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Employer Engagement Series One

Work-based Learning

Working the Curriculum: Approval, Delivery & Assessment

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Work-based Learning

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The UK Government has recognised the need for greater engagement between business and higher education. Their view is that if the UK is to continue to prosper in the knowledge economy, then business must get full value from its universities. Engagement leads to the co-production of knowledge and innovation that enhances the competitiveness of industry and practice. This policy is most relevant in those sectors of the economy where business and education are vocationally aligned. This is particularly true of the built environment sector where courses in architecture, planning, surveying and construction are designed to support specific professions. Engagement in these areas already exists and the question is - is it working effectively?

There have been a number of reports and studies calling for the improvement in the performance of the built environment sector (Latham and Egan, to name but two). There have been other, more general reports, calling for changes in engagement activity between business and universities (Lambert and Leitch). The message is clear; engagement between industry and higher education in the built environment is not optimised and needs to be improved. The debate about whether to take action is over; now we must determine how to change.

The introduction of the sector skills councils has established organisations with clear responsibilities to understand and represent the needs of business. Emerging from the sector skills councils is a call for greater use of work-based learning as a key plank in the strategy for better engagement between higher education and business. Work-based learning sets out to establish constructive alignment between the educational objectives of industry and academia for the mutual benefit of the company, the university and the learner.

This series of guides on employer engagement and work-based learning provides direction on important issues such as curriculum design, assessment and quality assurance. Through the medium of case studies and discussion notes, the reader is presented with useful information that will help them adopt work-based learning and incorporate it into existing or new programmes. The intention is to provide an effective resource that will aid the transition to work-based learning; benefitting from the experience of others and avoiding many of the pitfalls.

Work-based learning can play a significant part in forging new partnerships between academia and industry. This series is an important development that will help all of us to work together to meet the challenges being set by Government.

Professor Mel Lees
Chair
Education College at the Construction Industry Council
A strong relationship between the business and university sectors is critical to helping the UK maintain competitiveness. Both sides benefit – businesses from new thinking and high quality graduates, universities from practical insights that enrich their teaching and research, as well as funding.

University and business collaboration has come a long way in the past decade as the continued joint activity attests – CBI is working in partnership with Universities UK to promote good practice in business-university collaboration for workforce training, and have found many good examples of development of customised programmes.

Of course, there is scope for even greater interaction between higher education and business in the UK, and all must play their part in removing barriers to making this happen. It is on the skills of the British workforce – and on the development and use of new skills – that our future prosperity in large part depends. The drive towards higher value-added products and services can be successful if business is confident that its workforce has the necessary capabilities. But CBI surveys show that many employers are not confident that there will be sufficient skilled people available to them in the future to meet their needs – working with universities can help to address these concerns. This report highlights some excellent practice and should provide inspiration to others wanting to get involved.

Susan Anderson
Director of Education and Skills
CBI
Welcome to working the curriculum: Approval, delivery and assessment

This pack is designed as a resource for anyone who is designing, developing or modifying an existing curriculum to use with employers. Our aim is to provide materials which address and explore the challenges of designing and delivering work-based learning within the Higher Education system. These can be used to promote an individual understanding of practical and strategic approaches but they are also designed to be used to support staff development for work-based learning.

The pack has been written by practitioners in the field of work-based learning and employer engagement so it has an explicit ‘how to’ focus. Case studies and examples are used throughout to illustrate how engagement and learning in the workplace has taken place. However the pack goes beyond a purely practical focus to explore the motivations of employers and academic institutions in seeking engagement.

The approach taken to the subject represents our collective experience of working with large and small employers in the public and private sector. We recognise that this represents a particular way of addressing challenges and promoting engagement – and there are, of course, many other approaches that are equally effective. Throughout the pack we have explicitly structured activities to encourage readers to develop responses that meet their own circumstances based on their own experience and offered our response as an illustration.

Navigating this pack

The pack is divided into three sections

- Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement
- Quality Assurance for work-based learning
- Assessment in the workplace

Each section stands alone and can be referred to individually if you have a particular area of interest. Within each section you will find a series of activities which are designed to help stimulate thinking. These activities contextualise the issues discussed helping to draw lessons for your own practices. Although each activity can be undertaken by individuals, some provide ideal stimulus material for group discussion.

Throughout the pack we have provided a summary of responses to activities and discussion which explores the wider implications of the issues addressed. Where you are asked to carry out a particular task as part of an activity, our response is included at the end of the pack. We have also included a longer case study which is a real example of how a Higher Education Institution has broadly addressed one of the key challenges of each section. It is envisaged that the contents and activities will help promote innovative practice and we anticipate that this pack will have scope outside the Built Environment sector.
Contributors

About the editors

Aled Williams
Aled is Deputy Director for Construction, Surveying and Real Estate, in the UK Higher Education Academy’s Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE). He has contributed to the development of Construction, Surveying and Real Estate education with enthusiasm and effectiveness, at multiple levels. As Senior Lecturer at the University of Salford activities range from the ‘chalk face’ of student learning, through faculty and institutional initiatives to regional and national projects.

He has a track record of successfully leading on several employer engagement projects with funding bodies including: HEFCE; Higher Education Academy; ConstructionSkills; GMSA Lifelong Learning Network; EU and NW Higher Level Skills Partnership. As the Director of the Construction Knowledge Exchange (CKE), and member of the Employer Engagement Facilitation Group within the Higher Education Academy, he has completed applied research in partnership with key industry collaborators.

Niraj Thurairajah
Niraj is a Research Fellow in the UK Higher Education Academy’s Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE). He presently leads the ACBEE project which forms part of the accelerating change agenda endorsed by the Strategic Forum. The main focus of this initiative is to foster collaboration and dialogue between industry, higher education and professional bodies, thus encouraging the provision of more relevant training and education for the future and improving the quality of UK student output.

In addition to his involvement in various other research projects, Niraj also lectures in Construction Management and Quantity Surveying at the University of Salford. In the last 7 years, he has undertaken work-based teaching modules for BSc and MSc students, encouraging learners to apply their knowledge to practical industry problems. His research interests include employer engagement, pedagogical strategies, construction partnering, leadership and culture.

About the authors

Dr Darryl Bibby
Darryl began his career in a marketing company where after 7 years he became responsible for sales, marketing and the performance of clients’ contracts including publishers Penguin, OUP, Elsevier, and Springer Verlag. In 1992 he moved into Higher Education and joined Oxford Polytechnic as Business Development Manager successfully marketing the University’s CPD, short courses and International Summer School. By 1995 he had become Head of Oxford Brookes’ Centre for Continuing Education. Darryl’s work with employers led to him becoming heavily involved in regional skills initiatives and research.

In 1999 he was appointed Director of the new Centre for Lifelong Learning at Coventry University, which after years of significant growth was made a full School of the University in 2006 with Darryl as its first Dean. Darryl has successfully secured more than £10 million of funding related to skills development and work with employers.

Dr Judy Rumbelow
Judy has worked in staff development for Higher, Further and Adult Education for the last ten years, designing and delivering programmes to academic and support staff. At the Open University Judy designed and managed a customer service programme for 300 student services staff. Judy has worked extensively with employers. At the OU she set up and led a unit to deliver vocational development for staff and then expanded this winning business from large external clients. Judy also worked with private sector companies to pilot the use of higher level skills standards which she had written as part of a team working with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

Judy joined Coventry University in 2005 as Associate Dean of the School of Lifelong Learning. Working with Darryl she wrote the successful bid to the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund for £4m for Employer Engagement which she later was seconded to as Project Director.
The aims of this section are:

- To explore the academic implications of involving the employer in curriculum design
- To examine the pedagogical and practical effects of work-based delivery
- To investigate the balance between customisation to meet employer needs and the benefits of scalability
- To improve communication with the employer during design and delivery to ensure employer needs are met
- To increase the confidence of those designing and delivering work-based learning to propose innovative approaches which suit the demands of the workplace

Purpose, audience and rationale

The opening section of this pack provides a series of activities for those who are designing and delivering a curriculum with the aim of engaging employers and encouraging them to enrol their employees on learning programmes. Employers can be involved in curriculum design at many levels ranging from the opportunity to comment on design in the final stages to involvement in selecting module content, assessment strategy or teaching and learning methods. Whatever the level of their involvement, including them in curriculum design enhances the relevance of curriculum to their purpose and starts to build a relationship, making the academic institution aware of their learning needs and the organisational content and culture in which they are to be delivered.

In this section we also recognise that delivering work-based learning can raise considerable challenges for the institution and the employer. Where delivery takes place in the workplace the challenges are most evident; but even where learning programmes use simulations or scenarios challenges can arise. We consider, however, that the combined benefits of explicit relevance and an absorbing of the environmental context into the learning process outweigh any difficulties that might be encountered.
The content of this section ranges widely, and recognises that in many cases practitioners will be working with existing curriculum to adapt it for new employers rather than designing new programmes from scratch. An activity is included to help those with responsibility for designing the curriculum to involve employers in the process. There is also an activity which focuses on examples of how the practicalities of managing learning in the workplace will influence delivery methods and may even affect the design of the curriculum.

**Activity 1** considers the extent to which employers might want to be involved in curriculum design and possible barriers to their involvement. We approach this subject from the point of view that the employer will dictate the level of their involvement rather than the institution.

**Activity 2** explores the different models of work-based teaching that an institution might employ, illustrating a continuum that ranges from minimal reference to the workplace to delivery at work alongside students continuing with their day to day responsibilities. This activity concludes with a consideration of the support tutors might need when delivering work-based learning and how this might differ from the traditional support offered.

**Activity 3** focuses on practical issues of delivery of work-based learning, using a series of scenarios to address provision of contingencies for times when learning is affected by the business imperatives of the workplace.

We start the section with a detailed case study which illustrates in broad terms how an employer and a University have worked together successfully and note the implications and benefits for students, the employer and the University. This case study demonstrates the potential value of involving an employer in curriculum design and the delivery of learning.

Then we move on to three activities which are designed to help you and your team prepare to work effectively with employers on curriculum design and achieve the levels of integration described in the case study.
Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement
Case Study
The Styles and Wood Academy

Styles and Wood is the UK market leader in the provision of space planning, design implementation, fit-out and facilities management services for the retail sector. The company has offered a Continuous Professional Development Programme for all staff since 1993 and in 2003 launched the Styles and Wood Academy with Manchester Business School (MBS) and SCA, a private training provider. The purpose of the Academy was

- to benchmark and accredit internal performance levels
- to raise standards of professionalism across all areas of the business
- to deliver training in transferable skills (e.g. communication, team working, management) which would complement its traditional construction-based skill set

The initial Academy prospectus offers four modules, Values, Behaviours and Aims; Improving Skills – Delivering Results; Becoming a Manager and Advanced Management Learning. Each module is a three-day course which comprises introduction and theory at MBS, a visit to a host company as a practical demonstration of best practice on day two and a review of what has been observed and learned on day three. The programme is innovative in that staff from all levels are encouraged to learn together and engage with the business, placing emphasis on improving retention and demonstrating a commitment to personal development. A staff comment reflects this saying ‘it was fascinating to hear so many varied points of view on a single topic’.

For further reading: www.acbee.org

Working together on curriculum design

MBS and Styles and Wood work closely together to ensure the curriculum meets the company’s needs. MBS has spent time in getting to understand Styles and Wood’s business – for example its overarching commitment to the customer – and working out how to thread this element of company culture through all modules. In designing the programme MBS has also taken care not to shy away from the commercial goals which are critically important to Styles and Wood such as improving customer retention and enhancing relationships with suppliers. Styles and Wood recognise the support that MBS can give them in building long term staff development frameworks which are more substantial and influential than short term interventions. Getting the process of working together right is critical to the success of the programme. Neil Davies, Chief Executive of Styles and Wood captures this, describing it as ‘the right people put together with the right time frame and the right objectives’.

Work-based delivery

The programme combines traditional delivery with a work-based element comprising visits to other organisations that demonstrate best practice. Styles and Wood also host visits for organisations, and recognise the benefits of bringing learning from outside the construction industry back to their company. The make up of the learning group from a wide range of levels in the company also adds value to the learning experience.

“Using work-based learning in your design can make the relevance of your curriculum explicit to employers”
Activity 1
Involving employers in curriculum design and delivery

The purpose of this activity is to consider the extent to which employers can be involved in curriculum design and delivery and identify where there may be barriers to involvement both on the part of the employer and the institution.

Activity 1 suggests a series of questions which supplement the central question of the extent to which employers can be involved in curriculum design. These questions are designed to stimulate discussion about the barriers to and implications of involving employers. You should aim to record your responses to each question, either referring to the examples or your own experience.

This activity will probably yield a fuller response if you are able to discuss the questions with colleagues.

Resource sheet 1 shows you our responses to the questions presented above – you may want to compare these with your own.
Examples

Two examples are included below to help you get started on thinking about practical ways in which employers might want to get involved in curriculum design.

Example A

You are building a strong relationship with the UK Training Manager of a global construction company and many of your recent graduates have gone on to work for the company. When you meet one day he tells you about a current problem he has with sourcing higher level learning for staff who want to move from a role of Site Manager to Project Manager. Staff who want to make this move need a ‘licence to practice’ Black CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) status. The Training Manager has a clear idea of what he wants to improve capability and competency, underpinning knowledge and understanding, suggesting a modular scheme mapped to higher NVQ outcomes which provides the underpinning knowledge and understanding that the managers need. They can subsequently translate this into on-site practice to demonstrate competence for their NVQ.

Although the Training Manager has a clear understanding of the type of learning experience and qualification he wants for his staff, he has wide ranging responsibilities and will expect you to present a solution to his problem.

Example B

At a meeting of the innovation forum on the local science park, the heads of two local Universities’ Computer Studies Departments were presenting what they could do for companies in the area whose business was IT and communications. Both heads made presentations. After the presentations and during the questions that followed, a senior executive of one of the major companies asked if students could be taught proprietary software systems rather than the non-specific systems and languages that they were currently being taught. His reason was that once the students were taken on as employees, the companies had to retrain the students. Both academics’ view was that they could better educate the students by using more generic examples in order that they could learn principles and approaches rather than specific methods. Many of the other industrialists then joined the discussion and stated among other things that there was additional cost to them to retrain which they thought could be avoided. The two University representatives maintained their position and argued that the students were much better able to learn because of the approach they took and would continue to take.
In the following discussion we consider which of the challenges raised by the questions it is possible to address and how this might be possible. The level at which employers may wish to be involved in curriculum design is likely to vary between those who play a completely passive role and simply select an existing programme which the institution already offers, sending students to study in a traditional mode, and an employer who works with an institution to design a range of programmes to meet its particular needs. You may find that the level of employer involvement varies over time depending on work commitments and fluctuations in business. While one approach is not better than the other, it is likely to make it easier to extend your relationship and engage with an employer who takes some interest, however small, in curriculum design. Benefits include the outcome that the resulting programme will be relevant to the employer and students and it will be easier for the institution to prepare for future business with that employer by identifying wider needs for learning. Employer input to curriculum design can also improve programmes in an institution more widely. Those with responsibility for designing them gain greater insight into day to day workplace challenges which will inform any future curriculum design for work related programmes.

If you are keen to involve employers in curriculum design it should be fairly straightforward to address their anxieties. If they have limited time it would be possible to schedule meetings at their workplace, perhaps with an individual academic who could report back to full course team meetings. Employers can also be reassured that their ideas on content, delivery methodology or assessment strategy are particularly valuable and these can easily be rephrased into the format required by the approving body if the employer is concerned about the way they are expressed.

An institution’s anxieties about involving an employer in curriculum design can also be addressed though this may require changes that are more challenging. Just as the academic who works most closely with the employer on curriculum design may feel he/she is ‘translating’ the employer's ideas into a format that the institution understands, that person may also feel that he/she acting as a buffer between the employer and institutional systems and procedures. So if an employer wants, for example, to work with you to design a programme which sits at two different academic levels, you may need to negotiate your way through the institutional systems and procedures to see if it is possible. It is probably best to work from the premise that anything is worth a try but that in some cases the institution will not be able to meet the employer’s needs. Often you will be able to broker a compromise which will go some way to delivering the curriculum the employer wants but will sit within institutional systems.

Employers may want you to design a curriculum that is suited to their particular work environment; so for example, a call centre employer might want the content of a management programme to have a very strong focus on time management reflecting the importance this has in their own business. In these circumstances you may need to strive to find a balance between the design that feels bespoke for the employer but which has relevance for many different types of employers. You may find that you can offer the flexibility to give the customised feel at the level of delivery and assessment rather than in curriculum content.

One of the keys to successful employer involvement in curriculum design is to put yourself in their position. Probably their most pressing need is to secure learning, training and development for their employees which will make them do their jobs better. They are seeking this against a background of many other business imperatives which means that they will welcome a solution that delivers the learning that they want. If their input to the curriculum is a valuable use of their time to ensure the learning programme they get meets their needs as closely as possible, you are likely to find they are keen to be involved.

The way in which a programme is delivered will often make or break an employer’s decision about where to commission learning and development. Many will be under pressure to release employees for the minimum period of time from their day to day work for learning to reduce cost and disruption to the business. The next activity considers a variety of ways in which work-based learning can be taught, taking particular account of the support that will be needed by the tutor to deliver successfully in each case.
Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement
The purpose of this activity is to identify a range of ways in which work-based learning can be delivered, paying particular attention to how these might differ from teaching traditional students and the support tutors might need to deliver work-based learning successfully.

**Activity 2**

Models for work-based teaching

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**Example 1**

Students taught by lecture and seminar in groups from mixed employers. Work-based examples used to support learning.

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**Example 2**

Students taught in their own workplace with minimal time off the job. Real work used as a medium for teaching and learning. Context and environment of work used in teaching delivery.

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**Activity 2** represents a continuum of ways in which work-based learning can be delivered ranging from an example where students follow a traditional delivery model, attending the institution, but drawing learning from work-based examples, to a model where all teaching takes place at the workplace with minimal time away from the student’s job.

To start the activity you should consider other examples of work-based teaching and make a note of them at the appropriate place on the continuum represented on the above diagram.

**Resource sheet 2** shows some possible responses – you may want to compare your responses with these.
Examples

The two examples below will help you to get started with this. Once you have completed this part of the activity for each teaching model you have come up with (or using some of ours), you should think through what additional support a tutor might need to take account of the special demands of work-based teaching.

Example A

A large local employer sends a group of 15 students to a college to undertake a six month programme in first line management. The students attend college for two or three day blocks of study and are taught as one group. A team of tutors is responsible for their teaching, most of which is delivered by lecture or workshop. The tutors have a strong relationship with the employer, and each tutor is in regular contact with the HR representative of the employer. Tutors are supplied with support materials from the employer such as policy manuals about recruitment and selection and are asked to make use of these in their teaching where possible. Senior managers from the employer are invited in as guest speakers on the programme and while tutors tend to use generic learning activities in their workshops they are encouraged to apply them specifically to the working context of the employer. Assessment tasks are not specific to the individual employer – and all the tutors deliver and assess the same programme with mixed employer groups too – but tasks are specifically designed so that it is easy for students to use real work examples to support their assessed learning.

Example B

A global company manufacturing vehicles for the defence industry with business on multiple sites has enrolled 40 learners spread across six sites. A tutor with experience in the employer’s business area is explicitly allocated to the employer and travels to all six sites to deliver learning. The employer is keen that students spend as little time off the job for learning as possible so much of the delivery of learning is undertaken through coaching and mentoring by the tutor. Delivering this one programme to a single employer is a full time post for the tutor. The tutor is also responsible for all student support for these students and when she is not on any one of the particular sites offers students support by email and phone.
Resource sheet 2 provides a short guide to more detailed case studies from the Built Environment that illustrates different work-based teaching methods. The case studies have been gathered and reported as part of the Accelerating Change in the Built Environment Education Project (www.acbee.org).

The following discussion talks through some of the demands and the support you could consider offering. There is a wide variety of ways in which work-based learning can be delivered and in many cases, innovative delivery methods can attract an employer to your programme where they provide a solution to the operational problem of taking staff away from their work for training or learning. New approaches to delivery may require tutors to learn and demonstrate different skills and approaches and to do this successfully tutors will need support.

Tutors may need to manage differing levels of involvement with employers depending on the structure and design of the programme they are working on. It might be a useful approach to pair up a tutor with someone with business development or relationship management experience to support the tutor in building the relationship with the employer. Where an employer is sharing information with a tutor to support delivery the tutor may also need advice on issues such as maintaining confidentiality, especially where material they are using might be commercially sensitive. This might be sourced from the institution’s legal advisors.

A tutor who is teaching at a single employer may need a very different type of support from one working with students from lots of employers, especially if they are working on site. The tutor’s integration with the individual employer is likely to take place quite quickly. In this situation tutors may need additional support to stay connected to their institution hence the pre-arranged times may be hindered where they come in to meet up with other tutors doing similar roles. In addition, managers from the institutions may wish to visit them on site.

Where tutors are teaching at workplaces they may need support to manage practical issues that would not arise when teaching at an institution. They are likely to need to understand and adhere to workplace protocols which can range from wearing safety clothing on site to needing to have a CRB check in place in case they come into contact with vulnerable adults. Tutors may have to cope with disruption to the teaching and learning environment perhaps if they are working somewhere where emergency support may be needed and students have to leave the teaching environment suddenly to support colleagues. Tutors might also need help to establish communication systems especially where they are working through an employer’s IT system. This can certainly make it easier for tutors if they are aware of what is expected and supported practically and administratively where possible.

Since work-based learning is delivered in workplaces all of which differ from each other in some way, the tutor will quickly need to become adept at judging the demonstration of knowledge, skills and learning that manifests itself in very different ways. The breadth of understanding that this can generate will benefit the tutor, but until a certain level of experience is gained it is important to have a robust moderation system in place that supports a tutor’s assessment judgements.

It is especially important for a tutor who assesses the work of students at only one or two employers to be exposed to a much wider range of examples as part of the moderation process.

A working knowledge of the sorts of challenges and difficulties that can arise from the practicalities of delivering in a workplace environment can be particularly helpful for those designing a work-based curriculum. Activity 3 is based round three typical workplace scenarios – considering these and the potential problems associated with them should help those involved in design to avoid such pitfalls.
Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement

Work-based Learning

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The purpose of this activity is to highlight the challenges that can occur when delivering work-based learning in a variety of environments and to demonstrate how delivery and assessment methods can be adapted to meet unexpected workplace demands. The implications on curriculum design for such changes are also examined.

You should first consider each scenario either individually or in a small group and try to answer the questions.

There is rarely a definitive answer to such scenarios – and there are an infinite number of challenging situations generated by relating teaching closely to the workplace. Yet most challenges can be solved even within the sometimes strict parameters of university systems and procedures. The richness and relevance which students gain from their learning being closely related to their work should outweigh or at least match the effort needed to ensure the smooth delivery of work-based learning.

**Activity 3**

**Responding to the challenges of delivering in the workplace**

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**Scenario 1**

The BSc Construction Management offers work-based assessment for some elements of the programme where students are studying part-time and in employment. As a work-based tutor you have a group of five students all with the same company and you have planned for them to present their work on tendering to the Commercial Manager when he is on site. Your assessment of this presentation will count as part of their marks towards a level 1 module. The night before the Commercial Manager’s expected visit to the site one of your students calls you to say he/she has heard the Manager’s visit has been cancelled because he is working on a short notice tender at Head Office.

**Questions**

a. How does this scenario differ from the type of problem that might happen with traditional students?

b. What are the implications for the students?

c. What would you do in the short term (next 24 hours) and the longer term (next week)?
Response

a. All those working on assessment opportunities for students know that logistic problems can (and do!) happen at the last minute – the institutional IT system can crash hours before students are being assessed delivering a PowerPoint presentation for example. The fundamental difference in the work-based scenario is that in this case the tutor has little or no control over the situation. Since the core purpose of the Commercial Manager’s role is not the assessment of students but the day-to-day business of the organisation, you as the tutor may not even be directly informed that the visit is cancelled.

b. Potentially this could disrupt the assessment schedule for the students especially if the cancellation of the visit was because of an organisational challenge that means a similar meeting will not be rescheduled quickly. Students are likely to feel let down that the opportunity to present ideas to the Commercial Manager has not materialised – and it is important that this unavoidable situation does not taint their view of the programme. However, it is also important for them to be involved in suggesting contingencies as similar situations are likely to occur throughout their working career.

c. Damage limitation in this scenario is possible. It is probably going to be difficult to change the dates for submission of assessment tasks for marking to allow for the presentation to occur at a later site visit, so you will have to consider other assessment opportunities. It may be that students could present individually or in small groups if they have one-to-one’s scheduled with individual line managers. Otherwise you could organise for them to deliver to a manager who is on site all the time. There is also the option of them delivering to each other or a larger group of peers with you managing the process of peer feedback on their ideas. They could perhaps follow this with a summary written report of their ideas to the Commercial Manager. The adaptations in process and presentation methods that they have had to undertake to deal with the unexpected change in circumstances are likely to enhance what they present for assessment rather than detract from it.

Longer term it might be useful for you to talk to your contact in the organisation and identify whether there are opportunities for students to present their ideas to senior managers who are less susceptible to business imperatives and therefore more likely to go ahead.

“It is important not to allow logistic problems to put you off seeking real work opportunities for assessment”
Scenario 2
You are the work-based tutor for a group of students from three different locally based companies working in the construction sector. One of the tasks you have designed for your students asks them to present work from a real project, an aspect of which includes a review of forward financial planning. The group are particularly enjoying this task and the discussion is ranging widely when you suddenly realise students from different companies are sharing information about how their companies manage issues of the quality, time and cost in building to achieve the required profit margins. You realise that they may have shared commercially sensitive information about their own companies with people working for competitors.

Questions:

a. What is your first reaction? What actions would you take immediately?

b. Are there any implications for University processes and procedures?

c. How do you handle this with the employers involved?
a. This is a situation which arises quite frequently when working with employers and hopefully you will have considered how to maintain confidentiality when you planned the delivery of the programme to multiple employers. Perhaps you will have already signed a confidentiality agreement with employers or this might be part of a learning contract you have agreed with students. This scenario demonstrates that however careful you are in the commercially sensitive environment of work-based learning you need to be very alert to potential breaches of confidentiality. You will need to remind students that they should be aware of their responsibilities as employees as well as students and that they need to consider potential commercial sensitivities when they discuss their work with anyone outside their own organisation. This should be a good learning point for them as the situation might just as well have arisen outside the learning environment.

b. Implications for University processes and procedures could potentially be quite far reaching. It can be assumed that assignments submitted for assessment may also contain commercially sensitive material. Obviously the content of all assignments in the institution should be treated in confidence, but staff who deal with assignments should be reminded of the importance of maintaining confidentiality. If assignments are photocopied and copies stored it will be particularly important that all copies are accounted for.

Tutors who regularly deal with employers will probably be aware of the potential sensitivity of information but if you involve those who are less familiar with these demands at moderation they may need to be advised of the need for confidentiality. External examiners may also need to be reminded of this and may need to be made aware of the University confidentiality agreement if one is in use.

c. You will need to decide the best way to approach the situation in this scenario with employers. They will need to know what has happened and may need to remind their staff of commitments to confidentiality required by all employers. You might explain that in using real work for assessment the circumstances described in the scenario will always be a risk, but hopefully the benefits from the relevance of learning will outweigh potential problems. Their employees need to know about which aspects of their work are potentially commercially sensitive, not just in a learning environment. If you have not done so already it might be wise to go through future assignments with an employer representative to identify any potential areas of sensitivity and discuss how you might deal with these.

“Gaining a clear understanding of an employer’s business will make it easier to manage issues of confidentiality”
Scenario 3
You are module leader for a work-based module which is being delivered to a cohort of students ranging across several different employers. The programme is not customised for individual workplaces and most of the learning derives from generic scenarios or activities which students must then apply to their particular situations. You have been building a relationship with the Training Manager of one of the large employers who has 20 students on the programme and who you hope will want to enrol a much larger group next time. The 20 students from the single employer are taught in a discrete group.

However they are the only single employer group on the module – other groups are made up of students from a variety of employers. In your regular meetings with the Training Manager she mentions that several of her students tells you that they are having difficulty seeing the relevance of the teaching to their work.

Questions:

a. Is there anything you can do?

b. How would you manage this with other tutors on the module?
a. This is a difficult situation as you will be keen to address the concerns of the Training Manager, but will need to make sure that any changes you might consider to delivery or assessment must not provide unfair advantage to any of the groups of students undertaking the module. The challenge of this scenario gets to the heart of a key issue in employer engagement – how far can you flex what you deliver to meet the needs of clients? There is no definitive approach to this scenario, and any extra cost incurred by the suggestions below would have to be considered. It would be possible for the tutor teaching the group from the single employer to liaise with the Training Manager to source actual examples from the workplace to use in their teaching. There would be time implications for both the tutor and the Training Manager in this approach. The Training Manager might also be able to supply documentation to the tutor which could ensure that the terminology used about work are familiar to students. Even small language changes can help students to accept the relevance of examples used for teaching – for example do organisations refer to the people they deal with as customers, clients, or perhaps even patients? Using the wrong vocabulary can alienate students very easily. Although it may not be possible to change the assessment strategy of the module immediately there may already be a scenario or project based approach. In this case it might be possible for students from the single employer group to use a project from their own workplace or a scenario which is supplied by their Training Manager.

b. It is essential that the tutor of the single employer group keeps in close contact with the other module tutors to ensure the experience of all students is comparable. To aid this it might be possible for tutors to observe each other in action. Exposure to the delivery of a programme that is closely work-related may also support the tutors taking a more generic approach by introducing them to a broader bank of examples that they might use in their teaching.

“Simple changes can make a curriculum seem more relevant to learners - using their vocabulary, referring to their individual workplace policies and protocols or seeking individual examples from their own work”
To encourage employers to be involved in curriculum design you will need to take a flexible and creative approach, making sure any demands on them fit with the way they manage their business and workload.

There is a wide variety of work-based teaching methods and approaches that you can use ranging from those that refer to work-based examples to those that are delivered in the workplace. Using a range of methods can give programmes a bespoke feel for employers and although it can be demanding for tutors it can also broaden their range of skills and update and contextualise their practice.

The approach of each activity in this section encourages academic staff to consider the employer’s viewpoint in relation to the design and delivery of learning. This provides a climate conducive to developing rich and fruitful communication with employers about the needs of their employees and their business.

Delivering a curriculum at work can raise new challenges which are not normally encountered in more traditional learning circumstances. Using a combination of flexibility, thinking through potential challenges in advance and respecting the employer’s viewpoint can address almost all of these.
Designing and delivering a curriculum for employer engagement
The aims of this section are:

- To examine whether it is necessary to make current university approval and quality assurance (QA) systems more user-friendly for work-based learning and if so, consider how this might be achieved.
- To review the feasibility and implications of introducing change to QA and approval systems in a higher education environment.
- To consider how the approval process could be made quicker, more flexible and responsive while retaining strength and integrity.

Purpose, audience and rationale

The quality assurance process for work-based learning is often identified as presenting a barrier to engaging with employers. Approval processes can be characterised as being unresponsive to the timeliness and flexibility needed when seeking to meet demanding employer requirements and deadlines. This brief section acknowledges that large scale change of QA and approval systems for work-based learning, which is unlikely to form the majority of an organisation’s provision, is not feasible or desirable. Instead the section explores the possibilities and implications for small scale change, working both from the point of view of those whose responsibility it is to manage the quality assurance system as well as those who submit programmes for scrutiny.

This section of the pack is aimed at all those who are or might be involved with approving, monitoring or evaluating a work-based learning curriculum.

The section aims to foster an open minded viewpoint encouraging those who regularly approach the QA process from one point of view - for example from a regulatory perspective - to understand how it seems for others who approach it from a different direction. In this section we recognise that a change in practice may be needed from those who submit work-based learning programmes for approval as well in the approval system itself.
The activities in this section aim to encourage the reader on a straightforward and practical level. They focus on understanding why approval and quality assurance appear to present a particular challenge for work-based learning and promote solutions to typical problems, which may even affect the design of the curriculum.

**Activity 1** reviews and explores the challenges of QA considering two different standpoints. As a result of this activity we encourage you to define particular areas where a change in approach to the QA process might start to address challenges.

**Activity 2** takes a step by step approach to seek small-scale solutions to challenges, noting the feasibility of suggestions and also implications which range beyond those immediately involved in the process.

We start with a detailed case study which illustrates the process of taking a programme developed explicitly in response to employer demand through a university approval process.
Quality Assurance for work-based learning
Case Study

Employer-led MSc/PGDip in Construction Management

streamlining the approval process

This case study illustrates the type of demand employer-led curriculum design can place on a University Quality Assurance (QA) process, and how this can be accommodated. Several special arrangements had to be made to meet deadlines and deliver what the employer required in the timescales identified. The process has provided part of the stimulation for the development of a fast-track approval process – a good example of how a QA and approval process can become more flexible.

In June 2007 a project was started for the development of an employer-led MSc/PGDip in Construction Management.

The development work for the programme was funded by the North West Higher Level Skills Partnership (www.nwua.ac.uk/HLSP) – an external body – with two key aims:

- To demonstrate a response to an employer’s higher level skills need
- To respond in a timely fashion to the employer’s demand

At each point in its development a Steering Group was consulted to ensure that the programme remained true to the ideals of ‘demand-led’ provision.

Passage through the approval process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2007</td>
<td>Business case submitted to demonstrate the market need for new provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2007 – Sept 2007</td>
<td>Exceptional approval required to allow the programme to be advertised before approval completed ready for January 2008 start. As no Teaching and Learning Committee was sitting over the summer approval was gained by chair’s action recommended by the Associate Dean Teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2007 – Dec 2007</td>
<td>Documentation was prepared for approval, although some slippage occurred as a result of the programme being demand led. It took more time than anticipated to achieve ‘sign-off’ from employers – an important element of the funding conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2007</td>
<td>Programme was accepted and approved at the School Teaching and Learning Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An additional bespoke Programme Approval Review Sub-Committee was organised to undertake approval of the programme at Faculty level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2008</td>
<td>Programme was brought to the University Teaching and Learning Committee for approval. It was not approved initially on an issue relating to the relationship between full and part time modes of delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2008</td>
<td>A solution was proposed and approved by chair’s action allowing delivery to start in Feb 2008.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been positive impact for the University of Salford in that this was not solely about being able to offer a programme that delivered comprehensively on employers’ wishes, but also having shown the capacity to flex its systems. A new Fast Track approval and validation process has been designed by the Associate Deans Teaching for the University.
Activity 1
Taking into account different points of view

The purpose of this activity is to understand the variety of challenges associated with QA and approval for work-based learning and come to a position where all those involved in the process can work together to seek solutions. The activity looks at the ‘sticking points’ in relation to QA that affect different groups of people and considers whether changes ought to be made.

The activity encourages you to consider systems and procedures as well as ways of presenting work-based learning programmes for approval and asks you to think through whether change is a realistic possibility. Activity 1 helps to prepare for Activity 2 where the implications of making changes are explored. Although the quotes on Viewpoint 1 and 2 are not from specific individuals they reflect commonly expressed points of view which we hope you will recognise.

**Viewpoint 1** considers the perspective of an academic or person who is designing the work-based programme for which approval is sought

**Viewpoint 2** takes into account views of those who manage and administer the quality assurance and approval process – perhaps working in the Registry.

You should read through both of the viewpoints and consider the following two questions.

1. Should any changes be made to quality assurance and approval systems and procedures to respond to these challenges?

2. Could any changes to quality assurance and approval systems and procedures be made?

Then, taking into account the positions outlined on both sheets, identify whether there are any broad aspects of process where change might address the concerns expressed. For example an aspect you might want to consider could be ‘timing and frequency’ of the approval process.
Viewpoint 1: five key challenges
Presenting work-based learning for approval

1. ‘To meet the demands of employers we need flexibility around delivery methodology, assessment strategy and timing of delivery and assessment. The way we are handling the negotiation process with employers means that we may not be able to confirm our approach at the time we seek approval’

2. ‘Part of the QA and approval process refers to justifying our market for the programme. This is a typical chicken and egg scenario! Our employers will only confirm interest when they know what we are offering, but we can’t confirm our offer until it has been agreed through the approval process’

3. ‘The scheduling of the QA and approval process is designed for year long programmes which start in September and either last over a year or fit a fixed semester pattern. We need to be able to start our programmes for employers at any time during the year’

4. ‘The forms we have to complete are not designed for work-based learning so lots of the questions we have to complete are not really relevant. A small example of this is where we have to choose where teaching will take place from a drop down list – none of the choices are appropriate. In itself this probably doesn’t matter, but when the number of questions you can’t answer mounts up it can be frustrating and seem as though you are trying to thwart the process, which you aren’t’

5. ‘Sometimes the modules we design with employers don’t fit the established norms that exist as part of the approval process, so for example level two modules in some cases don’t have a pre-requisite because they are aimed at people with a specific level of job based experience. Our system expects all level two modules to have a pre-requisite at level one’

“There are certain principles that we need to adhere to, but often the pressures to get programmes approved quickly derive from attempting to meet the needs of employers within their timeframes”
Viewpoint 2: five key challenges
Approving work-based learning programmes

1. ‘The systems and processes that support the QA process are really important. They may seem bureaucratic but they are there to make sure all programmes approved meet a particular standard. We are often under a lot of pressure to flex systems for work-based learning especially where the University wants to attract large employers, but we need to maintain the systems for all programmes or the integrity of the whole system is threatened’

2. ‘One of the things we need to be sure of is that all students of the University are being offered a similar experience. So we need to know about things like access to the library and support for their health and welfare. We’re concerned that because work-based learning is often not delivered on campus these sorts of things may get forgotten for these learners’

3. ‘While we know that assessment opportunities need to be flexible for work-based learners we have to be sure that they are fair. This is important where different groups of students on the same module are doing different assessment tasks, but it is also critical in relation to regulations about extension, late submission and deferrals. It is a real challenge to achieve the flexibility needed but to make sure we keep the commitments which the University makes to all students’

4. ‘Where employers are involved in the assessment process in ways that might affect the outcome for a student we need to have ways of making sure that the employer is working at a particular standard. To ensure this we need to know as much as possible about the approach towards assessment before approving it’

5. ‘Some employers want programmes customised, but often the module descriptors which outline what goes into the programme are used by students from different employers and by students who are not in work at all. We need to check that even if delivery is customised the students from that employer have the same opportunities as those from different employers’

“In managing the QA process we want to be as flexible as possible, but we know that any amendments we do make need to be contextualised”
On first reading the wide difference in identified viewpoints might suggest that the only way to address the concerns expressed both by those seeking approval for programmes and those managing the QA system would be to alter the system radically. However this would be very difficult to do and would probably not be necessary. For most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), work-based learning is only a small part of their business, with traditional degree programmes still making up the majority of their provision. It is encouraging that some small scale changes to the way in which QA is approached for work-based learning may go a considerable way to making the process more flexible and responsive, yet retaining a clear commitment to the maintenance of quality and consistency in provision for all students. Some possible areas for change are explored below.

Timing of the approval process to include frequency and duration

In many HEIs the approval process is designed to fit around the traditional start of the academic year in September or October. The approval cycle may take a considerable period of time with programmes designed for delivery in September needing to enter the cycle as early as the preceding March. Often the process of approval is staged with periods of several weeks or even months required between each stage.

When HEIs identify that an employer has a learning need that cannot be met by an existing programme, academics will need to design a new programme which will require approval. Most employers will expect a swift response as the need they have identified is immediate. This means that to meet employers’ needs and use this to stimulate the design of new programmes, HEIs may need to devise systems that can react outside the traditional annual programme. The process from start to finish may also need to be completed more quickly. It is important to recognise that such changes will not only make demands on those managing the QA system, but also on academics designing programmes who may have to make changes or seek feedback on what they have written (perhaps from external advisors) over a shorter period of time. The above changes to both processes should be possible although there are wide ranging implications for workload. These are explored in Activity 2.

Design and completion of paperwork associated with the approval process

Most approval processes are based on the completion of a series of standard forms. Asking those submitting programmes for approval to complete these serves to standardise the system and also ensures that no critical information on aspects of the provision are left out. In an effort to make the process of completing such paperwork less onerous, and also sometimes to allow information received to be managed electronically alongside other record keeping systems, the options available for description of certain aspects of provision are inappropriate for work-based learning.

When submitting a proposal for a work-based programme, especially one that is delivered in the work-place rather than on campus, it is possible that several of the sections or questions from the approval process prove very difficult to answer - for example, the University may not have full control over the teaching facilities available for students. It is essential that such issues are not ignored – the facilities and resources that students have access to are a very important part of their learning experience - but the approval process should provide the option for explanations that might not necessarily fit the expected parameters of a traditionally delivered programme. It may take a little more time to consider varied approaches; but to accommodate the breadth of work-based provision and ensure the quality of the student experience it is essential. Of course, allowing such variety in response may have knock on effects on the electronic storage of such information once approval has taken place. If it is recorded in standardised fields the implications of this must be considered.

Discussion
Discussion

Flexibility in approval of delivery and assessment methods

It is often expected that by the time programmes are submitted for approval, clear decisions will have been taken about the way in which they will be delivered and assessed. This is entirely reasonable given the way in which the approval process applies to traditionally delivered programmes, and this advance knowledge can be essential to the smooth running of delivery, ensuring facilities and resources are available. In work-based learning delivery may be less traditional, perhaps shared between workplace and campus. The exact nature of delivery and assessment may depend on what is happening at an employer at any particular time – for example the exact nature of a work-based project may depend on capturing the business of a particular customer.

It is important for those considering the programme for approval to be clear about how delivery and assessment are planned, but it may be possible to allow flexibility of certain elements within a framework to allow the variations necessary to meet the needs described above.

The discussion above suggests that some changes to systems are necessary to ensure that the non-traditional nature of work-based learning does not drive it outside the current parameters for approval nor constrain it so much that what a University can offer is unattractive to employers. However in an organisation as large and complex as an HEI, even the small changes that might be required have considerable implications that range widely across personnel and departments.
Quality Assurance for work-based learning
Activity 2
Resolved the tensions: small scale solutions to procedural issues

This activity follows on from Activity 1 and encourages you to consider how you might make change happen in relation to the QA and approval system for work-based learning. It starts from the position that large scale change is unlikely to be possible and seeks to identify small scale changes. The activity also seeks to avoid the position that the only aspect of the process which should change is the QA and approval system. You are also asked to consider if QA and approval could be made easier by changes to the way academics present their programmes.

Moving on from the key areas that were identified for comment as a result of Activity 1 you will have the opportunity to consider each area in more detail and assess the practical implications of implementing change. One of the challenges of implementing any change in an HEI can be the number of different areas that are affected by each change. A key part of the activity asks you to consider who within the University might be involved in each of the proposed changes.

Firstly you need to review the aspects of the QA and approval process that you identified as needing a change in approach as a result of your consideration of the comments on viewpoints 1 and 2. In the discussion we considered the three following issues - but you can add more:

- Timing of the approval process to include frequency and duration
- Design and completion of the paperwork associated with the approval process
- Flexibility in approval of delivery and assessment methods

You then need to take each of these issues and try to break them down into a series of actions that might deliver the changes you were looking for. So if you were addressing timing of the approval process you might identify the following actions:

- More frequent meetings of approval panels
- Approval panels scheduled throughout summer periods
- Reduction in time between stages of approval

As you do this, remember that these actions will require changes to both the QA process and from academics presenting programmes - for example a reduction in the time between approval stages will only make a difference if the revisions to programmes can be made in time to meet shorter deadlines.

For each of the proposed actions you should then try to identify who in the HEI might be affected - so more frequent approval panels will have implications for the academics who sit on the panels as well as those who administer them. If the implications you identify seem too onerous you might suggest another solution - perhaps the panels could draw from a wider range of academics to reduce the workload for a smaller group.

Finally for each action you should judge how ‘do-able’ you think it is in your understanding of the context of QA in your organisation. You can award it red, amber or green depending on your judgement.
The following table shows a worked example to help you get started and Resource sheet 3 provides more detailed information on the three issues identified here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge/issue</th>
<th>Possible changes/activities</th>
<th>Personnel affected</th>
<th>Do-able?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timing of the approval process to include frequency and duration</td>
<td>Approval panels may need to be held more frequently or even on demand</td>
<td>Academics. There could be a series of ‘teams’ to lighten approval load</td>
<td>Amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval panels may need to be planned outside traditional semester or annual cycle</td>
<td>Registry staff administering approval. There shouldn’t be much more work, but certainly more meetings</td>
<td>Amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A framework ‘module’ for work-based learning may need to be given outline approval in advance</td>
<td>Registry staff. More complex logistically</td>
<td>Amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval panels may need to take place during the summer months</td>
<td>Academics who are experts in work-based learning (probably cross faculty) will need to write module</td>
<td>Amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design and completion of the paperwork associated with the approval process</td>
<td>Academics would need to be available for panels</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility in approval of delivery and assessment methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Assurance for work-based learning

Learning points

Small scale change to the QA and approval systems may be all that is needed to support the development of work-based learning programmes. Such changes are probably more feasible in a Higher Education Institution than radical change and can often be introduced with minimum disruption.

Before any change is implemented careful consideration should be given to the implications for all systems and procedures as well as the workload for those operating them. In a complex organisation such as a University these are likely to be far reaching and while they should not prove an impediment they will need to be considered.

To develop a more flexible and responsive system of approval will require change from those administering the system as well as those submitting programmes to it. If timescales are shortened to speed up the process, this will mean that those submitting programmes may need to complete substantial preparatory work more quickly.

It may be useful to develop a core group of academics and those administering the QA and approval process who have an expert knowledge of the challenges of QA for work-based learning. This will ensure that there is expert advice on hand for those developing work-based learning programmes.
The aims of this section are:

- To review the variety of skills, learning, knowledge and understanding that work-based learning might generate for assessment
- To explore ways in which assessment strategies can be designed to mesh with workplace practices
- To consider the implications of using real work for assessment from the point of view of the employee/student, the employer and the HEI
- To examine ways of extending the scope of existing or traditional assessment methodology to accommodate work-based learning

Purpose, audience and rationale

This section provides practical advice on all aspects of undertaking assessment in the workplace. Although in most cases the underlying principles for assessment in the workplace are the same or very similar to assessment for campus-based students, the practicalities of managing assessment in a workplace can expose some unexpected issues. Just as with traditional students, the assessment process can prove both challenging and unnerving for those who have not studied for some time or lack confidence in their written skills. Employers and managers can also place considerable emphasis on the results of the assessment process as a measure of the success of their workforce. In these circumstances it is vitally important that the process runs smoothly.

We hope this section will be useful for any academic staff tasked with designing work-based assessments. It should also be informative for business development staff who might discuss work-based assessment with potential clients.

Undertaking assessment in the workplace can provide motivation for teaching staff to develop innovative modes of assessment, looking beyond the traditional essays and written assignments. When designing assessments for the workplace a useful starting point can be the work that students are already carrying out as part of their day to day role. Using this type of opportunity for assessment can help to increase the confidence of an anxious student as you are judging them in an environment where they probably feel assured. Employers are also keen to make efficient use of their employees’ time - often the most frequent complaint they receive from their employees is that assessment takes up too much of their own time. However, when considering the work that students already do for assessment it is essential to ensure that you are not simply asking them to demonstrate what they already know or can do. Assessment in the workplace should also be a developmental experience.
The three activities in this section aim to advise on ways in which workplace assessment can be used developmentally, inspiring you to try new approaches which are relevant and interesting for students and allow you to make fair judgements of their progress. The activities also focus on tips and techniques for ensuring the practical aspects of assessment run smoothly.

**Activity 1** looks at ways of generating assessment opportunities from real work, which considers the challenges raised by this approach and suggests ways to address them. An example of an assessment brief for a real work task is also included.

**Activity 2** focuses on the practicalities of using real work for assessment and provides a useful checklist of traps, tips and techniques for those designing assessment tasks.

**Activity 3** considers how best to manage the process of assessment with employers, exploring typical concerns and responses. This activity also suggests effective ways of communicating with employers about assessment.

A case study is included which demonstrates how an assessment opportunity has been constructed by referring explicitly to the challenges of real work for project managers.
The MSc in Construction Management programme was initiated to answer a specific call for demand led education in the built environment. This aims to provide the educational component of a NVQ Level 5 that supports the attainment of the managerial/professional Construction Skills Certification Scheme. Risk and Finance Management is one of the six 30 credit modules. It is authored in such a way to demonstrate the students have an understanding of these NVQ elements. Module tutors utilised various approaches to support student learning:

- Formal contact time through weekly online virtual sessions and three workshops
- Ongoing real time constructive support and formative feedback

MSc Construction Management students are construction/project managers and have various levels of knowledge and experience regarding their current projects and access to company specific information. They are familiar with risk management and financial performance in the construction stage. However, one of the learning outcomes of this module is to equip students with knowledge and capabilities in pre-contract risk and finance, which requires experience slightly different from the post-contract period. The notion that ‘project managers may not need pre-contract experience’ was correctly dismissed straight-away by training coordinators of construction firms who were involved in this programme.

Hence, assessment for this module was designed to examine work-based and tacit knowledge by setting-up a simulated assessment which could be easily constructed with situated work-based information.

### Setting the assessment brief

The assessment brief is set on a live project, BBC’s move to Media City, inviting students to submit a bid to construct and operate a staff residence. As part of the assessment brief, students are asked to perform an interim presentation to a panel of academics and industry practitioners on market analysis, site selection, development plan, construction cost and initial risk appraisal. Modifications and other proposals are laid out by the panel to progress further into the bid submission. Students are then asked for the final submission at the end of the 15th week, in the form of a detailed bid document covering above mentioned areas and financial appraisal with the evidence of financial decision making together with advice to the client.

### Work-based assessment

This assessment urged students to use knowledge gained from problem solving activities during the workshops, learning packages and relevant literature synthesis. By this, students are expected to develop practical capabilities and reflective practice to initiate and implement change. Advice to the client and interim presentation are set to improve the ability to analyse and critically evaluate situations and proposals with established and creative thinking. Students noted live project, involvement of industry practitioners and formative problem solving workshops as the critical interest factors of this assessment.

This assessment is a valuable way of harnessing the learning opportunities provided by the workplace to award HE credit. It ensures that students are able to contextualise their learning, deepening their understanding.
Activity 1
Generating assessment opportunities from work

The purpose of Activity 1 is to encourage you to think through how the things people do at work can provide legitimate opportunities for assessment. The activity aims to broaden the types of work you might consider asking a student to present for assessment, by taking account of the work they are already doing or are about to do as part of their job. The second part of the activity aims to explore the legitimacy of workplace assessment and respond to the (fair) criticism that simply presenting evidence of what a student can already do does not demonstrate learning. In this section you are encouraged to challenge a work-based assessment task and review where the potential pitfalls lie both in setting the assessment and judging the results.

The activity concludes with consideration of a written brief for a work-based assignment with the opportunity to review the level of detail required to ensure a thorough understanding of the workplace task.

To get started on this activity first you should consider the following learning outcome. This is one of several learning outcomes for a Project Management module that is being offered at level 1 and includes delivery and assessment in the workplace.

By the end of the module students will be able to prepare a project plan for a small team of people and monitor their progress against it.

Either on your own or in a small group you should note down what a person who had a job in project management could produce from their own work to show that they had achieved this outcome. Try to focus on what they might produce as a part of their work rather than what they might write specifically for assessment.

We came up with the following ideas:

- The project plan itself
- A presentation of the project plan to team members
- Objectives set for team members which help them to make progress towards the plan
- Individual reviews (like appraisals) for team members’ progress against the plan
- A report detailing progress against the plan for a line manager

Below is an example of how an assessment task could be constructed to meet the learning outcome, which takes into account the everyday work of someone in a project manager’s role.

For their assessment task students are asked to submit a project plan that covers an aspect of their work that can be completed in approximately one month. As well as the project plan they are asked to submit a review of progress after two weeks and one month.

For the final part of the assessment they are required to prepare a report for either their team or their line manager on their progress against the plan. This report must include a section which evaluates the project planning techniques and the approach they chose and a review of what they would do differently next time.
Using what people do at work to provide opportunities for assessment is not without its challenges and it is essential that people with responsibility for devising workplace assessments are alert to these. In relation to the example above, or your own example of assessment in the workplace, you should consider the questions and try to respond to them. Our ideas follow.

**Questions**

a. How could you ensure an assessment activity, using some of the things people do at work, enabled student learning rather than just benchmarking what they could do already?

b. What would be the challenge in describing the assessment task to students?

c. What challenges might there be in grading what students submitted for assessment?

d. What challenges might the variation in the context provide in setting and judging the assessment task?
Response

a. At level 1 a good way of ensuring the assessment activity is driving learning is to require the student to engage in some way with the material they are presenting for assessment. There are a variety of ways you could do this:

- Ask the student to review or evaluate the activity or work they have done. For an inexperienced student you may need to point out how to do this perhaps asking them to explain what they would have done differently if they had to do it again.

- Set a task where the student needs to disseminate information about part of what they have done. You can increase the complexity of this activity by stipulating the audience – or perhaps asking a student to refer to two different audiences such as peers or a line manager. You may find that the student has to present to their line manager anyway as part of the normal reporting procedure of work.

- Ask the student to break the activity down into stages or a sequential process and review whether they could improve the process by working through the stages in a different order or placing different emphasis on particular stages.

b. It is essential that the way the assessment task is described to students is clear and unambiguous. You will also need to write the task in a way which is generic enough to accommodate a variety of working contexts. Achieving this balance between specific and general can be tricky, but is possible. The aim is to write a brief which seems inviting to students but generates the minimum of questions about what to do from students. We have included an example as Resource sheet 4. This is by no means a perfect example and you might like to review it to identify areas where a student might question or need more clarity.

c. You may find that the level of thought, understanding and analysis demonstrated in a student’s work is far in advance of the way in which they express themselves. This often happens because students have a great deal of experience and expertise in their jobs but little experience of writing for assessment, especially where they need to conform to the norms of writing for Higher Education. Once alerted to this challenge, tutors assessing such work can make clear decisions by referring to the learning outcomes and the extent to which each student’s work meets them. The opportunity for tutors marking such work to talk to each other and share experiences, either formally through moderation or informally is vital. You might want to consider using broad grading bands, especially at level 1 as it may be particularly challenging (and also unnecessary) to make fine decisions between pieces of work that differ widely in context.

d. When devising workplace assessments, especially for a group from different employers, it is likely that the context of the assessment will vary widely. If you are using real work for assessment, a project plan for one organisation may look very different from one used in another. Unless you are assessing a very specific method of planning it should be possible to write the assessment brief to accommodate different approaches, but this situation will encourage those setting the assignment to focus on exactly what the student is required to demonstrate rather than the size and shape of the assignment. Resource sheet 4 provides an example of how this can be achieved.
Activity 2
Using real work for assessment: traps, tips and techniques

Activity 2 is designed to examine the practical pitfalls that may occur in the delivery of workplace assessment for the student, the employer and the HEI. The activity is solution focused and should help those new to workplace assessment avoid some typical problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Potential problem</th>
<th>Possible solution</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. For traditional HE assessments written work usually has a word limit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. University requires electronic submission of all assessments but some of the material students wish to present cannot be submitted electronically (e.g. large scale A1 site plans)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Students may wish to use work for assessment that they have created as part of a team. They can be unsure of whether they are allowed to do this and if they are, how they should record which elements of the work they are responsible for</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Students using real work for assessment may be tempted to include information of a confidential nature or information which is commercially sensitive for their organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. ‘Live’ documents that students complete while working (for example records of a patient history) may be less perfectly presented than those prepared for a simulated scenario. Students may wish to submit the original as part of their assessment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In this table, we have identified several issues that workplace assessment can highlight in a typical Higher Education assessment system. If you or your team are experienced in workplace assessment, you may want to work through these issues and describe the solutions that you have identified. For those who are less experienced in this area or those who require a quick reminder of how such issues could be resolved, Resource sheet 5 provides our solutions. As you can imagine, some problems seem intractable, and for these we have been reduced to suggesting a ‘workaround’!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Potential problem</th>
<th>Possible solution</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F. An organisation has several students studying a particular module, all of whom are preparing a work activity for assessment. A sudden and unexpected change in business priorities means that all these students must stop doing the activity which they were intending to present for assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. The real work that the student presents for assessment is at widely varying levels with some written elements struggling to achieve the required standard of written communication, but including evidence of thought processes and skills that are well above the required level</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>H. The student fails their University assessment but has provided a piece of work for assessment which has achieved the required level of performance in the workplace</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity 3
Managing the process of assessment in the workplace

When you take the decision to include workplace assessment in your programme employers are likely to be reassured by the way in which this makes explicit the relevance of the teaching and learning activities to their workforce and their business imperatives. However, using workplace assessment you may also feel that you raise the stakes for you and your team. The employers you are working with will be engaged with the assessment process, but that also means they may question and challenge the process too.

The first part of this activity aims to highlight the type of questions employers might ask and how you might respond. The second part of the activity recognises that the way in which you convey information to employers is important. Universities have a reputation with employers for spending a lot of time writing and using ten words when one would do! This short section provides tips for communicating successfully with employers in relation to assessment.

Example

What has a 7,000 word assignment got to do with my job? Why can’t I do something that is more relevant?

Both employers and learners often struggle to see the relevance of academic assessment to work place activity. The size and nature of material requested for academic assessment can often create a barrier for the uninitiated. It is very important to ensure that employers ‘buy in’ and understand the method of assessment. With some imagination it is possible to align assessments so that they focus on activity that is already taking place in, or is useful to, the workplace. For example, if a student is presenting an assessment on project management they can base the work on the structures within the company where they work.

The resulting material can have a real impact within their organisation and help make it clear to line managers and directors the value of the educational journey that their employee is undergoing. When aligned with workplace activity reaching the word limit is often not the problem but staying under it! When the learner can see the direct relevance of their academic studies to their practice the learning is often more complete and carried out with more enthusiasm.
### Communicating with employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer comment</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I've got some people who aren’t pulling their weight at work - they’ll fail the assignments I expect’</td>
<td>This may not be the case – it is quite possible for people to do very well in assignments even though their employer perceives them to be under-performing at work. Conversely students who are great performers at work may also fail assignments. It is important to explain how this may happen at an early stage to employers and also tactfully remind them that the assessment process will not act as a tool to identify or rectify underperformance at work – though of course it may be useful as a supporting measure if other tools are also in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘One of my students hasn’t submitted their first assignment - can he just carry on anyway?’</td>
<td>This will depend on the HEI’s policy. If the student can continue it will be essential to explain the implications to the student and the employer, especially in terms of any award the student might miss out on. You will also need to consider the effect this might have on other students who might be struggling - news travels fast when all the students are with the same employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I intend to report all students’ individual marks at the directorate meeting to motivate them to do well’</td>
<td>You will have some tricky issues to consider about who actually gets to hear what marks students get. Should their employer know what marks they have got for individual assignments especially if they are paying for the programme? You will need to check whether the enrolment form and documentation makes any comment on this and ensure it is in line with what you decide to do. Your organisation may already have a policy on this for sponsored students. You might also want to talk to your employer representative to consider whether this will really motivate students or whether a slightly less detailed reporting process might be more effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Do our students have to do the assignments - can’t we just do the learning?’</td>
<td>Again this will be decided by your HEI’s policy but as funding is often attached to the completion of assessments students may have to complete them. Employers will often be supportive of this if they understand the funding rules. Also if assessments are relevant to the workplace and the process is handled efficiently this will ease employers’ anxieties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I would like our students to get feedback on their assignments within two weeks of submitting them’</td>
<td>You will know if this is possible within your organisation’s system. You will need to be aware that this timescale may be considerably shorter than other tutors are expected to achieve with traditional students. You may need to explain the importance in terms of employer relationships to tutors who are having to meet the short timescales.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communicating with employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer comment</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘If our students aren’t on site how will they submit their assignments and get them back?’</td>
<td>Individual arrangements will depend on particular circumstances but you may need to rely on internal or external postal services if electronic submission is not an option. This may have implications for return of assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Two students have told me they really want to do the programme but are worried about their written English. They are also worried that their colleagues will find out and they don’t want them to know’</td>
<td>Clearly your organisation will want to offer support, but this may have to be done discreetly. It is very important to understand that students may have a genuine anxiety that asking for help might adversely affect their career prospects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The University pass mark is 40% but we’d like the pass mark for our students to be 55%’</td>
<td>This may be an employer request which you simply cannot comply with. In this case you can only offer them an explanation for why this cannot happen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tips for providing employers with information about assessment**

The success or otherwise of ensuring employers understand these messages depends considerably on your own skill in communicating with them. Below are some tips on best practice in communicating with employers:

1. In providing information you will need to keep a balance between ensuring employers have all the information they need but keeping your documentation brief and easy to read - universities have a reputation for being long winded!

2. Choose your language carefully - clarity and brevity are both vital and it is important not to assume any knowledge of Higher Education systems or acronyms

3. Employers really only need to know about HEI systems and procedures associated with the assessment process where they touch them

4. If the documentation you are providing is to be circulated within the employer organisation you may need to have it checked by the employer representative you are dealing with first. The employer may have style or branding rules which they want you to adhere to

5. Do everything possible to get all the information about assessment right first time. There is a often tension between waiting to finalise arrangements and the need for early information - but it is vital not to give information that will later have to be changed

6. Be sure you can keep your promises about things like feedback time or systems for submission and return of assignments

7. If there are rules associated with assessment that cannot be flexed under any circumstances tell the employer - so long as there aren’t too many they will be likely to accept this as they will have rules like this too in their business

8. Be clear about what support the employer will need to offer to students - starting with a minimum and working up to levels of support which are more demanding for the employer

9. In all written documents you should be sure to make clear that you understand the priority that business imperatives must take.
Learning points

When designing work-based assessment it is always useful to review the work students are currently doing in their jobs. You may be able to provide opportunities for assessing their real work, but even if it is not possible or appropriate to do this, your understanding of their work environment should enable you to ensure the relevance of scenarios or activities you use for assessment.

If you are able to make opportunities to assess real work, this will provide an efficient use of time for students and their employers.

When you deliver assessment in the workplace you may experience certain practical challenges. Almost all of these can be overcome, but careful planning to avoid problems escalating is essential. The assessment process is an area likely to cause anxiety for students and employers – the more smoothly it runs the more positive your relationship with an employer (and your students) is likely to be.

Any communication with employers about assessment needs to be clear, jargon-free and absolutely accurate.
Further reading

This reading list is designed to suggest seminal reports, texts and articles that are relevant to the topics.

**Seminal Reports**


**A good place to start**


or


Both of these texts comprise a series of articles about workplace learning which are relevant and accessible and also useful for further references. Even though both books are now nearly 10 years old many of the contributors are still writing in this field. They also demonstrate that until recently a key location of work-based learning research was Australia, although now the UK seems to be catching up.
Further reading

Academic arguments around learning by doing - how is it different?


These two texts explore (in a very readable way) the way in which learning as you work differs from developing knowledge in other ways.

Effect of workplace context on how you learn, including situated learning

The idea of situated learning is first explored by Lave and Wenger.


Other relevant articles


Resource Sheets
Resource sheet 1
Involving employers in curriculum design and delivery

How far should employers be involved in curriculum design?

Does employer involvement in curriculum design raise issues concerning accredited knowledge?
- Employer may want practical skills accredited alongside knowledge and learning, this can challenge the system.
- Judgement about implicit experience of employees. Can credit be offered for experience?
- Might feel academics from institution are more knowledgeable than them.

What anxieties might an employer have about being involved in curriculum design?
- Might not think it's their job - institutions should take full responsibility.
- Concerned about the commitment, especially leaving work to attend meetings.
- Might not understand rules, protocols or language of an academic programme.

What implications for curriculum design might delivering in the workplace have?
- Workplace delivery may need flexible strategy.
- Might need flexibility between workplace and classroom.
- Challenge of access to resources.
- Different ways of delivering support may be needed.
- Size and shape may be affected. The way topics are covered in the workplace may not fit a modular structure.

What anxieties might an employer have about being involved in curriculum design?
- Employer might suggest service requirements an institution can't meet.
- Employer might want something an institution can't offer.
- Employer might want something so individualised that it cannot be produced economically.
- Employer might want something an institution can't offer.
- Employer you are talking to might not be representative.

In what ways could an employer be involved in curriculum design?
- Have a representative on the programme design team.
- Make a recommendation on how they would like programme to be assessed.
- Suggest how programme might be delivered.
- Advise on content they would like to see covered.

If an employer wants a customised or bespoke curriculum, how might this be accommodated?
- Customised programme could be produced for an individual employer if they were prepared to meet the cost.
- The look of the programme could be customised for example co-branded materials.
- Certain elements of programme might be customisable.
- Employer might want something so individualised that it cannot be produced economically.

Can credit be offered for experience?
- Have a representative on the programme design team.
- Make a recommendation on how they would like programme to be assessed.
- Suggest how programme might be delivered.
- Advise on content they would like to see covered.

In what ways could an employer be involved in curriculum design?
Resource sheet 2
Models for work-based teaching - Examples

[A] Some modules team taught through traditional workshops, lectures and seminars but also supervised by placement tutors who work closely with employers.

[B] Distance learning supported by virtual ‘real time’ tutorials and tutor contact by email.

[C] Tutors teach students from a single employer in small groups off the job.

[D] Student presents examples of work for assessment by tutor against generic work based outcomes.

[E] Students taught in their own workplace with minimal time off the job. Real work used as a medium for teaching and learning. Context and environment of work used in teaching delivery.

[F] Students taught by lecture and seminar in groups from mixed employers. Work-based examples used to support learning.

[G] Project Based Module. Theory based and generic but applied to large scale real work project topic (simulated or situated).

[H] On-line teaching customised to individual employer. On-line tutor teaching employees from several companies at any one time.
# Resource sheet 2
## Models for work-based teaching - Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>ACBEE phase</th>
<th>Main collaborator</th>
<th>ACBEE case study title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>University of Salford</td>
<td>BSc Construction Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>Loughborough University</td>
<td>Centre for Innovative Construction Engineering (CICE)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>Sheffield Hallam University</td>
<td>Short Industrial Work Placements</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>University of Salford</td>
<td>NWDA - Constructing Excellence in the NW</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>University of Bath</td>
<td>Distance Learning Collaboration in South Africa</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>Northumbria University</td>
<td>Foundation Degree in Building Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>University of Central England</td>
<td>'APEX' Reflective Practice for Housing Practitioners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>Ulster University</td>
<td>Construction Professional Development Programme</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>Manchester Business School</td>
<td>The Styles &amp; Wood Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>University of Reading</td>
<td>Construction Cost Management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>Napier University</td>
<td>Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Contracting Management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>The Bartlett</td>
<td>MSc Interdisciplinary Management of Projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
<td>Constructionarium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase three</td>
<td>The Hanazhogschool, Groningen (Netherlands)</td>
<td>The European Challenge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phase two</td>
<td>Queens University, Belfast</td>
<td>Disasters and Hazards Exercise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>Edinburgh University</td>
<td>Health and Safety Management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>University of Abertay Dundee</td>
<td>Undergraduate Construction Skills Application</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>University of Salford</td>
<td>Project Management (BAE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refer to [www.acbee.org](http://www.acbee.org) for detailed case studies.
## Resource sheet 3
### Resolving the tensions: small scale solutions to procedural issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge/issue</th>
<th>Possible changes/activities</th>
<th>Personnel affected</th>
<th>Do-able?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing of the approval process to include frequency and duration</strong></td>
<td>Approval panels may need to be held more frequently or even on demand</td>
<td>Academics. There could be a series of ‘teams’ to lighten approval load</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval panels may need to be planned outside traditional semester or annual cycle</td>
<td>Registry staff administering approval. There shouldn’t be much more work, but certainly more meetings</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A framework ‘module’ for work-based learning may need to be given outline approval in advance</td>
<td>Registry staff. More complex logistically</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval panels may need to take place during the summer months</td>
<td>Academics who are experts in work-based learning (probably cross faculty) will need to write module</td>
<td><strong>Green</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design and completion of the paperwork associated with the approval process</strong></td>
<td>Academics writing work-based learning programmes could identify ‘pinch points’</td>
<td>Academics who are work-based learning experts</td>
<td><strong>Green</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rather than changing forms, guidance notes for work-based learning programmes could be prepared</td>
<td>Academic and registry staff with previous experience of submitting work-based learning programmes for approval</td>
<td><strong>Green</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional points added to drop-down lists or standard guidance to accommodate work-based learning issues</td>
<td>Registry staff</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member of registry staff to act as specialist advisor for work-based learning</td>
<td>IT staff who design templates</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Registry staff</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>HR staff to offer staff development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibility in approval of delivery and assessment methods</strong></td>
<td>Framework module could be approved in advance which states outline parameters for delivery and assessment allowing flexibility within these parameters</td>
<td>Academics who are experts in work-based learning, (probably cross faculty) will need to write module</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement that detail of delivery and assessment methods can be approved at School/Faculty level after main approval process</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Committee</td>
<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Example of assignment brief for work-based assessment

**This assignment must be submitted by 24th July 2008**

### Introduction
This assignment requires you to demonstrate what you have learned about project planning and techniques for monitoring your own progress and the progress of other people at work against that plan. You are asked to select an aspect of your current work where you are using a project plan to drive a particular activity. You are then asked to review progress against it and analyse how you might improve your planning and monitoring techniques in future. What you need to do is explained in more detail below.

### Presenting your assignment
- Please put your name and the name of your organisation on each sheet of paper
- Please remember to retain a copy of the assignment
- You should consider confidentiality when submitting the assignment – do you need to remove names of people or organisations?
- Your assignment should be printed and submitted as a hard copy. Where possible your assignment should be typed but it is acceptable to submit handwritten or photocopied documents if these are what you used for project planning
- Where the assignment brief has more than one task please remember to make clear which piece of work relates to which task

### What you need to do

#### TASK 1 - Project Plan

a. First you should select an aspect of your work where you are using a project plan to drive and monitor a particular activity
   - This should be a plan where you expect to see results over a time period no greater than one calendar month
   - If you regularly work on large scale project plans you may need to select a small part of a larger scale plan to ensure you can see some progress within a month
   - The plan you choose should cover work which involves people other than yourself. For this task you should submit the plan you are using for assessment

b. You will need to show on your plan what progress has been made towards completion after two weeks and again after one month

c. You will need to make clear how you have monitored progress against the plan - you could do this by annotating the plan or writing a short paragraph to submit with the plan

d. You should also record any changes you had to make to your plan to cope with unexpected circumstances – again you could do this by annotating the plan itself or in an additional paragraph

#### TASK 2 - Reporting on progress and evaluating your approach

For this task you need to prepare a report about how you designed and implemented the plan
- This can be either for your line manager or for your project team
- You should make clear who your audience is and ensure you adapt what you write to suit your audience
- Your report must include a section which evaluates the project planning techniques and approach you chose and also a section which reviews what you would do differently next time you planned a project of this nature
- Your report should not exceed 500 words

### Assessment criteria
Your assessment will be judged against the following criteria
- The clarity and feasibility of your project plan
- The demonstration of your understanding of planning techniques and techniques for monitoring progress
- The quality of your evaluation of your choice of techniques for planning and analysis
- The communication skills used in your report

### Relevant learning outcomes
Assessment tasks for the module are designed so that you can demonstrate how you meet the learning outcomes. Below the learning outcomes that are the focus of this assessment are identified
- To prepare a project plan for a small team of people and monitor progress against it
- To evaluate a variety of planning techniques and assess their suitability for particular outcomes
- To communicate a rationale for choices of techniques taking into account the needs of different audiences
### Resource sheet 5
Using real work for assessment: traps, tips and techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Potential problem</th>
<th>Possible solution</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. For traditional HE assessments written work usually has a word limit</td>
<td>If students are using real work they may supply documents from their work as part of their assessment which are longer than the word limit. If students consistently supply lengthy documents, marking time for tutors will be considerably increased.</td>
<td>A word limit can be used for sections where students are creating documents purely for assessment - for example a reflective account or analysis. Where students refer to lengthy documents they can be encouraged to take a copy and annotate to show which areas are particularly relevant to the assessment criteria. Another option is to ask them to reference particular sections of a longer document in a reflective account.</td>
<td>Encouraging students’ ability to select real work examples which demonstrate knowledge, understanding or skill is particularly important as it develops their own ability to identify what is relevant to the assessment criteria.</td>
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<td>b. University requires electronic submission of all assessments but some of the material students wish to present cannot be submitted electronically (e.g. large scale A1 site plans)</td>
<td>This may cause several knock-on problems if copies of assessments are moved to tutors through an electronic system, potentially increasing the amount of time for marking to be completed. Depending on how rigid the University system is, the only solution may be to deal with real work assignments that cannot be submitted outside it. In many cases the problem can be solved by scanning in documents that exist in hard copy, but for very large documents or perhaps written material that must remain in situ, this can be impossible. The University will probably need to decide to advise either hard copy submission or electronic submission as a combination of the two could cause confusion.</td>
<td>Ensuring students keep a full copy of assignments for themselves is especially important in case a hard copy gets lost in transmission. You will also need to agree a policy for return of documents in case copies need to be returned to work – even if only to be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.</td>
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<td>c. Students may wish to use work for assessment that they have created as part of a team. They can be unsure of whether they are allowed to do this and if they are, how they should record which elements of the work they are responsible for</td>
<td>Although the University may already offer advice on this situation to students, shared responsibilities in the workplace can be more complicated than for traditional group assignments such as presentations. It is vital that work-based students are able to use work derived from teams without risking the accusation of plagiarism. It is important that students are not put off using material that has been created at work by a team in which they played a role. Often some of the work which develops their thinking and skills most effectively is team work. Students should be encouraged to articulate their part in any activity and each assessment should have an element which is completed by the individual. Should similar assignments be submitted from two or more students working in the same workplace it is important to investigate the circumstances carefully before assuming any plagiarism.</td>
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# Resource sheet 5

## Using real work for assessment: traps, tips and techniques

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<td><strong>d. Students using real work for assessment may be tempted to include information of a confidential nature or information which is commercially sensitive for their organisation</strong></td>
<td>Where students work refers to activities carried out with clients or colleagues, information about them could potentially be seen by a wider audience than they might reasonably have expected. Commercially sensitive information could accidentally be shared especially where students from competitor organisations are studying together.</td>
<td>Students should be advised to remove any reference to individuals by name before submitting an assignment.</td>
<td>There is no easy solution to this issue as a key part of the learning process is likely to be for students to share their learning with others in similar roles. Students should be advised of the importance of thinking through what they share with others and reminded that they are likely to be bound by the confidentiality agreements of their respective organisations.</td>
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<td><strong>e. 'Live' documents that students complete while working (for example records of a patient history) may be less perfectly presented than those prepared for a simulated scenario. Students may wish to submit the original as part of their assessment</strong></td>
<td>The team responsible for assessment need to be clear whether students will be penalised for this. This can be challenging if non work-based students are also studying the module using scenario or case study material instead of real work.</td>
<td>This problem can be easily solved by a set of criteria that can be applied to real work documentation - so long as the criteria are transparent and there is a justification for any differences between students using real work for assessment and students using simulations.</td>
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<td>f. An organisation has several students studying a particular module, all of whom are preparing a work activity for assessment. A sudden and unexpected change in business priorities means that all these students must stop doing the activity which they were intending to present for assessment</td>
<td>This is a surprisingly common occurrence and can cause several unforeseen problems. Firstly, University regulations will probably not include work pressure as an allowable reason for an extension on submission of assignments. Even if they do, all students from that organisation will probably have to complete individual paperwork. If an assignment is delayed but there are other students in the group doing the same assignment on the original schedule there is also the issue of potential plagiarism. A student who has yet to complete the original assignment might benefit from seeing the marked version belonging to a colleague.</td>
<td>Often is it impossible to avoid this situation. It is a good idea to raise this as a possible scenario with a representative from the employer early on and explain that it might make things difficult for work-based students. Switching students from a real work assessment to a scenario based one might also be an option.</td>
<td>You may choose to discuss extreme workload being used as an extenuating circumstance for late submission of assignments – but this can cause as many problems as it solves as it is very hard to define at what point the workload is great enough to interfere with the assessment process.</td>
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<td>g. The real work that the student presents for assessment is at widely varying levels with some written elements struggling to achieve the required standard of written communication, but including evidence of thought processes and skills that are well above the required level</td>
<td>This can be a real challenge for grading purposes where the quality of thought is way in advance of the quality of expression – and one which is by no means limited to work-based assessment.</td>
<td>Tutors should use their professional judgement supported by regular formal and informal discussion with other tutors working on this and similar modules. Advice should regularly be sought from the external examiner.</td>
<td>This can be difficult for the student, particularly as it may be hard to keep this information from their work colleagues who are also students. The student and/or the employer may be concerned that the student is not good at their job.</td>
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<td>h. The student fails their University assessment but has provided a piece of work for assessment which has achieved the required level of performance in the workplace</td>
<td>This can be difficult for the student, particularly as it may be hard to keep this information from their work colleagues who are also students. The student and/or the employer may be concerned that the student is not good at their job.</td>
<td>In all documentation it should be made clear that the assessment for University purposes is against the learning outcomes of the module and not the ability of the student to do their job.</td>
<td>It can be hard to maintain the confidentiality of individual student’s marks especially as some employers may want students’ marks to be passed to managers throughout the organisation. It is important to set up systems that aim to maintain individual confidentiality for students as far as possible.</td>
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CEBE is one of 24 subject centres, which comprise the Higher Education Academy. The network was established to promote high quality learning, teaching and assessment practices in UK Higher Education. The primary purpose of CEBE is to provide discipline based support for learning and teaching in the built environment subject communities.

www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk

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The Government has established a network of 22 Centres of Knowledge Exchange Activity to support higher education institutions working with business and the wider community. This National Construction Knowledge Exchange (CKE) was established with the aim of promoting links and collaboration between higher education and the UK construction industry. Our mission is: To be recognised as an exemplar of good practice in knowledge sharing and to demonstrate high quality impact on business performance.

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