situated
within their normal work-based environment and bounded by the agreed tripartite
learning framework. At the Certificate and Diploma stage of the course, the learner is
able to design their learning experiences in relation to the management of professional
practice, business environments and organisational theory which are relevant and
appropriate to their requirements and their chosen pathway of study – in other words,
contextualised through the work-based project. At the MA stage the entire course is
student defined and focuses upon a work-based research project. The overall teaching
and learning strategy is to use real-world work issues as learning vehicles and to ensure
that both learners and employers have full commitment to project outcomes through a
negotiated work-based curriculum which is participant-led and emphasises the blending of theory, practice and reflection for consolidation of permanent learning.

Assessment of the outcomes is via negotiated tasks and encompasses a variety of methods, including:
— work-based literature review,
— group-based assignments,
— dissertation,
— independent study,
— reflective reports.

The assessment strategy is 100% coursework and is designed to not only evidence the achievement of their personal needs and the learning outcomes, but to enable the learner to define appropriate assessment criteria, with the guidance of course tutors, which are formalised within the Learning Framework agreement. Individual module descriptors give precise pass criteria and the weighting of the component marks, where relevant, which contribute to the overall module mark. In addition, attendance at learning set meetings is considered to be an important, integral part of the learner’s educational experience. Consequently, attendance is mandatory and no more than 2 absences are permitted. In cases where this occurs, the learner is required to complete an alternative piece of work to compensate for the learning. The Learning Framework, which ensures that assessments are clearly linked to the learning outcomes and are of appropriate scope and size, is required to be signed off by the employer as a key stakeholder in the learner’s development.

The management of the assessment process requires internal moderation and the appointment of an External Examiner appointed by the HEI whose role is to ensure that academic standards are in line with national norms for the subject and to ensure fairness in the consideration of student progression and awards. The MA in Management is approved by the Chartered Management Institute.

Best Practice: Guidelines

1. Quality = assessment as teaching design = embedded within the teaching content and related directly to the learning outcomes – not a ‘bolt on’ or ‘after thought’ i.e. a ‘programme of assessment’ that uses a wide range of assessment instruments to tackle the complexity of work-based learning. A perspective from research based studies on assessing professional development carried out by van der Vleuten, Cees P M and Lambert W T Schuwirth at Maastricht University in the
Department of Educational Development and Research (2006)

2. Ensure a commonality of language accessible to all stakeholders: HEI, employer and learner. Differences in terminology, meaning, and jargon need to be addressed so that there is clarity of understanding between all parties and agreement within the context of the learning and assessment frameworks.

3. Provide a continuous ‘cycle of quality’ that can be applied across HE institutions and employer organisations involved in work-based learning programmes. A key element of this cycle is the feedback mechanisms that are put in place to assure all participants that quality procedures and standards are applied in a consistent and equitable manner and that feedback is an integral element in programme improvement.

4. Provide a student guide on the assessment programme associated with the course, including information on assignment related issues such as marking criteria, use of models, theories and readings, referencing conventions and feedback mechanisms.

Lessons learned:
Proactive participation and engagement of management level from employer organisations with learners in their study can help create a workplace environment for successful learning.

Support is needed in developing appropriate assessments to evaluate the learning that occurs in the workplace (Poikela, E. 2004) and to construct appropriate tasks that incorporate relevant high-level thinking and rubrics for quality assurance and quality control.

Principles for quality of work-based assessments:
— Acts as a vehicle for constructive feedback and achievement
— needs to be matched to learning outcomes
— provides evidence of learning from workplace experience
— based on the principles of validity, reliability, consistency and impact
— incorporates appropriate work-based activities and tasks
— map to occupational /professional standards and academic QAA benchmarks
— at appropriate level for achievement
— enables students to demonstrate academic and work based outcomes
— instruments link to credit, criteria and level, made explicit and transparent
Assessment Configuration

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