

# Learning *from* Experience Trust

## Work Based Learning for Academic Credit A Dissemination Document

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1993 this project set out to try an approach to Work Based Learning (WBL) which had not been attempted before. Indeed, it was in 1977 that Norman Evans first suggested this approach to three year degrees to the then Department of Education and Science which turned it down as far too radical. Fifteen years later this dissemination document demonstrated that academic credit could be awarded to students on three year, non vocational degrees for what they have learned from a period of work experience.

Hence the title of the project, Work Based Learning for Academic Credit. The importance of this project is that it shows that some of the benefits of four year sandwich courses can be incorporated into three year degrees without any threat to academic standards. It also shows that employers as well as students and academic staff respond enthusiastically to the opportunities offered and find great benefit in the experience. So the Trust and each of the three participating institutions appreciate the then Employment Department's decision to back an initiative which at that time was moving into the unknown.

The target was to attempt to demonstrate that from a term long period of work experience, students on three year, non vocational, non sandwich degree programmes could acquire knowledge and skills which could be assessed academically so that those achievements could contribute to and be incorporated in the final examination results of classified honours degrees. It would be applying the assessment of experiential learning to three year undergraduate study.

There were several reasons for making the attempt. If successful, it would extend the higher education curriculum, enriching and expanding the opportunities both for students to learn and for academic staff to promote students' learning. It could offer an additional approach to using practice to complement theory as a way of learning which benefits many students; it suits their learning style. In turn it could provide an attractive opportunity to some of the increasing numbers of students expected to enrol for degree studies and so bears on recruitment. It could offer ways for students to increase their employability. And, most important, it could offer students additional ways of taking greater responsibility for their own learning and so encourage them to go along the route leading to lifelong learning.

From the start, the project was given explicit support and encouragement from the Vice Chancellors of the two Universities and the Principal of the College of Higher Education. From then on the development and operation of the project not only depended on employers' willingness to contribute and so spend considerable time on all stages of the scheme, but also on their response to the opportunity to become fully recognised working partners in programmes leading to classified honours degree results. In all ways their contributions exceeded expectations. An undeclared hope was that more intimate forms of collaboration would develop between employers and higher education through tapping the interest of employers in helping to induct the next generation into the world of work.

As this dissemination document shows, in varying degrees all of these hopes have been realised during the three year period of the project. Its success rests on the remarkable teamwork achieved by the three very different participating institutions. The team consisted of an overall project manager and a project manager and project officer in each institution. To start from scratch, agree learning outcomes for work-based learning, to design three-way negotiated learning agreements, a common assessment procedure, through what amounted to an extensive staff development programme involving the three institutions and employers, quite apart from all the administrative implications of recruiting students, pairing them with employers, supporting them and then assessing their results

speaks of very strong commitment and conscientious work by all those involved.

Without that commitment the problems posed by all those elements could not have been solved. Finding employer partners was relatively easy for Chester College because of its long established requirement that students undertake a month's work experience at the end of the summer term as part of their degree studies. Liverpool University set the project in the Science Faculty across a range of departments. Liverpool John Moores University focused the project on disciplines which did not offer sandwich placements. Differing rhythms to the academic calendar meant that Liverpool University arranged WBL for AC mainly during the spring term, whereas the other two institutions offered it in the summer term. Liverpool John Moores University accommodated WBL for AC within their modular course structure. Chester College had to make special examination arrangements for its WBL for AC students at the end of the spring term. All the assessment and examination procedures had to be approved formally by the appropriate academic committees in each of the three Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). And all the challenges mentioned in these two paragraphs had to be solved to the satisfaction of all three institutions before there was any possibility of offering WBL for AC as an option to students.

As a result of all these efforts, academic staff, employers and the Steering Committee alike are convinced that the project sends a powerful message to all in higher education as to what can be achieved where there is a will and energy to find additional ways of trying to serve students.

That message is underlined by the three very different institutions. Each is convinced of the merits of the scheme. Work Based Learning for Academic Credit is being incorporated into their regular mainstream academic provision for three year degrees. It is a successful example of pump priming for a pilot project leading to full incorporation.

The Learning from Experience Trust owes a great debt to all those students, academic staff and employers who have contributed to what I hope will be seen as a seminal development for higher education.

## 2 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

### Introduction

Changes in graduate employment prospects in the 1990s place increasing significance on the ability of students to adapt to a wide range of career possibilities. Employers are often more interested in the outcomes of Higher Education (in what students can do with their qualifications) than the detail of what has been learned. Developing the skills of applying knowledge requires a broader approach to learning - one which is less content based and more orientated towards the achievement of understanding and personal development.

Experience within the workplace provides a setting for part of this process of learning. The challenge of work requires students to develop skills of communication, cooperation, self-reliance and self-expression which are of more general value. It also provides students with the opportunity to relate the conceptual framework and ideas derived from subject studies to the practicalities of day-to-day working practices and allows greater scope for students to evaluate and articulate their learning. It is not simply the benefit of experience itself, but the ability of students to learn from and apply experiences which is of relevance in the context of work placements.

### What the Project Set Out to Do

As a project, Work Based Learning for Academic Credit (WBL for AC) set out to do something different and innovative with learning from work experience. It sought to develop the award of academic credit for work-based learning within three year undergraduate, non-vocational, non-sandwich course degrees. WBL for AC was offered as an option to undergraduates. Three different institutions worked together - Chester College of Higher Education, Liverpool John Moores University and The University of Liverpool- and their experience has illustrated that work-based learning for academic credit for three year degrees can be developed within a wide range of Higher Education Institutions.

### The Main Objectives

The main objectives of the Project were

- to establish academic credit for work -based learning in undergraduate degrees
- to provide learning opportunities for students in higher education
- through 'off-campus' learning activities
- to offer students an additional way of taking charge of their own learning to establish a direct connection between work-based learning achievement and its added value for academic progression
- to strengthen collaboration between employers and higher education
- to enhance the employability of newly qualified graduates.

### The Main Features

The key to the successful introduction and implementation of a Work Based Learning for Academic Credit project is the development of a genuine partnership between students, employers and HE supervisors. While each of the partners has specific functions to perform, the overall success of a placement as a source of learning relies on the extent to which the three partners can develop a common set of objectives and a mutual recognition of the contribution each partner brings to achieving learning from the placement experience. This takes time and effort. Short cuts will not work.

WBL for AC represents a distinctive style of learning in higher education. It is not the same as

sandwich course education. The plan was for students to spend four days a week on work placements and one day in their home institutions for a Supporting Programme. The latter comprised tutorials with academic supervisors, general discussions so that students could learn how to reflect systematically on what they were doing and learning, compare experiences and learn from one another, and presentations for students to develop communication skills.

The project highlighted distinctive styles of learning through the constant interplay between theory and practice. These were facilitated by the negotiation of a Learning Agreement which underpinned the whole process since it involved employers and academic staff as well as students. Even though it was the student who gained academic credit, employers and supervisors developed fresh insights into the ways learning can take place and into ways in which a variety of workplace experiences can yield profitable learning in business and academic settings. All three groups of contributors to the programme - employers, academic staff and students - were thus involved in relating theory to practice at every turn.

### **3 THE PROJECT: STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS INVOLVED**

A variety of employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors worked in partnership with the three HEIs to provide a wide range of placement opportunities in areas such as social services, specialist retailing, personnel, accountancy, industry, theatre, journalism, politics, leisure services, hospitals, environmental health departments, teaching, libraries and planning departments.

In academic year 1991-92, 32 students chose to participate in the project and undertook work placements with 30 employers. The data protection act prohibits the disclosure of individual marks for assessment but one student obtained a first class, 17 obtained upper seconds, 11 gained lower seconds and three obtained third class honours.

Students came to the project from a wide variety of academic disciplines including Earth Science, Engineering, Environmental and Evolutionary Biology, Health and Community Studies, History, Media and Cultural Studies, Movement Science, Physics, Politics and Urban Studies.

In academic year 1992-93, the number of students taking part in the project increased to 49. Eight students obtained a first class, 23 obtained upper seconds, 14 gained lower seconds and four obtained third class honours.

## 4 MAKING IT OPERATIONAL

### Learning Outcomes

To turn the plan into an operational reality required careful negotiations between academic staff of the three institutions, with employers and students. First the academic staff had to agree a set of learning outcomes which were appropriate to the objectives of the project and which could be applied to each and every work placement. Every student, whatever the discipline they were studying, needed to work and learn to the same brief.

The six learning outcomes agreed were:

- 1 Knowledge of what an organisation does.
- 2 Understanding of how an organisation achieves its aims with reference to its internal organisation and management.
- 3 Understanding of the economic/environmental context and its interaction with the organisation.
- 4 The acquisition of personal and work-based skills.
- 5 The ability to evaluate experiential learning in the light of
  - a) academic subject knowledge
  - b) subject knowledge and skills gained directly from the placement
  - c) knowledge gained from the supporting programme
  - d) the students' own independent sources.
- 6 The ability to reflect on and evaluate learning from the placement as a whole.

### Learning Agreements

The next stage was to devise ways of incorporating these learning outcomes into a simple learning agreement which could be negotiated between students, employers and academics. (See Appendix I.)

The Learning Agreement needed to be framed so that, working from their own negotiated learning objectives, students could relate the learning gained in their academic courses to a practical task undertaken for an employer. Employers needed to identify tasks which would be useful to their organisation and which would also allow the student sufficient scope to develop appropriate skills - personal, management and subject based. In liaising between students, their academic departments and employers, the HE supervisor needed to ensure that there was sufficient scope in a manageable task for the student to gain academic credit, as well as offering the support of the HEI in providing the necessary administration and documentation of the scheme for all parties involved.

### Negotiating the Learning Agreement

The student, the HE supervisor and the employer were jointly responsible for drafting the Learning Agreement and for exchanging copies for confirmation and signature. In particular the 'learning outcomes' needed careful consideration. Learning outcomes were seen as forecasts of the end result since they set out what it was the student intended to achieve during the placement.

**General learning outcomes** are those which have been approved as the central concerns of any placement. They need to be defined with specific reference to particular placements.

**Specific learning** outcomes are those which provide the opportunity for specifying anticipated learning which relates directly to the particularities of the placement.

The section of the Learning Agreement on **Proposed methods and evidence required** is where

detail may be given of any planned 'product', such as the completion of a report or a particular project, and the methods used to achieve those ends. Such a product may provide important evidence for assessment although it is the learning that has occurred that is assessed rather than the success or otherwise of a particular project.

### Modifications To The Learning Agreement

It was intended that the Learning Agreement should provide the three parties with a structure for the placement, but it was not intended to be a straitjacket. As the placement develops, the Learning Agreement may be subject to modification to take account of changes of direction, or of new opportunities for learning.

### The Supporting Programme

An integral part of the project has been the Supporting Programme. This was designed to enable students, from a wide variety of academic disciplines, to appreciate the different styles of learning involved in the project and to recognise that the whole 'team' of students, employer partners and academic supervisors forms a *resource* on which to draw throughout the work placement and assessment period.

In each Higher Education Institution programmes to implement the Supporting Programme have been delivered to a *common* set of objectives but within quite different timetable framework.

The Supporting Programme was organised during the period of work placement, usually on the basis of setting aside one day a week in the HEI. This was preceded by a number of induction sessions during which students were made aware of basic elements of business organisation and management and the socio-economic context of employment in Britain today. These induction sessions provided a necessary knowledge base to underpin the achievement of Learning Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 (see section 2). The sessions were also necessary to enable HEI supervisors to meet their students; to organise the practicalities of budgeting for placement costs and to ensure that students were clear about the assessment procedures for this element of their academic programme.

The principal objectives of the Supporting Programme were to enable students to develop an understanding of their own style of learning, to recognise the strengths and limitations of their present approach to learning from experience and to evolve new methods of learning and personal organisation. This ensured that they could contribute fully in their employment and articulate clearly what they had learned from the experience.

Particular attention was given to communication skills. The presentations given by each student to colleagues, HE supervisors and employers provided a clear incentive to develop these skills.

The organisation of the student group into action learning sets in one HEI proved a very valuable way of developing teamwork and mutual support in addressing specific issues which had occurred in the workplace in the previous week.

A significant element in the Supporting Programme was the Dialogue Assessment (see section 5) which capitalised on the opportunity for self-assessment in relation to both professional and personal development. Students learned how to appreciate, understand and transfer the skills they had gained from their academic courses into their work situations and vice versa.

## 5 ASSESSMENT

### Rationale

The key question to be addressed was how to measure two seemingly opposite categories of learning by means of the same strategy: on the one hand, to measure the accomplishment of practical tasks completed for an employer; and on the other hand, to measure the extent to which a student can apply theoretical knowledge gained on a degree course. In short, an assessment strategy needed to be valid for the practical task and at the same time, be valid alongside other forms of assessment of theory on a conventional degree course.

The strategy was derived serendipitously from the involvement of three very different HEIs in the project. The fact that the three differed in tradition, method of organisation, ways of expressing their curriculum and subjects studied, prompted the identification of learning outcomes as a basis of assessment. These were expressed at a level of generality which could accommodate the differences.

The use of learning outcomes was appropriate because it required students to make connections between the language used by academic institutions and that used by employers. The six learning outcomes (see section 2) designed by the three HEIs required students to make this connection in relating the subject(s) studied in their degree to the particular tasks required by their employers.

Four modes of assessing the learning outcomes were selected:

- Presentations
- Dialogue Assessment
- Portfolio
- Evaluation Document.

**The Presentation mode** was chosen because emphasis on verbal communication is particularly appropriate in the workplace. Indeed, Presentations are frequently used in most organisations. Many HEIs have introduced Presentations as a mode for assessment for conventional degree work, thus the gap between HEIs and the workplace is already narrowing.

**The Dialogue Assessment** capitalised on the reality of everyday transactions between students, employers and HEI supervisors. The ability to capture and record these 'real life' assessments and points of growth in understanding is a feature which may be unique to this project. The Dialogue Assessment gave students the opportunity to participate in assessment by negotiating with their HEI supervisor and employer over the degree class for this element of their work.

**The Portfolio requires** the collection of data from the work placement and reflection on this data by students in such a way that they see the development of their learning from an initial starting point to the end of the placement.

**The Evaluation Document summarised** and crystallised the learning that has taken place as it was realised by the student.

The preparation of the Portfolio and Evaluation Document clearly resembled the writing of reports, special studies and dissertations in conventional degree programmes. What was additional was the fact that they required translation of terms between those used in academic institutions and those used in the workplace.

Whilst modes of assessment gave evidence relating to each learning outcome, particular scope was provided as follows:

### Presentations

There were two presentations.

- The first, within the first five weeks, was of fifteen minutes' duration and gave particular scope for learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3.
- The second, towards the end of the placement, was also of fifteen minutes' duration and gave particular scope for learning outcomes 5 and 6.

### Dialogue Assessment

The dialogue assessment was an ongoing process of reporting back by the student with, in particular, a more formal meeting being held after each presentation. The process of the presentations and the dialogue assessment allowed students the opportunity to reflect on and develop their Personal Action Plans and thus develop their learning and evaluation of learning outcomes 5 and 6.

Negotiation of critical incidents on the placement which presented difficulties to either the student or the employer (or both), also counted towards the dialogue assessment as the resolution of these difficulties provided a significant gain in learning for the student.

### Portfolio

The Portfolio consists of:

- 1 the students reflections on their learning in the light of relevant concepts;
- 2 a report if required by the employer or the Higher Education institution;
- 3 the students' personal daily log, submitted as the first Appendix;
- 4 externally produced company or other relevant information, contained in the second Appendix and necessarily referred to in the text.

The Portfolio is normally within the range of 6,000 to 8,000 words, excluding Appendices.

### Evaluation Document

This takes the form of a concise, structured report of the students: views of the extent of their achievement of the learning outcomes, particularly learning outcome 6. It also summarises the job description and the students' location in the organisation structure. It must be typed and must not exceed 1,500 words. The requirement for work to be typed is consonant with the requirement for other academic assignments at this level. It is felt that this is good training for students in presenting work in a professional manner. The limitation of 1,500 words is to focus the student's mind to produce a succinct summary. This is again a matter of professional training as many employers consider that longer reports would not be read by busy people.

### Resolution Of Students' Overall Degree Class

The four modes of assessment enable the HE supervisors and employer mentors to compile evidence of the achievement of the stated learning outcomes accredited to each mode. In order to do this, indicative descriptors were agreed in relation to the levels of achievement of each learning outcome and, most particularly, in relation to the amalgamation of the evidence from each mode.

HE supervisors, in discussion with employers, prepared a summary of the evidence from all four modes and negotiated an agreed final recommendation taking all elements of the WBL into account.

The complete set of material presented by the student, together with all the record sheets referred to

above, was then scrutinised by the appropriate External Examiner which in the case of one HEI, was an examiner appointed specifically for this project; in the case of the other two HEIs the External Examiners were those associated with the students' academic programmes.

An example of indicative descriptors and the guidelines for amalgamating the modes of assessment to obtain an overall degree class is included in Appendix Two. This is an extract from WBL for AC Assessment Strategy. It is essential to realise that indicative descriptors represent negotiation and accommodation to the views of the team running the project, HEI staff, employers and students. This represents a clarification in the minds of these participants of what counts as achievement in each of the modes of assessment and holistically, takes all the modes into consideration in the determination of the final grade.

## 6 THE ROLE OF THE PARTNERS

Looking in turn at the part played by the three partners, the nature of the partnership and the opportunities it offers become clearer.

### Students

Students are the most obvious beneficiaries of the placements and the learning derived from them; the value of any particular placement depends on their effort and motivation and on their ability to develop the opportunities provided to their best advantage. .

There are a number of things that students needed do to ensure a successful placement within the context of this project. These included:

- approaching academic tutors, careers advisers and colleagues who administer the institutional employer database to find out about and identify appropriate opportunities for placement;
- identifying, in liaison with academic tutors, the type of placement most appropriate to their individual programme of study, their personal inclination or their preferred career destination;
- allowing adequate time for negotiating the content of the Learning Agreement with employers and academic supervisors;
- participating fully in the supporting programme which included opportunities for drawing on the experience of other students;
- monitoring progress within the workplace by keeping a daily or weekly journal and building in the critical reflection and experiences which were incorporated into the final portfolio.

### Employer Partners

Employer partners involved in the project ranged from multi-national 'blue chip' companies to small one-person businesses. Many students elected to undertake placements in public service organisations.

Employer partners contributed to the students' learning by specifying tasks to be completed during the placement, by providing advice and guidance on a day-to-day basis and by allowing access to information. The specific role of an employer partner depended on the size and internal management of the organisation but in all cases employers:

- participated in negotiating the Learning Agreement;
- ensured that students had appropriate facilities and working conditions at the workplace;
- provided day-to-day supervision to see that designated tasks were completed;
- provided students with the opportunity to acquire information about the management and organisation of the workplace in order to fulfil the learning outcomes which related to understanding the management of the firm in its economic context;
- contributed to the assessment of the students' performance.

### Higher Education Supervisors

The Higher Education supervisors involved in the project had the responsibility of facilitating the students' learning and guaranteeing the validity of the marks/credits achieved. This role involved:

- assisting students in the process of placement search;
- negotiating with students and employers the content of Learning Agreements;
- contributing to the supporting programme and formative assessments;
- determining, in collaboration with employer partners and internal and external examiners, the extent to which students achieved the stated learning outcomes;
- providing pastoral support for any student who ran into difficulties and visiting

students regularly in their workplace.

Drawing on the experience of the project, any HEI embarking upon a scheme to develop work-based learning should prepare the ground carefully. Points for consideration include:

- The support of colleagues at Senior Management level (since the question of funding for travel for HEI staff to visit employers and supervise students, and funding for student travel needs to be considered) and at Head of Department level for those subject areas in which the work-based learning is to be located.
- The need to build up a bank of potential employer partners.
- The setting up of a central agency to co-ordinate approaches from staff and students to prospective employer partners. Generally employers do not appreciate ad-hoc approaches from individual students. The central agency can build up a database of employer partners and deal with all correspondence. It may also set up interviews with staff and students and co-ordination all relevant documentation.
- Advertising the value of work-based learning to students. In the project it was found that the enthusiasm of students was a powerful force in persuading reluctant subject departments to take part in the scheme. The crux of the matter for students was relating the academic study for degree courses to a job which was useful to employers. Deciding what to do was difficult for students and marked the beginning of the learning process involved in undertaking work-based learning.

## 7 THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT FOR STUDENTS, EMPLOYERS AND ACADEMIC SUPERVISORS

### Students

The opportunity for work-based learning has provided students with:

- Skills/capabilities directly related to the solution of practical problems. Work placements have provided opportunities for the acquisition of specific skills in relation to the completion of defined tasks and activities. In addition, students have found that some basic academic skills have been enhanced by the discipline imposed by the demands of work (eg report writing).
- An exposure to the impact of practical task management upon relevant theoretical understanding. In some instances this had a very practical relevance in that the placement was in areas closely related to the students' subject studies (eg Media and Cultural Studies). This was not an essential ingredient of the placement experience and those working in unrelated placements still had the opportunity to relate skills acquired in the academic environment to the demands and challenges of the placement (eg basic research techniques - exercising skills of 'thinking' in a practical context).
- An opportunity to negotiate complex personal interactions within an occupational and professional setting. Coping with work requires a degree of confidence and self reliance. Students were encouraged to take on responsibilities and develop basic social skills to work effectively with others. The experience also helped students to recognise their own abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and employment potential.
- Insights into the interaction between sound analysis and judgement on the one hand and the achievement of optimum objectives on the other. Students have learned to define achievable objectives in a work context and appreciate the advantages of time management, project management and working to tight deadlines.
- As a result of undertaking work-based placements on this project students have gained greater self-confidence, self-reliance and personal maturity. The experience has enhanced awareness of the connections' between discrete subject knowledge and its specific application in an organisation setting.
- Different work placements provided different opportunities for the acquisition of specific skills in relation to the completion of defined tasks and activities. Students developed capabilities which will be of value for a wide range of career opportunities (practical, technical, administrative, IT skills, etc.).
- Students on the project had to meet many challenges with which they had to cope, for example one student drawing on the academic knowledge from his courses in Plant Science was able to come up with ideas that resulted in an increase in yield per acre for a tomato growing company.
- Significant improvement was demonstrated in the management of a wide range of social and personal interactions. Students on the project gained an understanding of how organisations are managed and how they conduct their daily affairs through networks of personal contacts and the general acceptance of codes of practice and business ethics. The work experience also raised students' awareness about the 'culture' of firms and institutions, and how this influences attitudes and approaches to work.

In addition there were longer term benefits to students undertaking work-based placement. These included:

- A greater awareness of the context and value of learning from experience of work.

*"Working on the project made me appreciate the value of the academic skills I had learnt, and realise that they could become integrated at a much greater level than they had before, allowing me to put some technical skills I had learnt in college into practice."*

- An understanding that learning is a permanent and recurring feature of life by accepting that learning is a lifelong activity to be renewed and continued throughout a working career.
- Consolidating the connection between abstract knowledge and its application in a social and organisational context.

*"It has developed my understanding of what it's really like in a work environment - complete with frustrations and constraints."*

- The ability to harmonise the values of employing organisations with those of academic institutions.

*"I really became aware of the links between the theoretical and the practical - the two came together for me."*

## Employers

- The expansion of participation in higher education means that employers in the future will have access to a greater number of graduates. In particular employers will be able to assess the capacity of future graduates for a wider range of occupational roles.

*"It is important to invest in students through schemes as this as these people are the future of the organisation"*

- Employers participating in the project have been able to monitor changes in the character and quality of higher education, to contribute to policy-making in higher education, and to contribute directly to the higher education of potential future employees.

*"These undergraduates are our future managers. We have a responsibility to them."*

- Employers are able to influence the shape and direction of higher education by
  - encouraging Higher Education Institutions to accept the credibility of work-based learning as a legitimate part of an academic programme;
  - extending work -based learning opportunities to greater numbers of students;

*"The personal development of the student was amazing throughout the project"*

- entering into formal institutional ‘compacts’ to provide work-based learning opportunities for particular cohorts of students.

Further advantages to employers include

- the development of an accredited mentor relationship with HEIs;
- insights into useful ideas which may transfer into their own staff training.

*"Involvement in work-based learning has been a sort of indirect form of staff development for us. We welcome the initiative and would hope to be involved in it in the future."*

### Academic Staff

Increased participation in higher education has focused attention upon the different character of the student cohort. Academic staff are now teaching students from a broader range of social and educational backgrounds. Work-based learning for academic credit encourages a diversity of learning experience and offers students the opportunity to complement and enhance their formal academic study. The benefits to academic staff are revealed in their students who show

- greater sensitivity to the complexity of contemporary issues;
- greater confidence in tackling conceptual and practical tasks;

*"One benefit of the scheme is allowing students to gain experience outside the University laboratory."*

- more independence and self direction in their study;
- capability of addressing a number of tasks simultaneously;
- orientation towards problem-solution as well as problem identification.

Direct benefits to staff include

- closer involvement with work-based mentors;
- appreciation of the potential of work-based learning for improved academic performance;
- acceptance of the credibility of the skills and capabilities generated by work-based learning opportunities;
- research opportunities to explore the relationship between academic performance and work-based learning.

*"There has been a definite improvement in students' abilities to engage in self-directed learning since their experience of work-based learning."*

## 8 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Having established that academic credit can be awarded reliably and validly for work-based learning within three year degrees, there are a variety of ways in which HEIs could integrate WBL for AC into their mainstream provision in addition to offering it to full-time students as an option. Part-time students could undertake a WBL for AC component based on their regular employment as part of their course. Credit accumulation schemes can enable students to undertake WBL for AC to suit their domestic and employment arrangements. Individually negotiated learning agreements for an entire programme of study could incorporate WBL for AC. In some cases it might be appropriate for people in full-time employment to enrol as part-time undergraduate students for WBL for AC only, as the first component in their degree programme. Alternatively, people in full-time employment could use WBL for AC as a module forming part of a degree course.

However, the prospects for the further development of work-based learning in the higher education curriculum depend upon the extent to which universities, students and employers come to share the value and the importance of academic achievements demonstrated in a workplace setting.

In this respect, WBL for AC needs to be seen by employers and students as more than just another 'scheme'. It is not simply a work experience opportunity; it is an authentic academic learning environment closely coupled to the main academic programme of students. Clearly, students will expect to gain some employment advantage through an increased sensitivity to labour market conditions via the work-based learning experience, but they should also expect positive academic benefit to flow.

Most modern organisations recognise the importance of their human capital resource; the Investors in People programme encourages employers to commit themselves to learning strategies for their employees. Therefore it is possible to imagine a future where authentic and legitimate academic achievement can be demonstrated by employees and students in the learning context of employment.

This may imply greater sophistication in the kind of learning support available to students, something 'which could be achieved by the establishment of a network of accredited employer-mentors. Inviting employers to receive University accreditation for their personal support strategies might be attractive to individuals. It could lead institutions to establish a small cohort of accredited 'associate' lecturers and assessors, formally legitimising the processes of work-based learning in their quality assurance arrangements.

In the longer term, WBL for AC may provide the means by which academic programmes generally can be re-positioned to accommodate employment learning opportunities. The role of the 'year-out' in sandwich course programmes might be productively modified by offering students an accredited semester-length work-based learning opportunity. This could meet the objectives of the original sandwich placement whilst offering some efficiencies both in the placement of students and in the 'time to degree completion' rate of such students.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix One**

**Learning Agreement**

Name of Student	HE Institution
Name of Employer	Company/Organisation
Name of HE Supervisor	HE Institution
Dates of Placement: From	To
Name of Company/Organisation	
Address	

Telephone Number	Email address
Brief Description of Placement	

Name of Employer Mentor  
Names of HE Supervisors

**Learning Outcomes (General)**

Assessment will include:

- L.O.1 The student’s knowledge of what the organisation does.
- L.O.2 The student’s understanding of how the organisation achieves its aims with reference to its internal organisation and management.
- L.O.3 The student’s understanding of the economic/environmental context and its interaction with the organisation.
- L.O.4 The extent to which the following personal and work-based skills have been acquired:
- L.O.5 The student’s ability to evaluate experiential learning in the light of:
  - a academic subject knowledge
  - b subject knowledge and skills gained directly from the placement
  - c knowledge gained from the Supporting Programme
  - d the student’s own independent sources.(If possible, the main areas for development should be listed.)
- L.O.6 The student’s ability to reflect on and evaluate his/her learning from the placement as a whole.

**Learning Outcomes (Specific)**

(Add here any other agreed learning outcomes which are particular to the placement.)

- L.O.7
- L.O.8
- L.O.9

**Proposed Methods and Evidence Required**

This document has been completed and agreed upon by the following:

.....

A The student should complete and sign this section.

1. My hours of work are ..... (as agreed).
2. I am familiar with the Health and Safety regulations of (the company/organisation)
3. I have satisfied myself that I have adequate personal insurance.

Signed

.....  
B. The student, supervisor and any other parties who may be privy to confidential information, should sign the following declaration:

Modifications To The Agreement

## **Appendix Two      Assessment Strategy**

The assessment is holistic in approach. The awarder is to recommend an overall degree class in relation to the learning outcomes achieved by this mode of assessment and to support this recommendation by a rational account related to agreed descriptors.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- 1 Knowledge of what an organisation does.
- 2 Understanding of how an organisation achieves its aims with reference to its internal organisation and management.
- 3 Understanding of the economic/environmental context and its interaction with the organisation.
- 4 The acquisition of personal and work-based skills.
- 5 The ability to evaluate experiential learning in the light of
  - a) academic subject knowledge
  - b) subject knowledge and skills gained directly from the placement
  - c) knowledge gained from the supporting programme
  - d) the students' own independent sources.
- 6 The ability to reflect on and evaluate learning from the placement as a whole.

### **Indicative Descriptors For Each Learning Outcome**

Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3 are similar in kind and will relate to the set of descriptors listed at A below. Learning outcomes 5 and 6 will, by definition, relate to the class 2:2 and above on the scale at A below. Learning outcome 4 (skills) will relate to the set of descriptors listed at B.

#### **A      Descriptors**

- Fail an inadequate or nil submission
- Pass a partial descriptive account
- 3 an adequate descriptive account
- 2.2 a comprehensive account with evidence of understanding
- 2.1 all descriptors for 2:2 plus shows evidence of analytical thought
- 1 all the descriptors for 2: 1 plus shows perception and insight in a clearly worded account.

Learning outcome 6 relates through the eight-week placement, including the distinctive process of learning through/from experience.

Learning Outcome 4: Personal and Work Based Skills - the identification of relevant skills to be targeted on the placement will be a matter for negotiation by each student/employer /Higher Education supervisor.

#### **B.      Descriptors: Learning Outcome 4**

- Fail no evidence of skill development
- Pass limited skill development; many tasks only partially completed
- 3 many skills developing; completion of several tasks
- 2.2 majority of designated tasks completed; development noted in most of the appropriate skills
- 2.1 appropriate skills developed; most tasks successfully completed
- 1 appropriate skills developed and successfully applied.

## **Guidelines for Amalgamating Modes of Assessment to Obtain Overall Degree Class**

- Fail Failure to attend part of placement, non-submission of written work, inadequate involvement in personal development programme. Total lack of commitment.
- Pass Incomplete portfolio, below standard achievement across the range of learning outcomes or adequate performance in one or two areas but failure elsewhere.
- 3 Adequate overall performance. Some demonstration of the ability to learn from and apply experience. Weaknesses in some areas but compensated for by strengths in other areas. Basic competence in work-based skills.
- 2.2 Satisfactory all round performance. Clear evidence that learning outcomes have been achieved. Ability to relate experience to programme of study. Reflection on personal development. High level of achievement in some areas - not so good in others.
- 2:1 Good performance. Demonstrated competence within the workplace. Ability to articulate and apply experience. Ability to work independently (and make decisions). Clear understanding of the purpose and value of learning from experience.
- 1 Excellent performance across the full range of learning outcomes. Evidence of independence of thought and ability to develop the placement experience beyond initial learning agreement. Insight into the operations of an organisation and well developed overview of the working context. Articulation of learning and ability to draw on relevant conceptual frameworks. Ability to monitor and reflect on the purpose and value of learning from experience.

Many of the guidelines may need clarification within the context of an individual placement and may be subject to modification in the light of experience. It is important to make sure that all students are in a position to maximise their achievement and are not faced with unrealistic expectations.

Resolution of students' overall degree class will take all elements into account.

### **Appendix Three     Steering Group Members**

Mr David Pierce (Chairman)	Department of Employment, Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate
Dr Philomena Alston	Overall Project Manager, Chester College of HE
Mr Fred Bass	Cheshire, Ellesmere Port & North Wales Chamber of Commerce (From February 1992)
Mr John Carhan	Dean of Academic Studies and Project Manager for Chester College of HE
Mr Norman Evans	Project Director, Learning from Experience Trust
Mrs Vivienne A Geary	Personnel Consultant (From October 1992)
Mrs Helen Gregory	Salstream (Resigned February 1992.)
Mr Peter Monon	Monon Consultancy.
Dr Roy Pegg	Director of Curriculum Enrichment, Programme Project Manager for The University of Liverpool.
Professor David Robertson	Executive Director, Policy Development and Project Manager for Liverpool John Moores University.
Mr Ron Taylor	PACE Public Relations.