Work-based Learning Futures

Proceedings from the Work-based Learning Futures Conference, Buxton, April 2007, organised by the University of Derby and Middlesex University

Edited by:
Professor David Young
Professor Jonathan Garnett
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University of Bolton
Introduction

The Buxton Work-based Learning Futures conference was held on 19 and 20 April 2007. It was organised by Learning through Work at the University of Derby (winner of the 2006 Times Higher Award for Most Imaginative Use of Distance Learning) and the Centre for Excellence in Work-based Learning at Middlesex University (a Higher Education Funding Council designated Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning). In addition the Conference was supported by Ufi/Learndirect and the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC).

The conference membership was made up of colleagues in the field of work-based learning (WBL) who had developed particular expertise to share and explore their ideas with a view to forward-looking interpretations of work-based learning. We sought to capture the current leading edge of work-based learning practice and explore where it might be taken in future. The focus of these edited conference proceedings, like that of the conference itself, is futures. New and dynamic changes are reshaping higher education and it can be argued that work-based learning is at the heart of many of these changes by challenging traditional perceptions of the role and form of higher education and leading the way with new ideas, pioneering curricula and innovative research practices, partnership initiatives and systemic change.

There is a clear policy context for work-based learning. Employer engagement, graduate employability and workforce development and new forms of partnership with sectoral and professional bodies are all seen by government as important challenges. And, of course, the whole skills agenda is highlighted in the recent publication of the Leitch report – reactions and responses to which seem likely to occupy the field for some time to come.

Papers are presented in four themes:

- Learners, Knowledge, Power and the University: the Challenge for Work-based Learning Futures
- Work-based Learning: Contexts, Opportunities and Practice
- Work-based Learner Perspectives
- Harnessing Technology for Work-based Learning

Rather than prescribe a tight style sheet, we have been keen to allow authors to write using a register and style appropriate to their own purposes and experience. So, we have critical reflections on practice, research reports, opinion pieces and explorations of philosophical perspectives, representing the depth and variety of discourse explored though the conference and offered here as a contribution to thinking in this developing field.

Section one focuses upon ways in which WBL challenges established thinking, systems and structures. Portwood sheds light upon some of the epistemological challenges and tensions of WBL by focusing on the work-based project. He argues that, unlike former
versions of work-based learning which were accommodated as practical expressions of subject-based epistemologies, the location of the current version in the university-workplace relationship means that there is no obvious epistemological home for it. Portwood concludes that the combination of reflective thought and research and development in the work-based project suggests that the epistemology of work-based learning may best be understood as reflective pragmatism. Garnett takes up the theme of responding to the challenges of WBL. This chapter draws upon current knowledge management literature, the extensive work-based learning experience of Middlesex University and the recent development of a ‘Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning’ in work-based learning at Middlesex at a time of major institutional change. Garnett argues that WBL challenges and has the potential to enhance the structural capital of the university and that attention to structural capital issues is essential if work-based learning is to be successful. Harvey ends the first section with a discussion of the changing power relationships between learners, the University and the work context. She concludes that power balances are changing – a shift in work-based learning from institution-led developments towards an increasing recognition of the learning achieved by individuals through their workplace activities which she sees as the future of work-based learning developments in higher education.

Section two provides a range of contributions exploring different contexts, opportunities and practices. Challis describes the context of the Care sector through the remit of the Sector Skills Council, Skills for Care and Development. She identifies the range of flexible work-based provision being applied in the sector and concludes that there is a need for a clearer understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges which surround social care and engagement with higher education. The potential of work-based learning to widen participation in higher education is highlighted by Braham and Pickering. Not only can work-based learning widen access it can also enable learners to gain recognition for their learning from experience and thus to achieve advanced standing within a university programme of study. Lucas et al present a discussion of a consortium approach to foundation degree development for a large employer – the RAF – undertaken by the universities of Chester, Derby, Staffordshire and the Open University. The co-operative procedures adopted, based on a shared vision, mutually owned by the four universities and the employer, may be unusual, but they argue that it may be a more effective way for higher education to address client needs than a competitive approach.

MacLeod and Lyon explore in depth their use of a work-based learning module for health care professionals. They highlight the success of work-based learning in increasing collaboration and partnership between local NHS trusts and the University. Work-based learning approaches often provide the opportunity for higher education to engage with learners who would not be able to engage with traditional university programmes and forms of delivery. A key challenge for WBL is to develop structures, contacts and ways
of working which effectively draw upon and enhance subject disciplines without being circumscribed by them. Another dimension of the work-based learning challenge and conflicting power relationships is explored by Helyer and Hooker, drawing upon their WBL project experiences with Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. The project provided crucial funding without which it is unlikely the SMEs could have been engaged. They argue on the basis of experience that state intervention is vital and that just as WBL delivery needs to be flexible so does the funding of it. The linkage between qualifications and work-ready knowledge and skills is not self-evident. It is also important when focusing on national needs for a more productive workforce not to forget or detract from the potential of learning to transform individual lives! Cope and Seden conclude this section by discussing the University of Derby’s national piloting of the accreditation scheme of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). They argue the need, as we move into ever more flexible learning provision, for work-based learning tutors to demonstrate situated learning capability and capacity, thus practising ourselves what we ask of our learners.

It may be a truism, but without work-based learners there would be no work-based learning! Hence section three, which focuses on the voices of individual learners who have engaged fully with the transformative process of higher education based in their workplaces. Learning in higher education is not a straightforward process of knowledge transmission, a commodity to be parcelled up by providers and presented to learners. Rather, it is a process of change and transformation for those involved. A shift away from a supply-side approach to higher learning in the workplace as proposed by Leitch may be welcome, but to attempt to replace ‘provider-led’ with ‘employer demand’ is a potentially dangerous over-simplification which ignores the fact that deficit models in which skills gaps are filled by the ‘delivery’ of segments of discrete curriculum content are completely inappropriate for higher education.

Young and Stephenson explore, through a study of on-line tutorial exchanges with work-based learners undertaking higher education programmes, what it feels like to be a remote participant pursuing personally negotiated programmes to degree level. From the exchanges – almost 2000 of them – it seems clear that learners are willing and capable of taking responsibility for shaping and managing their own university programmes based on learning through work, that they can initiate and sustain academic discourse on-line and that they feel a sense of pride and achievement in doing so. For tutors the tone of tutorial discourse is critical. It needs to balance friendliness and a degree of informality with clear and precise guidance.

Blundell, Lyon and Myciunca are all work-based learners within the LtW Scheme at the University of Derby who offer a range of perspectives on their experiences of undertaking individually-negotiated work-based learning programmes to degree level and beyond.
Blundell discusses the rewarding process of gaining his master’s degree in engineering through which he has become more technically confident. However, his achievement is not simply a personal outcome, but has developed a useful practical model for his company. Lyon, another master’s graduate, analyses her own work-based learning within three main areas; her unique personalised curriculum and its approaches to assessment, her personal learning journey and the context of the impact of infrastructural considerations and the future challenges to HEIs, employing organisations and government policy of such individualised approaches to work-based learning. Young and Stephenson wrote about on-line tutorial dialogue from the tutor’s perspective. Myciunka flips the coin. Drawing on his own experiences as a LtW learner – 260 entries into the LtW dialogue function between himself and tutors – he explores, through two major themes – ‘Learning Experiences’ and ‘Barriers to Learning’ – how tutors, as learning providers, help learners develop new perspectives that enrich their lives to open new opportunities for learning and becoming.

Edmunds ends this section by analysing his experience of LtW from ‘both ends of the telescope’ – as both postgraduate learner and career civil servant – manager and policy maker within the former DFES (currently DCSF). He concludes that the underpinning infrastructure is in need of improvement, but sees significant opportunity in developing the relationship between employers, employee learners, institutions and professional bodies, in exploring the extent to which the disciplines surrounding learning and leadership and management can be integrated and in establishing further the workplace as a place of knowledge production. Finally, he argues that, in a work-based learning network, all the partners receive benefits.

Section four focuses on some of the uses of technology in work-based learning. Critten and Moteleb argue that work-based learning should support knowledge sharing, taking the same direction as the so-called Web 2.0. Drawing on a project being undertaken at Middlesex University Business School, they describe how fourteen managers are being encouraged to share with each other and their organisation the outcome of their individual work-based learning through the development of a Virtual Social Knowledge Space. Haldane et al describe an e-APEL platform, currently under development, which facilitates to a significant extent the informal pre-entry estimation of the likely scope for a claim for accreditation of prior learning. The continuing need for tutor-claimant dialogue at the formal claim stage is recognised, but the paper suggests that technology can also facilitate this process to mutual advantage in a situation where the number of claims for APEL is likely to increase, given the current WBL agenda. The collection concludes with a summary of the work-based learner practitioner discussion facilitated by Graham and Rhodes. The focus of the discussion was the use of critical reflection as a pedagogic tool. Readers are encouraged to take up this discussion on line by contacting Sue Graham [sue.graham@northumbria.ac.uk].

David Young    Jonathan Garnett
September 2007
Learners, Knowledge, Power and the University: the Challenge for Work-based Learning Futures
Towards an Epistemology of Work-based Learning: Eliciting Clues from Work-based Learning Projects

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Abstract

Recent developments in work-based learning in higher education have prompted the question of its epistemology. Unlike former versions of work-based learning which were accommodated as practical expressions of subject-based epistemologies, the location of the current version in the university-workplace relationship means that there is no obvious epistemological home for it. References to transdisciplinarity and interprofessionalism simply beg the question in so far as they do not provide the justification of true belief crucial for the epistemological identity. Taking work-based learning projects as key activities to the knowledge-based interests of both universities and workplaces, the paper explores the epistemological clues which they provide. Noting the pragmatic orientation of all projects, it sets the scene for an examination of work-based learning projects by an analysis of epistemology, pragmatism and projects generally. It then explores the common and distinctive features of work-based learning projects, highlighting that they combine reflective thought and research and development. It concludes that the clues elicited by the analysis suggest that the epistemology of work-based learning may best be understood as reflective pragmatism.

The latest version of work-based learning in higher education is still trying to find its epistemological feet. Deriving and developing its knowledge from active engagement in the interests of the workplace, it has no obvious epistemological home. This contrasts with longstanding versions of work-based learning which emanated from various disciplinary bases, often with specific professional connections, and applied subject knowledge to the work situation through placements and training. Hence, although all versions of work-based learning use work experience for learning purposes, they differ in where they place the emphasis in the university-workplace relationship. When the university is given primacy, the workplace affects epistemology only in so far as it is a test-bed of subject-based and professionally-related knowledge. When the workplace is forefronted, the university affects epistemological in so far as it translates and transposes work-based knowledge. However, in order to do thus, the university has had to look beyond established disciplinary and professional reference points to find an epistemological home for work-based knowledge. Hence, staying with its disciplinary and professional language, it has coined such terms as transdisciplinarity and interprofessionalism (Garrick & Rhodes, 2000; Gibbs & Costley 2006). Apart from acknowledging that work-based knowledge is not confined to single disciplines or singular professions, this response continues to beg the epistemological question.
Even if these characterisations of work-based learning are accepted, what is their epistemological base? This paper believes that attempting to address the epistemological issue raised by work-based learning through terminology which amounts to meta-versions of existing descriptors is little more than a red herring in the quest for an epistemology of work-based learning. Rather it argues that the source and sphere of its epistemology and thereby its identity, lie in the engagement of the university in the purpose and practices of the workplace. Plainly a full examination of that engagement is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, as an initial contribution to this topic, it singles out work-based learning projects because both the universities and workplace acknowledge the key contribution they make to knowledge generation and use (Boud & Solomon, 2003:5).

Of course, such an approach is itself complicated, even contentious. At the very least, it asks what kind of knowledge is involved, not to mention a host of contextual, cultural, structural, ideological and practical issues. More profoundly, projects, by their very nature, predispose a pragmatic perspective. Indeed, this paper is predicated on the assumption that all work-based learning has pragmatic intentions and outcomes. However, it argues that while pragmatism broadly offers an orientation to a work-based learning epistemology, an understanding of the foundation and forms of that epistemology can best be obtained through examining and exploring work-based learning processes and practices. Hence, the choice of work-based learning projects to elicit clues to a work-based learning epistemology. Obviously clarification of terms is needed before discussing their relation. Thus the starting point of this paper is a consideration of the concepts of epistemology, pragmatism and projects. The relation of them is then explored in the light of the nature and outcomes of work-based learning projects. The paper concludes with a discussion of the foundations of a work-based learning epistemology and a suggestion of its form.

**Epistemology**

At root, epistemology is a study of knowledge or justification of belief (Dancy, 1985:1). More fully, it is the study of the nature of knowledge and justification which Moser (2002:3) notes involves studying the defining components, the substantive conditions or sources and the limits of knowledge and justification. At stake, therefore, are definitions of knowledge and provision of evidence. Knowledge has been variously categorised, for example, Eraut’s (1994:16) propositional, procedural and practical types, or Moser’s (2002:3) empirical and non-empirical versions of propositional knowledge, non-propositional knowledge (acquaintance or awareness) and knowledge how-to-do.

An epistemology will usually embrace all of these but according to such considerations as context and concerns will differentiate its emphasis. Thus, in an Indian context the pramana theoretical base of epistemology emphasises non-propositional knowledge (awareness, not belief) and knowledge is seen as episodic rather than dispositional (Perrett, 2001: xiv).
Accordingly, in this case, evidence or justification is cognitively based and includes perception, inference and testimony. In western society, however, epistemologies are founded on Plato's notion of justified true belief where rationalists use insight, understanding and inference for justificatory purposes and empiricists complex kinds of experience involving sense and memory (Everson, 1990:225). Consequently, epistemology is not an uncontentious concept. This could scarcely be the case when in its philosophical home, scepticism is a senior resident. Indeed, even the common view that its essential feature is justified true belief is not without its critics. Myles Burnyeat, for instance, argues that the question is not: "Why, on what grounds, do you believe that?" but a consideration of what it is to master a whole techne or domain of objects, analysed right back to their elements" (in Everson:1990). For him, epistemology is not so much to do with justified true belief as true belief which is understood. This view of epistemology would include reflection as well as other forms of evidence.

The upshot of all this is that while all epistemologies are studies of the nature of knowledge, their foundations may differ and their forms of argument and evidence will vary. This leaves options open for innovations in knowledge such as work-based learning but in so far as it has an obvious pragmatic inclination, this is our next consideration.

**Pragmatism**

Pragmatism has many intellectual sources but primary among them are the works of Charles Pierce, John Dewey and William James. All Americans, mainly writing in the early part of the twentieth century, they spanned and connected philosophy, education and social psychology. For them, human actions are primary or rather the results of human actions are. Consequences of actions as the source of value and meaning are, therefore, the central feature of pragmatism. As Molander (1992:20) put it: 'American pragmatism is that people’s ideas and theories of reality are empty in themselves as it were; they have their primary meaning through their consequences in and for human actions’. Belief, accordingly, was seen by Pierce (1995) as ‘a rule for action’. And truth for James (1978) as ‘in the long run and on the whole, the expedient in the way of our thinking’. He adds that if an answer to a question ‘has no consequences for practice then the whole business is a waste of time’. Drawing on these ideas of the founding fathers, Cherryholmes depicts pragmatism as:

'Consequences of our conceptual framework...aesthetic dimension is key ingredient...pragmatist is first an artist using imagination and a sense of the beautiful, then an empiricist who looks to practical results...an inquirer and doer embedded in historical time, a particular culture, a changing society, a community of inquiry...power and democratic diversity, pluralism and fallibilism are important ingredients...living and doing without certainty, without a firm foundation, without Truth, but with aesthetic and social imagination brings challenges and fulfilsments rather than nihilism and despair.' (1991: ix)
Westphal, again echoing the founders’ ideas, supplies what is under-stated in Cherryholmes’s picture. Reviewing Fredrick L Will’s ideas on pragmatism and realism, he argues that the aesthetic and social imagination is not so much that province of the individual as of the social, and observes:

‘Pragmatism is designation for a cluster of philosophical views which stress the centrality of our interactions with each other and with our environment, of our practices, for understanding human knowledge and ideas.’ (1997:xiv)

In this sense, pragmatism may be seen as a social epistemology (Fuller, 2002) and an important contributor to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

Inevitably such ideas are contentious and open to criticism. Pierce (1995), for instance, acknowledged that they run counter to a Cartesian rationalist epistemology but argues that our desires are satisfied and that we escape from irritating and stultifying states of doubt not through belief per se but when they provide guides for action (Cooper, 1999:197). Also, these high-minded views can be debased. The notion of acting on the grounds of expediency, for example, could be criticised as:

‘a thorough lack of principle, exaggerated expediency emphasis on monetary gain, crassness and vulgarity in the ‘calculation’ of consequences and to be something bounded by a horizon of immediacy.’ (Cherryholmes, 1999:7)

But whether depiction or critique, the point to note is that there has been a renaissance of the concept of pragmatism in the past two decades. Books of readings (for example, Dancy 1985; Villaneuve, 1992) and even a special edition of a Journal (Misak, 2002) have revisited the ideas of the founders and strikingly have brought out the aesthetic and moral dimensions of pragmatism, its contextualism and its reflective, inquiry and social process.

Indeed, these tenets of pragmatism have subsequently been used in studies of wisdom (Baltes & Smith 1990; Sternberg & Jordan, 2005) and in analyses of the relation of tacit and explicit knowledge (Goranzon & Florin, 1992). Rorty (1979) went so far with a version of neo-pragmatism to assert that its pattern of inquiry based on ‘deliberation concerning the relative attractions of various concrete alternatives’ invalidates scientific and philosophical inquiry based on ‘method’. Despite challenges to Rorty’s views, not least by pragmatists themselves (Williams, 2001), his views on deliberation is a reoccurring theme in expositions of pragmatism and never more so than in Dewey’s notion of productive pragmatism. Hickman portrays this as ‘one of the praxis philosophies’ adding that:

‘... in the hands of the productive pragmatists, theory and practice become equal partners as phases of inquiry. Working together they orient themselves not just to the analyses of the past or present but to plan for the future...’ (2001:180)
The reference to the future gives a lead to introduce the subject of projects. Moreover, in view of the interest of this paper, the foregoing description and discussion of pragmatism give other significant leads to adjudging in what ways and to what extent work-based learning projects come under the banner of pragmatism. Crucial concepts are contextualism, aesthetical imagination, social interaction, praxis, reflection and consequences. If work-based learning projects can mainly be understood in these terms, then work-based learning itself can be seen as founded on and assuming some form of pragmatic epistemology.

**Projects**

A starting point for an examination of work-based learning projects is to ascertain if they bear the characteristics of projects in general and then explore if they have distinctive features arising from their involvement in the university-workplace relationship.

Kerzner (2000:1) identifies many of the key features of projects in his definition that a project is ‘an endeavour that has a definable objective, consumes resources and operates under time, cost and quality constraints.’ He acknowledges additionally that the achievement of the objectives call for a trusting relationship between the parties concerned and itemises that resources as:

> ‘knowledge of business, manpower, facilities, equipment, machinery, proprietary knowledge, special expertise, reputation, tools and methodologies, project management, skills, money.’ (ibid: 117)

The list is comprehensive if viewed from a commercial standpoint but others elaborate it. Stewart (1997:207) sees projects as packaging and selling knowledge with the objective of creating value. Harryson (2006:17) stresses that contextual nature of projects, identifying networks of representatives of collaborating organizations as the source of innovation but, like Kerzner, he argues that trust is a conditional resource. He conceptualises project networks as interlinking and combining various functional areas/units, especially research and development, design and manufacturing, marketing and sales, and product management. Chapman and Ward (2002) concur, asserting that marketing, contracting, safety and financial management are essential project processes.

In sum, these and many other contributors identify context, objectives, various research and development and management processes and practical products as vital features of projects.

Others explore the nature of projects. Cleland (1996:23), for example, noted that projects may provide:

- development of knowledge, skills and attitudes to support future enterprises;
• focal point for integrating resources to create products or processes;
• strategic pathway for commitment of people and resources to create value in the future.

These observations may be used to construct an elementary typology of projects. Thus, the development reference may be cast as an informative type of project which is intended to clarify, extend and embellish knowledge or simply to entertain. The reference to focal point may be constructed as indicating reformative type which modifies, redirects and changes the emphasis of existing systems, structures and practices. Finally, the strategic pathway reference may be seen as a transformative type concerned with producing new patterns, new ways of seeing what is familiar and paradigmatic change.

Obviously, projects may span as well as be confined to these types but this typology helps to clarify the kind of processes involved in their design, execution and uses. Thus while all projects require a research and development methodology, actual methods may differ according to the type of project. One has only to think of appropriate methods, to take extreme examples, for undertaking a census (informative), reforming a religious body such as John and Charles Wesley’s Methodism (reformative), and delineating a new social order such as Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto (transformative) to see differing quantitative and qualitative approaches and methods in play. However, whatever the type, all writers on projects are agreed that projects by nature are collaborative enterprises. Davenport & Prusak (1998:112), for example, argue that this cannot be otherwise if only because of the range of skills required (they list technological, psychological and business skills). Others point out that the nature of the knowledge involved affects how and what types of projects are undertaken. Thus tacit knowledge with its procedural properties is seen as crucial for undertaking projects but to be effective this know how must be shared and exchanged in a spirit of mutual criticism (Argyris, 1999: 231-233). Also praxis, which combines theoretical ideas and practical action, is seen as another crucial form of project knowledge, especially reformative and transformative types (Gadotti, 1996; Hickman, 2001:180).

Actual forms of collaboration vary but find their fullest expression in teams and while these might be fraught with logistical and personality difficulties, many authors signal their importance for knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; von Krogh et al, 2000:2) and organizational learning (Argyris, 1992:75).

Indeed, collaborative projects are seen to be important for individual learning as well because they encourage reflexive dialogue which helps the project worker to critically examine his/her perspectives and beliefs and possibly change them (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). And to recall the discussion o pragmatism, O’Brien et al (1999:24) observe that this kind of reflexivity assists structuring properties of social action.
Work-based learning projects

Turning to work-based learning projects, their location in the university-workplace relationship alters significantly what is expected of them, how they are conducted and their quality assessed. Obviously they bear many of the characteristics given in Kerzner’s definition (see above) regarding clear objectives, appropriate resources and time, cost and quality constraints. Above all, they are similarly regarded in an instrumental sense, although the emphasis shifts from practical production in the workplace to advancing learning in the university. Brockbank & McGill (1998:233) observe that projects in higher education ‘have the advantage of linking knowledge and self-experience in a social and applied context that more traditional formats of essays and unseen exams may not.’ Thus tacit knowledge with its procedural properties is seen as crucial for undertaking projects but to be effective this know-how must be shared and exchanged in a spirit of mutual criticism (Argyris, 1999:231-233). Also praxis, which combines theoretical ideas and practical action, is seen as another crucial form of project knowledge, especially reformative and transformative types (Gadotti, 1996; Hickman, 2001:180).

Hence, while many of the instruments and mechanisms of project design and execution differ little between work-based learning projects and projects generally, there are marked differences in purpose, ethos and values. Mainly this is because of the different stances which universities and workplaces take to the utilitarianism of projects. Broadly speaking, workplace projects are intended to satisfy the criterion of fitness for purpose; that is prioritising the utilitarian interests of the organization by whatever means. Whereas universities emphasise fitness of purpose, that is using justified and approved means to achieve whatever ends.

Work-based learning projects, accordingly, have to address this means-ends issue, hence the centrality of the role of the Learning Agreement in work-based learning programmes (Anderson et al 1998). Here the interests of the learner, their workplace and the university are intended to coincide through project proposals. The process, however, is skewed heavily in favour of the university. The Learning Agreement from the organization’s viewpoint is little more than acknowledgement that their member is undertaking a work-based learning programme with their awareness and, to some extent, assent to the projects s/he proposes to undertake. The university however controls the process and uses its predetermined standards and procedures to assess the validity (as opposed to the ultimate value) of the project. Hence, the dominating force in the construction and execution of work-based learning projects is the constitution of the university’s qualification system.

From a work-based learning perspective, this is not so autocratic and unheeding of external interests as it might sound. While the degree of involvement of the organization/workplace will vary according to the formal agreement between it and the university, its
representative in the form of the work-based learner will influence the composition, conduct and content of their programme in term of their own and their organization’s interests.

This has had some striking consequences for the university. Perhaps the most important is that the projects are geared to outcomes in the form of useful products for the individual and their organization. Admittedly the university’s judgement of the quality of these products is determined more by the justification of the means to produce them that their actual utility. Nevertheless, this is still a remarkable shift from a dissertation-type mentality and modality because accepting this principle of productivity has, in turn, affected the methodological approach of work-based learning. If projects are to have practical outcomes, the disinterested stance of many existing methods has to be revised to a research and development approach. However, very rarely has this change been taken to its logical conclusion of including organizational/workplace representatives in the assessment of the outcomes, particularly the value of the products (for a fuller discussion, see Portwood, 2007).

All the same despite this note of expediency being added, the traditions of the university hold sway. Never is this more clearly seen than in the individuation of its award system. While applauding all manner of collaborative methods, it continues to use its individually-based qualifications for recognition purposes. Accordingly, the kinds and degrees of collaboration are severely restricted and the ethos of team working is adversely affected (Erickson & Stull, 1998).

On the other hand, the various pedagogical practices of the university have enhanced the prosecution of projects. Perhaps the most important is the academic emphasis on the role of reflection and reflexive dialogue in developing attitudes of criticality and, more profoundly, critical being (Barnett, 1997). In this respect, the university’s use of literature makes a significant contribution to high-level learning capabilities. Equally, the university’s delineation and description of capabilities appropriate to different levels of academic award provide a helpful guide to the type of projects which are appropriate to the learner’s current abilities and attainments. Hence, using the above typology, one would expect at bachelor level projects of the informative type whereas at doctoral level they would certainly be reformative and possibly transformative – although in the latter case this would require a fully collaborative approach.

What then of the knowledge underpinning and emanating from work-based projects? Here the relation of the dimensions of tacit and explicit knowledge is helpful as also are the distinctions between contemplative and performative knowledge. Projects generally rely heavily on sources and expressions of tacit knowledge but necessarily have explicit knowledge outcomes at codified and personal levels (Eraut et al, 2000).
Work-based learning projects, however, stress explicit knowledge from their outset and require tacit knowledge to be articulated before the projects may be approved and pursued. As noted above, universities use reflective instruments and practices for this purpose and continue to use them throughout the execution of the projects. Thus work-based learning projects are never a narrow version of performativity but are infused with the spirit and means contemplatively. Supervisors, advisors and consultants are appointed to ensure that this kind of thinking as well as efficient operating takes place. In short, the projects are predicated on, use and demonstrate praxis.

As for consequences of the project activity, in one sense, they are whatever public status, other recognitions and rewards that the learner receives from the achievement of an academic award. But, from the university’s viewpoint the main consequence is the advanced learning of the individual affecting their personal and professional capabilities, motivations, satisfactions and understanding of themselves. While welcoming these consequences, the workplace also stresses the value of the products for the efficient and effective working of the organization and its enterprises. Hence, while all project activity has pragmatic intentions, these vary according to cultures, interest and provisions of their context. Where then does this leave the epistemology of work-based learning?

**Epistemology of work-based learning**

If knowledge is about justificatory evidence confirming true belief and if such evidence is contained in and demonstrated by consequences of action, then work-based learning may be said to have a pragmatic philosophy. In a general way, the evidence is exhibited in the new forms of relationship which work-based learning has introduced between the university and workplaces. The above discussion clearly admitted that claims for egalitarian partnerships are dubious, mainly because of the university’s continuing insistence on maintaining the role of sole arbiter of what constitutes and who confers their awards. However, the negotiating process involved in deciding the form, content and outcomes of the award-bearing programmes signal new styles and forms of mutual engagement between the university and other bodies. Both are fundamentally affected. At an institutional level, the university has to have in place curricula, pedagogies, assessment and accreditation systems and practices within appropriate regulatory and quality assurance systems which refine existing ones and introduce new features. Equally it has to have competent staff to manage and deliver these arrangements. The workplace similarly will need to revise its support and possibly its appraisal and reward systems and review its training provisions especially when the work-based learning development is at a corporate level rather than simply for individual workers. For them both, there are consequences of costs and benefits of the relationship centring on the concepts of collaboration and customisation. Ultimately, both are affected by the nature of the knowledge which is produced. Their mutual engagement will mean that both practice and theory in terms of praxis will be the
dominant form. Hence, the special role that projects play in this situation. Indeed, these ensure that even if no contractual arrangement or agreement exists between the university but members of the workplace are engaged in work-based learning programmes, then the interests of the workplace are included in prospective outcomes of project activity.

As for learners themselves, determining what, how, when and with what purpose they learn, whether it is formalised or not, have highly significant consequences for their self-identity, work experiences and career prospects. Perhaps the most significant benefit for individuals from work-based learning and its projects is the reconciliation of knowledge formation and confidence in action (Molander, 1992:23).

Plainly contextualism, power, democratic diversity, pluralism and fallibilism which Cherryholmes identified (see above) as key features of pragmatism are apparent in whatever form work-based learning partnerships take. He might have added ethics which necessarily are an important feature of any social arrangement but he did identify aesthetics as a key dimension. Michelangelo’s dome of St Peter’s, Rome is often used as an outstanding example of pragmatic aestheticism but what of modest work-based learning projects? Their outcomes would rarely qualify as objects of beauty in a conventional sense. However, if aesthetics are seen in terms of creativity and elegant forms of expression, the university’s insistence on critical reflection and quality of argument at least ensures that the outcomes of projects are not crudely utilitarian although not always useful. In this way, work-based learning projects may be seen as works of art.

To conclude, therefore, work-based learning, especially the outcomes of its projects and the capabilities needed to produce them are the ultimate justification of work-based learning as a true belief. The clues to the epistemology of work-based learning lie consequently in its reflective and pragmatic orientations and activities pre-eminently exhibited and undertaken in its project activity. Dewey long ago recognised the importance of reflective thought in shaping action and coined the concept of productive pragmatism. Suggestive as this is, all the foregoing considerations of the location of work-based learning in the university/workplace relationship lead me to conclude that the epistemology of work-based learning may be better described and understood as reflective pragmatism.

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Challenging the Structural Capital of the University to support Work-based Learning

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Introduction

University work-based learning (WBL) programmes are often represented by academia as an appropriate response to the needs of the ‘knowledge driven economy’ (e.g. Boud and Solomon 2003). However, to date, the challenges to and contribution of University WBL to the structural capital of the university has rarely been considered. Stewart (1997) identified structural capital as the organizing and structuring capability of the organization expressed in formal instruments such as mission statements, policies, regulations, procedures, codes, functional business units, task groups, committees or less formal culture, networks and practices.

This paper draws upon current knowledge management literature, the extensive work-based learning experience of Middlesex University and the recent development of a ‘Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning’ in work-based learning at Middlesex at a time of major institutional change.

Middlesex University has 15 years of operational experience of WBL as a field of study as well as a mode of delivery (Portwood and Costley, 2000). WBL at Middlesex can lead to all the major qualifications of the University (Undergraduate Certificate through to Professional Doctorate) and is used each year by some 1100 learners who are typically in full-time employment and may never come onto a Middlesex University campus. (For a detailed consideration of the current range of WBL practice at Middlesex see Garnett, et.al. 2007). Yet, even though the WBL provision is well established and comprises some 20% of the total part-time students of the University, it still sits uncomfortably within structures and procedures designed primarily to meet the needs of full-time undergraduate students. Anecdotal evidence from colleagues at other universities confirms that this is a general problem.

Learning from knowledge management literature

In an age of unprecedented access to information leading to information overload it is not information but the knowledge to understand and attach significance to information which is of particular importance (Choo 1998:57).

Stewart (1997) and a host of others (e.g. Burton-Jones 1999, Quintas 2002) argue that in the new knowledge economy it is intellectual capital which is the true measure of the wealth of an organization. Stewart argues that intellectual capital resides in the people, structures and customers of an organization. Intellectual capital can thus be seen as a combination of human capital (the knowledge, skills and capabilities of individuals and...
groups), customer capital (the value of an organization’s relationships with the people with whom it does business) and structural capital. Stewart (1997:110) argues that structural capital is vital and should be managed in order to promote ‘rapid knowledge sharing, collective knowledge growth, shortened lead times and more productive people’. Edvinson and Malone (1997) see structural capital as so important that they represent customer capital as well as internal innovation and processes as deriving from it. The importance of structural capital is the leverage role that it plays in relation to both human and customer capital. Yet this role is far from clear and is certainly problematic. Knowledge is possessed by individuals and enables them to make sense of data and information received. Mayo (2000:523) argues that ‘all intellectual assets are maintained and governed by people’. Individual knowledge forms the basis for communication of information to others who will then make sense of it in the light of their own personal knowledge. Structural capital can help individuals develop their personal knowledge, store and transmit the information derived from it and access information provided by others.

In the context of the organization, knowledge has no intrinsic value; it must have a performative value i.e. the knowledge has to contribute to the aims of the organization (Rohlin et al, 1998:39). The role of structural capital in formulating organizational aims, disseminating them and focusing knowledge production and application to achieve organizational aims is crucial. Choo (1998) highlighted the relationship between information, knowledge and decision making (a commitment to action). The importance of ideological, political and personal preferences come to the fore in organizational decision making and feature strongly in ‘post-rational management theory’ (Burgoyne and Reynolds 1997:164). This is not to downplay the importance of knowledge but to emphasize that, in the social context of the organization, knowledge creation and use is not a neutral or objective undertaking.

University WBL can be viewed as a means by which the intellectual capital of employers and potentially universities are enhanced (Garnett 2001). Traditionally universities have seen their role as developers of human capital and little attention has been paid to the potential of higher education to impact upon the structural capital of organizations. WBL appears to have the potential to impact on intellectual capital in general but structural capital in particular (Garnett 2005). Given the importance of structural capital to organizations this begs the question what structural capital resources does a university need to successfully engage in work-based learning?

**WBL challenges**

Defining WBL is recognized as highly problematic (Connor 2005). In the context of this paper it is understood to be learning which is at higher education level which primarily takes place at and through work in order not only to meet individual development
aspirations but also the performative aims of a relevant organization (usually the employer). Boud and Solomon (2003) identify a range of distinctive features of WBL. Significantly, especially when considering structural capital, they highlight the creation and operation of partnership specifically established to foster learning between an external organization and an educational institution. Such a partnership would clearly make demands upon the structural capital of both partners. In the case of the higher education institution regulations and procedures would have to be in place to enable the creation and operation of such partnerships. The aims and objectives of the institution would have to encourage a commitment to working in partnership and management priorities, structures and resource allocation would have to be aligned to promote and support such work. WBL programmes are negotiated between the partners and the individual learners and critically are derived from the needs of the workplace and of the learner rather than controlled by the disciplinary curriculum. Thus WBL not only challenges the structures of the university to be flexible in terms of mode of delivery but also can be seen as challenging its traditional epistemological structures. This is particularly true when considering work-based knowledge claims – for example, in the context of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), accreditation of in-company training or work-based projects. For WBL programmes to be genuinely work-based and learner-centred, they typically commence with a structured review and evaluation of current learning. This challenges the educational institution to move beyond traditional concepts of APEL to formally recognize learner-defined learning for possible inclusion in a future WBL programme (Garnett 1998). Such a programme would require the university to support at least one major WBL project designed not only to meet the academic standards of higher education and the development needs of the individual but also to have some relevance to the organizational partner (Garnett 2005). The structural capital of the educational institution must allow it to assess the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme with respect to a transdisciplinary framework of standards and levels. Supporting and assessing WBL requires staff with a particular range of knowledge and skills (see Boud and Costley 2006) and part of the role of the structural capital of the higher education provider is to ensure that such staff are developed and made available as required.

**WBL structural capital requirements**

The institutional decision to develop and support WBL is a ‘political’ one which will be rooted in an existing or redefined institutional mission. Such a decision will inevitably be influenced by a range of external factors, not least the prevailing policy context and the evidence of demand from paying ‘customers’ (Jarvis 2001). Portwood and Garnett (2000) have highlighted the role of high level champions, activists and allies in paving the way for curriculum innovation by changing or refining thinking, structures and procedures in the key areas of educational philosophy, resource allocation, organizational structures and regulatory frameworks. The ongoing Middlesex experience has taught us that these
are not one-off issues but remain core to the lifeblood of WBL as individuals come and go. In this sense they are real structural capital issues as they have to be integrated into the way the institution works and their importance has to be reasserted and the structural capital refreshed at times of institutional change.

A core consideration for WBL is the philosophical position taken by the institution to it on epistemological and educational grounds. The Academic Board at Middlesex took a radical position in the early 1990s by accepting the proposition that WBL be accepted as a field of study and thus regarded as a subject area for structural and procedural purposes. For instance, there are specific WBL programme structures, level descriptors and module learning outcomes. There is a WBL subject handbook and a WBL examination board making recommendations for the award of qualifications in Work-Based Learning Studies. This has provided an enduring internal position upon which to base the structural capital resources of the university and has been highly successful both in terms of attracting students but also winning commendation at QAA review and Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning status. With hindsight it could also be argued that while gaining comparability of treatment in structural terms with established subject disciplines it also emphasized difference. The emphasis upon difference may well have been a cause for some other areas of the university to be slow to take up a WBL approach and explore how this could be used in other subject areas. This dilemma was not strategically addressed until the award to the University of Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning status in WBL in 2005 and it has been a major factor in the recent creation of a pan-university Institute for WBL at Middlesex from 1 August 2007.

WBL as field or as a mode of study requires the institution to have regulations and procedures in place to identify, assess and accredit learning not provided by the HEI. Ideally this should not be confined to APEL but should also include organizational learning – for example, learning from training courses and competency frameworks – as this extends structural capital to include learning resources already developed and valued by the partner organization (see Garnett et al 2001). Garnett et al (2004) have argued that there is significant scope to rethink the purpose and practice of APEL so that it becomes a tool for learning recognition and development in the context of learning in partner organizations. If this were achieved it would be a major enhancement of the structural capital of both the educational provider and their organizational partners.

Having established the initial learning achievement not only of the individual but potentially also the partner organization, the next structural capital requirement is for a flexible curriculum which can incorporate learning from other sources and be responsive to the needs of workers and their organizations. Flexible curriculum structures alone are not sufficient; they must be implemented by staff confident in their ability as facilitators of adult and work-based learning and complemented by assessment strategies that
promote and reinforce learning and development of value to the workplace, such as projects leading to products. At Middlesex a framework covering all undergraduate and postgraduate awards was validated in 1995 and a complementary framework at doctoral level was added in 1998. This approach of validating a framework and the process within which individual routes to a range of different qualifications could be negotiated and formally approved has stood the test of time and was highly regarded by the QAA audit of Middlesex University in 2003. Yet despite this and subsequent successes under the present quality assurance regime it could be argued that WBL will only truly flourish when supported by an approach to quality assurance and enhancement which recognizes the nature of work-based learning (for example, significance of context, work-driven, epistemological issues, learning partnership – joint use of structural capital) as well as the more obvious and arguably less distinctive features of learner-centredness, flexibility and responsiveness. A key concern of such an approach to quality would be the fitness for purpose of the administrative systems of HEIs to ensure that they meet the needs not only of individual work-based learners but also the needs of their organizations.

It could be argued that many of the tools and technologies for successful operation of WBL such as APEL, learning contracts and work-based projects are now well established in many higher education institutions. Even if this were the case, evidence of difficulty in employer engagement with higher education in any capacity suggests that HEIs remain deficient in the development and implementation of approaches and structures for initiating and facilitating the construction and operation of work-based learning partnerships between HEIs and other providers of high-level learning (especially employers). A structural capital perspective suggests that such partnerships must, by design, focus upon and contribute to the business as well as the educational interests of all parties. Such a wider focus would require the structural capital of the HEI to provide staff development/mechanisms for sharing good practice that went beyond the facilitation and assessment of work-based learning in order to focus upon working with external organizations to fully utilize and enhance the structural capital of both partners.

The extension of activity and underpinning structural capital requirements strongly suggests that traditional models of funding may prove unwieldy or inadequate to support high volume WBL. This may be particularly true at undergraduate level where the economies of mass higher education appear ill suited to customized WBL provision sensitive to the needs of a range of employers. The Middlesex experience suggests that historic funding models and expectations based upon a traditional full-time student are not helpful to developing a flexible and customized provision to respond to the imperatives and timeframes of employers. To better support WBL, national and institutional target setting and resource allocation needs to move from the concept of the standard prescribed course to support learning pathways of variable durations and credit values.
Conclusion

WBL poses real and wide ranging challenges to higher education structures, procedures and practices. A key challenge for WBL is to develop structures, contacts and ways of working which effectively draw upon and enhance subject disciplines without being circumscribed by them. This paper suggests that a knowledge management lens, especially the concept of structural capital, sheds valuable insight into the nature of the challenges and suggests ways forward in developing WBL partnerships to enhance the intellectual capital of HEIs and work-based partner organizations.

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The changing Power Balance between Learners, Universities and Work Contexts

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Abstract

The Centre for Outcomes-Based Education (COBE) at the Open University (OU) has been carrying out research and development into work-based learning over the last six years. As the OU is the UK’s largest university, with over 217,900 people studying part-time and at a distance, this research has focused mainly on how OU students encounter learning in their own workplace and how that learning can be equated to higher education level. Since 2000 there has been a shift in approach to curriculum design from institution-led work-based learning developments to an increasing recognition of the experiences and knowledge already achieved by individuals through their workplace activities. This shift represents the future direction of work-based learning developments within higher education: a route which is moving towards a partnership between the individual worker, who has their own portfolio of work-based learning experiences, and the educational institution that can provide a structure for that learning but does not restrict or constrain the type of learning experienced by the individual. Findings from evaluation studies commissioned by COBE suggest that the power balance between learners, the University, and the work context has begun to change. This paper discusses how this change can be strengthened and sustained.

Introduction

In recent years higher education in the UK, and across the world, has been required to recognise that knowledge can be created outside of academia and degree-level programmes need to meet the skills needs of the employers [Strydom et al, 2004]. Specifically in the UK there have been a number of government initiatives, such as foundation degrees (HEFCE, 2000), that have linked higher education with workforce development and consequently this has raised the profile of work-based learning within degree-level curricula. Historically the creation of knowledge has been seen purely as the endeavour of academics within universities. However, current employer-engagement activities and work-based learning developments have resulted in different conceptualisations of knowledge which recognise that knowledge can emerge from work practices as well as academic research (Gibbons, 1998). Universities are no longer seen as exclusive institutions for a small, elite proportion of the population (Garnett, 2001); in fact, the new higher education agenda in the UK is embracing widening participation, employability skills and workforce development. The development of skills to ensure businesses can compete successfully in the global economic marketplace is seen as an essential goal for higher education. In this scenario, learners are being given more opportunities to share their workplace knowledge within higher education programmes. Nonetheless, many aspects of learning, such as assessment strategies, are still heavily controlled by university
policies so the extent to which power has been re-balanced towards more student-led activity is still debateable. This paper discusses the influence of work-based learning within the ‘new higher education’ (Trowler, 2001) environment and also considers the three-way balance of power between learners, universities and employers.

**UK Government initiatives since 2000**

Whilst students in some higher education institutions, mostly in the post-1992 new universities, and in some subject areas, such as health and social welfare, have had the opportunity to engage in work-based learning before the beginning of the 21st century, there have been a growing number of government initiatives since 2000 that have helped to promote work-based learning as a legitimate focus of higher-level study. These initiatives are set out in a number of key reports. First, in 2000, the new award of foundation degree was announced by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett (HEFCE, 2000). These awards include a compulsory element of work-based learning and were promoted as an opportunity to provide students with learning which specifically focussed on the higher level skills necessary for working in the increasingly competitive UK and global economic market.

Then in 2003, the Department for Education of Skills published the report ‘The Future of Higher Education’ (DfES, 2003). This report further highlighted the need for higher education to provide work-based learning opportunities. In the following year, another DfES report, ‘Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners’, again emphasised the importance of learning in the workplace as a way of enabling individuals to gain higher level knowledge and understanding. Subsequently, in 2006 the Leitch Review of Skills was published (HM Treasury, 2006) which further highlighted the relevance of work-based learning for higher education.

Those reports highlighted the emphasis which is being placed now on learning in the workplace and signify the particular importance being given to work-based learning at the present time. The current UK political and economic agendas are changing the way that higher education relates to individual learners and employers in that the work context is being seen as an important place where learning happens. Workers and employers are therefore being recognised as relevant partners in learning programmes rather than just receivers of university designed courses and programmes.

**Work-based learning developments at the Open University**

At the Open University (OU), developments within the Centre for Outcomes-Based Education (COBE) of a generic approach to work-based learning, both in terms of support and key topic areas, provide a model of work-based learning that places the student at the heart of the learning experience (Harvey et al, 2005). In this approach the student
mediates between the workplace and the university, and is responsible for finding a suitable person, such as a line-manager, to support them in their work-based learning activities. At the time that COBE’s approach was being developed, in the early 2000s, this represented an initial change in the power balance within the OU in terms of giving more power to the individual student to negotiate their workplace learning support and was a move away from institutionally organised workplace mentors (COBE, 2006).

Current development activity in COBE is now leading the future direction of work-based learning, and concentrating on the knowledge and learning experiences that workers have gained prior to becoming a student. This ongoing development has recognised the progressively changing pedagogical role for universities in parallel to designing a framework that enables students to equate their work-based learning to higher education. Liaison with employers and professional groups has been undertaken to ensure that the needs of workers with expertise and relevant experiences are met.

Based on these developments, future work-based learning initiatives can be predicted to entail an increasing role for students and their workplace. Given the changes that have occurred in the last six years, work-based learning curriculum initiatives in the future will include more emphasis on the individual’s design of their own learning programmes in line with their unique learning needs.

Student-led learning
Evaluating the involvement of students, the university, and the workplaces in COBE’s more student-led approach to work-based learning has revealed a series of opportunities and constraints (Peachey, 2006). Considering first the experiences of students, one important finding has been that some learners find student-led activities very challenging. This is particularly the case when students have had traditional learning experiences which require the acquisition of knowledge and understanding from tutor-led teaching texts. In giving students the power to negotiate their own workplace support, and to provide learning opportunities which facilitate student autonomy and choice, requires a high level of independent engagement with the learning experience. When students have the expectation of being taught knowledge, rather than finding out and creating knowledge, then the shift in the power balance that more independent study offers is not always accepted by all learners with equanimity. Even those who have demonstrated a high level of autonomy within their work practice do not always find it straightforward to display the same level of independence within their university experiences.

In evaluating the experiences of learners who do find student-led activities motivating and more in line with their preferred learning style, the power-balance is still too heavily weighted towards the university and the workplace. As proposed by Hase and Kenyon (2000)
flexible learning currently indicates greater accessibility rather than more independence for the individual learner. In other words, current levels of student-led activity are seen as being too constrained by the policies and procedures used to verify learning in terms of higher education and occupational standards. This is particularly the case in regards to the assessment of learning achievements. Whilst learners may have the opportunity to use their workplace knowledge within their higher education learning programmes, their own role within the assessment process is usually minimal or non-existent (Taras, 2001). The power still remains with the tutors and is seen as ultimately an institutional responsibility and in such circumstances even self-assessment opportunities may not empower students (Tan, 2004). Learning based on work experiences requires students to have the power to be actively involved rather than being a passive recipient of tutor-led education (Andresen et al, 2000).

**University systems and policies**

UK university systems and policies were not originally set up to accommodate flexible work-based learning curriculum opportunities. Learning that is wholly provided by institutions can be set out, managed and taught in ways that fit in with organisational processes. In these situations the university holds the power and the student is given a set programme of learning which needs to be followed. Even when students take part in more individually-focused learning pathways, where they can set the context of their learning and share their workplace knowledge, universities are required to meet external quality assurance procedures. In the 21st century these external quality assurance procedures will need to be appropriate for learning pathways that accommodate individual options and choices relating to work-based learning (McIntrye and Solomon, 1999).

In accepting that it is necessary to ensure students benefit from high quality learning experiences, it can be argued that systems that constrain student autonomy fail to recognise the full value of the knowledge gained through an individual’s own workplace endeavours or experience. It is therefore debateable whether there can be a real shift in the power balance between the student and university whilst such policies and processes are still set up to accommodate traditional tutor-led learning.

**Employer engagement**

Since 2000 there has been an increase in the number of UK higher education institutions involved in employer engagement activities in response to recent government initiatives that require an interrelated approach to curriculum and workforce development (Lipsett, 2007). Work contexts are therefore seen as vital aspects of higher education for some curriculum developments. This highlights the need for there to be a sharing of the responsibility for creating new learning opportunities so that the student can achieve both academic knowledge and higher level skills that meet the needs of employers in their business endeavours.
This requirement for higher education to work with employers was emphasised strongly at the beginning of the 21st century in the Foundation Degree Prospectus (DfES, 2000). Now in 2007, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has set out a strategic plan for how universities are expected to enhance the economy (HEFCE, 2007). During the past 7 years one might have expected to observe a shift in the power balance between the employer and the university with a shift towards a more integrated approach to curriculum development and one that involved a mutual understanding of how education and business can work together to provide meaningful work-based learning opportunities. Although it cannot be denied that there are examples of good practice which demonstrate some shifting of the power between higher education and employers, unfortunately there is still a long way to go before there will be a more sustained shift in power between these two, very different enterprises.

One major issue that often interferes with the interaction between universities and employers is that of language. Whilst universities speak about education and learning, employers see the gaining of workforce skills in terms of training and development. Such differences in the meaning of words and language are not insurmountable but they cannot be dealt with within a short timeframe. Building up relationships based on trust and shared understanding takes time and this process is only just beginning in some parts of these two sectors.

**Sustaining changes in the balance of power**

If small changes in the power balance between learners, universities and work contexts have been detected then it is worth considering how these changes can be strengthened to provide a more sustainable and equitable role for students, universities and employers.

One of the most important considerations is to recognise that all students are individuals and have different approaches to learning (Dweck, 1999). Whilst flexible work-based learning opportunities, developed by universities to promote lifelong learning, reflect the autonomy and self-directed learning undertaken by experienced workplace practitioners (Schon, 1983) some students find this approach does not fit with their own motivations and aspirations. Some students still associate learning with being provided with facts and data rather than with finding and utilising their own sources of knowledge. On the surface one might think that enabling individuals to personalise their learning to meet their own work and study needs would lead to more power being given to students. However, not all students want this power and so each individual who is looking for a more structured tutor-led approach to gaining knowledge is reinforcing the power of universities to set course and programme learning outcomes. To sustain and increase the role of students in their own learning it will be vital to provide support and guidance which enables individuals to understand how they can best take advantage of student-led activities.
Through the development of foundation degrees and other work-focused initiatives, work-based learning now has a legitimate place in the higher education curriculum. Nonetheless, university systems still remain heavily determined by tutor-led approaches to learning which do not easily accommodate flexible, student-led activity. Consequently, despite the increasing recognition of the value of work-based learning (Styne, 2004), moving to a system which fully recognises the student’s ability to choose their own learning pathway is not straightforward when it is in direct opposition to the mainstream view that academic knowledge is superior to experience-based learning.

The development of knowledge and understanding is no longer just the concern of students and universities. Recent UK government initiatives have set out requirements for employers to be involved in curriculum developments which focus on the needs of up-skilling the workforce. Reflecting on whether employer engagement has affected the power balance between students, universities and work contexts, evidence suggests that this should be seen as occurring in specific situations rather than a wide, general change across the whole of the UK higher education sector. Indeed there is a tension between the learning goals of the individual and the workforce development aims of employers (Garrick and Usher, 2000). To achieve a real change in the balance of power between learners, universities and employers will require this tension to be understood and accommodated within new curriculum developments.

Conclusion

This paper has considered some of the changes in student experiences that have occurred through the development of new approaches to work-based learning undertaken by COBE at the OU over the last six years. Over this period there has been a shift in approach to curriculum design at the OU from institution-led work-based learning developments to an increasing recognition of the experiences and knowledge already achieved by individuals through their workplace activities. This shift represents the future direction of work-based learning developments within higher education and findings from evaluation studies commissioned by COBE suggest that the power balance between learners, the university and work context has begun to change. Nevertheless, an examination of university policies and processes suggest they are not yet flexible enough to accommodate a general increase in the power of students to have more control over their learning. In particular assessment strategies are heavily reliant on institution-led and tutor-led decision-making processes and these can be seen to outweigh any student-led activity and thereby leaving the situation in favour of university-based control. Whilst students and employers have the power of customers in the ‘new higher education’ environment, and so are able to make decisions about which higher education institution can provide the most appropriate learning opportunities, the recognition that knowledge can be gained through workplace practices has not yet significantly increased their power within universities.
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Work-based Learning: Contexts, Opportunities and Practice
Higher Education and the ‘Caring’ Employer: developing a sectoral approach to work-based learning

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Background

Sector Skills Councils have a key part to play in an educational world which increasingly involves employers in the design and delivery of programmes.

Skills for Care and Development Alliance partners represent the Sector Skills Council for social care, early years and young people’s workforce in the UK. It is an alliance of five organisations:

- Care Council for Wales
- Children’s Workforce Development Council in England
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council
- Scottish Social Services Council
- Skills for Care

Skills for Care represents the adult social care workforce in England.

Social care in England involves some 31,000 social care providing organisations, which include local authorities, parts of the NHS, and independent/private and voluntary sector organisations. The sector employs some 950,500 people, of whom over 76,000 are social workers; the rest work in the broader social care field. Care may be provided in a variety of venues, including residential homes, day centres and the service user’s own home. Increasingly, people who use services have direct payments and individualised budgets so that they employ carers directly rather than receiving care through other agencies. The workforce is predominately female (up to 95%) with about 50% of these working part-time. Over 40% of the total workforce is aged between 35 and 49. The sector suffers from high vacancy and turnover rates, low status and low pay.

Education and training providers face the task of developing a workforce that can meet the needs of people who use services, and carers, within a rapidly changing scenario of qualifications development, inspection regimes, and health and social care legislation. Work-based learning is an integral part of training and development across the sector, yet consistency of approach is lacking.

The sector is effectively divided between social workers and social care workers, and qualifications represent this split. The Social Work degree is overseen by the General Social Care Council (GSCC), and includes a period of 200 days in placement. These placements have a competence element, based on national occupational standards,
which is assessed alongside the knowledge elements delivered by universities. Post-qualifying awards for social workers are delivered by higher education institutions in response to demand from regional consortia, and focus on practice-based learning.

Other social care workers undertake National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), similarly based on national occupational standards. The Council for Social Care Inspection (Department of Health 2001) states a minimum standard of 50% of employees having or working towards an NVQ at level 2, and registered managers holding a relevant qualification at NVQ Level 4 or equivalent.

The ‘twin strand’ qualification framework within which employment and, therefore, education and training takes place, makes it difficult for employees to plan progression routes which cross from one strand to another. Many care workers seeking progression leave the sector to undertake professional training in a range of health professions where there are more opportunities for diversification. Schemes such as Apprenticeships and the new 14-19 Diploma in Society, Health and Development encourage the integration of work-related knowledge with work-based skills development and assessment. However, moving from vocational qualifications to higher education often proves problematic because of the lack of transferability between the competence-based and the academic routes.

A continuing professional development strategy developed by Skills for Care in collaboration with CWDC (Skills for Care/Children’s Workforce Development Council, 2006) identifies where career progression routes exist or could be developed. The role of work-based learning in both social work and social care is essential and based on the need for a workforce which has demonstrated competence. However, a degree calls for learning and capability over and above competence, whilst the NVQ seeks principally to ascertain competence to do the job within a prescribed role or function.

Employers commission training which enables them to meet the minimum requirements of the regulatory bodies. This training is often commissioned on the basis of cost and convenience, so there is a strong chance of minimal training resulting in minimal commitment on the parts of both employer and employee. A ‘trained’ workforce may be suitable for now, but if the sector is to expand and become more responsive to people who use services, and carers, it might be appropriate to look more towards an ‘educated’ workforce.

A number of questions face the sector in terms of future training and development. If people working in social care are assessed according to their competence within a job role, how do they learn or develop skills which will aid creativity and independent thought which are essential to the future development of the sector? If such skills are not actively developed amongst the workforce, how will the sector be able to develop the skills it
needs to move forward into new areas, such as the use of assistive technologies? Further, if work-based learning is fundamental to all learning and development within the sector, is it possible to develop a single strategy or philosophy which reflects and expands current practice?

The rest of this paper will explore the various pressures and opportunities which exist within the sector and propose some ways in which higher education may be able to address needs which are currently either not met or, perhaps, have not been explicitly identified.

**Work-based learning in the care sector**

The increasing move towards the integration of work-based learning into higher education has been driven by employer need and government’s response to economic imperatives. Discussing the introduction of NVQs, Hyland (1999) was critical of the competence model as exemplified in the NVQ framework and did not foresee a major role for higher education in skills development. However, Bennett et al (2000) indicate the growing trend towards employer/HE links in developing a skilled graduate workforce. Boud et al (2003) have explored in more depth the relevance of work-based learning as an integral part of higher education and the preparation of learners for the world of work.

The Secretary of State’s grant letter to HEFCE for 2007-8 indicates the need for higher education to play its part in developing the national economy through increased employer engagement. Foundation degrees, launched by the Government in 2001 are a prime example of how employers are increasingly involved in the development, delivery and assessment of higher education programmes. Lord Leitch’s Review of Skills (2006) calls for an increase of the skills base of the UK, seeing this as essential for economic development. As well as focusing on Level 2, Leitch calls for an increase to 40% of the population who can demonstrate skills at Level 4 and above, and makes the case for greater involvement of higher education in the development of a workforce with a range of higher level skills. In the care sector, the Department of Health publication *Options for Excellence* (DH 2006a) also stresses the need for appropriate work-based learning, picking up on the messages in the White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* (DH 2006b).

**The potential for higher education in the care sector**

What, then, is the potential role for work-based higher education in social care? Maintaining the current divide between HE and non-HE provision does not augur well for the future of a sector which has connections to a range of other professions where regulation is high, and academic levels are the key to innovation and development. Yet the sector itself appears to lack ambition in this respect. Employers (increasingly individual people who use services, and carers, through the use of individual budgets and direct payments) do not always see the benefits of training and development within tightly
constrained budgets. The lack of tradition of higher education in the sector, outside social work and post-qualifying awards, means that aspirations may be lacking, and managers themselves may have no personal experience of higher education on which to build.

However, given the general move towards developing a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, and the demographic trends which indicate that, as the UK population ages, more care workers will be needed, the time may be right for a new push towards higher level skills in the care sector, developed and delivered through higher education.

The divide between further education/training and higher education creates an artificial boundary for learning progression. The perception is prevalent in the care sector that progression into HE must necessarily be into the Social Work degree, and Level 3 qualifications may or may not allow for this progression. Yet, to see the value of HE solely in terms of this professional qualification limits the potential for higher level learning. Social care needs professional managers, caterers, accountants, planners, architects, nutritionists, administrators and so on. It needs people with an interest in and knowledge of ethics, human rights, physiology, psychology. All of these can be developed in a range of degrees, or foundation degrees, and the resulting graduate skills applied within and across the care sector. What is missing at the moment is the consideration which promotes the development of professional development pathways within the context of these other disciplines, or the acknowledgement that people with Level 3 skills in care can benefit from and contribute to a range of HE provision.

Progression to higher education from vocational qualifications in schools and colleges remains low. Whilst it could be expected that Apprentices would be interested in moving into foundation degrees to maintain their work-based study, this is not happening. Reasons cited vary, but a consistent theme is the lack of involvement of higher education in planning the Apprenticeship, and thence lack of understanding of the programme and lack of commitment to the outcomes as appropriate for higher education admission. The new Diploma offers another vocationally related route into HE, and there has been helpful work done to ensure that gatekeepers are aware of and positively disposed towards the qualification and its learners.

In order to achieve a change in higher education across the care sector, a range of aspects will need to be addressed. These include:

- A focus on the sector by higher education
- A change of employer perceptions of what higher education can offer
- A need to tie higher education provision into employer needs at local, regional and national levels.
A range of existing higher education initiatives exist which can assist with such developments.

**Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)** aim to make the whole higher education offer available to vocational learners across a lifetime of work and study. They are partnership organisations which combine the strengths of further and higher education (including at least one research-intensive institution), working in collaboration with Learning and Skills Councils, Regional Skills Partnerships, appropriate Sector Skills Councils and other key stakeholders. They are able to supplement the number of places available in higher education by bidding for Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) which can be distributed across higher education providers within the network. Many LLNs are focusing on health and social care, and most will be funding ASNs for Foundation degrees. Most health and social care provision, however, focuses on Health, where, because of relative centralisation through the NHS, there is scope for cost-effective contracts. Social care is often seen as a ‘bolt on’ part of the provision, and reaching employers can be difficult owing to the dispersed and diffuse nature of employment in the sector. However, with greater awareness of the needs of the social care sector, and engagement with regional consortia, pools of potential learners could be identified.

**Foundation degrees (FDs)** are employer-led vocational degrees, normally taking 2 years to complete on a full-time basis and 3 years part-time. There are currently some 70,000 learners enrolled across England; the target is to reach 100,000 by 2010. Although funded through HEFCE, many foundation degrees are delivered through further education colleges, and there is every likelihood that, following the Further and Higher Education White Papers and the Leitch Review, some further education colleges will start to award their own foundation degrees. Further education has been a key provider of health and social care awards, and offers local provision to people who might not feel able or confident enough to consider entry to higher education through traditional routes. The combination of local provision and higher level qualifications awarded through further education colleges could be a key to enhancing the skills and knowledge base across the sector. A study recently commissioned by Skills for Care on Foundation degrees (Moses and McLenachan, 2007) indicates that, despite the sponsoring of this qualification by the Department for Education and Skills, there has been no parallel championing in the Department of Health on behalf of the care sector. The children’s workforce and the health sector have espoused them, often with employers driving development. Given the close working relationships between the adult and children’s care workforces and the health sector, a consistent or at least complementary approach to the integration of foundation degrees across sectors could be of benefit.
Higher Level Pathfinder Projects (HLSP) have been established to extend the Government’s Train to Gain scheme, initially designed to target Level 2 qualifications, to include higher education. They are being piloted in three areas in the first instance: North East, North West, South West. Each of these will establish means to test how HE-level programmes can be developed, packaged and marketed to create funding partnerships between employers, learners and providers. Each Pathfinder has its own priorities. The North East will focus on health and social care. These pilots can be used to inform appropriate means of engaging employers, particularly in small and medium sized enterprises, which form a large part of the social care sector, in order to reach those who have not so far engaged with higher education.

Higher education has, throughout its history, educated people for employment. Since the earliest days of preparation for work in the Church, through medicine, to more recent professions such as nursing and social work, the benefits of being trained in the discipline of critical review and professional reflection as well as professional practice, has underpinned the higher education offer. The perceived weakness, in today’s climate, is that the offer has been based on what the providers felt was important to teach rather than what employers and employees felt it was important to learn. This trend is changing. Through the Sector Skills Agreement and Sector Qualifications Strategy, Skills for Care has the opportunity to take to higher education the needs of the sector, and the funding initiatives from HEFCE offer a channel for this to be heard and acted upon.

The revised Social Work degree, the new post-qualifying awards and continuing professional development strategy give a set of principles and practices which could be applied to other higher education provision. The use of regional planning mechanisms and the integration of work-based learning, together with planned learning and career development could be expanded to a range of provision which would build on best practice in both professional development and educational design. National Occupational Standards and knowledge sets can guide the curriculum and ensure that any new higher education provision dovetails with and adds to existing NVQ and other qualifications. Under these circumstances, the ‘value added’ of the higher education experience would be to enhance the future capability of learners, in addition to affirming their current competence.

Enabling people who use services and carers to understand how to commission and get the best from their services may offer another strand for development with higher education, as could the development of roles emerging from the New Types of Worker project (http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/).

Higher education is now able to offer a range of provision outside the traditional and familiar full-time degree structures. Modular frameworks allow learners to follow negotiated pathways, often at a time, place and pace to suit themselves. Individual
learners can use their workplace as a learning environment so that they can earn credit for projects which they carry out as part of their work. In-house courses can be accredited so that learners can accumulate credit towards a qualification if they so wish. Short, customised courses can be developed with employers so that their own business needs are met whilst their workforce is developed. Other opportunities also exist for collaborative research and joint appointments of staff so that the professional currency of teaching staff is maintained and the educational development of practitioners is enhanced.

Employers in social care are not always aware of the potential flexibility offered by higher education, and may not approach institutions which could give their staff the skills, knowledge and experience of critical thinking which will be crucial to the future workforce. In addition, many people working in social care are earning low wages and may have low educational aspiration and confidence. Social care is not seen as a destination career for graduates, and employers are unable to pay graduate employees at appropriate rates. These elements would need to be challenged if the care sector wished to provide the level and quality of care necessary to meet the vision of the government and the expectation of people who use services, and carers.

With a clearer understanding of the opportunities, and the challenges, which surround social care and engagement with higher education, there is potential to use work-based learning to develop the care workforce of the future, and contribute to both economic and societal development.

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We believe that work-based learning (WBL) can serve to redress the emerging imbalance between the two agendas which have been generally at the heart of promoting work-based learning solutions, those of widening participation/social justice and economic competitiveness. This paper will look at the way in which WBL within the University of Derby Foundation Degree, Children and Young People’s Services may overturn the failure to deliver in some areas on the promise which original Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) work in the 1980s and early 1990s suggested.

Following the development of principles formalising the assessment of experiential learning by adult educators in the US during the late 1970s and early 1980s, (Keeton et al., 1976), and applying these principles in recognising the value of reflection as defined by Kolb (1984) and Schon (1987), planned experiential learning was being hailed as a way of using learning in the work context as the basis of achieving academic credit, and so as a liberator of people for whom first chance education had not delivered success. (Evans, 1988).

Many heralded the social equity of a system that would recognise the value of people’s non-school based learning, achieved incidentally or even accidentally through reflection on life experience either within or outside the workplace. Over the next ten years, parallel systems of collecting and presenting evidence of learning from prior learning (e.g. Gorringe, 1987, Storan, 1988) and from planned future experiential learning (e.g. Deardon, 1989) were being developed within HE institutions (HEIs).

The former systems, focused on prior learning, were generally organised centrally by HEIs, and were about support for individuals to engage with some form of process of reflection in order to identify and present evidence of learning from experience in a way that the HEIs could recognise as ‘academically’ valid and so assess for credit. And because the process was almost always being applied to mature people with life and work experience, it tended to be motivated by notions of individual empowerment and social justice. Adult education tutors were happy to consider nurturing ‘second chance’ students as a primary function. These ideals were later to feed into the widening participation debate.

The latter systems, for planned future experiential learning, were more likely to be faculty owned, and were generally within the umbrella of a defined and pre-determined curriculum. Work-based learning was developed as a tool for delivering future learning through real world experience as a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schon, ibid). Initially, this was therefore recognising the value of learning from work activity towards a higher level
learning experience. In this way, HE could claim to have been doing this for decades, if not centuries, through such as sandwich education, and the internships within the higher professions of medicine and law.

However, during the 80s and 90s, the work in recognising both prior and planned experiential learning was made more specific and precise through the articulation of a taxonomy by which to assess the relative value or level of learning that was taking place, and to quantify it in relation to a credit value. This was described most usefully under the banner of levels of learning outcomes (Otter, 1992).

Learning outcomes therefore became a tool for the adult ‘social equity through second chance education’ supporters of APEL, because they confirmed that prior learning could equate in level and substance to an ‘HE’ learning experience. They also became the means by which non-traditional curriculum content could be defined, thus opening higher education to those who could not access a traditional model of HE. This provided an alternative mode of study for those who had difficulty with the delivery schedule of traditional curriculum, or with the nature of institutional learning. They could use the curriculum content of their work activity to generate equivalent academic progression. This form of work-based learning therefore offered an opportunity to open up curriculum development as a powerful tool for individual empowerment.

Although it is true to say that some programmes, such as the Learning through Work programme at the University of Derby were set up to deliver against this model of planned experiential or work-based learning, it is also the case that many HEIs found the principles of APEL too difficult to apply in any practical sense, and notions of credit transfer were not taken up in any numbers across the sector, and so did not come to engage with the potential for defining curriculum through a mapping against generic learning outcomes or level descriptors. For most HEIs, work-based learning was a parallel, non-integrated activity to the main business of academic curriculum delivery.

It has remained a relatively small area of work, with only a few institutions actively involved, and the promised impact on levels of social equity of the experiential learning and work-based learning initiatives was correspondingly small. (Twenty years on there are still many places in the sector where the alignment of learning outcomes with teaching or learning activity and assessment methodology is not common practice.) We believe that this is one factor in explaining why in the 40 years to 2004 participation increased, but without a corresponding increase in numbers from non-traditional backgrounds. (Layer, 2004)

When the focus shifted to the improvement of UK plc higher level skills, and so economic competitiveness, the work-based learning movement received new impetus. Government white papers, such as 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential (DfES, 2003), and the
targets for participation in HE, and more recently the Leitch report (2006) which is calling for 40% of the workforce to be qualified to level 4 by 2020, have all refocused HE attention on the need for meeting employer agendas for growing higher levels of skill in the workforce. The earlier work has clearly shown that an effective method of doing so is through linking work-based learning with academic level descriptors and learning outcome statements. So we look to accredit in-company staff development programmes, and to translate emerging National Occupational Standards into outcomes within an HE level learning programme. As Roodhouse and Hemsworth (2004) point out, appropriately designed foundation degrees are able to respond fully to all these agendas.

The QAA in the foundation degree qualification Benchmark (2004) states:

‘Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of foundation degrees and their design. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace. It should be a two-way process, where the learning in one environment is applied in the other. Work-based learning requires the identification and achievement of defined and related learning outcomes.’

In other words, the use of work-based learning is fundamental to the development and design of a genuine foundation degree. Those areas of the sector which have looked to re-badge HND or other undergraduate provision with the foundation degree logo have not only missed the point but also done a fundamental disservice to those in the potential constituency for which foundation degrees were invented.

Work-related curriculum such as that which was for many years promoted in schools through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative was just that, a work-related curriculum. This was an attempt to introduce systematic models of simulation and work experience into education in order to give a real world flavour to the experience. The curriculum was owned by the provider, and was structured to fit with the needs of the provider. It was in that way institution-led. The extent to which it engaged individual learners was to some extent therefore mitigated; it was an occasional distraction from academic study. In relation to work experience, for example, the links between what was being taught within the institution and the experience in the outside world were seldom strong, largely accidental and sometimes non-existent, [Berkeley, Braham and Miller, 1990]. Within HE, the sandwich year is still rarely assessed beyond a simple pass/fail and there is often no direct correlation drawn between the curriculum content of the degree programme at levels 5 and 6 and the experiential learning experience of the placement sandwiched between them.
To a lesser extent the same may be said of the HNC/D. The curriculum is designed partly with the needs of industry in mind, but starts from the ability of the institution to deliver a programme at that level. It grows out of the staff expertise and the resources and facilities of the provider. It therefore uses a curriculum development and delivery model which remains largely institution owned and led with often parallel activities to reflect work contexts, rather than real world experiences integrated into the course.

The foundation degree gives HE the opportunity to turn this model around, and to start from and incorporate centrally the curriculum of work in the curriculum-related workplace as opposed to project or simulation based examples in a work-related curriculum. So the learning opportunities which a workplace provides can be identified, ascribed level and volume, and combined with theoretical underpinning delivered in a more formal learning context. Planned learning activities can be carried out and assessed using real world tasks and activities, within a planned curriculum. Where employers are centrally involved in this process of construction, the resulting curriculum is not merely a reflection of their needs, but genuinely presents a curriculum of work for academic recognition.

This reflects the structure of an authentically work-based learning programme, as exemplified by the Learning through Work scheme, which starts from the curriculum of work brought by the individual (or group of individuals) and combines it within a structure, reinforced with level descriptors and benchmark statements, with appropriate additional learning supported through the institution. However well intentioned, curriculum which is constructed from the opposite direction, i.e. which sets out a body of knowledge and then seeks a context to support this knowledge, will not produce learning in the workplace with the same degree of validity for either students or their employers. It will therefore fall short of its potential for engaging students in their own journey towards individual empowerment, and for engaging employers in growing higher level performance and so increased economic competitiveness.

We believe that the case study of the Foundation Degree in Children’s and Young People’s Services supporting classroom assistants offers an ideal demonstration of how social equity and economic competitiveness can co-exist as the rationale for and product of a work-based learning programme such as is being promoted above.

It is emerging within this programme that the concept of reflective practice as a distinctive feature of the foundation degree pedagogy may be providing too simplistic a model. As practitioners foundation degree students already have a sophisticated level of insight into their workplace issues but frequently do not recognise this in themselves and so lack the confidence, and evidence, to drive this forward and cause it to have an impact on their practice. Workforce remodelling in the Education Sector, (Raising standards and tackling workload ,15th January 2003, Children’s Act 2004) did help to provide the impetus for
change, especially as these two changes coincided with the development of foundation degrees, providing both the ‘will’ and the ‘way’.

Based on the experience we had with In-service teacher training for the post-compulsory sector, we developed a model of work-based assessments which students could fully contextualise to their own workplace. This was to encourage busy working people to see a purpose in their study and so to motivate them to continue. Unlike the HND model based on parallel activities, this introduces the concept of action-based research very early in the programme, and the outcomes are surprising. Students engage much earlier with research and do so confidently, both in terms of their reading, and workplace based research. Their overall achievements are higher; even when they progress to a traditional BA, they frequently outperform their peer group, something not generally anticipated by the academic community. They also seek to address much more significant problems in the workplace, with a high degree of success in finding real solutions to long term problems, which contributes to a virtuous cycle by further building their confidence, and hence increasing the complexity of their next assignment.

Two keys to this success can be identified. Firstly, close relationships with employers in the design of foundation degree awards have produced a course which matches the role against the theoretical input, so learners immediately see the application of theory to (reflective) practice. Secondly, the careful selection of the delivery team, who need themselves to have appropriate vocational experience, but perhaps as importantly have the interpersonal skills as adult education tutors. They need to build the confidence of their students, to provide tutorial support, to encourage, to reassure, reflecting the staff profile of those working in the original institutional context for APEL ‘Making Experience Count’ style programmes.

These students are adult learners, in a more traditional sense. Many have low expectations of themselves, high expectations of their teachers, and their only confidence is in their own perceived ability to be unsuccessful. This is perpetuated by the accepted hierarchy of a school environment, some teachers still being intimidated by other adults in the classroom, and protecting their own status, by unconsciously reinforcing the pecking order.

Contrary to this, many Teaching Assistants, and Early Years staff are in reality, talented, skilled, professionals, with real insight into classroom dynamics. They also have a strong work ethic, excellent organizational skills, and can easily find their way around educational systems and IT; they just don’t acknowledge it yet!

The difference is the starting point of the learner’s engagement with the programme, wanting to learn, to have a more dynamic position in the workplace, needing the skills to challenge the hierarchy in the workplace, doing the activity, already having the benefit of
hindsight so to speak. Tutor feedback then provides the confirmation that their original concepts were sound, or maybe just needed a little adjustment. This philosophy incorporates all the main elements of Phil Race’s model of learning (Race 2005), which has always applied particularly well to adults. Add to this the environmental aspects of new roles in the workplace, line manager encouragement and support with funding and this is a real winner!

‘This also helped me to realise that my lack of confidence relates to not feeling like I have any valuable experiences... When I first came on the course I felt I had nothing to bring. I didn’t do well at school, and I’ve never had a career, aside from working in an office for a few years, so I thought I had no relevant experiences’ (Gloria, quoted in Burke and Jackson 2007)

The pedagogy is different. The employer’s involvement in the design of the programme provides a real ‘fit’ with experience, so the two elements blend and provide mutual support and momentum, the reflective components becoming almost automatic.

There are also echoes of less-than-successful experiments in Nuffield Sciences, which worked well for students who had insight, based as they were on Piaget’s theories of learning, but lacked the structure necessary for your less-than-natural scientist. We suspect the same model applies here, again driven by the self-generating fuel of motivation: ‘I want to know, and I understand the rules, so I’ll find out.’

On many courses where the proportion of widening participation students is high, HEIs have a problem with low retention rates, and many are working on a number of projects to address this.

‘Four years into his term of office, and following the publication by HEFCE of its widening participation strategy, and its related performance indicators, the Secretary of State made it clear to institutions that retention as well as recruitment was a key factor of government policy to widen access to higher education.’ (Parry, in Peelo and Wareham 2002)

However, drop-out is low on the Foundation Degree programme in Children’s and Young People’s Services. We believe this is because of the high level of individual and collective engagement with the curriculum content and the learning methodology. One noticeable factor is the group identity which keeps people on track and this is very much encouraged by the delivery team. Indeed, where the usual life events such as pregnancy, ill-health etc. occur, students will choose to interrupt their study and intercalate rather than withdraw.
The end result is the same; these students are high achievers, have moved into significant roles across the broad field of education, are making a difference, and meeting the new expectations of ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES 2003) and the strategy of the Children’s Workforce Development Council. Many of them would never make that transition without TLC, a small, but vital, specialist element of WBL in this case.

So, perhaps at the end of it all, foundation degrees – properly constructed and delivered – are not ‘just’ about adult education, widening participation, developing higher skills policies, economic competitiveness, or even perhaps social equity. To the students on the course they are a seamless marriage of work and study, with people they like and value (including the tutors) which gives them challenge and opportunity. If they can meet the agenda of UK plc, and retain a function as vehicles for individual empowerment and social equity then that is a fantastic bonus!

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The RAF Foundation Degrees: Meeting Employer Need – A Consortium Approach

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Abstract

This foundation degree development involved assembling a consortium of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who could work together to develop bespoke Foundation Degrees (Arts) in Business, and in Leadership and Management, to be offered as an elective learning opportunity to personnel within the Royal Air Force. As a development it clearly predates the Leitch Report, but nevertheless addresses many of the key issues raised and provides a context for discussion about how the university sector can work with large employers.

This paper argues that the success of the consortium is founded in the shared vision of co-operative, rather than competitive working, the leadership of the RAF and their close involvement in all aspects of the consortium, together with the involvement of quality and finance managers from each HEI. In many respects it is a unique intervention by the HE sector in the field of Fd provision and joint working with clients.

Introduction and background

The Royal Air Force Foundation Degree – conceived in late 2004 and which began delivery in late 2006 – has been a significant event for the Higher Education (HE) sector and, in many respects a landmark in the way HE responds to employer needs. The Foundation Degree (Fd) has the potential to be one of the largest currently in existence, and also has significance as being the product of a unique process of co-operation between the Royal Air Force (RAF) itself, and a consortium of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who have worked together with the employer and other stakeholders to design the curriculum and deliver the programmes. The role of Foundation Degrees as programmes designed to facilitate the widening access and participation agenda in HE underpinned the project, as did the related drive by the UK government to promote engagement with HE qualifications that have a vocational focus (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2003).

In many respects, the genesis of foundation degrees was a political one driven by central government rather than the product of specifically academic drivers. Smith and Betts’ claim that the development of Fds was ‘less to do with the development of a carefully honed concept derived through recognition of the need for such an award across the academic community, but more to do with the Government’s desire to achieve certain key policy objectives’ (2003:224) has particular resonance for this discussion. Indeed, the UK government has been visibly keen to ensure that the Fd is utilised as part of its strategy to ensure engagement by the public sector itself with HE, specifically encouraging the uptake of HE-level vocational qualifications for public sector staff such as those in the civil service and armed forces.
Momentum towards developing vocational skills and qualifications at the interface between Higher Education and Further Education – and with the partnership of employers – continues to dominate much current government thinking, as the Leitch Review (2006) testifies. Nowhere has this move been clearer than through the continued promotion of foundation degrees, and the identification of those characteristics of Fds that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) regards as definitive and essential. In this regard, the QAA has argued that the distinctiveness of foundation degrees depends upon the integration of the following characteristics: employer involvement; accessibility; articulation and progression; flexibility; and partnership. While none of these attributes is unique to foundation degrees, their clear and planned integration within a single award, underpinned by work-based learning, makes the award very distinctive (QAA, 2004a:5).

These key characteristics of foundation degrees guided the development of the RAF Fd throughout – though it possesses both these features and some others which are more unusual and distinctive and thereby worthy of wider discussion. In particular, it involved the development of a consortium of providers that uniquely comprised four separate HEIs working in partnership with the employer, and stakeholders such as Foundation degree Forward (FdF) and the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). In addition, two HEIs also worked in partnership – commissioned by the employer – to conduct direct research among the likely target audience for the Fd, ensuring that the programmes that were constructed were fit for purpose both in terms of what the employer intended and in terms of likely engagement from a wide variety of potential participants.

**Initial approach**

The specific impetus for a Foundation Degree for the RAF came from Learning Forces within the RAF during late 2004, set in the context of the previously established ‘Foundation For Government’ Foundation Degree programme for civil servants developed by the University of Chester and the Cabinet Office (in consultation with a cross-section of six government departments). This civil service Fd was situated within Chester’s framework for the accreditation of work-based and work-related learning, and its development had been in response to a request from Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), that the UK Civil Service should be at the forefront of the government’s drive to establish foundation degrees as a means of addressing the range of policy imperatives identified above. The establishment of this Fd (initially as a ‘pathfinder’ project with the University of Chester but with the intention of wider participation involving delivery by other HEIs at a later stage) was a development that proved to be of interest to the needs of the RAF, which at that point was embarking on a major programme of internal restructuring.

Prompted by contact with senior civil servants in the Cabinet Office – including John McLoughlin who had been seconded by Charles Clarke from the DfES to co-ordinate the
development of the civil service Fd – the RAF entered into initial discussions with the University of Chester about the nature and operation of negotiated work-based learning frameworks and their possible suitability as vehicles for the development of an RAF foundation degree. Discussion with Squadron Leader Jim Pruden of Learning Forces identified the potential likely scale of the operation and led to the decision to involve a possible consortium of other HEIs to ensure wide-ranging delivery and coverage. This consortium was to be primarily drawn from those UK HEIs with similar negotiated work-based learning (WBL) programmes to the framework in operation at Chester.

Movement towards developing a consortium was, at the request of the RAF, assisted by Learndirect’s Learning through Work (LtW) team, a product of LtW being the main national network specifically for providers of negotiated WBL in HE, with an emphasis on provision at distance with online support. As a result, in late 2004 and early 2005, a number of HEIs – mostly participants in the LtW network – were invited to a series of meetings with the RAF to discuss the development of a consortium which could collectively design and deliver a flexible FD for the service, with initial routes towards awards in Business and also Leadership and Management.

Underpinning this development, the RAF commissioned Professor David Young from the University of Derby and Dr David Perrin of the University of Chester to conduct a research study into perceptions of Higher Education learning and accreditation within the RAF. The research used a grounded theory approach to data generation and analysis and sought to identify key themes related to higher level accreditation and civilian qualifications which could inform future strategy for higher level learning in the RAF. In this, it identified both the need for a foundation degree-type qualification within the service and a preference for work-based and work-related learning that was both flexible and capable of being facilitated at distance, due to the rapidly changing job roles and locations of RAF personnel. The key recommendations of the report included several points underpinning the need for the development of a flexible Fd with progression routes, involving:

- Accessibility of accreditation opportunities for all ranks;
- The recognition that accreditation should not be compulsory but actively sponsored by senior management with realistic commitments of both time and resources;
- The use of flexible frameworks of Work-Based Learning (WBL) and Work-Related Learning (WRL) using a blended learning methodology, designed to aid accreditation of prior, current and future learning and to encourage upskilling and critical reflection on workplace practices;
- Further development of the RAF’s recent moves to ensure that elements of its in-house training programmes are credit rated by the HE sector, wherever appropriate.’

(Perrin and Young, 2005:22)
The Report identified three important reasons why RAF personnel felt the need for coherent and consolidated HE accreditation opportunities: as an aid to recruitment, as an aid to promotion and retention within the service, and – most crucially of all – as an aid to resettlement given the significant progress of RAF internal restructuring (Perrin and Young:11-12). In this respect, the report found that:

’a more systematic approach to HE accreditation is needed from an early stage in the careers of personnel, which can impact positively on servicemen and women in terms of retention and eventually, resettlement’ (p.20).

The Report’s findings were used as the basis for informing the approach taken by the HEIs that were to become members of the RAF consortium as it was convened during 2005: namely the Universities of Chester, Derby and Staffordshire, and the Open University. Given the varying needs of the likely participants on an RAF Fd programme that had been highlighted in the Report, consideration was given to ensuring that skills that are transferable outside the armed forces would feature prominently. Similarly, in view of the learning preferences expressed (Perrin and Young, 2005:13-14) a blended learning approach was to be adopted as far as possible by each particular HEI and, indeed, across the consortium as whole, giving potential participants a variety of learning options to choose from while still meeting employer and participant needs within the general context of a negotiated work-based and work-related curriculum.

**Approach to Development**

All validation processes require consideration of a range of key issues, including curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment strategies, as well as operational issues concerning programme management. For the development of the RAF Fd the same issues had to be addressed, but on a cross-institutional scale, set in the context of the QAA Code of Practice (QAA, 2006).

For logistical reasons, the RAF and HEIs decided that the optimal way to approach the development was to identify a series of work streams reporting to a Steering Group. These work streams involved personnel from the RAF and all the HEIs, and focused on curriculum design, marketing, finance and quality assurance, being based on small, representative groups developing ideas and suggestions and bringing them back to the full consortium Steering Group for discussion and approval.

The curriculum work stream agreed that there should be a shared set of programme learning outcomes, developed co-operatively by all partner institutions with the RAF, to reflect the needs of the organisation and its personnel. In developing the learning outcomes, staff in this work stream were able to use the QAA Foundation Degree
Qualification Benchmark Statement (October 2004) and QAA Honours Degree Benchmark Statement for General Business and Management (2000). The work stream recognised that the agreed programme learning outcomes could be met through a number of different curricular models building upon particular expertise and approaches to work-based learning in the HEIs, while nevertheless forming a outline common curriculum. Roodhouse (2004:37) has noted that ‘a common curriculum language, National Occupational Standards and QCA key skills for vocational and work-based routes into higher education’ are essential for national credit frameworks to operate successfully, and it was this outlook that underpinned the curriculum work stream’s methodology.

The model chosen was that of constructive alignment, setting out to align learning with the curriculum, teaching and assessment processes and the resources to support learning. The role of the developers was to ‘create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes’ (Biggs, 2003), while allowing flexibility, where possible, to enable the learners to have a choice in the way in which learning is evidenced.

Smith and Betts (2000:594) have noted that for partnerships in work-based learning to succeed there must be ‘something in them for all concerned, and of which all partners are aware from the outset and actively pursue’. The over-arching emphasis on flexibility in provision to learners, to enable them to make real choices throughout their studies, has been this factor in this development, together with the will to see it work.

A number of key areas for the curriculum were identified, consistent and congruent with QAA Honours Degree Benchmark Statements for General Business and Management (2000) and the requirements communicated by the RAF and its personnel. These were then developed into mandatory, core and subject topic areas within two named awards, relating to either Leadership and Management or Business, with a minimum number of credits to be achieved in these areas (see Fig. 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Modules</th>
<th>Foundation degree Business</th>
<th>Foundation degree Leadership and Management</th>
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| (minimum 15 credits per module) | NQF LEVEL 4 Self Review/Programme Planning  
*An initial review and planning for the student’s route through the programme under guidance from a ‘home’ university tutor* | |
| | Skills and Approaches to Work Based Learning  
*Development of the skills required to progress a student’s studies* | |
| | NQF LEVELS 4 or 5 Work-based learning module(s) | |
| | NQF LEVEL 5 Exit Review  
*Review of what the student has achieved and the future development opportunities now available including routes to Honours degrees* | |
| Generic Core Topics | Communication and ICT Organisational Environment Working with People  
*These topics can be addressed through taught modules (online/direct/combination), APL (certificated or experiential), or negotiated experiential learning* | |
| (minimum 15 credits each) | Specific Core Topics  
(minimum 15 credits each) Specific to the named programme | Customers and Stakeholders Finance Operational Management  
*These topics can be addressed through taught modules (online/direct/combination), APL (certificated or experiential), or negotiated experiential learning* |
| | Leadership at Work Managing Change Operational Strategy  
*These topics can be addressed through taught modules (online/direct/combination), APL (certificated or experiential), or negotiated experiential learning* | |
It was therefore agreed that topic area could be addressed in a number of ways. For example, by taught modules (through attendance or distance learning) and negotiated modules (e.g. a work-based project). Similarly, it was recognised that a number of RAF learners would have extensive expertise within some aspects of the curriculum and should be encouraged to demonstrate achievement of these themes through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) processes, whether this related to certificated learning, or experiential uncertificated learning. A key driver in the design was that there should be flexibility within the curriculum for learners to include additional credit from themes or topics pertinent to their working role and that these topics could then be used by the learners to align their learning activities outlined in a programme plan.

Another key flexible feature of the curriculum design was in the attitude adopted towards helping learners undertake study with more than one HEI in the consortium. This involved RAF learners registering with a ‘home’ institution for a minimum agreed number of credits, but being allowed through the operation of agreed credit transfer mechanisms to undertake study with one or more of the other HEIs for access to particular types of content, or to learning driven mainly by online resources when participants are posted overseas.

Embedded through the agreed curriculum are also elements of process, designed to reflect the work-based nature of foundation degrees. These include an initial programme planning module, the requirement that a minimum of 30 credits for each programme must come from experiential learning components and/or work-based projects, and a final, reflective Exit Review module, where participants are encouraged to engage in programme-level reflection and a consideration of their possible next steps in personal and professional development (including progression to Honours, where relevant).

Parallel with this process from the curriculum work stream, one of the main issues identified by the work stream looking at quality assurance concerned the nature of the HEI co-operation involved, including whether this development could or should be considered under the QAA Regulations for Collaborative Provision (2004b). Stephen Jackson (Director of Reviews, QAA) was invited to attend a meeting of the Steering Group and offered support and advice ensuring the co-operative, rather than collaborative, nature of the development.

The quality assurance of the foundation degrees delivered by each HEI operates under an agreed set of Consortium arrangements. While detailed policies and procedures can vary between the consortium HEIs, they fulfil the common goal of ensuring the quality of the educational provision and the maintenance of academic standards within that institution, and are encapsulated in a Consortium Handbook, alongside germane protocols developed by the finance and marketing work streams.
The validation and approval processes for each programme have been those appropriate to the awarding HEI. To ensure transparency of process and strengthen the consortium arrangements, there was representation from both the RAF and the other consortium partners at formal validation events. Undoubtedly, this was a positive experience both for the HEI panels and for the development team as it encouraged articulation of the rationale and ethos of the consortium, as well as the operational details. The robustness of this approach was confirmed when, with minor adaptations, the agreed framework (including the programme learning outcomes) stood the test of four separate University validation or approval procedures.

It was agreed that in future, annual monitoring reports will be produced for each university where student performance indicators, including for enrolment, progression and achievement, will be made available to the RAF and other consortium members, thereby aligning the approach to the process outlined by Smith and Betts (2000:595), where the responsibility for monitoring, evaluation and review of provision needs to lie equally with the employer. As the Fd develops, the monitoring process will include the sharing of feedback from RAF students and comments made by external examiners in their annual reports, to enable the Steering Group of the consortium to further enhance the provision.

**Key Replicable Features of the Model**

The lessons learned from this project have been manifold, ranging, in particular, across co-operative working, client liaison with a major public sector employer, and curriculum design issues. In many respects, this was a project that was a ground-breaking one for HE and which possesses a number of features which can be replicated and developed in the future by others.

Studies of inter-organisational collaboration have suggested it is important to establish a basis for building trust between the parties involved by ‘...form[ing] agreements about the purpose of the collaboration’ (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). The process of trust-building is itself seen as integral to the broader process of negotiating the inevitable ambiguities and complexity of co-working. In projects such as this, with inherent structural complexity involving relations between an employer, four individual HEIs and a number of other stakeholders, agreement over the employer’s objectives was central to the project’s success. From that base the parties were able to develop a common understanding of the educational processes and systems needed to make the project operationally feasible and the representatives of each HEI began to establish how their institution could contribute to its success.

In the particular case of this project, it was steered from the outset by staff of the RAF Learning Forces (Accreditation and Training Unit) based at RAF Innsworth in Gloucestershire.
Their involvement in RAF generic staff training and knowledge of the various forms of accreditation gained at both pre-HE and HE levels provided tremendous impetus to the project’s launch and an invaluable asset as the consortium went through its various stages of formation. Indeed, it was the requirement for a University award which recognised accredited training and study from these various sources which was established as a key common objective. This was then reinforced by the findings of the staff-learner research study (Perrin and Young, 2005).

There have been such awards for commissioned officer staff in place for some considerable time with, for example, Open University credit being awarded against standard officer training courses such as the Joint Officer Command Course (JOCC) and the specialist courses involved in pilot and navigator training. However, most, if not all, of the training courses for non-commissioned air staff did not gain University credit, but instead were mapped against vocational qualification awards such NVQs, certificates and diplomas. Some of these awards were eligible for credit or APEL assessment, but in the first instance the two forms of accreditation were developed as mutually exclusive and the lack of formal articulation between them was viewed by the RAF as a barrier to potential career progression for their staff. Hence the introduction of foundation degrees presented an opportunity for this to be achieved, and the perceived career progression barrier to be addressed. The clarity with which this was communicated allowed a shared understanding of the client employer’s objectives to develop and facilitated a move towards a shared commitment based on empathy with the staff-learner group.

In parallel with this, the consortium found it essential to understand the constraints they were working under. While the Learning Forces team at RAF Innsworth were knowledgeable about accreditation systems, the profile of their staff-learner population and their behaviours, they had little knowledge of the QA, financial and regulatory frameworks of the HE sector. More importantly, they had no financial autonomy and limited decision-making discretion with regard to resource allocation – a position all too typical of training and development units within large organisations. Therefore, initial discussions about a single set of RAF awards validated jointly by the consortium HEIs established that this goal was unattainable given both the costs and institutional restrictions to the RAF itself becoming a validated institution. Views quickly coalesced around the establishment of individually-validated awards in each of the consortium HEIs instead. A further complication was that, as there was no client funding for the development of the awards, they needed to be largely based on existing curricular frameworks and teaching and learning methods. Anything new, including the award validations themselves, had to be justified in each HEI as being eligible for mainstream government funding.

Despite all the efforts taken to develop a coherent programme, the consortium was also aware that it might be considered overly complicated by the learners for whom it was
intended. We were (and remain) four different Universities, each with our own separate curricula and distinctive pedagogical/andragogical approaches. While we may be convinced of the virtues of these differences in catering to a large and diverse RAF workforce with a variety of different learning styles, it is clear that choosing the appropriate elements to form a coherent study pathway requires expert intermediation from trained advisory staff. We became acutely aware that in order to help learners make sense of the differences in each University’s approach we would have to work closely with the RAF’s Personal Learning Advisors (PLAs), so we spent some time working with them – an initial briefing on the programme at their national conference and two subsequent development workshops – to build their understanding of how each of our schemes operates and the processes of referral in each University. It is evident that many of the PLAs are unused to playing such a proactive role in what is effectively first stage academic advice, but already elements of good working practice are emerging in the referral process.

Areas for Further Investigation

Smith and Betts (2003:227) expressed scepticism about the employer’s role in Fd consortia, asserting that ‘it is unlikely that employers will ever play a central role in the management and operation of the Foundation Degree or any other vocational award’. By establishing a multi-HEI consortium, the RAF have, effectively, written in their own role as operational chair for the scheme, mediating between parties of equal status. This is perhaps in contrast to some consortia led by a single validating HEI who tend to act as power holder to other smaller institutions such as Further Education Colleges. Regular meetings of the Fd Scheme’s Steering Group facilitates the process of trust-building begun with the scheme’s inception and design, but also potentially allows the RAF to intervene, within agreed parameters, in the management of the programmes. This could form the template for future schemes of a similar nature.

While the HEIs have not formally collaborated in the development of new modules, several avenues have been opened, such as:

- supporting the further development of learndirect ‘Learning through Work’;
- the development of cross-institutional ‘learning resource’ workshops for RAF Fd learners;
- arrangements designed to ease appropriate credit transfer between HEIs for RAF Fd participants;
- the production of conference papers examining the innovative practice involved, and the organisation of an (albeit unsuccessful) HEIF funding bid;
- the extension of this model of working for use with other public sector bodies and large organisations, possibly including other sections of the armed forces.
Whether these and other avenues can be explored more fully depends upon the rather
difficult and shifting terrain of quality assurance for collaborative provision. Each of
the four Universities’ QA units is rightly wary of collaborative audit arrangements which
are costly and designed for single institution accountability. They continue to advise the
consortium representatives to steer around these arrangements. In the mean time we
continue to probe the boundaries with project suggestions.

One final area for future investigation is in validation processes, which many of us are
keen to streamline. While each of the existing awards was authorised separately, the
benefits of joint validation were discussed. In principle the consortium has committed
itself to the development of at least one other set of FD awards, linked to the accredited
training of RAF staff in engineering. It remains to be seen whether joint validation can
be trialled, or whether potential benefits would justify such a venture.

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Facilitation of work-based learning in health care settings

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Introduction
Changes within health service delivery have made it necessary to develop alternative ways to deliver education and training for health and social care staff. This paper provides an account of how work-based learning (WBL) was used to facilitate development of two different groups. The first group comprised recently qualified staff that needed to develop their clinical skills and competence within a specialist area; the second group were experienced senior staff who needed to devise and implement strategic plans in a context where rapid change was normal.

Background
Clarke and Copeland (2003) assert that developing nursing practice in any area demands skills, knowledge, support and a long term commitment to achieve best practice. Until recently staff development in these areas tended to rely on taught modules offered by the University which could be assessed and accredited. The University serves a widely distributed geographical area and one criticism of this approach was that modules had a 'one size fits all' approach which did not always meet the needs of individual learners or the diverse workplaces from which they came. There were concerns that programmes offered reflected a higher education view of the skills, knowledge and understanding needed by health service providers, while the providers often had different views of what was required to develop and improve practice in a given area of the service (Clarke and Copeland 2003). It has been argued that higher education programmes were not equipping learners sufficiently to meet the everyday demands of the workplace (Boud et al 2001; DoH 2000a,b,2001; Winter and Maisch 1996).

Ayers and Smith (1998) suggest that NHS Trusts need responsive education that meets the diverse requirements resulting from changing health policy and the development of new nursing roles. Educational programmes therefore need to respond dynamically to changes in healthcare services and to facilitate, not inhibit, learning between all professionals involved in patient pathways (Macleod Clark, 2003).

The term 'work-based learning' was a feature of the NHS plan (DoH 2000), and was used to describe how learning that is relevant to clinical practice and used in the clinical area, could benefit patients directly, (Thorne & Hackwood 2002). In response to this the Workforce Development Confederation (WDC) and local NHS Trusts commissioned the University to investigate and provide this option.
Process

A collaborative working group of University and NHS trust representatives was set up to examine both definitions of work-based learning and existing models of provision. An evaluation of current literature related to work-based learning revealed a range of methods to recognise learning from practice experience, which once evidenced could contribute towards academic credit. The School of Nursing & Midwifery following consultation with service representatives adopted a model based on Chalmers et al (2001) definition:

‘Work Based Learning & Assessment refers to mechanisms for learning for work, at work and through work where successful assessment leads to academic credit rating.’ Chalmers et al 2001: 599

After examination of a variety of models for implementing WBL, it was decided that an ‘open’ learning contract module with no learning outcomes would provide total flexibility, be suitable for both individuals and groups of students, and avoided multiple validations of similar modules. A robust structure for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) already existed within the School of Nursing and Midwifery together with expertise in identifying learning from experience and awarding credit. Work-based learning was seen as being the ‘other side of the coin’ to APEL, with APEL being retrospective and WBL prospective.

In designing the module the working group were conscious of the potential for WBL to be perceived as a ‘cheap option’. Spouse (2001) warns that to be implemented effectively, WBL cannot be seen as a cheap option as it requires financial resource (DoH 2000), for preparation and support of staff and both in the workplace and in the University. The learning contract was therefore designed with regard to ensuring that students on this module received equivalent study time to those on a taught module and built in an agreement which had to be signed by the student’s manager that entitled them to negotiate up to four days of release for study. This was incorporated to prevent managers thinking that WBL could be achieved entirely in work or personal time with no additional study being required. Agreement to this principle was sought from senior Trust and WDC representatives within the WBL working group.

Flanagan et al (2000) consider that a competence-based model builds on students’ abilities and is therefore empowering. Hence it was anticipated that a WBL approach could enable nurses to enhance their knowledge and become more confident, motivated and empowered. Organizational objectives including staff being enabled to maximise learning opportunities existing in the work place whilst remaining in practice and providing quality care were also addressed (Thorne & Hackwood 2002). It was recognised that for WBL to be successful, support within the clinical area was essential. Presentations were made to key stakeholders, who were keen for staff to gain academic qualifications
through WBL. Keeling et al (1998) cited in Flanagan et al (2000) suggest that it is important to communicate the nature and purpose of WBL to those who will be working alongside designated ‘learners’. This was particularly important to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of the time required and opportunities sought in order to facilitate WBL.

Using this module, two approaches to WBL were identified for the different groups. The first used existing validated learning outcomes from a clinical skills based module for students who needed to build knowledge, skills and competence within the specialist area. Learning contracts were formulated that supported clinical staff teaching within the practice setting. Several teaching methods were used including lectures, tutorials, nursing rounds, and mentoring. The second approach required developing individual learning outcomes for more senior staff, informed by personal development plans in collaboration with practice-based educators.

Students received an induction day which explained the rationale behind WBL and what was expected of them. They were also made aware of support available in the form of electronic resources and University tutor support, together with mentors and practice teachers within their clinical environment. The module ran over a six month period as it was recognised that students working on individual learning contracts might require more time to search for and access resources to support their learning. The time period also allowed greater flexibility in delivering formal sessions for those receiving some taught input within the Trust.

**Evaluation**

Some difficulties were identified from our early experience of WBL. These were predominantly related to pressures to deliver health services and a lack of appreciation of the resources required for effective WBL. Spouse (2001) suggests that learning in the workplace needs practitioners (students) to draw on knowledge gained from evidence and this may be lodged in texts or with other senior practitioners. It requires students to share their expertise, identify their learning needs and plan how such needs can be met. The time and expertise required to support this learning in practice was underestimated by clinical staff in spite of significant preparation. It could be argued therefore that this can only be achieved in settings where work commitments do not drain staff of all their time and energy but leaves time for thinking and collaborative working (Spouse 2001). In the current financial climate this may be a luxury. Locally, education purchasers are now exploring new ways to use education budgets by investing in the infrastructure to develop staff at all levels to support future WBL. With hindsight it cannot be too strongly emphasised that more investment of time and energy in the early stages of this type of learning is essential (Chalmers et al 2001).
Some difficulties were identified by students, relative isolation and lack of computer skills to effectively utilise electronic support. While this may have been anticipated for the students pursuing individual learning contracts, it was also the case for the students undertaking the ‘group’ contract despite meeting at regular intervals for planned taught sessions. Students studying for degrees or recently qualified students fared significantly better than those who had not engaged in recent study implying the issue may have been lack of confidence in study skills and perceived lack of academic support which was available electronically. Students with overseas qualifications who were less familiar with a reflective writing style for health/social care assignments also needed more academic support. This has highlighted the need to ensure that managers appreciate the skills required for this type of learning and can select students appropriately. Trusts may also need to consider investment in preparation of students for WBL in areas such as study skills and information technology.

Positive aspects of evaluation were that most students felt the module had stimulated their learning. Those undertaking individual contracts particularly felt that they had gained significantly and had ownership of their learning. Many of these contracts also generated work which was perceived to be useful to the areas concerned and had the potential to enhance practice and patient care.

**Conclusion**

Gregory (1994) warns of the danger of learning through experience being seen as a ‘quick fix’. Our experience so far shows that WBL is certainly not ‘quick’ neither is it a panacea which will ‘fix’ the education and development needs of the National Health Service. However, it is gathering momentum within the local area as financial pressures reduce the education budget and the potential for students to attend the University to study. The flexibility and potential of WBL to enhance both staff development and service delivery is a key driver for Trusts. The impact on the University has been to reduce significantly the number of ‘taught’ modules offered in order to funnel greater support into facilitating WBL. One of the major benefits of WBL has been the increasing collaboration and partnership between the Trusts and the University to develop rapidly responsive, flexible education. The University and the local NHS Trusts will continue to work collaboratively to increase the range, scope and support of WBL in the future.
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Employer/Employee Engagement – Who Pays?

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To survive competitively the UK needs a highly skilled workforce (Leitch 2006). There are numerous potential students who are too busy with their employment to attend university full-time but would benefit from HE level interaction. These workplace learners need to be encouraged to engage with HEIs, both for their own development and furthermore to improve the standard of their company’s (and country’s) workforce. Some ways in which this might be facilitated are investigated in this chapter using the University of Teesside’s Work-based Studies Degree and projects aimed at employer engagement. Student and company evaluations, a vital way of gathering data, raise many issues about the experience of both employers and employees and their thoughts and feelings about HE level learning, for example, its relevance, its accessibility and its value. Feedback from some of the companies the University is engaging with form a crucial part of this discussion.

The emphasis of the Leitch Review is on the UK’s economic competitiveness. As a restricted focus, this may well compromise the learning involved. To view skills and knowledge as only about the workplace, and most importantly the profit margins of that workplace, discounts what learning can also do to improve the rest of life. More rounded and capable individuals, who possess the expertise required to actually undertake ‘learning’, are much more likely to be socially complete (Burgoyne et al 2004). By honing generic skills and behaviours such as dedication, discipline, enquiry, analysis, critical debate, creativity, autonomy, making connections and reading widely humans are better equipped to respond positively to change, a necessity in our rapidly evolving world. The Leitch Review suggests that the UK requires 40% of the workforce to be qualified to Level 4 or above by 2020, describing the attributes needed as ‘economically valuable skills’.

As 70% of the workforce for 2020 have already left compulsory education it is clear that HEIs need to offer prospective students ways of accessing HE level skills that will suit them and fit their lives. The University’s Work-based Studies degree programme is designed for employed learners and therefore offers its core modules outside of the standard working day. They include skills of self-assessment and audit; planning and organisation; research and reflection. The programme uses the APL process to ‘Accredit Prior Learning’, taking into account both experiential & certificated learning. Leitch wants to put Britain in the top 8 most productive countries in the world, and proposes to do this by increasing qualification levels in the next 13 years. There must be a link between qualified staff and increased productivity, but it is not the only link and in fact it under-sells the experiential learning staff may have gained which does not carry a qualification but enhances their work performance. This could be articulated by the APL process, where previous learning is evidenced to gain advanced standing on to an award. The students access the six academic schools of the university in order to ‘flesh out’ the skeleton of
core modules with subject-specific content. The programme is a university-wide collaboration, gaining in popularity as pressure increases on HEIs to engage with employers.

As well as subject-specific modules students can undertake work-based projects. These are very useful to both student and employer; a piece of work they may have to undertake at work anyway is transformed into an academic assignment; there is less campus attendance, and they have access to the university’s research resources. The programme fulfils Leitch’s vision in that it enables employed learners to access level 4 qualifications that would otherwise be unavailable to them. However, placing all of the emphasis on the qualification and none on learning via experience seems short sighted. A qualification does not automatically bestow capability, awarding a certificate does not bring vital experience. An employee may hold a degree for twenty years and never use the skills they learned whilst studying. Will they be of more use to the workforce than someone who has no qualifications but has worked in a certain sector at increasingly sophisticated levels for those same twenty years? The first person would, with the review’s emphasis on qualifications, be seen as a more valid ‘number’ towards targets. The second person could potentially possess higher level skills and operate in a more sophisticated and developed manner in the workplace. If HEIs are to be led by Leitch’s focus on new study, then ultimately qualifications have to be better; more holistic with a remit to improve the many facets of the student; it is also vital to improve and include how we acknowledge, develop and validate existing skills, knowledge, experience and work-practice.

The Work-based Studies degree programme tends to attract cohorts from certain key sectors, for example education professionals, such as teaching assistants, trainers, technicians, mentors and unqualified teachers who need a degree to progress, engineers, those working in various business environments and police officers. The title of the degree is Work-Based Studies with a subject or sector in brackets – the inserts are typically, ‘Business’, ‘Education’, ‘Engineering’ and so on – new titles are validated via school academic standards committees, in line with coherent learning agreements. Some of the students have their fees paid by their employer but many do not. Similarly a limited number can manage to take time away from work to attend modules which are only on offer during the day. Frequently students note on their module and course evaluations that they could not have attended university or obtained a degree without the programme.

The programme offers a flexible route for employed people as well as advanced standing for learning already undertaken. It also provides an ideal progression route for many smaller awards including some foundation degrees. Employed learners who engage with the projects we are running can also use the programme to progress. Typically those learners recruited by the Negotiated Framework Project, funded by the Learning and Skills Council could progress onto the Work-Based Studies degree programme and continue to develop HE level skills in a flexible way. The project aims to engage with employed learners,
new to HE, particularly, but not exclusively, those employed by local Small and Medium Enterprises, in certain key sectors. Only 14% of small businesses offer training which leads to formal qualifications. They are not unwilling to train but financial and organisational constraints make training difficult (King 2007). SMEs are undoubtedly a complex sector in which to operate (Carter et al 2006).

The project has a focus on continuous professional development. Each student has an Individual Learning Plan which records the outcome of a skills audit undertaken with them and/or their company and details of tutorials and seminars. It also records what the learner hopes to gain from the training. The project has a focus on ‘training trainers’, this can be difficult as the majority of SMEs do not have a trainer, they tend to be small companies focussed on succeeding and surviving and training can seem a luxury. We have managed to train trainers mostly by targeting training companies.

The project activity is demand-led in that we develop and deliver training to businesses which supports their needs. We also provide advice and guidance to employees and, using the APL process, recognise skills already gained through work. The project team, in collaboration with the academic schools, accredit appropriate existing in-company training, write new programmes of learning, use existing modules, or devise a bespoke combination of these three.

Existing in-company training may be accredited by mapping training activities to University level descriptors and outcomes and by ensuring there is an appropriate assessment and sufficient contact hours between student and trainer. Companies are usually surprised and pleased to find that their training is on a par with HE level learning. Alternatively we devise new modules and programmes. This results in innovative new opportunities which fill a gap. There are also numerous university modules already validated which can be very useful to companies, such as Sage Accounting; Web Optimisation; Understanding Children’s Development; Introduction to Volunteering; Project Management; Mediation Skills; Effective English and many more. Many companies require a hybrid blend of what they are already offering their staff together with existing and new modules.

The learners involved in both the degree programme and the project usually have no experience of HE and limited time to devote to study. The growing importance of Open and Distance Learning to these students is very apparent (Macdonald 2006). Even if they do not want to complete their whole programme at a distance it is useful if it is an option to complete parts of it in this way. Many companies have other branches elsewhere and offering learning on-line means that subsequent cohorts can enrol. For example one retail store are currently offering exactly the same management programme their Teesside staff successfully studied last year to their store managers elsewhere in the country,
due largely to the online capacity of the modules in question. The downside of this is that we were only able to recruit the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Developer who has devised these modules because of project funding.

The project funding has also facilitated subsidised delivery and this is undoubtedly what has attracted many of the SMEs for whom the economic implications are crucial. Ironically, other companies are equally turned off by ‘free’ courses, presuming them to be of low quality. These activities are not embedded within university provision as without project funding there is no clear resource stream to pay for the development and delivery of such vital work-based learning. The Leitch review discusses who might pay – the employer, the employee, the state – but much work is still to be done in ascertaining the fairest way forward. To accelerate the work-based learning agenda Government interventions in the forms of career development loans and tax incentives seem vital (Wedgwood 2007) and it seems clear that there will not be an ideal solution which will work for every company and every learner. Just as the learning opportunities need to be flexible so too do the funding mechanisms. The amount of the fee is open to debate, as is paying in ways other than cash – for example by allowing staff time away from their job to study or by offering the university some other services. How does a company with very few members of staff find the time, realistically, to allow staff time off? This is a vital consideration for SMEs.

The project comes to an end in July 2008 and we are currently evaluating the impact of the training received. Qualitative information suggests that the project has been a great success:

- This is a new and innovative opportunity for (our) own training to be academically assessed, which of course is a great benefit to the learners and the company. The managers involved with the course have all raised their levels of ability. Their leadership and management skills have improved significantly (local media company, University Certificate in Advanced Professional Development)

- It has helped me get a better understanding of what I am doing in my job, as when I first began my job I was taught what to do, but not necessarily why it was being done (local environmental services company, Sage Accountancy)

- The learning exceeded company expectations with the programme benefiting the candidates on both a professional and personal level. The organisation benefits from having a group of more confident & competent managers (local retail chain, UCAPD in Resource Management [Retail Sector])
However, it is harder to gain quantitative data which might give useful answers to important questions, such as:

- Will better trained employees make the company more profitable?
- Will the employees stay with the company?
- Will they expect a higher salary in recognition of the new skills their employer may feel they have already paid for?
- Will the employer pay the full cost of having similar learning delivered in the future?

Evidence of economic impact is undoubtedly what will sell HE level activity to employers but it is difficult to gauge this quickly. It will take some time before it can be measured and perceiving changes to the company may take several years and multiple cohorts. The anecdotal evidence we have indicates the emergence of the flexible and responsive culture, capable of addressing employer engagement that Wedgwood (2007) discusses and this evidence is growing. However, the slow progress of building up evidence to support economic benefits does reiterate what Jenkins et al (2003) claim; that this will take time and effort.

Early evidence suggests that companies will pay when they have witnessed how tailored, relevant learning can benefit their business (Universities UK 2006). University fees can seem reasonable when compared to commercial training consultants. Employers who have received high quality training for one cohort of students, with project subsidies, have been willing to pay for subsequent cohorts. If they have their own appropriate training staff, this is a limited fee anyway, merely a percentage of the usual module fee for quality assurance costs. According to Wedgwood (2007) employers see value for money as the most significant aspect. They want a definable return on their investment, whereas employees’ concerns relate to confidence, time and costs. At the present time employers are not a major contributor towards fees, only 14% (some 37,000) part time students have their fees paid by either their own employer or by UK industry (HEFC 2006 cited in King 2007).

However, it is difficult to produce meaningful data with regard to who pays fees when there are so many different ways of paying. An employee may receive payment in kind, time off, a one off salary payment, a yearly increment or promotion and none of these things would necessarily be known to university finance departments.

The university staff who consult with and work alongside work-based learners need special skills to act appropriately in the commercial world and to effectively liaise between the companies and the university, often facilitating work for different departments across the university and brokering partnerships between several departments and companies. They undoubtedly need a thorough knowledge of academia in order to usefully diagnose what learning opportunities the companies will benefit from, but equally important is an understanding of both local and wider agendas. They need skills of persuasion, but hard-selling is not the answer. They also need to care about and understand the manifold
permutations of learning; a hybrid member of staff with a wider experience of life and the commercial/political worlds is definitely most likely to build relationships with employers. Of course, developing these kinds of colleagues also requires resources and offers an interesting parallel for a sector intent on developing the staff of other employers.

To ensure that deliverers address the aims of the Leitch Review these aims will undoubtedly become tied to funding issues. This raises questions about skills-funding which is dependent on employers’ needs, since these change and are connected to the employers’ own agendas. If expected to pay for the training their employees receive then employers cannot be criticised for favouring training that develops their company, and potentially their profit margin. However, employer-led provision can marginalise the needs and aims of employees and other stakeholders. Likewise employees may wish to develop themselves in different directions to that favoured by their employer. In those cases it would be reasonable to expect individuals to pay towards this themselves and/or to attend classes in their own time. HEIs and companies need to work together not only to develop programmes of appropriate learning but crucially to resolve funding issues. For too long HEIs have been able to make ‘off-the-shelf’ offers. To genuinely answer the needs of employed learners learning providers must ask questions, and be prepared to negotiate and shift position. They must be willing to hone and alter what they deliver and continually develop and evolve.

The Leitch Review promotes adult engagement, but it seems obvious that engagement with learning must start much earlier than this if it is to be meaningful and part of our culture. Children need to grow up being encouraged to develop a learning ‘mind-set’, so that they see the point of learning, this will have to include social benefits not just economic ones. It is also desirable, from a young age, to encourage learners to see that skills are not only produced via qualifications, but are rather learned and enhanced through practice, whether this is life practice or later, in the workplace, with qualifications providing evidence of achievement. If individuals are to pay increasingly for learning, and employers invest in their own workforces, then something of a cultural change is needed (HEA 2006). If employers are expected to fund training they will, rightfully, demand training which fulfils their needs and ambitions, complete with appropriate frameworks, assessments and adequate progression routes. The dialogue with companies needs to be an ongoing one and building relationships should be the aim rather than quick hits. Employers cannot be expected to fund activities they cannot see the need for, or the point of, or for ‘the good of the country’s economy’. Very few companies we have dealt with understood or saw the need for university level credits, and in some cases qualifications. What they see the point of is having the knowledge and skills necessary to undertake work activities; the connections with higher level education often need explaining and selling, which can take months, even years.
Learning enhances skills and builds a better more productive workforce (Dearden et al. 2006). However it must be remembered that learning also transforms and improves lives. Through competence comes confidence and having a population who believe in themselves will undoubtedly enhance the country’s economic viability. The holistic potential of learning needs to be prioritised, especially when individuals are to be expected to pay financially for, or at least towards, their learning. An employee’s wish to better themselves and even their performance at work may actually have little to do with how they feel about the company as a whole or the owner/manager. If this self-improvement is to be tied to qualifications then they need to be qualifications which are portable and meaningful. HEIs, companies and individuals must engage in discussions around evolving curricula. It can be difficult but it is not impossible to develop qualifications that satisfy the needs of both employer and employee. There is much ongoing debate around who pays for us, as a nation, to undertake this learning. However, the more pertinent question seems to be who pays if we don’t?

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**Accessed**

Introduction

The University of Derby has been one of four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nationally piloting the accreditation scheme of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The HEA is effectively the national custodian of the professional standards for teaching in Higher Education. The landscape for academic teaching practice is shifting as it begins to align with HEA policy and Government agendas such as the Leitch report. Thus academic and learning support staff, skilled in their first professionalism of their subject are potentially tasked with moving away from traditional lecture teaching to more innovative forms of delivery to provide the flexibility needed to meet the work-based learning agenda. To do so requires a corresponding move from personal pedagogies which are often implicit, to a more explicit second teaching professionalism, underpinned by standards. CPD to support this change in explicit capability and capacity is crucial.

The University has already approved its CPD Framework for Academic and Learning Support Staff which is its response to the professional teaching standards. At the heart of its approach is recognising, valuing, encouraging and guiding the developmental dimensions of activities that colleagues already undertake. The approach assumes that what we ask of our learners we should also practice ourselves. Thus as we move into an ever more flexible learning provision so we ourselves need to demonstrate situated learning capability and capacity.

Dual professionalism and communities of practice

Personal pedagogies are unavoidable – the issue is how explicit they are and how self knowing we are in purposefully applying them. Because they seem to work in a ‘good enough’ way most of the time, year on year they can readily become implicit, informal, even hidden. Teaching professionalism based on national standards challenges this process. Land’s (2001) work on personal identity and development in the context of organisations is particularly of interest here.

How do we conceptualise this professionalism though? From a technical rationale perspective (Schon, 1983), where standardisation and measurement are key and justifiable, or from an artistic viewpoint (Fish, 1998:40), ‘where risks are inevitable’ or where we need ‘esthetic knowing.’ With differing perspectives on how we examine professionalism, what implications does this have when putting CPD into practice and ultimately achieving ownership by staff? Indeed who should be putting it into practice, the organisation or the individual? This may in part be influenced by how a HEI implements such a policy and change in a meaningful way through its structures and systems.
An interesting question is posed by Baume & Kahn (2004): ‘is development seen as fundamentally about creating contexts that make development possible? Or is it seen as the development of staff?’ Can, and should, organisational structures, systems, and cultures change so that philosophical underpinnings of CPD can be considered; namely the technical rationale view and the artistic view? Natural tensions exist in universities because of the role of dual professionalism of both subject/profession and teaching. What are the additional tensions between such views and the implications for implementing and owning professional teaching standards?

In Wenger’s view of process and practice the two are seen to be inseparable, particularly in context of how we interact with our environment. ‘Practice is first and foremost a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful.’ (Wenger, 1998:51). He argues that in this way we develop communities of practice based on the organisational culture, usually informally, in order to make sense of our relationship with work, and to give us identity. He makes a strong argument for communities of practice to create contexts for individuals, which is something that an institution can, perhaps partly, influence by strengthening and providing a focus for such communities.

What we have done so far

A network of around 30 Teaching Fellows, mainly Faculty based, in partnership with Champions from central departments in learning support roles, was established two years ago through the University of Derby’s Quality Enhancement Department (QED). A Fellow with allocated time and responsibility to act as a lead for a theme (Assessment, CPD, foundation degree, Employability, PDP, e-Learning and Flexible Learning) works in each Faculty and some Central Departments. This LTA infrastructure allows key individuals to meet cross institutionally with a common purpose and early indicators suggest these networks are becoming highly effective. QED also led an initiative with regard to Teaching Informed by Research (TIR) projects which again have created a group of staff with a common focus for development. All the Teaching Fellows and TIR award holders meet as the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Advisory Research Group (LTAARG) to share and advice on good practice. These communities of practice are all overseen by a LTA Steering Group which acts as a standing committee to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, which has ultimate responsibility to Academic Board for LTA matters.

The Key Organisational Values of the University, known as the ‘Five Values’ were also launched two years ago (Quality, Valuing People, Opportunity and Openness, Customer Focus, Challenge and Innovation). The values are used to underpin all the strategic documentation produced by the University and as such are heavily used by the ‘centre’ in an organisational context. No substantial evidence exists as yet that these are beginning to change culture at the ground level or affect professional development, although this
research is planned to take place shortly. Only anecdotal evidence exists to date. At an internal Faculty conference, one member of staff was heard to comment – ‘they even want to control the way I think and behave now.’ However, most other members of academic staff say, what values?’ We are seeking to situate these values through mapping onto them the teaching standards, which include their own values.

**Professional Teaching Standards**

Judgement by peers from the above communities of practice has ultimately been the choice for reviewing CPD portfolios of members of staff who wish to demonstrate good standing with the Professional Teaching Standards and so be recognised by the Higher Education Academy. It is also understood that any framework needs to be ‘owned’ by both the University and the individuals for implementation to succeed. Therefore, considerations of balance, natural tensions, and scalability as well as cost implications are being taken into account. However the most challenging aspect of building a framework is how it aligns with existing University structures. The question is not that it aligns, but what it aligns to. CPD Teaching Fellows for example favoured attaching peer review of evidence to Faculty Learning Teaching and Assessment Committees, whilst other suggestions included that of ‘mocking’ the assessment board model. Issues of scalability after the pilot phase were of serious concern particularly with the former. The conclusion has been to use LTAARG, whose members will be asked to perform the review process and act as the peer judgement element considered by Barnett (1997) to be crucial to development. It is a wide body of individuals from all areas of the University and already reports to the University Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee to which it is entirely appropriate to tie the Professional Standards. Work will commence with this group in the Autumn Semester 2007/08.

Personal development and peer judgement are being partnered to take into account Schon’s (1983, 1987) view of personal reflection for development, and Barnett’s (1997) view of peer judgement for development. We are allowing opportunities for both where needed, and with time personal space in an e-tool will be made available with opportunities for sharing if the individual so chooses. Sharing will be allowed between peers and, again should the individual so choose, their line manager for review purposes.
What we intend to do next

The most difficult challenge over the next academic year (2007/08) is not that we have structures and processes in place as an institution to facilitate and enhance CPD, but that of how we persuade academic and support staff to acknowledge, capture and record what they do in the development of learning and teaching practice. From the artistic paradigm of CPD, development is in the main continuous in any HEI, but recording it in ‘chunks’ to facilitate the technical rationale view likely to be used by management will be difficult. In these times of performance management, it is not sufficient that we continue to develop our learning and teaching practice we must evidence that we do so, and in doing so, attempt to justify the qualities of our professional judgement in higher education.

Thinking the longer term, we consider the key drivers include further creating a Learning Communities Culture. When looking at the suggested dimensions to aligning with HEI structures and process, we need to examine to what extent does the culture of the HEI influence this implementation? For example, to what extent, how quickly, and how strongly does the organisation intend to make the links between its staff appraisal system and any framework? Madden and Mitchell talk about a sanctions model and a benefits model for CPD (Jones and Fear, 1994) which may also give an indication to the strength of the intended links and the affects this has on culture. Staff in higher education today are working within a system that requires them to constantly balance and re-balance the demands placed upon them in terms of teaching (Bourner, Katz and Watson, 2000:11) which obviously has implications for the individual. In physiotherapy, for example, evidence suggests that there is a guilt culture in devoting time to CPD in the workplace (O’Sullivan, 2003:107). If a guilt culture exists will ownership ever be substantial?

To deal with this, time is needed, which is why a six year plan is proposed.

Conclusion

Obviously the CPD Framework for Academic and Learning Support staff is still in its infancy. Whilst structures and systems are being amended, much work is still to be done on asking staff to recognise, capture and reflect on the learning and development that happens naturally in many workplace environments. Academia by its very nature has a range and variety of activity that the framework is likely to be organic in its pilot year. Whilst structures and systems can be designed to capture this flexibility perhaps the feelings of guilt may take a little longer. Staff will continue to be encouraged to see their own professional development in the workplace as an important worthwhile activity.
References


Work-based Learner Perspectives
The Use of an Interactive Learning Environment to Support Learning Through Work

David Young, University of Derby and John Stephenson, Middlesex University

Abstract

Built on evaluative interviews with participants and analysis of detailed online exchanges between students and tutors, this paper, which is the first stage of a work in progress, explores an emerging typology of remote student / tutor engagement within the context of learner managed learning through work. Through a range of case histories, the paper explores what it feels like to be a remote participant pursuing personally negotiated programmes to degree level, identifying and discussing issues raised, patterns and cycles of learner concerns and assessing what kinds of tutorial responses are helpful (or not). Discussion leads towards an understanding of pedagogical and personal issues associated with online supervision in the emerging paradigm of self-managed Learning through Work.

Context

The University of Derby is one of 8 UK universities which, in association with UfI/Learndirect, offers opportunities for people in the work-place to design, negotiate and complete online personalised programmes of study based on their everyday work and leading to full degree awards. The UfI/Learndirect Learning through Work (LtW) programme is of particular interest to academics engaged in debates about different models of work-based learning, pedagogical aspects of online learning and more recently the combination of the two in the one model. Being online has meant that full transcripts of exchanges between students and tutors are available, with participants’ permission, as a unique resource to improve our understanding of the learning and tutoring processes involved. This paper explores the issues involved, based on analyses of those transcripts and seeks to improve our understanding of learning-through-work as a paradigm and online tutoring as a process.

Background

Conceptually, LtW focuses attention on the informal learning through the work process itself (Eraut 2004) and enables the learner to engage purposefully with the social context in which it takes place (Billett 2002, 2006). The programme requires otherwise tacit learning (Polanyi 1967) to be planned and made explicit so that outcomes can be tested against criteria for certification (Evans, 2004). Every time people engage with new challenges they have opportunities for significant learning (Cairns and Stephenson, 2002). Such learning requires tutorial support to help students (a) articulate their learning from previous work experience and plan ways of making learning from current and projected work activities explicit; and (b) secure formal recognition for the achievement of that learning.
Much debate about the efficacy of online learning focuses on cost effectiveness (Moses 2001, Leck & Gram, 2002, Grant, 2002) rather than pedagogical effectiveness. More recently ‘blended learning models’ have become fashionable (Bonk et al, 2006). The central issue behind LtW is that any form of top-down online training, however blended, will be less effective than learning driven and managed by the learners themselves (Reeve, Gallacher and Mayes, 1998; Brink et al 2002; Woodall 2003; Cairns and Stephenson 2003). Martinez (2003) found that personalised programmes, direct relevance to immediate work needs and opportunity for personal development are effective ways of reducing the high attrition rates associated with e-learning. The LtW programme is a response to the challenge of personal relevance and work-place effectiveness.

Role of LtW Online Tutors

UfI/Learndirect recognised the importance of tutorial support from the outset. The LtW Student Handbook (UfI/Learndirect 2004) states that university tutors will offer academic guidance and support in designing a programme, finalising a learning contract, securing accreditation of prior learning and feedback to help students judge progress and the suitability of their programmes. The underlying aim is to give students the personal confidence and understanding to accept responsibility and to navigate their way through the unfamiliar waters of higher education.

Research into tutoring and on-line learning

While there is a large and growing body of research about the use of on-line learning in higher education (Issroff and Scanlon, 2002), not much of it focuses on on-line learner / tutor discourse. For instance, attention has been paid to the use of computer-mediated communication in fully on-line and primarily web-based courses (Booth and Hulten, 2003), as well as in conventional university courses where on-line tutor-student exchanges supplement lecturing and face-to-face tutorials and/or replace such methods (Smith, Whiteley and Smith. 1999). Most research has focused on discussion groups and group tutorials (e.g Booth and Hulten, 2003; Browne, 2003;) and the link between the use of e-communications and learning ( e.g. Pachler and Daly, 2003). Other researchers have explored students’ reactions to, and views of, the use of e-mail discussions (e.g. Smith, Whiteley and Smith, 1999); e-mail support (Le Cornu and White, 2000); and facilitators’ experiences (Harlen and Doubler, 2003).

Research on Learning through Work for University Qualifications

In a previous study of students’ experience of LtW (Stephenson and Saxton, 2005), the quality of tutorial support emerged as a strong feature in 94% of the cases reviewed. Features particularly appreciated were:
Responsive tutorial support also emerged as a critical factor in candidates’ success in a study of learner experience in another self-managed learning-through-work programme (Stephenson et al 2006). The authors concluded that:

‘Support from tutors on the programme is particularly helpful when it
(a) is focused on generic issues relevant to programme procedures and criteria for success;
(b) helps candidates to formulate, articulate and justify their achievements and intentions;
(c) is responsive to candidate initiative and suggestions;
(d) is focused on helping candidates take themselves forward; and
(e) is readily available when required.’

The above studies focused on student reflections of the experience as a whole. Bosley and Young (2006) worked directly with actual transcripts of online exchanges between tutors and postgraduate students undertaking LtW programmes at the University of Derby in spring 2004. The exchanges were found to mirror those of effective face-to-face learning encounters in that on-line learners asked questions, reported on progress, sought feedback and disclosed personal information and feelings, while tutors gave direct answers, advised and made suggestions, explained, elaborated and offered signposts. However, significantly for a tutorial situation, the majority of discourses were initiated by the learners.

This paper takes further the work of all three studies by analysing and exploring the type and content of dialogues between tutors and a wider selection of LtW learners. The intention is to illuminate the actual pedagogical experience of online tutorial support for the benefit of other learners and tutors.

**Aims of the study**

1. to gain insight into student experiences of self-managed on-line learning-through-work programmes leading to university qualifications;
2. to prepare notes for guidance, based on those insights, to tutors on how best to offer support for students
3. to contribute to current debates on the nature of learning-through-work and the use of the internet.
Sample, Access and Ethics

We report on the online tutorial discourse of a sample of students with at least two years experience of LtW, representing the broad range of LtW learners, from mature students new to HE, to graduates building masters’ awards. All are adults (30+) who have made significant use of the Dialogue function built into the LtW web site and who found overall tutorial support to be satisfactory. Analysis of their tutorial exchanges is aimed at identifying generalisable features of those relationships that students regard as satisfactory. The transcripts give insight into the micro level of learner involvement in the LtW programme which we investigated. They also offer some insights into learner concerns and appropriate tutor responses in work-based learning more generally. A follow-up study will examine exchanges not regarded as satisfactory. All participants in this study, students and tutors, have consented that their online exchanges are used, provided anonymity is preserved.

Method

We employ a qualitative methodology, drawing on features of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994) aimed at ensuring that concepts and insights emerge directly from the data itself, not from researcher pre-conceptions. The contents of all exchanges are disaggregated and each component is labelled and sorted according to its main focus. Each sorted collection of data is further reviewed to produce more generic labels for further grouping followed by another layer of abstraction. At each stage, grouped labels are checked backwards for consistency with the original data. The final stage is a synthesis of generic labels into emerging propositions for testing with other cases and for contribution to debates on wider issues. Almost 2000 online exchanges between 33 undergraduate learners and eight tutors were included in the study.

Emerging themes

The following generic themes are emerging from the analyses of learner initiated exchanges.

1. **Learner Control**: showing the student seeking, taking, assuming, exercising or asserting control of the programme, its direction and progress;
2. **Focus On Work**: responses to conditions and opportunities at work; impact on work; changed or emerging work constraints;
3. **Initiatives**: decisions; actions; reasons for decisions: looking for affirmation;
4. **Seeking Reassurance**: of ability; ‘on the right lines’;
5. **HE Culture**: engaging with and understanding levels; programme structures; style of writing;
6. **Seeking Clarification**: of possibilities, plans, constraints etc.
Exchanges about Learner Control

Strategic learner control is at the heart of the LtW programme in that learners themselves put together and negotiate approval for the programme as a whole. Analysis of day-to-day exchanges initiated by learners shows that learner control also extends to detailed scheduling of activities, monitoring of their own programme and negotiating help:

Scheduling
- I thought over the Xmas period, whilst I have a little time off work I would start thinking about drawing up my prior learning module portfolio.

Monitoring
- My tasks for the coming week are to ensure that: a. something is written in each relevant section of each component b. The appropriate level indicators are checked-off.

Negotiating help
- I am ready to start my next module which is ‘Employment Law’. Could you find someone to support me?

Exchanges about the Learner’s Focus on Work

Participants are required to develop their overall programmes in the context of their work. However, workplaces are rarely static. New opportunities for learning can emerge mid-course, changing work-related constraints can affect the smooth operation of the

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**Figure 1: Learner Initiated Dialogues by Category**

- Social / affective: 15%
- Learner Control: 18%
- Focus on Work: 8%
- Initiatives: 14%
- Seeking Clarification: 24%
- HE Culture: 11%
- Seeking Reassurance: 10%

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programme and employers can be motivated to provide support for and be involved in their employee’s programme:

**Opportunities at work**
- I feel I could look at the way that my salon’s environment is in a state of flux (alluding to my Marketing Plan) and critically analyse the ways in which the staff may respond to the change in the format of a report.
- We have an excellent library at our research and development site which employs three staff who work to manage the literary information that our scientists use for their research. I think I would be fool not to use these resources.

**Changing constraints at work**
- We have had some news at work that may affect the research component and I have been working on. I want to discuss a possible change of direction within this module to try and include how the removal of local doctors’ surgeries to out of town premises will affect the pharmacy and the patients.

**Employer support for the learner**
- Both of these components are now being partly sponsored by my boss (which may not be a bad thing), who may want to make some slight amendments.
- I have a full time job in a school but they have allocated me time to do this course while I’m at work so I should be able to finish it by May.

**Pressure from work**
- Work is hectic at the moment and I am struggling to get quality ‘thinking’ time!
- Sorry for the lack of activity on my learning contract, but it has been murder at work and I had an assessment to hand in for my open uni course.

**Learner initiatives**
- The opportunity to design and manage their own programme encourages learners to take initiatives in both work and their studies.

**Ideas for work**
- I have had an exciting idea concerning the development of a series of spreadsheets which salons could use to track ‘money’ more effectively. I would use ‘new technologies’ to develop this software.

**Changes in programme**
- I have altered my timescale for completion of my final piece of work (Evaluation of T/O rotation) to December 2004 but I plan to work on this whilst I am on maternity leave, time and energy permitting!!
Seeking reassurance
LtW learners do not have the benefit of shared learning experiences with peers from which they can acquire some understanding of how well they are doing. They seek reassurance on whether they are up to the job. They also require reassurance that decisions they have made about their programme are appropriate:

Am I up to it?
• I’d be grateful if you could check over what I’ve written and to give me a ‘morale booster’ to, hopefully, get it finished in the next 3-4 weeks.
• What do you think so far?

Have I made the right decision?
• I have changed some of the components for this module. I hope this OK.

H.E. Culture
Being work-based, learners are often unfamiliar with university conventions and need guidance on fairly basic issues such as citations and differences between work and academic styles:
• Thank you for your support. I feel I’ve learnt a lot from you about creating professional, academic work in the business area.
• I have particularly noted your observations concerning the poor Harvard referencing and a lack of academic style in my writing, both problems I feel I can overcome with your help.

Clarification
Despite being responsible for designing their own programme, learners often need guidance on how to fit in with the university’s academic procedures, and the processes that must be followed:

Academic
• Do I need to be more specific? (I am always worried about waffling on unnecessarily.)

Processes
• Who shall I send finished piece to and do I need any pro-forma?
• How do I proceed from this point?
• Could you give me an idea of how things will progress from this point?
Social / affective issues

LtW learners develop a personal and social relationship with their tutors and are willing to share their feelings about how the work is progressing and to express appreciation for support they have received:

Appreciation
• Thanks for the advice, I’m starting to get an idea how the independent learning thing works now.
• Thanks for your support and guidance at present, I really needed those words of encouragement.

Sharing confidences
• Step sister aged 32 died leaving behind a 2 1/2 yr old and 4 month old baby and have had mega problems at work too! Not my month!

Tutor Responses

Students find tutor responses most satisfactory when the tone of the on-line support is informal and friendly, yet definitive and authoritative without being over-prescriptive. Tutor responses are characterised by the following features:

Figure 2: Tutor Responses by Category
Empowering
Effective tutoring seeks to recognise the often significant quality of what learners have produced.

- What you have done so far is terrific – you have actually started a much bigger process which is in effect the claim for Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning.

Enabling
It is very noticeable that tutors frequently use modalities when offering advice. This is perceived as an enabling feature for learners.

- I think you need to ... I suggest ... My advice is ... I do think it would help you ... I’d recommend ... My advice for now is ... I think you need to explain ...

Reassuring
LtW learners are not always confident. They appreciate reassurances like these:

- Please don’t worry about having taken some time out from study – LtW is designed to be flexible and to be available when you need and are able to use it.
- just keep going; you are doing well!

Facilitating
Successful LtW tutoring points the way for learners to take ownership of their own learning, to access resources, or to provide alternative sources of specialist disciplinary support, as the following illustrate:

- Do you want to have a chat about a final draft ...?
- ... if you experience any problems with your account and need library access contact ***** and they should be able to help.
- ***** is still away, so I’ve asked ***** to take a look from a clinical viewpoint.

Extending
Frequently, tutors’ experience can identify ways for learners to enhance their studies

- You have been instrumental in implementing new initiatives in your (professional) area. It might be useful to think about whether or not it is time to review/audit/update some of these.

Confirming
- Yes, it’s fine to make the changes.
Explaining
Clarity, detail and coherence are important:

- Your learning contract is worth 15 credits of your award and is a component in itself. We have to build your learning programme (what you are going to study) component by component on the contract and then it is assessed and your programme of learning approved. (The learning contract) is generally the first component to be completed but as Working and Learning is an agreed component there was no problem in your completing this before the contract was completed.

Emerging propositions
This is an ongoing research project but on the basis of initial analyses of exchanges students generally regarded as satisfactory, tentative overall propositions are already emerging:

1. students learning through work can be helped online by sensitive tutors to articulate, take responsibility for and pursue at HE level their own work-based HE programmes;
2. taking control puts pressure on the LtW learner who is seeking HE recognition to establish or confirm their personal credibility at their target academic level;
3. tutors are effective when they are committed to building and sustaining the learners’ confidence to be in control of their own programmes;
4. support is effective when it is informal and friendly, yet definitive and authoritative without being over-prescriptive;
5. readily accessible exemplars and help pages releases the tutor to focus on helping students engage key aspects of being responsible for their own programme.

In short, it seems, good tutor inputs to online exchanges focus on helping students clarify their needs, recognise the constraints, establish their credibility and build their capability.

Re students
- LtW learners are likely to be the instigators of tutorial dialogue;
- formulating written communication potentially leads to more focused and productive exchanges;
- learners can access a wider range of tutor input/resources at the point when they identify a need for it, rather than when it might appear on a lecture or seminar schedule;
- tutors can potentially spend less time in giving effective individual service to learners than they would in more ‘normal’ lecture / tutorial situations;
- there is greater potential for pride in achievements through personal ownership of the programme.
**Re tutors**

It is emerging from the exchanges that in addition to having an empathetic yet rigorous demeanour, tutors are effective when they have

1. Knowledge of credit systems and academic regulations;
2. Confidence to support generic skills – academic writing, referencing, research, personal development planning, etc.
3. Willingness to work outside subject comfort zones;
4. Capacity to help learners maintain momentum and motivation.

**Some wider implications**

**For students:**

From our study we have learnt that students are willing and capable of taking responsibility for shaping and managing their own university programmes based on learning-through-work, that they can initiate and sustain academic discourse on-line and that they feel a sense of pride and achievement in doing so.

**For tutors:**

We would say that the tone of tutorial discourse is critical. It needs to balance friendliness and a degree of informality with clear and precise guidance. This guidance should be facilitative rather than directing and the tutor needs to be prepared to move in directions
proposed by the learner, while maintaining a focus on the academic parameters within which the study is taking place. The above analysis can form the basis of some notes for guidance, based on real experience, for tutors new to this kind of work.

For on-line learning through work in general:
Our growing insight into the features of effective tutorial practice has the potential to shift the balance of debate about online supervision more towards its pedagogical stance and away from technicalities and corporate budgets. It also has potential to contribute to staff development for those planning to introduce similar schemes.

We anticipate our emerging propositions will be of particular interest to the growing group of academics exploring theoretical models of work-based learning in general and learning through work in particular. It adds a new arena – higher education tutors and culture – to the social context within which learning through work can be supported, facilitated and tested. It facilitates effective collaboration between university and employer in response to the developmental interests and needs of individual learner-workers. The emerging propositions illuminate ways in which universities, via their tutors, can help learners engage productively with learning opportunities at work, convert informal learning to formal programmes of study, articulate their learning aspirations and negotiate accreditation for their learning achievements.

References


Work-based Learning – an Engineer’s Perspective

John Blundell, Alstom Power Ltd

Abstract

This paper documents the experiences gained by a student during the successful completion of a Work-based Learning Master’s Degree. The case study includes examining the relationships between the student, employer and University. Although, these three aspects are of importance the paper will mainly examine the role of the student (myself), which will be interspersed where appropriate with comments relating to the roles of the employer and the University of Derby.

From the company viewpoint the content was relevant to the business unit requirements, which in addition, extended my professional development to other pertinent areas of interest and research. This research not only benefited the company but also enabled me to increase my knowledge and investigate new design and technological concepts. Therefore, support from the company was essential for the successful completion of this type of study programme. It is important to stress that due to the sensitivity of the material it was essential that the company and university entered into a confidentiality agreement.

Gaining my Master’s degree has been a rewarding process as I have become more technically confident. In addition, my company appear to consider it to be of benefit as their response has been to promote me to the highest level of engineer within the department.

Introduction

This case study documents my experiences gained during the successful completion of a Learning through Work (LtW) Master’s Degree in Combustion, Fuels and Performance Modelling at the University of Derby.

This case study examines the relationship and roles between the student (myself), my employer (Alstom Power Ltd) and the University of Derby. Although, these three aspects are of similar importance this paper concentrates on the role of the student, which will be interspersed where appropriate with comments relating to the roles of the employer and the University.

I have worked in the Power Generation industry for more than twenty-five years, most of which have been in the capacity of a thermal design engineer. My position at the time of undertaking my studies was as a Senior Design Engineer working for a large global engineering company specialising in the refurbishment of power plants around the world. Therefore, the title and content of my Master’s degree reflects the technological nature of my employment.
The Learning Contract

The first aspect to be approached when undertaking a LtW course is the construction of the learning contract, which forms the basis of the modules to be studied; enabling the appropriate award to be granted. This concentrates on the construction of the learning contract from the positive aspect of designing your own course to the more difficult area of understanding the academic / educational phraseology. The university provided ongoing academic support and expertise in the required disciplinary areas, located through my personal tutor, to enable my course to contain sufficient academic content to meet the appropriate level of study and support my technical application in the workplace. This approach meant that I became actively involved with my learning from the beginning, which enabled me to own the learning process. In addition, the main advantage of this type of learning process is the ability to tailor each section of the course of study to reflect your own work-based experience and role within the company.

Chisholm and Blair (2005) comment that many university designed curriculum courses are overloaded and often de-motivate students. In addition, that the academic programme does not meet the students requirements. This was my experience as prior to considering work-based learning I reviewed several existing MSc courses, which contained many aspects, which were of little interest or relevance. My experience confirmed Boud and Solomon (2003) when they state: ‘The programme followed derives from the needs of the workplace and of the learner rather than controlled by the disciplinary curriculum.’ (quoted in Garnett, 2006)

To construct a learning contract that would be suitable to the University, my employer and myself for my LtW course of study was a challenging undertaking. In the formulation of this learning contract I worked with a workplace mentor (a more experienced engineer) and a personal tutor from the University in constructing and choosing the modules of study to be included. Whilst this has the positive aspect of enabling you to design your own course content there is also the more difficult task of understanding the academic / educational phraseology. This task should not be under estimated, as it is likely to involve considerable time and effort to complete. For someone not involved in the academic world mindset confronting this phraseology can prove a daunting task. In addition, the idea of constructing your own course may appear to give total freedom to include a large range of work-based activities but due to the necessity to demonstrate achievement at the required level this soon focuses the structure.

It is at this stage that the involvement of the university, in particular the important and essential role of the LtW personal tutor, web based examples and literature from Ufl/Learndirect, are critical to the successful completion of this contract. In addition, I had the advantage of my wife being in education; she could act as interpreter!
As mentioned earlier, the main advantage of this type of learning process is the ability to tailor each section of the course of study to reflect your own work-based experience and role within the company as well as undertaking research activities.

This process of constructing your LtW contract can be very time consuming and, as in my case, took quite a few months to complete. However, due recognition is given to this activity, as credits towards the overall programme are awarded for successfully completing the learning contract. Certainly, completing the learning contract phase provided me with a sense of achievement early on in my study programme.

Finally, although it is important to establish your learning contract and programme of study prior to commencement, it is possible with this style of learning to adjust the learning contract during the study programme. However, this needs to be carefully considered and agreed with the appropriate University body, as it is not intended to be a means of constantly changing the structure of the study programme.

**Course Structure**

An advantage of this type of study is that it enables a course structure, which can have varied learning style content, which is often not available with other study programmes. For my particular course of study I was able to include a variation in learning styles.

My completed contract (180 credits) consisted of the following structure:

- Learning Contract (as discussed above) – 15 credits
- APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) – 60 credits
- Computer module (Distance learning with the University of Derby) – 15 credits
- Mathematics module in partial differential equations (Taught – evening class at the University) – 15 credits
- Work-based module – 15 credits
- Work-based project – 60 credits

**APL**

Martin (2003) considers that work-based learning should include learning which results from experiences, activities and purposes of the workplace, provided that it can be evidenced and assessed.
This was my experience as I could demonstrate that much of both my recent and present activities were already at the appropriate level of study. I presented four projects which demonstrated my ability to problem solve in an innovative way and at a level acceptable to undertaking a postgraduate degree.

The four topics presented were:
1. Coal study
2. Power cycle analysis
3. Electrical switchgear room airflow distribution
4. Economic investigation

The flexibility of this aspect of the course enables the student to provide this evidence as either a detailed written report or a presentation. In my particular case I was able to present my evidence to a University panel as a PowerPoint presentation with accompanying documentation.

This presentation raised the issue of confidentiality due to the information involved in the presentation being proprietary and hence belonging to my company. It is important to stress that due to the sensitivity of the material owned by companies then for this method of learning it will become essential that the company and university enter into a confidentiality agreement. This highlights an essential requirement of support from the company for the successful completion of this type of study programme. This process can take some time due to the requirement of obtaining an agreement that both parties, but in particular one that the company can accept. For many companies this will be an essential aspect of this form of study programme, as proprietary information (particularly when technical information is involved) is important to enable any company to remain competitive.

In my case this process was completed in a reasonably short period of time due to the recognition by the University of the importance of this agreement to my company.

This ability to obtain credits early in the study process from the Learning Contract and the APL was a positive incentive to me to undertake this type of course.

**Computer module**

This module, Computer Programming in Java, was undertaken as a distance learning activity via the Internet and e-mail. The course material was downloaded from the Internet on a weekly basis and assignments submitted by e-mail.

The advantage of this type of study module was that I could progress at an agreed pace suitable to my work situation. The disadvantage is that it requires often more hours of study than if you are involved in face-to-face learning. I was in the fortunate position to
be able to buy and borrow from the library some helpful books on the computer language I was studying. This could have proved a disadvantage if the University was not local or the student’s financial position restricted the purchasing of material.

The process can sometimes appear a little impersonal, but this is where having an excellent personal tutor enabled me to bridge the gap. As in the learning contract stage I found that this type of learning needed the support of my LtW personal tutor in liaising with the course tutor.

**Mathematics module**

This gave me the opportunity to obtain face-to-face learning from an evening class mathematics module in analysis of Partial Differential Equations. Certainly this module would have been more difficult to undertake if it had been available only as a distance-learning unit.

I found the mathematics module a very exhilarating experience and it made me feel much more involved in the University, even if within the group I was quite a few years older than the other students. I had a fairly steep learning curve due to part of the course being based on the utilisation of the computer program Matlab. While my fellow full-time students were familiar with this software, for me this was another part of the learning process. On the positive side this enabled me to interact with the other students who were extremely supportive in providing some basic tuition on the rudiments of the software. The rest I obtained from books; either borrowed from the library or purchased for my own use later. With being on site at least once a week this gave me an ideal opportunity to use the library facilities, which contributed to my feeling more integrated into the University culture.

Although the course itself was demanding, one of the most difficult challenges from this aspect of my study was sitting the final exam. I had forgotten how much your hand aches from three hours of writing. Although in the past writing things long hand was common to my position, nowadays everything is computerised and very little is conveyed using the handwritten word.

**Work-based modules**

From the company viewpoint the course modules and content were relevant to the requirements of the business unit, which in addition, extended my professional development to other pertinent areas of interest and research. This research not only benefited the company but also enabled me to increase my knowledge and investigate new design and technological concepts. This supports the concept described by Boud and Solomon (2003) quoted by Garnett (2006) that work-based learning can contain projects that meet the needs of both the learner and the organisation.
This is an appropriate point to mention that support from the company was essential for the successful completion of this type of study programme. Although it should be stressed, that as with the other University modules these involved a large proportion of my own time to complete. Further, with respect to the company it is essential that they actively participate in the learning process by being prepared to provide material and time to attend tutorials, exams, et c. at the university. In my case they were generous in also providing financial assistance in paying my fees in full.

I included two work-based modules within my course structure, the first being of 15 credits and the final work-based project being of 60-credits. The first module was technical and directly relevant to my work role. Entitled Investigation of the utilisation of mathematical computer CFD models to understand the impact of overfire air systems on wall fired furnace performance, it enabled me to investigate basic jet theory and apply it to furnace performance. The advantage of undertaking the 15-credit module first was that it established the fundamentals required in writing a report at master’s level. For example, it enabled me to become familiar with the use of the Harvard referencing system.

The final 60-credit work-based project was entitled Investigation of the utilisation of mathematical models to predict the extent of unburnt carbon in ash from burning pulverised bituminous coal particles. This provided me with an opportunity to investigate the development of mathematical models and in particular one model known as CBK8, which has enabled me to appreciate and understand its fundamental structure. This model is now an invaluable tool in my company’s ability to predict levels of unburnt carbon when firing various coals.

An essential aspect for the company, especially perhaps given the climate change agenda, is the ability to provide Unburnt Carbon in Ash Guarantees, which maintain a low risk factor to the company’s upper management and commercial department. This tool, developed through my final work-based project, along with others, is a significant aspect in enabling the company to provide such guarantees on projects.

For this aspect of the course the University provided me with two experienced specialist tutors to guide me through the thought process required for this level of work. The company agreed to let me attend regular monthly tutorials, which were partly in company time and partly in my own time.

In addition to the University tutors my mentor within the company was of great assistance in discussing the various aspects of these two modules. Although not an academic educationalist he had many years of experience and technical knowledge, which was invaluable in successfully completing this aspect of my course. He was able to focus and challenge many of my concepts and ideas prior to bringing them to the University tutors.
for further discussion. Therefore, the support of a more experienced colleague within the company is another invaluable requirement for this type of study.

Martin (2003) comments that there is often a difficulty for students moving from the university environment into the unstructured world of work. The university tends to approach problem solving as an individual abstract intellectual process whereas work-based learning is often within a team structure and operates within a problem based environment to meet specific targets.

I found moving the other way from work-based problem solving to a more structured university approach just as difficult. Therefore, I had to undertake an important mind shift in my learning when compared to the projects I was normally involved in for my company. My normal approach at work is to find as ‘good’ a solution as possible within the constraints of cost and time available. For the LtW programme, I was being encouraged not only to consider the solution as the goal but also to value the thought process of exploring and researching the subject under consideration. The outcome might have been that no practical solution was achievable which, at work, would end the investigation. Within the LtW programme, I was being encouraged to consider the process as more important and significant than achieving a successful closed solution. However, I did not achieve simply a ‘process’ outcome, but actually came up with a useful practical model for the company.

**Conclusion**

Gaining my Master’s degree through LtW has been a rewarding process as I have become more technically and environmentally confident. In addition, my company appear to consider it to be of benefit as their response has been to promote me to the highest level of engineer within the department.

**References**


Abstract

I completed an MA degree entitled ‘Ethical Practice in Personal & Professional Development’ in October 2005. My experience of worked-based learning (WBL) was probably atypical as I had not carried out paid employment since 1992, due to a debilitating and disabling health condition. My life experience formed my work base and although I had been involved in a rich variety of voluntary work, no organisation was prepared to fulfil an employer role in my WBL.

I have analysed my work-based learning into three main areas:

1. The role of my unique personalised curriculum and the different approaches to assessment of my evidence of learning,
   which connects closely with:
2. My personal journey in making paths and took place in the context of:
3. The impact of infrastructure considerations and the future challenges to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employing organisations and government policy of this individualised approach to work-based learning.

I suggest that recognition and development of different models of WBL will need to be at the core of WBL futures.

Work and Me

The possible contradiction between carrying out a work-based learning programme, while not in paid work has led me to consider what constitutes work for me, an unemployed disabled person.

Taylor considers that:

‘What constitutes an activity as work, as opposed to something else such as leisure, is not whether it is paid but whether it involves the provision of a service to others or the production of goods for the consumption of others.’
[2004:38]

This definition recognises unpaid domestic tasks, often carried out by women, as work, but fails to encompass the experience of many disabled people or people with chronic illness whose work focus is:
management of their disability or chronic illness so as to remain as fit as possible;
• carrying out basic daily living tasks which may take much longer and be much more
difficult than for non-disabled people;
• possibly becoming a legal employer of those who assist them in those tasks.
(Barnes & Mercer, 2005).

Gradually, I have moved from the situation indicated above, where management of my
disability and basic daily living tasks was my entire work, to engagement in unpaid voluntary
work, often using my personal experience of disability.

It was from this base that I began to study for an MA degree, which was further personal
development, enabling me to become more confident and recognise transferable work-
related skills. In order to become eligible for work-related benefits, rather than receiving
Incapacity Benefit, I needed to work more than 16.5 hours a week. I took this step and
began working half time in May 2006. Although I had little difficulty in securing a job
as a project manager (job share), sustaining the job alongside the continuing tasks of
managing my disability and daily living tasks, proved too costly of my energy and health.

Introduction

Smith and Betts (2000:591) argue that it is only ‘...learning through work that is experiential’
that truly provides a partnership approach to using work as a basis for learning. My
WBL programme at the University of Derby used Learning through Work (LtW) which is
underpinned by a learning contract to ensure that the learning programme meets the
objectives and requirements of all three parties (HEI, learner and employer) involved in
the learning partnership.

Figure 1 illustrates the key elements of my learning contract, its impact on making paths
in my personal journey and their relationship with the infrastructure within which my
learning took place.
Curriculum and Assessment
As my learning programme was unique and personal to my situation, I had to develop the learning contract almost from scratch, with support from my tutor. I looked at examples of other learning contracts, but as they were about very different situations from mine, they didn’t really help. Most of the components I designed and carried out began with a blank sheet of paper. Although I found this whole process very difficult, not least because I have no background in education or curriculum planning, there were immense benefits from being able to direct my own study and work in ways that suited me without an external timetable. Furthermore, I discovered abilities well beyond my expectations because I was free to explore different avenues and develop without constraint.

Social justice for disabled people, a concern close to my heart, became a key theme throughout my curriculum (APEL, Democratic Communication, the research project within research methods, published article for writing for publication, dissertation).
My programme was truly holistic, integrating theory with my own life experience. I was able to incorporate flexibility in the assessment process, which helped to develop a wide range of skills. For example:

- **APEL** – Materials from training to become a Disability Equality Trainer with reflections on my learning;
- **Case Study** – Democratic Communication (service user-led committee’s response to proposed changes in governance of a large charity providing services to disabled people);
- **Written report** – Research Methods (awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 among small and medium sized enterprises [SMEs] in the market town where I live);
- **Personal Development Planning (PDP)** (a position statement of PDP in Higher Education together with an analysis of PDP in the LtW programme at the University of Derby, both at January 2005);
- **Peer reviewed published article** (Lyon, 2005) and seminar with powerpoint presentation – Writing for Publication (an article about direct payments, a social care provision through which social care claimants receive money rather than a provided service. My article argues the case for recognising the impact of direct payments on social exclusion of all social care claimants and not just direct payments recipients).
- **Dissertation** – Independent Study (Heart and mind: issues and dilemmas for visibly disabled people seeking ordination in the Church of England).

**Making Paths**

Designing and carrying out my learning programme was a personal journey of making paths relating to the process (transitions and transformations, inclusion and empowerment) and also relating to outcomes (learning to learn and personal employability) of my learning.

**Transitions and transformations**

Throughout, there have been transitions as I have needed to make paths through psychological and practical barriers, moving from relatively comfortable positions of confidence in what I was doing, into the unknown. Although uncomfortable in themselves, these transitions have often led to transformations and significant personal development.

The first significant transition was in actually beginning my programme and deciding on the qualification I wished to achieve. My initial objective was to study for a recognised qualification to demonstrate to myself and other people that I was intellectually capable and sufficiently strong (physically and emotionally) to commit to the task and complete it within an agreed timescale. Initially, I thought that a post graduate certificate would achieve that goal for me, but after meeting my tutor I was persuaded to embark on a Master’s degree.
My next major transition was in specifying the individual components of my programme. I saw opportunities to use my previous professional experience of business analysis as a basis for developing partnership working with the large national charity for which I was a service user and governance volunteer. I began to plan a programme under the general heading of ‘Strategic management and ethical practice’ and tried to liaise with senior staff about how we could work together to that I would carry out real work for them, while they fulfilled the employer role in my programme including contributing to funding. Soon, the Director General decided that no such partnership should take place and so I had to revise the overall focus of my programme and review my commitment to voluntary work with the charity. I no longer had a clear goal, which meant greater uncertainty and the need to keep an open mind towards my own personal and professional development. As I began to study in earnest I realised that I could not have managed to continue my previous commitments to the charity as well as studying.

Another transition was around my decision to write an article for publication in a peer reviewed academic journal. This was a significant movement towards opening up opportunities for professional development in research and academic fields.

By the time I was ready to plan my independent study, the shape of my programme had changed from my original title of ‘Strategic management and ethical practice’ and so it was necessary to re-negotiate a new title. I realised that strategic management applied to my own personal and professional development rather than to any business environment. The title of my award was changed to ‘Ethical practice in personal and professional development’.

For my independent study, I wanted to use myself as a research participant. I had already carried out insider research but my independent study involved a further transition from insider research to being a member of the ethnographic group I was researching and using myself as a full participant.

**Inclusion and empowerment**

For me, this aspect was often linked with transitions and transformations, but for learners carrying out WBL within the context of paid employment, it is likely that their learning will result in tangible career development benefits. However, even in my situation I have been empowered through getting to know staff in other schools of the university and have moved from a lonely path to feeling part of various different communities, such as the university itself and academics from other HEIs with common subject area interests.
Learning to learn

As well as making paths along my own journey, my programme included making paths affecting other people, systems and organisations, both in the process of carrying out my work and also through dissemination of my findings.

Gray (2001:7, 8) identifies characteristics of WBL that distinguish WBL from classroom learning. In particular he sees that the process of ‘learning to learn’ is as important as the ‘attainment of knowledge’.

As I had never studied an arts subject beyond GCE ‘O’ level, learning how to obtain resources, learning to write appropriately, crediting material from other authors and learning to disseminate my research, were the main areas in which I needed to learn to learn. Also I realised that processes I already carried out, such as reflective practice, were part of my learning tool kit.

Dissemination of knowledge from my research projects began during the research process itself and continued as I drew together my findings. For example, the survey of SMEs in my town increased awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act. An article about my research was then published in the local paper which helped to disseminate my findings. Similarly with my independent study, enabling other visibly disabled people to tell their own story made paths within the research process. There has been some dissemination of my findings through providing a copy of my dissertation to my Bishop and following up his request to send a copy to the Director of the Ministry Division which is responsible for selection and training of ordination candidates.

Personal employability

As indicated in the opening section, ‘Work and me’, my prospects for paid work improved considerably as a result of completing this MA degree. In fact I applied for three part-time jobs within a period of less than a month and was offered interviews for all of them. Two of these interviews took place within the same week and I was offered both posts, from which I chose the project manager (job share) post and then declined the third interview.

I was able to use my skills to analyse the elements of the project and define its scope, which had not been done previously. Although this valuable work contributed significantly to understanding the project and provided a basis for developing a project plan, it did not help to reduce the pressure on me to engage in a level of activity and busy-ness beyond my strength. Consequently, I experienced considerable deterioration in my health and had to end my employment. I have now accepted that the government’s definition of working full time (more than 16.5 hours a week for a disabled person) is beyond my limitations,
but it is nevertheless frustrating that this artificial line prevents me from using my abilities to earn my living. As a result, I need to remain in the welfare system which tends to be disempowering compared with being eligible for employment related benefits.

Although paid work of more than 16.5 hours a week is beyond my resources, I have been able to do some Permitted Work as allowed by the DWP alongside receiving Incapacity Benefit. This work has become available through contacts at the University of Derby and has opened up new areas of work in research and academic fields, using skills developed through my learning. I have also continued to seek personal development and fulfilment through using my gifts and skills in contributing to the life of the community.

Unexpectedly, an avenue that I had been pursing for many years has opened up and I have been accepted to train to become a priest in the Church of England. It is anticipated that this would be on a part time, unpaid basis. I have felt called to this vocation for many years and I hope my determination in continuing to respond to this call, despite the existence of many barriers, has created paths for other people. Completion of my MA degree was a significant factor in the decision of the selection advisory panel to recommend me for training.

**Infrastructure Considerations**

So far, I have been writing about me and my personal journey, but for me, as for everyone else, my personalised learning programme has not taken place in a vacuum, but in the context of an existing infrastructure of employers (existing and potential), HEIs and government policy. Now, I turn my attention to these infrastructure considerations.

**Relationships between learner, employer/organisation and HEI**

Model A represents an organisational approach in which WBL is initiated by an employer or organisation developing a mutually beneficial partnership with an HEI to meet the learning needs of the employer. When the learner becomes involved, there is already an agreed framework within which the learner determines his/her own personal programme. This is the approach described by Smith & Betts (2000) which also provides the backdrop for the various contributors to Boud & Solomon (2003).

In contrast, model B represents an individual approach where WBL is initiated by the individual learner and the employer (or organisation) role is more tenuous in the partnership. I suggest that the difficulties I experienced with the organisation I had anticipated fulfilling an employer role may be a common experience within the individual approach as the role of the organisation is not well defined from the outset of the partnership. This may lead to tensions for the learner with her/his employer.
However, the organisational approach is not without potential tensions between the learner and employer. Zemblyas (2006) looks at potential conflicts between the needs of the employer, such as improvements in productivity, flexibility and efficiency compared with the learner’s objective of greater self-realisation through WBL. He observes that the fundamental concept of WBL may cause tensions between the learner’s role as an employee and their motivation for learning, and raises concerns about bringing the private act of reflection for professional and personal improvement into the more public domain of the workplace. Recognising and developing these different models and the potential tensions within each may be significant to WBL futures.

**Government Policy**

Government policy will continue to affect the future of WBL. It is important that the learning needs of all age groups and all abilities are addressed and not just those of low skilled young people. There also needs to be a joined up approach among government departments with responsibility for learning and work of any kind. My own situation illustrates particular concerns for more severely disabled people and people with severe chronic health conditions about the implications of the government’s welfare to work policy and the transitions between welfare and work related benefits.
Conclusions

My main observation is that there appears to be more than one model of WBL. In particular, opportunities should not be missed to develop the individual model alongside the more prevalent organisational model. I think that for the future it will be helpful to identify the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of each model, and the roles of HEIs in supporting both learners and organisations through potential tensions arising within each model.

My personal experience demonstrates that WBL is both possible and valuable without involvement of an employer/organisation. It may be that WBL provides better preparation for work for people who are not in work, than a more traditional taught learning programme. This could open up new opportunities for WBL.

References


Implications for futures of Work-based Learning: A learner’s Auto-ethnographical study

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Abstract
Written from the perspectives of a Learning through Work (LtW) learner running a hairdressing business, this paper provides visceral experiences of learning processes encountered at the University of Derby.

Drawing on discrete facts from auto-ethnographic activity, implications for andragogy are discussed. How may enactors, who are training providers, help learners develop new perspectives that enrich their lives to open new opportunities for becoming?

Not intending to constitute anecdotalism, the study tries to move beyond what is the case, to explaining why or how events occur.

Purpose
Written from the perspectives of an LtW learner, this paper provides visceral experiences of learning processes encountered at the University of Derby. The research investigates why and how events occurred that led to or prevented andragogy, which Knowles (1980) describes as the art and science of helping adults learn. MacDonald et al (2000) claim workplace learning is the fastest growing area of adult education. James (2002:373) speaks of the ‘procedural technical knower,’ who can apply knowledge in the workplace. This inquiry allows personal investigation of learning experiences that enrich my professional life to open new opportunities for becoming.

Introduction
Field (2006) states workplace learning is maturing as an area of research. Bosley and Young (2006) underline research into computer-mediated learning (CML) is limited. There appears little study from the learner’s view. Wenger (1998) cited in James (2002) reminds us of the importance of studying the learning process as learning transforms who we are and what we can do. It is more than an accumulation of skills and information; it is an experience of identity.

Methodology
A qualitative approach is taken to give insight into the mind of the learner. Uppermost in the mind of the researcher is that the study should not constitute anecdotalism. It moves beyond what is the case, rationalising why they may have occurred. The study draws on auto ethnography, in which Seale (2004) explains researchers use their own experiences and responses to events as sources of evidence about social processes; here, andragogy.
Moving beyond recollections as a source of information to prevent naïve empiricism, 260 entries of the dialogue function – asynchronous online discussions between tutors and myself were scrutinised. The benefit of combining scrutiny and self-knowledge is summarised by Saville-Troike (1989:110):

‘... the ethnographer can plumb the depths and explore the subtle interconnections of meaning in ways the outsider could only do with difficulty.’

The auto ethnographer acts as observer and informant, which may overcome the problem of verification of unbridled speculation. I acknowledge Platt’s (1981) caveat cited in Scott (2006) that the ensuing analytical description might not be a definitive account. There may be other ways of interpreting the text.

The dialogue entries were coded according to themes displayed within them. Broad themes were affective or emotional content, learning occurrences and barriers to learning.

**Presentation of data: learning experiences**

260 entries into the dialogue function between 8/05/2005 and 8/07/2006 by tutors and myself were scanned for evidence. The data were reduced to facilitate access and analysis. The major themes are ‘Learning Experiences’ and ‘Barriers to Learning.’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Experience Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/07/06</td>
<td>“Thanks for helping me – without your guidance on my Marketing I wouldn’t have reached this level.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04/06</td>
<td>“Thanks so much for finding the time to make your data available to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/07/05</td>
<td>Re: Essay Planning “I’m sure the more you take time to digest information the easier it will become.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/11/05</td>
<td>Re: Tutor advised learner to visit CIPD Conference “Hope you enjoyed the exhibition.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/05/05</td>
<td>“I have sent you a 9 page document on referencing using the Harvard system.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/06/05</td>
<td>“re the Powerpoint presentation you need to readdress the order – think about it as telling a story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/06/05</td>
<td>“Do you mean the electronic journals? Could you let me know more about this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/07/05</td>
<td>“I found a really useful document about essay writing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/03/06</td>
<td>“There is guidance on planning and submitting available to you when you log on to support materials at My LtW <a href="http://www.learningthroughwork.co.uk%E2%80%9D">www.learningthroughwork.co.uk”</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/10/05</td>
<td>Re: Applying research “I realise I have probably not been applying research I carried out in earlier pieces.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/11/05</td>
<td>Re: Drafting essay “I’m sure that starting to draft materials is the way forward.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/09/05</td>
<td>Subject knowledge “I do need to look at incentivisation as a subject.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/09/05</td>
<td>“It took me a while to get to grips with what I was going to actually research with my Employment Law module.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/01/06</td>
<td>Re: Faulty thinking &amp; research outcomes “I realise that research may not always lead to the outcome the researcher wishes it to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/01/06</td>
<td>“Lovely to see you again yesterday and to touch base.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/10/05</td>
<td>“I agree I have diverged from my original thoughts. I find especially useful your feedback re the structure of the report.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/12/05</td>
<td>“Thank you for your positive comments – it means such a lot when I’m typing away at home by myself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/12/05</td>
<td>“Our comments are below – you are well on target for a good honours degree.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11/05</td>
<td>“We think it’s useful for learners to share peer support.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation of the dialogue data follows. I believed I would not have reached higher levels of learning without guidance. My previous work experiences of being a Further Education (FE) tutor may have led to this. In FE the tutor aims to create a nurturing environment by planning activities designed to create learning. I may have exhibited faulty thinking around undergraduate studies.

On scanning the text listed in the ‘Advice’ section, it appears the activities were pedestrian. Tutors show learners how to construct essays, how to reference with academic rigour and how to research using the Electronic Journals. However, this behavioural action created foundations to render sound academic writing. It really may be a question of tutor and learner finding a starting point for the individual dependant on existing skills. However, tutors know these skills are needed in Higher Education (HE) study. Therefore, a generic resource for the faculty could be created cataloguing the skills of research, writing and referencing.

Once foundation skills were in place I moved to higher learning levels. I realised that I needed to apply the knowledge I was discovering for it to be useful. Through perusal of feedback on work I could begin to aim for autonomy in my studies. I began to know how to draft documents and search for information with a narrow enough field to study.

I gained enhanced researching and writing skills. I became a ‘different’ person. I learned to think in an academic way and apply knowledge in the work place rather than relying on anecdotal knowledge.
Presentation of data: Barriers to learning

Table II: Barriers to Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Learning</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor problems:</td>
<td>8/05/05</td>
<td>Lack of time of tutors “I am short of time at this part of the year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8/09/05</td>
<td>Problem of access to tutors uninvolved with scheme “When do you expect to hear from the tutor? I have to submit my final draft for the end of September in time for the November exam board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28/09/05</td>
<td>“I don’t really want a repeat performance of my Employment Law work where I got conflicting comments from 2 tutors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic problems:</td>
<td>15/06/05</td>
<td>Tutor could not access essay “I have downloaded your Powerpoint, but I can’t access your essay as it’s not in Word.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23/11/05</td>
<td>If work is not marked on e-document, where is feedback? “I’m not sure we wrote on script.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16/12/05</td>
<td>Spamming stopped work reaching tutor “Good job you used dialogue, too – spamming stopped your essay getting through.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety of learner:</td>
<td>6/05/05</td>
<td>“I need to gain a good grade in this piece.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/06/05</td>
<td>“She has started to lift the level of my work.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of barriers to learning

There appeared to be 3 types of problems or barriers to learning: electronic problems or problems with ICT systems, tutor problems, and my anxiety as a learner. Electronic problems appeared to include incompatibility of my laptop and my tutor’s system. Moreover, systems designed to protect users of communications technology such as anti ‘Spam’ technology sometimes prevented work getting through. The fact that the scheme is administered electronically may interfere with tutors annotating work. Although, some tutors very helpfully did this electronically in different coloured text.

There were problems connected to disparity between a roll-on roll-off scheme such as LtW (learners can enrol/start at any time of the year) and the semester system. There may not really be a tutor available to give teaching during the summer. Furthermore, specialist tutors not connected to the scheme – ‘third parties’ identified by my usual tutors – may not have had time or known the importance of being able to return work in time for exam boards.
I suffered from anxiety concerning grades. This hampered progress. By detailing dates of dialogue entries, timing of such events can be scrutinised. I registered anxiety at the beginning to midway on the scheme. Tutors’ awareness alleviated this.

**Discussion of data**

Positive learning experiences outweigh negatives I experienced as a learner. It seems tutors may need to find a method for projecting learning experiences through the present system. However, the noun ‘system’ may cloak a variety of meanings. The system could include the LtW website, or the dialogue function. It could also contain the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. Wider still, it could extend to the whole university’s system. How can this wider community be projected to and harnessed by remote learners?

**The system of Learning through Work**

Morgan (1997) postulates virtually anything can be defined as a system by drawing a boundary. Discussing learning in the workplace, boundaries can be drawn around the university and the workplace to encompass both as separate but interacting systems. In Lifelong Learning the systems could act in harmony.

![Figure 1: Model of an open system](image)

Adapted from Beardwell & Holden, (1997; 56)

According to Beardwell and Holden (1997) the open system imports from and exchanges with its environment what it needs to meets its goals and exist. The inputs are converted into a form that is useable. Outputs are generated that are returned to the environment. These are used in exchange for further inputs.
The university imports learners and course fees from its environment to subsist. Money is used to pay staff, academics and researchers. In turn teaching and research is developed and returned to the environment.

The workplace imports paying customers to keep the business running. Personnel are also imported, but may require training, if they are to be ‘useable’ by the concern. Outputs are generated in terms of commodities or enhanced services to the customer base.

**The tandem systems of academic institution and workplace**

There may be an area between the two systems that is interconnected. This could be the ‘Conversion Process’ where according to James (2002) new philosophies, policies and practices are created for the symbiotic good of both parties. The crossover between the two systems includes two types of stakeholders – tutor and learner. The medium of learning could be the communication channels between the two systems and stakeholders. An issue could be how learning is projected through the virtual and physical systems to produce transformative education rather than formative training.

![Diagram of University, Communications, and Workplace](image)

*Myciunka (2007)*

**Projecting learning through communication channels**

Gallacher et al. (2002) point out that part-time learners appear to study at the periphery of their lives and institutional and structural factors as well as personal issues might mean engagement with the role of learner is limited. In Learning through Work the ‘university’ enters into the workplace through electronic portals. At the University of Derby, UDo is the gateway to study resources, including electronic journals, electronic book collections and the Mintel platform. There is a comprehensive range. However, exhibiting to the learner what to do with these resources may be a stepping-stone to higher learning. Time is used symbolically within the presentation of data in this project. The processes of
learning may be plotted. It may be that communications between tutor and learner are planned to coincide with events. The best training approach between the 2 systems at certain times could be evaluated. In relation to Information and Communications Training, Mead et al (1999) declare that the application of different training approaches at different points in training or to different cognitive task components may be a sound approach. Some communications may be best left in the physical, such as showing artefacts to a learner and being on hand to offer descriptions. Other communications such as essay planning may be best served electronically to save time and travel. Smewing (2007) points to the use of MP3 players for learners to access information. This appears to be an accessible reservoir for the basics of research and writing skills.

**Ascending pathways to meta-cognitive knowledge**

Paloniemi (2006) defines meta-cognitive knowledge as learning to learn and having an awareness of one’s strengths. This may only take place once behavioural learning has been marked out by the tutor. Once this becomes embedded in the consciousness of the learner, cognition in terms of subject knowledge and skills such as getting to grips with exactly what to study, becomes available. This may then lead to learning in the humanistic paradigm, leading to learner autonomy.

**Figure 3: Developing Mode 2 Knowledge**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Mode 2 humanistic workplace activity, meta-cognition, and tutor-led behavioural activity.]

*Myciunka (2007)*
Mode 2 knowledge can be characterised by its effectiveness to solve workplace problems or ability to establish competitive advantage. It is developed in the industries for the industries. Gibbons et al (1994) name this extradisciplinarity.

**Future research**

Regarding futures and epistemologies, Gunaratnam (2006) asks the question, ‘How might we know differently’ about learning? Van de Stege (2003) suggests re-conceptualisation using 3 units of analysis. They are, policy makers/advisers to education, tutors/faculties as the implementers of policy, and the learners themselves. Johnson (2001) advocates a force field analysis of the resisting and enabling factors to development of WBL. Further study concerning the development of mode 2 knowledge in the workplace may take place. WBL is centred on the individual’s workplace epistemologies. Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers underline the capacity of individuals for creativity, choice and growth. However, as this paper suggests, the humanistic paradigm of teaching and learning may only be revealed once learners have been led through a behavioural pathway. Tutors may need to illustrate the ‘how tos’ of learning before epistemologies can be nurtured.

Development of a model to liberate these ideals could represent a conduit to the future(s) of Learning through Work.
References


A personal view of Work-based Learning: policy and practice from both ends of the telescope

John Edmunds, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Sheffield. Formerly Team Leader, Skills Group, Department for Education and Skills.

Introduction

Over the past three or so years I’ve been responsible within the Department for Education and Skills for developing the policy for ‘Train to Gain’, the Government’s new national employer training programme. In the process of doing that work I came across the Learning through Work (LtW) programme – flexibly delivered, work-based Higher Education developed by the University for Industry with a small number of Higher Education Institutions. While I hold qualifications in management and accounting I’ve been conscious for a long time that I’d missed out on a degree-bearing education and do not have any qualifications specific to education and to policy making. So I decided to experience work-based learning for myself and obtain some academic credit for the work I do.

I enrolled with the University of Derby through their LtW programme, an experience that has been illuminating in a number of respects: building knowledge of Higher Education disciplines; understanding better the learning I have but which is not accredited or recognised in any formal way; learning that engagement is difficult but at the same time rewarding for employer and employee; and being able to look employers and other learners in the eye when developing policy and communicating it. I am part way through my programme of study and acquiring new knowledge and experience that I am already bringing to bear on our next phase of policy making around Train to Gain and the Government’s Skills Strategy.

The Government’s Skills Strategy, published in two White Papers, aims to improve the skills of the UK workforce in the face of increasing global competition and the relative advantage its major competitors have in that respect. The White Papers were ‘21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential’ published in 2003 and, in 2005, the second titled: ‘Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work’. With rapid improvements in the education of workforces being made in Asia and the Far East, the future, if the issue of skills is not addressed, would be bleak according to the rhetoric surrounding the Leitch Report (2006). To make the improvements needed Government has already committed to a strategy that shares investment in skills between the State, employers and individuals. Leitch recommends that, by 2010, all Government funding for work-based learning for adults should be routed through its new national employer training programme Train to Gain (T2G) or through learner accounts. T2G offers employers access to a wide range of training provision, delivered flexibly in the workplace where that is what the employer wants. The programme was based on the former Employer Training Pilots which were extensively evaluated by the Institute for Employment Studies. Work-based learning is in the ascendancy.
It is possible – perhaps even likely – that traditional routes to higher education may not be sufficient to deliver the ambition that Leitch has set out. Other delivery methods might be needed if we are to engage with adults already in the workforce – as we must – given those people are already busy juggling work and family commitments. And their employers, most of them small, employing fewer than 50 people, may be equally reluctant to engage through traditional approaches to delivery.

Background

The national employer training programme that is branded ‘Train to Gain’, referred to by Leitch, has been my area of responsibility within the DfES since 2004. Within the DfES I worked on developing policy in relation to large companies following my work on Regulatory Impact Assessment for the first Skills Strategy White Paper back in 2004. Before that I held posts in the Department for Trade and Industry, the Small Business Service and the Employment Service having entered the Civil Service as a Clerical Officer working in a Jobcentre on a one-month temporary contract – a little over 20 years ago now.

Over almost all of that time my work has been focused on employers, employment and the workplace. I must have spoken over the years to literally thousands of employers about their needs, and probably a similar number of individuals about theirs. Most of those conversations would have involved an element of discussion about qualifications and training both to get a job or to advance within an organisation. I’ve also worked on internal functions in personnel as well as being a line manager in my own right for all but one year of my career. Again, learning, development and training are important aspects of the organisation’s performance. Taken together that experience has left me with, I think, a reasonable level of knowledge and insight about learning in relation to the jobs people do. I would not, however, call myself an expert in terms of every facet of it.

Even now, with new technology and other advances the world of my current Department still concerns a bunch of people in a ‘classroom’. The classroom might be virtual, or in the workplace, teaching might be done via electronic means but we remain concerned with people. I know that because I am one (!) and I’ve been, and still am, a learner. More specifically I’m a work-based learner, by which I mean my learning is focused on my job and what I need to perform and progress within it; and my learning is also delivered, in the main, through it. In other words I do not, at any point, go to college. In fact I’d say that, with the use of technology, significant proportions of it barely require me even to leave my desk in terms of directly engaging with my coursework.
Motivations

Motivation to get involved in learning or training is an interesting subject area. I think it would be unusual to find a learner who had one straightforward objective or aim. Certainly I had a number which included:

- A consciousness that I’d never had a higher education, within which lie vague notions around self-esteem and thoughts that my career had overtaken my learning. In a sense, a need to make up for lost ground;
- More specific work-based needs in terms of being able to offer my employer certain skills and qualities. For example, to develop increased proficiency in the conduct and application of research to policy making;
- Some more personal work-based needs to improve my ability deal with other experts in the field with greater confidence and to prepare for future career opportunities;
- Being convinced, on the basis of the evidence available to me, that learning helps people progress and that if it did it should help me also.

I also have a more specific need which is a need to be able to look employers and learners in the eye. In other words, to practice what I preach and in doing so learn more from the experience itself about work-based learning and Higher Education.

At the risk of sounding like Sir Humphrey (or possibly Donald Rumsfeld?) I should also mention a motivation or need that I didn’t know that I had which was a need to take some time to reflect what it was I wanted, i.e. I didn’t know that I had that need. The reason that I didn’t know I needed that was because, not having had a higher education, I had no in-depth experience of doing that in a structured way. You don’t know what you don’t know.

Getting in

Discovering the Learning through Work programme was a complete accident for me. In the course of my work I encounter and need to work with a wide variety of stakeholders in and around the world of education. In a discussion with the University for Industry (UfI) around the role Learndirect might play in delivery of the Government’s agenda I was introduced to Learning through Work (LtW). LtW operated then, as now, as essentially a small-scale pilot testing tailored, flexibly delivered Higher Education that individuals could carry out at work. I was taken through some of the case studies – some of whom I could easily identify with, particularly the case of an individual whose career and responsibilities outstripped her formal education. I was equally encouraged to hear that around 70% of those participating had their fees paid by their employer. The reason I had not heard of this programme was that it was never heavily marketed. Even so I was told it had around 1500 participating learners at the time (2005).
Entry to the course was equally unstructured. I began by simply playing around in its website, just kicking a few ideas about. Deleting a few, developing them a little further and then tentatively pressing the ‘send’ button to find out what the reaction of the 8 participating institutions might be. Selecting the institution was a little tricky because it isn’t necessarily clear a) that they don’t deliver just anything or b) what it is they will support in terms of particular academic fields of study. The first reaction was a rejection that the University in question couldn’t support my aims. I was disappointed with that response on two counts. First, the outright rejection and second that they didn’t explain clearly to me why they’d rejected me. Nor did they point me toward an alternative institution. My second attempt was with the University of Derby who reacted positively and encouraged my application thereafter.

I’m fortunate in working for an employer that simply has to believe and be seen to believe in education, skills and lifelong learning. But that doesn’t mean either that learning is necessarily taken to qualification. And nor does it mean my employer will simply pay out on request. A case has to be made to show how investment in any training will support the Department’s objectives. Developing that case was, while relatively straightforward, quite interesting because it was done in the context of the Department’s performance management system. In that system, our individual performance is judged, using criterion referencing, against whether job objectives have been met and whether we have demonstrated the behaviours expected of all staff in the Department. In that context development needs are identified and it was against those needs that a case could be made to ask for my studies to be funded. So the learning I’m doing is linked ultimately to achieving the Department’s mission and objectives. For example, one of the modules I’m doing is ‘Research Methods’ which will help me understand and present evidence for or against particular policy options. This will support better advice to Ministers and better decisions.

The web-based front end to LtW is, to say the least, temperamental. The fact that it requires a fairly substantial handbook to guide the user through it from screen to screen just about says it all. It freezes on occasion and sometimes parts of the screen simply disappear. All the components are there but the way they’ve been assembled leave considerable room for improvement from the user’s perspective. It simply isn’t instinctive enough to the extent that when I’ve found what I want I write notes to remind me how to do so again. In addition to Learning through Work’s own website is the University Derby’s own ‘UDo’ site. This means I work through two systems and have thus far not been entirely sure which is best for what. I certainly have to remember a variety of usernames and passwords for different sites.

My experience of the administration at the University of Derby has been of a certain level of ‘clunkiness’. Partly that seems to be due to genuine academic requirements, i.e. is something imposed upon them. For example, instead enrolling once for the whole qualification I’ve had to enrol twice – for each academic year. Each time requires me to
get a letter from my employer who, each time, will feel bound to question whether it is really necessary and whether we have the financial cover. Other aspects appear to be due to the shift of focus in this type of learning from learner alone to learner and employer. It required me to explain on more than one occasion that I need an invoice to be raised and sent to my employer – not a bill to me. Equally, there is a need to recognise that employers operate on a financial year, typically April to March, not an academic year (August to July). This is very important in terms of funding because in the case of my employer internal budgets change from one year to the next. There is no guarantee that it will be available in the following year. So raising invoices on a module by module basis is not necessarily the best approach.

**Getting started**

I found starting on my studies interesting from the outset. I have easy access to support from my tutor via telephone or e-mail – whichever route suited me, either using the messaging service with the LtW system or via conventional email. Packs of materials arrived quickly explaining about the component parts of my studies and that explained the relevant level indicators. The Level Indicators were straightforward to understand – they are a criterion referencing system similar to our own performance management systems in the Department. There is the potential for someone to consider more how those two things could be integrated, on which I have some thoughts below.

The course of study contains the following components: a learning contract, optional claims for accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), set courses and work-based projects. Flexibility exists around which order you take them in and how long you allow yourself to complete them. I began, on advice of my tutor, with a substantial APEL claim. The Learning Contract would normally come first and indeed we had sketched out some ideas in that.

**Making some progress**

Never having done an APEL claim previously I approached the task as I would my work; a quick draft setting out what I’d achieved in order to provide a framework. My tutor very quickly corrected me – she was not directly interested in what I’d achieved, but rather what I’d learned. Looking at my experience in that way represented a completely different and quite refreshing perspective. On several occasions as I developed the claim I found myself saying ‘I’d forgotten I learned that’, for example learning about European law – competition regulations within article 57 of the Treaty of Rome (sounds dull as ditch-water but quite interesting!).

I received 60 points at level 7 (HE Level 4) for the APEL claim and felt something that I’d heard learners say before on work-based programmes: that I didn’t realise I operated at that level. In other words the process has been illuminating in that it has raised my level
of self awareness. Furthermore, I had reaped an additional reward from my work and gained academic credit in a subject area directly related to my job and to my aspirations. There is, I think, a lot to be said for the process itself and I can see an opportunity in the approach to, again, integrate learning with work and performance management.

The Learning Contract component of LtW is effective in forcing the learner to stand back and think quite deeply about their motivations and what they hope to achieve. It requires analysis, drawing on a number of sources, of what your learning needs are and how you expect them to be met. These, quite naturally, need to be aligned to your aims. As a process it is a little like business planning, the components being:

- Your experience and existing qualifications (in essence, a baseline);
- Your purpose in what in wishing to undertake the course (in business that would be the organisation’s ‘mission’);
- What your aims are (in business, objectives); and:
- The components, which together amount to sufficient credit for the award of the qualification sought (in business, your operational activities intended to achieve the objectives and mission.)

Through this process I learned a little about higher education, for example about the level indicators attached to a particular qualification and about the criteria that will be applied in assessing progress. Again, I could see the similarities between performance management systems and management in general.

**Is it challenging enough?**

I’ve shared with others in the Department information about my experience. Some react positively, others less so. The main criticism is a familiar one to people involved in the delivery of work-based learning – in particular NVQs. It is that all that is happening is, thus far, an assessment of current knowledge. In other words that the learner is learning nothing new and that the process somehow lacked ‘stretch’.

In response I’d say three things. First that the process of reflecting on what had been learned I found personally quite stretching. It is possible that that comes more easily to others. Second, that the so called ‘stretch’ had already occurred – note that prior to joining the DfES I had no substantial knowledge of developing educational policy – I had to learn it. Third, and perhaps most important to me, was that my APEL claim provided academic credit for things I’d thought of and developed – in other words my original thinking. I’m unaware of other avenues to do that.
The module I’m part way through (Research Methods) does, in any case, go beyond accrediting my existing knowledge. From what I’ve read so far I certainly have a fair understanding of research and, in the past, I’ve conducted some. I just didn’t call it research – I’d have called it something like a ’Post Implementation Review’ – but according to the literature I was actually carrying out a qualitative evaluation using a structured questionnaire.

The future

In terms of the future we should perhaps group our thoughts into 2 categories. First, areas for development of the current approach in terms of making it work more effectively. We might consider these to be more incremental in nature. There are also, I believe, opportunities to take things yet further which might be more capable of delivering greater leaps forward.

Developing the supporting IT systems so that access is more straightforward for the user is important in terms of effectiveness. It should be feasible to link this to the administrative systems operated by the institution delivering the learning. This is important not just from an ergonomic point of view but because many work-based learners will use good systems in their own organisations. For example, in the DfES I can book training, travel tickets and claim expenses on-line. The systems aren’t perfect but they operate more effectively than LtW. Consequently my expectations are toward something at least as good. That might also be the case for other employers. But in doing that we should recognise, I think, that the use of LtW’s ’hub’ is quite innovative and we should guard against throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Developing the employer-facing aspects of the participating institutions is also important. That need for further development reveals itself in how the learner is dealt with by the institution, for example the need to re-enrol for each academic year and to whom invoices are directed. Again there are potentially systems issues here, for example in being able to contact the finance department to check whether invoices have been paid.

The opportunity areas are, I think, substantial and within them is room for considerable innovation. First, the notion of having the support of a learning expert, i.e. my tutor, available on line, to support me in my job is an attractive one. The days of the Department employing large numbers of staff trainers are long gone. Properly trained mentors are hard to come by. Training and learning is bought in as and when it is needed. Engaging with an institution more closely, in a longer-term relationship could bring mutual benefits. In addition to those I receive as a learner there is also a body of knowledge held within the DfES – I suspect in most employers – that isn’t available to academic circles because there isn’t a stable mechanism to share it readily. Some knowledge sharing clearly does occur, for example through conferences, written communications and so forth.
But, observationally, this tends to be research and evaluation outputs informing participants rather than a more systematic approach to mining individual knowledge. Furthermore, we in particular identify many areas where further research is needed. It is interesting, therefore, to be able to present this paper because it demonstrates participation in a new network and represents the sharing of individual knowledge from one organisation into academic circles.

The second major area, linked to the point above, is to consider how we can integrate learning and education with the performance management systems that many employers use. Typically these focus on business objectives and might, as ours does, contain aspects that attempt to identify what development an individual might need to achieve them. But assessing those development needs tends to be carried out by a line manager – hardly ever would that individual have formal expertise in conducting that type of analysis on the basis of learning needs. Could the LtW learning contract, perhaps, provide a framework for doing that?

In other words, can we seek to join up the world of education with the world of leadership and management to the mutual benefit of both? What does research tell us about that? Am I atypical in my experience or my thinking?

**What the literature says**

We need to be clear about our vocabulary. Searching the internet for ‘work-based learning’ produces two main areas. First, literature that refers to learning that is focused on work and/or has a strongly vocational element to it. For example, developments in UK Government policy around increasing the relevance of qualifications to the workplace. Second, literature that was more relevant to this paper covering learning that occurs in the workplace and is focused on meeting the needs of the individual and the organisation they work for. Learning that takes place in the workplace but which is really only focused on the needs of the individual – for example, learning a foreign language with colleagues at work – I would place out of scope for the term ‘work-based learning’.

There does seem to be some support for the notion of integrating learning with the organisation’s business objectives. But in doing so you need to recognise differences within the organisations engaged in learning and therefore be adaptable in how learning is delivered.

Harris (1999) explores what he refers to as ‘network theory’ which ‘…holds that organisations are made up of a series of networks that are constantly being shaped by the actions of workers…’. He points to prior theories that include a ‘self-initiated-external’ network with this encompassing ‘…learning that is predominantly stimulated by external contacts such
as professional associations, universities, colleges... and that ‘...new developments... drive the learning.’ So there would appear to be something in the idea of developing one’s own organisation through extending its network, through learning, into the external environment. In terms of implications for policy, Harris suggests that if we want to do more in relation to encouraging work-based learning then thinking about non-traditional avenues are going to be necessary. Well, maybe we’re getting there.

The Employer Training Pilots, the forerunner of ‘Train to Gain’, were heavily evaluated over the three and a half years they ran from 2002. While focused on flexible delivery of basic skills and first full Level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs) rather than Higher Education, they demonstrated clearly, in three reports by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) (Hillage et al, 2003, 2005, and 2006) how effective learning institutions could support business organisations and the individuals within them to the benefit of all. Rather than referring to the findings directly, I will briefly recount a visit I made to a participating employer in Leicester because what I saw and heard was typical of the research findings.

This was a small textile manufacturing company seeking to reposition the business in the face of global competition. I met the employer, the providers and some of the learners. All the learners achieved their qualification which was delivered on site by the independent training provider. Many of the learners also needed basic skills due to English not being their first language. Leicester College supported their basic skills needs. The employer reported improved performance including, interestingly, the learners beginning to innovate for themselves. For example, in working out that by operating a machine in a slightly different way that production costs could be reduced. This sort of result was essential in helping turn the business around. So we can see how by extending the organisation and developing its network with learning institutions that performance can be improved.

Maclaren and Marshall (1998) explore ideas around this concept of partnership between employer, learner and learning institution in their report on Belfast University’s work-based learning programme. Their report resonates with my own experience and the research I point to above. They note (p328) how, recently, universities were building stronger links with employers in recognition of the economic contribution expected of them. They also refer to ‘...mutually satisfying learning outcomes...’ and are clear that partnership between employer, employee, educational institutions and professional bodies are key to an effective programme of learning. They point to a further pushing of the boundaries from the educational institution’s point of view through taking advantage of ‘...all potential sources of learning.’ They also see further development of the learning network concept into people not directly involved in the learning programme, for example work colleagues. From that evidence, if it applies generally, we can develop our thinking not just about learning networks within and beyond an organisation but how they must be constructed to operate effectively.
I’m also struck by the point about mutual gain. There would seem to be something in this for the educational institution as well as the learner and employer. There would appear to be a seam of knowledge that is generated within the workplace that might add to that held in the institution through traditional academic routes. For that to happen, though, the process of reflection – a key part of my own experience – needs to take place and without it, Maclaran and Marshall (1998) report, ‘...the learning is incomplete.’ My interpretation of that report is that it suggests that all participants in the process – not just the student – are learners. All obtain some benefit.

For the learning provider participation in work-based learning would seem to change the traditional relationship. Tutors operate more in a mentoring role than that of a ‘teacher’. Maclaran and Marshall point to that and so does Chappell (1999), who examines the impact on the practitioners. Understanding the impact on learning providers is a key part of policy making and so worth reflecting on. Chappell reflects on how educational institutions are adapting to their economic role. Partly, he says, that is in response to criticisms that they are somehow unfit for purpose in terms supplying an effective workforce. Again, we see from his paper the development of the idea of the workplace as the ‘...most authentic site of learning for work.’ I’ve heard my own head of department at the University of Derby referring to the ‘...workplace as a legitimate site of knowledge production...’, so there would seem to be some agreement that acquiring knowledge through our jobs is quite legitimate and should potentially have greater importance attached to it.

The different relationship the tutor or teacher has with the learner is of interest. Chappell (1999) reflects that because the learner is a worker then they will naturally possess knowledge, possibly considerable knowledge, of their own subject area. They are therefore in a position to make an ‘...immediate and ongoing evaluation of the industrial expertise of the ...teacher’. That must, surely, mean that a traditional idea of the teacher or tutor being somehow superior to, or ‘in charge of’ the learner cannot hold. The relationship must be collaborative instead and indeed that is how I see and have experienced the relationship with my tutor. Alternatively, if we were to depersonalise things, we could view the tutor/institution as a ‘resource’.

Work-based learning, Chappell notes, is distinct from traditional vocational learning in its level of personalisation. Maclaran and Marshall (1998) had also highlighted that knowledge was ‘...often personal rather than public’. For the delivering institution this means the development of individualised programmes of learning – which is not to say that pre-set modules cannot be taken. It involves the institution in negotiating the learning content and support systems; and in monitoring the contractual relationship between the learner, employer and the institution. I touched on the learning contract earlier and establishing the relationship with the institution falls out of that process.
I was interested to read the report by Nixon et al (2006). My own institution, Derby, is featured in that report. It certainly confirms much of what I’ve experienced and looked into in my brief review of the literature above. What strikes me about its findings is a sense that Higher Education institutions engaged in work-based learning are continuing to find their level. So even though the literature I’ve come across goes back nearly 20 years. The area of work-based learning is still relatively new for HE. One wonders whether more could be learned from much older work-based routes such as apprenticeships. As well as a need to do things like develop a more consistent vocabulary around the subject the report points to a need to continue to develop ‘...good pedagogic practice...’ and that the ‘...sector does not as yet fully understand the nature of ‘what works well in practice...’’. My instinct is that there are two things to do here. First, to agree what is a good process and get that working efficiently. Second, to work on that idea of a very different educational relationship in which learner, provider and employer are in co-operation, with each ‘learning’ from the process and each receiving benefits in doing so.

There may be an opportunity to develop work-based learning as a tool for managing performance. By this I do not mean understanding better whether and/or how learning affects organisational performance; the evidence is overwhelming on that point even though a direct causal relationship is difficult to prove. What I mean is whether it would be possible, given a mentoring/ facilitation role on the part of the education institution and where the employer is part of a learning network, to use learning – in particular the process of reflection – to help manage people. I return to my tutor’s asking me ‘What did you learn?’ Perhaps this offers an opportunity for some further dovetailing between the field of management and that of education.

Maslow’s (1970) phrase, ‘hierarchy of needs’ is perhaps a good starting point. This suggests that once our existential needs are met we then are motivated to seek needs around achievement, personal growth and fulfilment. That would accord with my motivations in work-based learning and, if Maslow is right, with other people too. We also know that having a good education and qualifications increases the likelihood of being in employment and higher wages. So education generally could be seen as protecting one’s existential position, for example because it increases job security and the likelihood of being able to continue housing oneself.
We might push that argument further by extending into the field of motivational theory. Herzberg, (1959) proposed a range of motivations for individuals in the workplace. These range from 'hygiene factors', essentially the things that dissatisfy and therefore demotivate if present, through to factors that are more motivational. There is some fit between this and Maslow’s theories because, top amongst the motivators, are achievement and recognition. Both of those things come with attaining a qualification – after all, look at how many people frame and hang on the wall their university degree and graduation photographs.

So I do think it is going to be possible to triangulate between work-based learning, education and management and motivational theory. We should see, if it holds good, benefits to the learner, the organisation and the educational institution. The problem here is that I am not an educator, but a manager and a policy maker. To use learning as a way of managing performance, alongside more traditional task and objective based management, requires a different knowledge and skill-set. However, many managers will possess negotiating skills, for example.

There are two choices here – either the organisation develops these skill sets in-house or it buys them in. Programmes of work-based learning might enable a strong element of both. Further, the idea of a developed learning network makes an internal/external argument far less meaningful. I see this as something that might be worth pursuing. Just as an organisation would have a long term relationship with a bank or other financial institution then why not also with and educational institution? An alternative model might be to allow, as I have, the individual to take control over the development of their own network. Again, there could be combinations of both.

It occurs to me at this point that one could, using work-based learning, develop one’s educational skills including obtaining recognition for those that I might already possess. A work-based B.Ed?! Well why not?

**A possible model**

I attempt here to bring what I’ve described together into a model that may assist to define and describe effective work-based learning. By effective I mean an approach premised on delivering results for the learner, the learning institution and the organisation (i.e. the employer). I illustrate the model here:
In this model I attempt to define work-based learning as a situation in which the learning experience is inclusive of the learner, employer and the Learning Institution. In other words there is the active participation to at least some extent by each of those parties. I argue that situations where only two of those groups are participating as something else – I suggest education or training. The union between only employer and learning institution is of interest, being a little more problematic to identify what is going on. My own view is that in that relationship is knowledge generation in which the learning institution would codify the knowledge against the relevant academic requirements. The context within which each the learning activities occur avoids them doing so in a vacuum to no real benefit or use. In other words, work-based learning is not narrowly academic. In addition, the model suggests that in work-based learning there would be some accreditation to distinguish it from training. Equally I’d suggest direct relevance to the job being performed by the individual in that specific work context – to distinguish it from general education. In other words for an effective process to occur our three elements need to be, somehow, in balance.

In turn, that might assist with the definitional issue and, working from the conceptual diagram, above I propose the following initial definition:

‘Work-based learning: The acquisition of accredited knowledge and skill in the context of purposeful activity involving the active participation of an individual learner, their employing organisation and an education or training institution working to an agreed curriculum to the mutual benefit of each.’

In terms of process we might consider the following:
In this illustration I propose how work-based learning might be integrated, in process terms, with business operations. Learning could help codify, through the process of assessment against challenging criteria, knowledge generated in the process of day-to-day operations.

**Summary**

Work-based learning, we have seen, has been a developing area for a range of educational institutions here and abroad for a number of years. Its methods of delivery appear to be relevant to the full range of educational levels from basic skills to degrees and beyond. However, the learning sector has yet, in the UK at least, to bring through what the optimum approach or approaches should be. The underpinning infrastructure is in need of improvement.

There are also significant opportunity areas in terms of:

- developing the relationship between employers, employee learners, institutions and professional bodies where they exist;
- exploring the extent to which learning, and the disciplines that surround it, can be integrated with leadership and management and the disciplines that surround that;
- establishing further the workplace as a place of knowledge production;
- recognising that, in a work-based learning network, all the partners receive benefits.
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Harnessing Technology for Work-based Learning
Towards a Second Generation of Work-based Learning – Supporting Social Knowledge

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Abstract
In the same way as technology is now focusing on the support of knowledge sharing, the so-called Web 2.0, the argument of this paper is that work-based learning should take the same direction. It draws on a project being undertaken at Middlesex University Business School: a work-based learning MA in Leadership Practice run for managers at Lloyds TSB Asset Finance Division. It describes how fourteen managers are being encouraged to share with each other and their organisation the outcome of their individual work-based learning through the development of a Virtual Social Knowledge Space.

Introduction
The argument of this paper is that in the tri-partite relationship between the learner, the learner’s workplace/organization and the academic institution, it is the organization that is often the sleeping partner. The individual gets academic credit in exchange for their ‘human capital’ and academia accumulates ‘structural capital’, but what for the organization which provided the context and ‘corporate curriculum’ (Harrison and Kessels, 2004) for the individual employee to draw upon in the first place? This paper argues that the ‘social capital’ created by individuals learning together in the workplace has been neglected and that it is this ‘social knowledge’ which should be the prize for organizations supporting work-based learners as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Human, structural and social capital in WBL
The notion of a ‘second generation’ of work-based learning in the title takes up the image of the second generation of the web, Web 2.0, where emphasis moves from individuals using the web to improve their own knowledge (Web 1.0) to Web 2.0 where individuals both share their knowledge with each other and, more crucially, through their sharing change and add to the body of knowledge shared by them all. Wikipedia is a good example of this practice.

The experience of one of the authors, Aboubakr A. Moteleb, is in the field of creating Virtual Social Knowledge Spaces for social learning while the other author’s background, Peter Critten, is in the field of Human Resource Development (HRD). What has brought them together is the notion of ‘social knowledge’ and collaboration with a leading financial services company in the design and delivery of a Master’s programme based on work-based learning.

This paper begins by looking at social knowledge from an HRD perspective starting with a review of what ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowledge management’ has meant in this context and how this is changing. We then outline the background to the work with the Financial Services Company and the challenges this has presented as far as enabling the organization to capitalize on the social learning that has resulted from fourteen managers undertaking this MA. Finally we look at options for a virtual social knowledge space within which social capital can not only be stored but used for reinvestment in the company’s intellectual capital.

Knowledge as social capital

The mainstream view is of knowledge being located in people’s heads:

‘The view is that knowledge must be extracted from individuals and preserved for the organization in the form of practices, routines and codes of one kind or another in which organizational knowledge is said to be stored. This perspective focuses attention on the codification of knowledge in artifacts, and the use of information technology’ [Stacey 2001:40]

In sharp contrast is a ‘social constructivist’ view (sense making by individuals and sharing of stories) and ‘social constructionism’ (knowledge comes out of relationships) where ‘knowledge is embedded in the ordinary, everyday conversations between people’ [Stacey, 2001:36]. In such a context ‘knowledge ... is not an ‘it’ but a process of action’ [Stacey, 2001:116]. This leads to his use of the term ‘communicative interaction’. The power of conversations was picked up by Patricia Shaw in a later book (2002) where she reinforced Stacey’s notion of ‘communicative interaction’:
In the movement of our everyday communicative activity, we are creating who we are and what we can do together within shifting constraints of a material, technological and social nature. This is not the way we usually describe what we are doing in organizations’ (Shaw, 2002:30)

Etienne Wenger also saw ‘knowing’ ‘as a matter of action, engagement in the world’ (Wenger 1998). He saw organisations as comprising ‘communities of practice’. At the heart of Wenger’s philosophy is that knowing, like learning, is socially and contextually determined. Out of this active participation and engagement with others we arrive at our identity through a process of ‘negotiating meaning’.

Communities of practice, as defined by Wenger (1998), can enable us to contextualise the concept of organizational learning in a way that the concept of ‘the learning organization’ (Senge, 1990, 1999; Pedler et al 1991) was never able to do. Our position is that however much proponents of the learning organization espoused its principles, when put into practice they always came up against the boundaries of traditional views of organization and management as grounded in a ‘mechanistic’ paradigm (Critten 2006).

By contrast, the concept of a ‘community of practice’ could be developed and put into practice without having to be constrained by any theory of what is or what is not an organization. At the heart of Wenger’s philosophy is that knowing, like learning, is socially and contextually determined. ‘Knowing’ he says, ‘is a matter of ... action, engagement in the world’ (Wenger, 1998:4). Out of the active participation and engagement with others, he suggests, we arrive at our identity through a process of ‘negotiating meaning’. The argument, then, is that the heart of learning and knowledge does not reside in an abstraction called ‘an organization’ but in ‘communities of practice [which] are the locus of “real work”’ (Wenger, 1998:243).

In the next section we look at a ‘real work’ situation which has enabled us to examine in greater detail the interrelationship between individual, social and organizational learning.

**Connecting up learning in the workplace**

In 2005 Middlesex University Business School accredited an Action Learning based leadership programme run by Value Projects Ltd (VPL) for senior managers in Asset Finance Division of Lloyds TSB. Tailor made to the needs of organizations, the focus is on ‘Action Leadership Questions’ (ALQs) each of which focuses on a particular leadership issue the manager wishes to address. The Business School reached an agreement with VPL and Lloyds that 100 of a possible 120 credits at level 4 could be used towards the newly-validated MA in Leadership and Management Practice (WBL) requiring the managers to complete a combined ‘Research and Planning Module’ (20 credits) and a final project
(60 credits). Lloyds TSB Asset Finance Division gave each manager the opportunity to go on to complete the MA and all fourteen managers have now taken up this opportunity and completed their final project.

The VPL programme of action leadership questions facilitated through action learning sets prepared the students very well for our MA, the research methodology of which is based around action research with a particular emphasis on what McNiff and Whitehead call ‘Living Theory’ (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Action research, with its emphasis on collaboration to improve joint performance, was well suited to the kind of issues managers were having to address in Lloyds and ‘Living Theory’ was particularly appropriate to the personal leadership issues each manager was having to wrestle with. Living Theory focuses on the beliefs and values of the individual in the context of achieving results in collaboration with others.

In line with previous emphasis on Action leadership questions, each of the managers’ dissertation focuses on an Action Research question. Examples include: ‘How can I enable my team to create a coaching and performance culture?’ and ‘How can I improve my personal practice by becoming a more effective change agent?’

The Training Manager for Lloyds TSB Asset Finance Division has this to say about the future of such programmes:

‘Work-based learning programmes, like this, we believe, prepare managers and leaders to deal with the relentlessly increasing pace of change far more effectively than taught programmes.... the more traditional approaches to leadership development are less effective in developing the collaborative style of leadership that can deal effectively with increasingly complex and ambiguous challenges.’

What is interesting in the comment above is that the Training Manager recognises the social process which is the only way that a ‘collaborative style of leadership’ can be developed. But while his managers, having now successfully completing their final project, have each been awarded an MA and the University can add this MA to its ‘structural’ capital – what is it that will remain within the Organization? This is the conundrum we explore in the next section.

**Current Conversations: What knowledge is being made explicit?**

The fourteen managers pursued a wide scope of projects, encompassing a wide range of operations for LTSB Assets Finance Division – the commercial arm of the Bank. These projects were supervised by academics at Middlesex University from different departments and schools because of the different interests and studied areas. The projects covered
topics that range from sales team motivation to capitalising on knowledge of retired experts. The learning of these fourteen managers happened relatively in isolation from each other. A relationship among the manager, their academic supervisor and their line manager realised – to some extent – the triangular relationship among student, university and organization as depicted in figure 1. However, these projects were pursued separately among the fourteen managers and among their supervisors. The focal points for these managers and their supervisors were the Training Manager for LTSB Asset Finance Division and Peter Critten (programme leader at Middlesex University).

Now that the managers have completed their MA there are additional dissertations in the library of the University and a copy that will held by the organization and the individual. This then becomes the ‘structural’ capital that all three partners could draw upon. But what of the contributions made by the other participants who are represented in figure 2?

In the course of writing up their project these stakeholders will have contributed their own ‘knowledge’ but they are likely to have done so on a one-to-one basis.

**University Supervisors**

This is normally a one-to-one exchange of information, sharing of knowledge. *But supposing, given individual receiving feedback agreed, feedback was made available to all participants as well as other supervisors?*
Action Learning Sets
Learning from what Revans called ‘critical friends’ in action learning sets is key to this programme. Throughout the VPL accredited leadership programme and the sessions for the MA the participants continued to meet in three action learning sets. But supposing, given members of respective action learning sets agreed, feedback from each action learning set was shared with each other?

Operational Teams and Peer Groups
Whereas ‘the project’ is at the heart of the above two learning relationships this is unlikely to be the case where manager meets with his own team or manager colleagues. But as the project is ‘work-based learning’ it is inevitable that learning will have been derived from interactions at work in what Savage (1996) calls ‘work as dialogue’. When the individual has completed their MA there is unlikely to be further contact with University supervisors though the Action Sets might continue. But supposing there was a process that could access the learning that will continue to take place in conversations in the workplace and make it available ‘live’ to other groups?

Extending Conversations: What social knowledge can be drawn upon?
Although the fourteen managers pursued different inquiries in different departments, some of these inquiries are interlinked on the business level and/or the academic level, and inquiries and results from some may impact others. A potential area for improving learning for LTSB is to extend conversations for knowledge sharing and social learning among the fourteen managers and communicating this knowledge to the organization.

From the experience of one of the authors of this paper – Aboubakr A. Moteleb – supervising one of these projects, there is valuable knowledge that is implicit in conversations, not captured in projects’ documents. Only a small fraction of knowledge is rendered explicit (codified) based on learner’s ability to communicate this knowledge through writing. Aboubakr had the opportunity to visit his student and observe part of the project within the actual action learning context. This revealed some of the implicit knowledge embedded in conversations among stakeholders. On the other hand, listening to different learners has revealed that they should be talking to each other. Most, if not all, the current fourteen managers are in different LTSB departments associated with different parts of the value chain. The project of one can have a profound impact on the activities of another.

Extending conversations among learners, supervisors, line managers, and teams as well as between learners and each other – as depicted in figure 3 – can enhance knowledge creation, communication and utilisation (Moteleb et al, 2005). A Social Knowledge Space that creates an environment suitable for extending conversations can enhance human, structural and social capital for the tri-partite.
The next section introduces some currently available technologies that can be integrated to facilitate such conversations. (See Moteleb and Woodman, 2007).

**Designing a Virtual Social Knowledge Space**

Extending conversations requires creating a Virtual Social Knowledge Space where stakeholders can interact with each other and with artefacts while being at different locations at different times as illustrated in figure 4. Virtual Social Knowledge Spaces are supported by what is dubbed lately as Social Software or Social Technologies. These are ‘loosely connected types of applications that allow individuals to communicate with one another and to track discussions across the Web as they happen’ (Tepper, 2003).
Figure 4: Virtual social knowledge space

- Multi-conversations among learners and teams
  - Learner
  - Learner
  - Teams
    - Operation Teams
    - Operation Teams
  - Multi-learner conversations among themselves and with line managers
  - Multi-learner conversations among themselves and with supervisors

- Multi-conversations among learners and their projects
  - Learner
  - Learner
  - Projects
    - Similar area
    - Similar stakeholders

- Multi-learner conversations among themselves and with line managers

- Multi-conversations among teams and projects

- Organisation
  - Line Managers
    - Line Manager
    - Line Manager
  - University
    - Supervisors
      - Supervisor
      - Supervisor

- Expertise
Learners can keep a Web log or a Blog for their projects. Blogs are chronological journals on the Web. This extends conversations among learners and their supervisors, line managers, action learning teams and operational teams. Learners could also have a personal Blog describing their learning journey. These could accept comments from a limited audience such as fellow learners and supervisors, but could also extend conversations to others. Blogs of current and past learners could offer a wide scope of social capital overtime to the organisation, the university and to learners themselves. In this respect learning does not stop at the point of completing a certain qualification, but continuing professional development through generations of learners. This applies not only to learners but to other stakeholders including supervisors, line managers, action learning teams and operational teams.

Learners and their action teams can use Wikis to collaborate in different areas. Wikis are mass collaboration spaces linking different collaboration teams and projects together. This extends conversations among different groups of learners, supervisors, line managers, action learning teams and operational teams. Expertise gained from action learning can for example be co-written and shared among relevant stakeholders using Wikis.

Stakeholders including learners can use RSS to have more effective communication. RSS is a set Web feed format used to send information updates to relevant users according to their RSS settings. This allows stakeholders to follow only on conversations of relevance or interest.

Other Social Technologies such as tagging could be used to visualise the evolution of learning in project Blogs or Wikis by forming clouds of content on time intervals. Tagging could also be used to form brief descriptions of learners, supervisors or projects. In that respect, tagging facilitates bringing people of same interests and/or expertise together.

**Conclusion**

Working with companies provides a route towards what we envisage as a ‘second generation’ of work-based learning in so far as our role is not just accrediting individual work-based learning but helping the organization as a whole articulate and recognise the human capital that is being adding to its body of knowledge (Harrison and Jessels, 2004). Through our experience with a cohort of fourteen managers from Lloyds TSB Asset Finance Division, we assert that only a small fraction of knowledge is captured explicitly. The majority of knowledge stays implicit in many isolated conversations between different groups of stakeholders. Extending conversations through the creation of a Virtual Social Knowledge Space among stakeholders and making these conversations transparent can enhance human, structural and social capital for the learner, the university and the organization respectively.
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To what extent can the APEL process be facilitated through the use of technology?

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Abstract

This paper describes an e-APEL platform, currently under development, which facilitates to a significant extent the informal pre-entry estimation of the likely scope for a claim for accreditation of prior learning. The continuing need for tutor-claimant dialogue at the formal claim stage is recognised, however the paper suggests that technology can also facilitate this process to mutual advantage.

In the authors’ experience, two factors have been placing a strain on the APEL process at the present time. Firstly, the current system cannot easily be scaled up to meet an increase in demand. Secondly, much of the work required by APEL needs to be undertaken before the potential student makes a commitment to study. Although the University concerned takes pride in the advice and support it gives to prospective students taking a decision of some importance to them, helping a student to arrive at an informal estimation of possible APEL credit can be time consuming.

In order to establish context the paper begins with a brief examination of APEL from a global and historical perspective. It then focuses on the accreditation process in the specific context of Learning through Work (LtW) at the University of Derby, detailing the challenges, which have led to the e-APEL project. The final section provides a brief functional and structural outline of the application together with some suggestions for its future use and development.

The Historical and Global Context

The early attempts at formal recognition of experiential learning in the UK date back nearly thirty years, gaining impetus through the work of the Learning Through Experience Trust and the subsequent introduction of a framework of competence-based National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the 1980’s.

APEL is an essential process whereby qualifications, part-qualifications and learning experiences are given appropriate recognition (or credit), to enable students to progress in their studies without unnecessarily having to repeat material or levels of study. Toyne, (1979:53)

Interest in and implementation of the Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) is inextricably linked to the growing recognition that in a global knowledge economy, initial education in one’s youth will no longer suffice as the single input of intellectual development around which a career can be built, however effective it may be as a launch-pad for the world of work.
Learning has arguably always been a lifelong experience since capabilities developed in the workplace, the community and through informal personal study have contributed both to effective performance in our working lives and to the enrichment of our private lives. However, when the demands of a changing world and new aspirations necessitate additional inputs of formal learning then the time invested will be more productively spent if unnecessary duplication of capabilities gained in an informal context is avoided and the advantages to be gained from the closer integration of learning and its application are maximised.

This potential importance has received recognition in key educational international and national policy agendas with specific emphasis on APEL placed in recent documentation for the Lisbon Agenda, the European Qualifications Framework (Corradi et al 2006) and the UK government’s Leitch Report in 2006.

The UK is not alone in its long standing interest in the principle of recognising learning acquired in an experiential context. This interest is mirrored globally. Although terminology varies from country to country (Corradi et al 2006) APEL has become an established and widely used academic process across the world. In the USA, substantive development of ‘Prior Learning Assessment’ can be traced back to the early 1970s. ‘Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition’ gathered momentum in the 1990s in Canada and at about the same time in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa where the term ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ was more commonly used.

Although for the purposes of this paper we have chosen the terminology Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning to emphasise the work-situated context the simpler term APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), typically used in the Netherlands to emphasise that learning from any source may merit recognition, is also often preferred in the UK.

Corradi (2006) also describes a trend toward the increasing use of APEL across Europe to support the widening participation agenda, as individual countries seek to transform their HE sectors from elite to mass systems. These trends suggest that in future the number of learners (and employers) approaching Universities and seeking APEL recognition may increase,

It is also important to note the growing interest in APEL within pan-national bodies such as the European Commission within whose policy documents the terminology ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ learning is more commonly used. Formal regulatory intervention in respect of APEL at a European level would be likely to be deemed outside the remit of the EC, given the degree of national autonomy in respect of education. However, various policy documents and initiatives in support of lifelong learning are consistent with the principle of recognising knowledge and competence acquired through informal learning activities (Davies 2006).
The various activities and events associated with the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 contributed to the impetus toward models of lifelong learning within which the recognition of previous achievement was considered important e.g. (Evans and Davies 1996).

The importance of informal learning and its recognition figure in the EC Memorandum of Understanding on Lifelong Learning in 2000 (European Commission, 2000) and in a communication supporting the Lisbon strategy declaration to make the EU ‘the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010’ which was adopted by the European Council in 2000. (European Commission, 2000)

The Bologna process, initiated in 1999 to support mutual recognition of qualifications throughout Europe initially made slow progress. However, the subsequent work on the European Qualifications Framework is progressing towards qualifications awarded based on learning outcomes and the Bergen Communique of 2005 among its recommendations explicitly tasked the Bologna follow-up group to report progress by 2007 on:

‘...creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning.’
(Bergen Communiqué 2005:5)

Very recently in the UK, Chisholm and Davis (2007) have challenged the current practice which many UK based universities have adopted limiting APEL to around 50% of total programmes and propose models to extend this to 100% at postgraduate levels.

Furthermore, since 2006, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE 2006) has adopted employer engagement as a third strategic objective for universities alongside teaching and research. UK Universities seeking to maintain their key role in guiding, managing and particularly in accrediting learning may therefore need to take a fresh look at APEL practices as they broaden their provision in line with this new agenda.

**The Academic Perspective**

Adult learners seeking to enter or re-enter university will bring with them the learning that they have acquired elsewhere. The Global Learning Alliance, citing research by CapitalWorks research, suggests that most learning does not take place in structured formal settings as shown in Figure1 below:
Given that much of this learning takes place at work it is perhaps unsurprising that research into how technology might help to support the APEL process arose as a response to practical problems associated with the delivery of University accredited work-situated learning. Learning through Work (LtW) represents a distinctive approach, allowing students to tailor their learning programme of study to their circumstances and ambitions and at the University of Derby circa 80% of prospective entrants to this programme enquire about the possible recognition of their prior learning. For this reason the staff working with new prospective entrants have been developing their APEL practice since 2002, working within the University’s regulatory framework and quality assurance systems, including external examiner scrutiny of APEL practice. Practice has also developed in conjunction with UfI/Learndirect-ltw and its network of other HEI members. Learndirect –ltw publishes a useful Learner Support Handbook (UfI/Learndirect 2004) which explains the concepts and principles of APEL (certificated and experiential) and offers generic information to help learners of any of its network HEIs. This includes a set of Level Indicators for each HE level of study, derived from QAA (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) level descriptors, (QAA 2004) but geared to work-based learners.

The University of Derby LtW team have supplemented this with an online (but not interactive) guide to support learners in identifying the kinds of work-based learning experiences which might form the basis of a claim for APEL. This resource offers practical advice about issues such as mapping such learning to Level Indicators, writing reflective reports or annotations and compiling evidence (often but not exclusively portfolio based).

Bekhradnia (2004) has drawn attention to the value of level indicators as one means of
providing comparability in the wider context of assigning credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) points; an issue gaining further significance as a consequence of the Bologna process and the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In this context the evidence base that supports an APEL claim may, in future, need to be encapsulated in the Diploma Supplement or the more detailed Transcript of Record that will help universities identify any progression issues that may arise when recruiting students with existing credit gained elsewhere.

At Derby, academic practice, confidence and expertise have grown over the last five years, and have been extended across a wider range of participating tutors, including subject specialist assessors where appropriate. The majority of learners have sought general credit for trans-disciplinary learning rather than mapping learning to existing modules, but a minority have claimed against specific credit in relation to existing taught modules from across the University. However, given the large number of both potential and enrolled learners who seek APEL related advice, and to be efficient, effective, consistent and fair to all, but scaleable as the scheme grows, it is now an urgent challenge to consider how technology might assist the process – enhancing both quantity and quality.

Prospective students, particularly those considering work-based learning, understandably want to know if they have a potentially successful claim for APEL since this affects both the time and expense needed to achieve their desired qualification and hence their decision whether or not to embark on a programme of study. Furthermore, if their employer may sponsor some or all of their studies, then that employer also needs a reliable estimate as to how much funding might be needed overall. These seem not unreasonable expectations, but of course until a claim is actually fully developed, evidenced and assessed, there are no guarantees of the successful achievement of credit.

The cost issues associated with APEL can be a deterrent to HEIs, since the considerable time often invested in pre-entry guidance is unremunerated. While a fee can be charged for the formal claim process that takes place post-enrolment no contribution to APEL costs are currently available via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

A major focus of the e-APEL project is thus to encourage and enable anyone thinking about applying to an HEI who feels that s/he may gain recognition for existing work-based learning to gain support to assemble a clear set of information about learning which might be acceptable for inclusion in a claim, with less dependence on human academic advisors than has been the case so far, particularly pre-entry. This data can then support the formal claim process when more interpersonal support will be required. It is intended that this two stage process would be supported by ‘Estimator’ and ‘Advisor’ tools described below.
The Developer’s Perspective

The e-APEL project aims to support and enhance the APEL process through the use of technology. Although developed in the specific context of the University of Derby’s Learning through Work programme the use of open source components should mean that the toolkit will be adaptable to other contexts, particularly where level indicators are used. Its principal functions are to:

- Provide guidance and support about APEL to learners prior to and/or after enrolment;
- Assist learners in formulating their prior learning in relation to their Learning ambitions;
- Gather information from learners to enable a well-informed discussion to take place with an APEL assessor;
- Guide and support for the learners in the compiling of their claim using e-portfolio services.

Specifying e-APEL Tools

An overarching aim is to make the APEL process more manageable, not just by automating certain steps, but by actually defining the process more explicitly in the first place, and then redesigning it to fit new needs. At each stage of the project the development team has been questioning and challenging the APEL assessors to achieve clarity and consensus. Such questions help to make more explicit the diagnostic questioning process used in telephone, face to face or e-mail contacts currently. This baseline analysis of current processes can of itself serve to enhance the quality of practice as we seek to transfer some of it to e-assistance.

The services developed will need to be accessible and relevant to a very diverse range of learners and the potential for variability of advisor experience, time and commitment inherent in a totally face-to-face system should be reduced.

It is important to recognise that the prior experience of learners is extremely diverse and the toolkit needs to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that ultimately each individual can customise and create a claim that adequately describes their knowledge and expertise and the evidence needed to substantiate it.

The roles of both learners and advisors need to be supported and enhanced – but not replaced – by the technology. It is important to appreciate the need for academic judgement and experience in the evaluation of prior experiential learning.
Figure 2: Supporting the APEL Process

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<tr>
<th>Estimator</th>
<th>Advisor</th>
<th>Claim service</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build profile</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enrolment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Define prior learning</td>
<td>Create estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create proposal</td>
<td>Refine proposal</td>
<td>Build claim</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review estimate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accreditation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create estimate</td>
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</table>
Figure 2 outlines how the APEL process has been divided into four distinct activities within the project and how these map onto the three software applications that the project is developing:

- The Estimator is the environment that guides students in finding and defining their prior learning.
- The Advisor is the application that supports APEL assessors in the evaluation and structuring of a proposal for APEL.
- The Claim Service is the e-Portfolio in which learners can evidence their claim.

The fourth activity, identified as 'Elsewhere’, is the business of enrolment, assessment and accreditation. This will be specific to user-HEIs and is clearly beyond the scope of the e-APEL project.

The Estimator is the probably the most important application of the three software applications and has received the largest amount of development time to date. It seeks to establish two key variables for any experiential learning: its level and its scope. Ascertaining either of these presents a number of problems.

Whilst the level of a learning experience can be estimated, APEL depends on whether or not the learner is able to articulate that learning up to the appropriate level in order to satisfy assessment processes. Another significant level obstacle lies in translating the academic frame of reference necessary to understand the differences between levels without the guidance of an APEL advisor.

The estimator asks potential learners to identify their current highest qualification. This provides an idea of the level up to which learning has already been recognised and accredited. Learning below this level does not need to be considered for APEL. The learner’s current level of experience (be it through work, voluntary work or another role or responsibility) provides some insight to the type and level of things they might have learned after they gained their highest qualification.

Establishing the scope, or the amount of credit is presents even greater difficulties. The idea that one unit of credit is notionally equivalent to 10 hours of student learning is central to UK undergraduate provision. However, how can we identify the specifically relevant learning hours within work-based project, which may have taken several months in practice? The notion of ‘10 hours per credit’ can only be a guide, not an accounting procedure. Whilst word lengths and their equivalents in portfolio formats may also be considered as indicators of scope, they do not account for the conciseness, complexity or coherence of a piece of work.
A more general challenge arises from the diversity of claims and circumstances that could be relevant for learners. The variety of experiences that are valid for APEL is virtually infinite. An important function of the Estimator therefore, is to try and narrow down the options to those that are likely to be relevant, without being too exclusive.

The method used for clarifying the level of experience stems from existing practice in Learning through Work. The learner is presented with a set of level indicators. These statements provide a description of the level of responsibility, complexity and thinking they need to engage with in the role they fulfil. These level indicators are generic, and will be applicable regardless of someone’s background or profession. Aside from helping to establish the level on which the learner is operating, the process also raises the awareness in learners about what in their experience might be relevant for consideration as experiential learning. When the learner progresses to the definition of their prior experiential learning, they are asked to link these individual learning experiences with one or more of their chosen level indicators. Since these level indicators are generic it is practicable to produce a tool that can be used to map a broad spectrum of prior learning experiences, against HE qualification framework levels. The approach could, however be readily adapted to other contexts where level indicators have been defined and should, for example extrapolate well to competence-based qualification frameworks such as the UK NVQ system.

Thus, on a strategic level, the e-APEL project could eventually lead to a much wider set of lifelong learning tools, linking in to professional development career planning, building flexible learning contracts and any other domain where the learner’s past and future learning are managed. Some of these tools and functionalities could exist within an HEI, while others might exist in a variety of spheres including industry and FE.

**Looking to the Future with e-APEL**

The e-APEL project is still in its very early stages both technologically and conceptually. The potential savings for learners and academics have already been touched upon in this report. There are however a number of additional incidental benefits that might be generated by the project which are also worth mentioning.

Firstly what has been clear from the interest that it has generated in a wide number of HE, Adult & Community Learning, FE and Industry fora is that the project has considerable potential to build bridges between these sometimes disparate communities. It can do this by offering something of value which can be developed and improved by interaction between these communities.
Secondly by streamlining, developing and most importantly promoting the APEL process the project can improve a key HE access point for a wide range of groups that might otherwise have not otherwise have considered HE as relevant to themselves. This access point is key because APEL allows individuals to make their own experience and lives relevant to HE. In the same way it also demonstrates to employers and organisations that HE is willing to do the same for them.

In doing this APEL provides validation of individual and organisations’ experiences and this reason it can act as a first step in bridging a gap created by expectation and misapprehension as to what HE can offer. This potential is made very clear in the French HE system where the APEL process has the status of a legal right. Validation of learning from experience is of particular importance to the widening participation groups and to employers. In both cases the APEL process demonstrates that HE can value and accredit learning and experience that takes place outside of an academic setting. The increasing mobility of labour and the recognition of APEL in many OECD countries (Corradi et al 2006) could also be a factor in increasing demand in the UK.

Thirdly following the publication of the LEITCH report in 2006, employer engagement is at the very top of the agenda for UK HE. Extensions to the e-APEL concept could be developed to support this further. Whilst e-APEL offers the opportunity to open a dialogue with individual learners within companies to accredit training that has already been undertaken, it is still a retroactive a priori process. In the future the project could look at extending the e-APEL concept by developing a similar web-based application to support and facilitate the accreditation process of existing employer training courses.

All of this remains nothing more than potential at the moment. The project is still at an early stage and a number of technical and conceptual difficulties remain to be resolved. Perhaps the greatest difficulty that the project and the concept faces however is in terms of raising awareness not only amongst learners, but also their employers. This is important, not just in itself, but also for the impact that such interest could generate in HE policy-making circles. The single most important possibility for the APEL process (and by extension e-APEL) remains that of it receiving HEFCE core funding. If policy was to change then the potential of APEL and e-APEL could become a reality.
References


UfI/Learndirect (2004) *Learning through Work Learner Handbook*, Sheffield, UfI/Learndirect
The purpose of this short paper is to summarise the key points raised during a workshop session at the WBL Futures Conference held at Derby University’s Buxton Campus in April 2007, and to stimulate further discussion through an interactive online facility.

The theme of the session was around the use of critical reflection as a pedagogic tool for learner-centred and negotiated work-based learning at higher education (HE) level. Our aim at Northumbria is to develop learners to become lifelong reflectors with positive benefits at personal, professional and organisational levels.

The session started with a brief overview of approaches used at Northumbria with regard to work-based learning; namely to encourage an investigative and integrated relationship between academic theory and workplace practice which prepares individuals to be the type of professionals needed in today’s workplace i.e. reflective practitioners. There was an interesting debate about the different forms of learning approaches (competence-based vs. a more academic, reflective, approach).

Participants on such programmes should become successful highly motivated, active learners, who work autonomously and take responsibility for identifying their learning needs and aspirations. In addition they should be able to manage the learning process, draw upon, use and develop significant prior and current work experience and professional knowledge and develop and utilise appropriate learning and enquiry methods along with project management skills.

The discussion focused largely upon some of the issues and dilemmas around using critical reflection as a pedagogic tools. Since a key tenet of this approach requires learners to question the status quo, there was an awareness of the fact that reflection can be disempowering, especially if it leads to the realisation that nothing within the individual’s control can be changed to improve their work situation. In order to make critical reflection a positive experience, a structure or framework for engagement is necessary. Given that reflection can be an unsettling experience for the learner, this needs to be an adaptable and supportive mechanism which guides them through their reflective journey and which incorporates and explains clearly the rules of engagement. This should not only include the usual guidance on process, support, learning and teaching assessment etc. but also set clear boundaries on issues related to ethics, confidentiality, respect, trust, etc.

Some of the themes that were discussed at the session were:
Implications for HE

What do we mean by critical reflection in the workplace and what is its purpose? Why are we encouraging people to reflect critically in the workplace? How does critical reflection in/on the workplace differ to approaches to reflection in mainstream HE learning? How do these mainstream approaches impact, inhibit and enable critical reflection on work-based learning? What are the key rules of engagement including ethical, confidential and commercial consideration – how to establish boundaries? How do we codify this in a way that is beneficial to the individual and the workplace, while at the same time remaining acceptable to HE requirements?

Supporting the learner

What should be the process to facilitate, embed and assess reflective practice in an increasingly changing and challenging working environment? Work-based learners are often undertaking their programmes whilst holding down very demanding and pressurised job roles – how do we help them to find the space to reflect in order to become successful lifelong reflectors? How do we prepare ‘non-standard’ HE learners to critically reflect on their work-based practice? What is the recipe for success in getting people to engage and remain committed?

The role of the workplace

What factors within organisations make for a successful environment for critical reflection? What are the benefits and drawbacks for the learner and the workplace? How does the tri-partite relationship between the academic, the learner and the workplace provide an effective framework for reflective practice? What is the potential impact on organisational/wider change?

As a follow up to the session the aim now is to start building up a repository of practitioner knowledge which could be utilised as a checklist for those developing and designing work-based learning programmes using critical reflection. There is a recognition that practitioners generally don’t have time to read long academic texts but need some practical guidance and may welcome an opportunity to explore some of these themes and share good practice. Therefore we have developed a grid format (see Fig.1) which we intend to upload onto an interactive space [such as a wiki] where practitioners can contribute their own thoughts and knowledge and engage in some debate in order to move the knowledge base forward.

It is hope that this will provide the stimulus for some useful debate and move the debate forward in a helpful and practical way. At the time of going to press the exact location of the interactive areas was yet to be determined so if readers are interested in participating, please e-mail Sue Graham (sue.graham@northumbria.ac.uk) in the first instance, who will be able to direct you to the correct address.
What do we mean by critical reflection in the workplace?

- Reflecting upon past and current prevailing social, political, cultural, or professional ways of acting
- Investigating relationship between academic theory and workplace practice.
- Interpreting, analysing and challenge current thinking and practice
- Developing new knowledge, understanding and attitudes...
- thereby improving own professional practice


What is its purpose – why are we encouraging people to critically reflect in the workplace?

‘Critical reflection is important... because it is only through deeper critique that work situations can be improved, workplaces transformed and productivity significantly enhanced. It is about noticing and questioning the taken-for granted assumptions that one holds and that are held by others. While it can be a discomforting process, it is necessary in all situations that do not involve perpetuating the status quo.’


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<td>How do these mainstream approaches impact, inhibit and enable critical reflection on work-based learning?</td>
<td>Discussion around the acceptance of pedagogy of work-based learning at HE level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the key rules of engagement including ethical, confidential and commercial consideration – how to establish boundaries?</td>
<td>What is acceptable for the purposes of assessment? Is a workplace artefact sufficient in itself? Some practitioners strongly felt that it was, but others required a critical commentary alongside. If we accept such products we need credible methods to assess them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do we codify this in a way that is beneficial to the individual and the workplace, while at the same time remaining acceptable to HE requirements?</td>
<td>Are we (HE) capable of assessing all the learning that is going on or just that which is the academic element? What is the role of the workplace in assessing? Can we recognise / assess collective change – e.g. organisational, collaborative developments?</td>
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<td>It’s easy to assess the explicit but how to assess the tacit learning? (Eraut) How to assess the <em>application</em> of knowledge?</td>
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| What factors within organisations make for a successful environment for critical reflection? | The workplace presents an opportunity for critical reflection through:  
- Improving professional performance and career development  
- Understanding social interaction – personal / interpersonal  
-Responding to political drivers – internal and external  
- Working within the organisational culture:  
  - Management systems  
  - Structural mechanisms  
  - Procedural mechanisms  
  - Resources | |
| What is the potential impact on organisational / wider change? | How do we acknowledge / recognise the process of transformation?  
Should the assessment be based upon the transformative journey?  
Should it be assessed in terms of the value to the organisation i.e. improved productivity, efficiency, money saved? | |
| For supporting the learner | Self Reflection: The Learning Journey  
- Where have I been and who am I?  
- Where am I now?  
- Where am I going?  
- Me and others  
- Me and the organisation | |
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<td>A support structure for critical reflection Adaptable and supportive mechanism to guide learners through their reflective journey Rules of engagement e.g. ethics / boundaries / respect / trust... Guidance for key players • Learner • Tutor • Workplace advisor • Organisation A process for embedding reflection Stage 1 Exploration Stage 2 Proposal Stage 3 Enquiry Stage 4 Planning Stage 5 Implementation Stage 6 Presentation and Evaluation</td>
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<td>How do we prepare ‘non-standard’ Higher Education (HE) learners to critically reflect on their work-based practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the recipe for success in getting people to engage and remain committed?</td>
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Notes on Contributors
David Young
David Young is Professor of Work-based Learning and Head of Flexible Learning within the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning at the University of Derby. He has been engaged in the development of award-bearing work-based learning since the mid-1990s and has had significant experience in external examination, staff development and consultancy in the field in the UK and internationally. He has also presented extensively at local, regional and national conferences. He led the University of Derby team which won the Times Higher Education Award in 2006 for Most Imaginative Use of Distance Learning. He was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2007.

Jonathan Garnett
Professor Jonathan Garnett is the Director of the Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning (CEWBL) and Acting Director of the Institute for Work Based Learning (WBL) at Middlesex University. Jonathan has over fifteen years experience at the leading edge of the development of work-based learning programmes with public and private sector organizations in the UK and overseas. Jonathan is Professor of Work Based Knowledge and a founder member of the Work-Based Learning Research Centre at Middlesex University. His current research interests include the use of work-based learning to enhance the intellectual capital of organizations and the role of the university in promoting work-based learning.

John Blundell
John Blundell has worked in the power industry for the last 27 years. He is now employed by Alstom Power as a principal design engineer with responsibilities for thermal, combustion and fluid dynamics. He studied for his first degree – in Mathematics – with the Open University. He recently completed his Master’s degree, in which he gained a distinction, through Learning through Work with the University of Derby studying Combustion, Fuels and Performance Modelling. John is married with four sons and in his spare time enjoys oil painting and listening to a wide range of music.

Jeff Braham
Jeff Braham is Head of Academic Partnerships at the University of Derby. Jeff has been developing experiential and work-based learning HE credit systems for over twenty years. He has incorporated vocational and academic outcomes within flexible curriculum pathways and extended progression routes into and through HE as a means of Widening Participation. He has worked with public and private sector organisations at all levels from pre-entry to postgraduate CPD and has been External Examiner for several HEI and Professional body work-based learning and higher vocational schemes. Jeff’s professional interests include APEL, vocational/academic credit frameworks, experiential and work-based learning, widening participation, employer engagement and progression arrangements.
Maggie Challis
Dr Maggie Challis is Programme Head for Education and Training Supply with Skills for Care. She worked for many years in adult, further and higher education as teacher, outreach worker, project manager, head of centre and researcher. She has worked in three English universities on staff and curriculum development, was Higher Education Manager for Ufi/learndirect, Foundation degree manager in the NHSU, and Associate Director for Learning Innovation at Foundation Degree Forward. Maggie has published extensively and undertaken national and international consultancy on APEL, work-based learning, distance learning, assessment and quality assurance.

Sandy Cope
Sandy Cope is a Senior Teaching Fellow at the University of Derby. Her career to date has involved working in both the public and private sectors, latterly in a role of Business Development Director. She is currently on secondment from the Derbyshire Business School to the Quality Enhancement Department where she has dual responsibilities; firstly, to help implement a framework within the University for the enhancement and capture of Continuous Professional Development, and secondly to work with programme leaders looking at Programme Design. Sandy is currently undertaking a professional Doctorate in Education focusing on the implementation of CPD.

Peter Critten
Dr Peter Critten is a Principal Lecturer of Middlesex University Business School. He has extensive experience and publications in management and leadership development. Peter is currently Programme Leader for the Doctorate in Professional Practice and the Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning Co-ordinator for the Business School.

John Edmunds
John Edmunds is a career civil servant now working in the Department for Children Schools and Families. He has had a wide range of roles in the fields of employment, education and skills in a range of management roles, most of which have featured an interest in work-based learning. He is currently working on a review of work-related learning for 14-19 year olds and balancing work with bringing up four school age children and working toward his master’s degree with the University of Derby.

Sue Graham
Sue Graham is Work-Related Learning (WRL) Manager at Northumbria University, responsible for a small central team co-ordinating and developing Northumbria’s flexible work-based learning activity in response to employer demand through curriculum innovation and project management. She has worked at Northumbria since 1997, becoming WRL Co-ordinator in 2001 and WRL Manager in 2004. With a professional
background in teaching and teacher training in ESOL, she has taught in Spain, France and the UK in companies and higher education. She is a quality assessor on behalf of UCLES for initial teacher training courses. Interested in the pedagogy of lifelong / work-based learning and the surrounding policy context, she is a module tutor on Northumbria’s recently launched MA in Lifelong Learning.

Andrew Haldane
Andrew has, for the last 20 years, specialised in research, consultancy and implementation in the field of Flexible and Technology Enhanced Learning and on projects concerned with widening participation. During the 1990s he served for six years as Chair of BAOL (British Association for Open Learning). From 2001-2004 Andrew was Vice-chair of the PROMETEUS European expert network in e-learning.

Morag Harvey
Morag has been working at the Open University (OU) for 13 years and has undertaken a variety of roles including Associate Lecturer, Residential School Tutor and Senior Project Officer. She joined the Vocational Qualifications Centre at the OU, now the Centre for Outcomes-Based Education (COBE) in 2000. She helped lead a successful HEFCE-funded project developing a distance learning framework for Graduate Apprenticeships which included an element of work-based learning. Morag used this project experience together with her involvement in OU foundation degree programmes to help develop an innovative approach to distance-learning work-based learning. Morag has promoted work-based learning as a legitimate area of study within higher education.

Ruth Helyer
Dr Ruth Helyer is Head of Workforce Development at the University of Teesside. Her experience includes being Programme Leader for the Negotiated Learning Scheme, a work-based studies degree for a diversity of employed learners, and managing large funded projects aimed at employer engagement. Activities here include accrediting in-house company training to devising new and innovative tailored packages of learning. She has a record of wide-ranging conference presentations and publications in both Work-based Learning and English Studies, the most recent being ‘What is Employability?: reflecting on the postmodern challenges of work-based learning’ in the Journal of Employability in the Humanities (August 2007).

Elaine Hooker
Dr Elaine Hooker is Work-Based Project Officer in the Department of Academic Enterprise at the University of Teesside. Elaine’s path to academia also came through the mature student route. With an early career in science and technology, primarily in industry and then in education, Elaine has been lecturing for ten years in Biological Anthropology,
Early Years Education and has recently moved into work-based learning. She currently works with Ruth Helyer on the Negotiated Learning Scheme and work-based projects, delivering modules and engaging with local companies and employees offering HE level learning to work-based learners.

Mike Lucas
Mike Lucas is a senior lecturer with the Open University Business School and currently Director of their Undergraduate Business and Professional Development programme. He joined the Open University in 1997, having spent the previous 10 years teaching business and management to further, higher and adult education audiences. Mike was closely involved in the design the Open University’s BA (Hons) Business Studies programme, one of its first named honours degrees. Since 2003, when he took up his current role, he has been leading the development of the programme to incorporate work-based learning and employer-led partnerships in curriculum design.

Mike has long-standing research interests in adult learning theory and he has developed several OU courses emphasising experiential and action-centred learning. He has also authored several OU texts and study components, including Understanding Business Environments (OU/Routledge, 2000) and Understanding Management (with M.Friel and J.Hughes, Open University, 2004).

Jane Lyon
Jane Lyon developed her career in the ICT industry as a systems and business analyst, but had to retire from this work in 1992 due to a disabling chronic health condition. She became involved with work-based learning through studying for a Master’s Degree using her life experience as her work base. Since then she has carried out literature based research relating to Communities of Practice and prepared learning materials for a cohort of new learners. Jane has now been accepted for training to become a priest in the Church of England. Her ministerial training will continue to follow a work-based learning approach.

Joy Lyon
Dr Joy Lyon is a lecturer in nursing at the University of Southampton School of Nursing and Midwifery and Lead for APEL in learning beyond registration programmes. Joy’s background is in cardiothoracic nursing and she was recently awarded her PhD for an investigation into the needs of adult survivors of congenital heart disease. Joy is committed to the development of APEL and particularly the reflective nature of learning through experience.
Lyn Macleod

Lyn MacLeod is Academic Coordinator for APEL and Work-Based Learning at the University of Southampton School of Nursing and Midwifery. A nurse of 30 plus years experience and a lecturer in nursing, Lyn is passionate about APEL and enabling health care practitioners to gain academic credit for experiential learning. Work-based learning was added to her portfolio 6 years ago because of its similarities to APEL. She led a multi-professional working group for the development of APEL and WBL across the Hampshire and Isle of Wight area and has led the introduction and implementation of accredited work-based learning through the University of Southampton.

Rene Meijer

René has worked as a software developer for LogicaCMG, and has designed and implemented applications and designed ICT policies in secondary education in the Netherlands, and FE in the UK. Currently he is the Head of the Centre for Interactive Assessment Development at the University of Derby, providing e-assessment development and delivery using the TRIADS engine.

Ann Minton

Ann Minton leads the Learning through Work Scheme at the University of Derby, and has been awarded the University’s Principal Tutorship in Work-based learning in recognition of her experience in the facilitation of work-based learning. Ann’s work enables individuals and organisations to negotiate and gain accreditation for learning in the work place. Ann co-ordinates quality assurance activity for the Scheme and takes an active part in quality enhancement activities at University level, particularly championing the quality enhancement needs of flexible, work-based provision.

Aboukar Moteleb

Aboubakr A. Moteleb is a member of the School of Computing at Middlesex University. His research interests relate to virtual social knowledge space and he contributes to the work of the Centre for Excellence in Work-Based Learning in this area.

Michael Myciunka

Michael Myciunka has been a practitioner in the hairdressing industry for 26 years. He has worked in various capacities in industry – business manager, owner/manager and product house technical representative. Wishing to use his experiences for the benefit of others, Michael has worked in the FE sector as lecturer, assessor and training liaison officer teaching Customer Service and industry skills. Having graduated from the University of Derby with a first class honours in Applied Business, studied through the Learning through Work Scheme, he is now intent on helping establish a research base for the service industries. Presently studying an MA, doctoral research beckons.
Chris Newman
Chris Newman is a Senior Lecturer with extensive experience (19 years) of teaching and learning in Higher Education, and supporting staff development. She is currently Learning Through Work Development Coordinator at the University of Derby, facing the challenges of scaleability as this scheme grows. Over the last 5 years she has supported a large number of individual learners within the Scheme to prepare their claims for APEL.

Dave Perrin
Dr David Perrin is the Manager of the Professional Development Unit at the University of Chester where he manages a framework of negotiated work-based learning with approximately 800 learners, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Major clients include the Cabinet Office and civil service more generally, the NHS, and private sector coaching organisations. As an academic, he specialises in personal review for adult learners, negotiated learning and the facilitation of APL.

Formerly based at the University of Liverpool and University of Wales, he also has academic expertise in political and economic theory and has written extensively in the field.

Jo Pickering
Jo Pickering is Head of Education Studies at the University of Derby, and, at some point over the last 28 years has taught/managed in most education sectors including Further, Higher, Secondary and Community. She has also dabbled in Nursery, Primary and Prison Education. Her academic subject areas include Biology and Psychology, and her main area of interest is the relationship between these disciplines and learning and behaviour. Originally a researcher for the Institute of Occupational Medicine (National Coal Board), and briefly an Education Consultant in the private sector, Jo has decided that widening participation and facilitating achievement is what she really enjoys!

Derek Portwood
Professor Derek Portwood is Emeritus Professor of Work Based Learning at Middlesex University. Derek was a pioneer of the development of work-based learning at higher education level. He established the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships at Middlesex University and was the first Director of the Centre. Derek advises on the work of the Centre for Excellence in Work-Based Learning at Middlesex University.
Garth Rhodes
Garth Rhodes is Head of the Flexible Learning Centre in the School of Health, Community and Education Studies at Northumbria University. He leads a team of academic staff that is responsible for developing and implementing flexible education and work-based learning provision in a range of professional areas including, Health & Social Care, Children’s Workforce and Education. Prior to his work in Higher Education he worked for many years in the fields of Community Education and Vocational Education and Training.

Roy Seden
Roy Seden has worked for two and a half years as Quality Enhancement Manager at Derby University, recently moving to 2 days a week in the same role. He spent 25 years in faculty at De Montfort University where his pedagogical work was part of an RAE 4 submission. He then worked in the University Centre for Learning and Teaching where he led the University Teacher Fellowship Scheme, supporting 5 successful National Teaching Fellowship applicants. Upon moving to Derby he has been responsible for implementing a University learning teaching and assessment infrastructure and developing a CPD Framework for academic and learning support staff.

John Stephenson
John Stephenson is Emeritus Professor and previously (1997-2005) Professor of Learner Managed Learning and Education at Middlesex University, where he was also Academic Director of the Doctorate in Professional Studies programme. He also convenes Capability Associates, a network of consultants specialising in work-based development, online learning, development of personal and corporate capability and higher education curriculum innovation.

John was National Director of the RSA’s Higher Education for Capability project 1988-1998. He led the establishment of the Ufi Learning through Work scheme (1998-2000), and founded the International Centre for Learner Managed Learning at Middlesex University. His main professional interests are online learning, learner-managed learning and work-based learning. He has published extensively in these fields. John advises on the work of the Centre for Excellence in Work-Based Learning at Middlesex University.

John Wallace
At the University of Derby, John Wallace is responsible for promoting employer engagement within the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning’s Programmes and project managing the university’s new VLE. He has worked in the ICT industry as a developer and project manager and has taught in Adult & Community Learning, FE and HE. He is currently completing a doctorate investigating how the university sector is using e-learning to meet the government’s widening participation agenda.
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