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Work Experience Placements

A LET Discussion Document

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Edited and updated 2014 by Dr. Mike Field OBE and Derek Hilyer BSc (Econ) MA

We recognise this paper was first published by LET in 1991 we feel that it still offers insights into the use of experience-based learning placements.

We have moved to the position where no academic course will be complete without a period of work placement, yet the benefits of placement remain unclear and uncertain and assessment of outcomes continues to be problematic.

This is surely a strange situation to be in after such a long history of work placements. In professions such as teaching, social work, nursing and medicine, it has never been possible to secure an initial qualification without supervised and assessed work placement.

Courses which include an element of work placements have been operating in this country for over a century, starting in Glasgow in 1880, and in England, in Sunderland, in 1903. The United States followed in 1906 with cooperative courses at the University of Cincinnati. But I have tracked down a reference to thin sandwich courses much further back than these, right back to King Solomon who, we read in the first book of Kings in the Authorised Version: "Sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses; a month they were in Lebanon and two months at home."¹ Why then, after all this experience, is there still uncertainty about the effectiveness of work placements, about their precise benefits, and about the relationships between learning, to put it crudely, in the classroom and in the workplace?

In part, the uncertainty reflects the longstanding divide between education and training. More fundamentally, perhaps, the uncertainty derives from those two traditions in English education that underlie so much of its ethos and its elitism and stand as proxies for quality - scholarship and studentship. Scholarship stands at the heart of the English education tradition, and by scholarship I mean erudite learning coupled with a scrupulous, critical approach, translated for the most part into mastery of an academic subject.

Students are there in order to master a prescribed corpus of knowledge, the 'subject', and to acquire intellectual skills that can be applied as logical and critical thinking. They are, moreover, there to be taught by teachers and the notion of studentship is based upon a perception of the relationship between teacher and taught that formalises learning and leads to a prescription of methods of assessment that demand, all too often, the reproduction of what has been taught, rather than assessing what has been learned. In placement there is little room for either scholarship or studentship. The emphasis is upon the application of and the relationship between bodies of knowledge, and the environment is one in which the didactic approach gives way to teamwork, to group tasks, and to the necessary acceptance of personal responsibility.

The growth and extension of an element of work-based learning, far from resolving the uncertainty, has added to it. The provision of work placements in many courses, in some of which it is commonly not possible to identify common professional interests centred upon the

¹ 1 Kings 5.14.

work placement, has opened up the debate about the relationship between placement and course and, indeed, whether there should be any such relationship. Yet the issues and the problems are common to all courses that require work placement, whether clearly and specifically dedicated to a well-defined profession, such as teaching, social work, quantity surveying or medicine, or not so dedicated, as in business studies, public administration or industrial studies.

Three major questions face us in respect of work placements:

1. Do they provide necessary aspects of learning not available in other ways?
2. Is there integration between the learning in work placements and the learning in the academic course?
3. Are work placements cost effective?

The first question takes us to the heart of the matter. If necessary and required skills, knowledge and understanding are acquired in work placements and can be acquired in no other way, then work placements must be insisted upon and the outcomes properly assessed. The difficulties arise, in the first place, in securing agreement upon the essential skills, knowledge and understanding, and so we finish up, all too often, with a case for some contextual application of knowledge or claims for the virtue of rather vague 'work experience'.

The second question assumes that there is some value in and necessity for integration between prior academic course work and work placement, an assumption that can be challenged and, indeed, which must be challenged, at the very least to secure a definition of 'integration'. For we do not commonly learn by first mastering abstractions, theory and analysis, and then applying knowledge and principles. But, whatever our view of the learning process, the question remains - what necessary relationships are there between the academic course and the work placement? That question takes in aspects of timing of the placement, of feedback, of assessment.

And the third question has regard not only to the claimed central purposes of work placements (the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding) but also of claimed spin-offs, such as the value of the work placements in, for example, careers choice and recruitment; in widening the experience and contacts of academic staff; in curriculum development; in strengthening and extending education-business links.

There is something called education and there is something called experience. The former is provided in a place dedicated to and equipped for that purpose - a school, a college, a university. Experience is not education and can be picked up in a place of work. There are some people who believe that education needs enhancing, that is, raising in value, and that providing opportunities for gaining experience through work placements is an effective means of enhancement. It reflects, I believe, the dominance of an input model of learning, in which the value and the quality of education are thought of in terms of inputs - the content of the teaching; student-staff ratios; duration of courses; assessment methods that test the ability to reproduce knowledge and so on. It is precisely because of the dominance of that model that such little progress has been made in securing a clearer understanding of the value, or otherwise, of work placements.

The purposes of work placement have been described in various ways. One can easily construct a very long list of purposes and supposed benefits. That list would range from objective, hard-edged things like acquisition of job specific skills; career information and

knowledge of a particular organisation, through more generalised things like linking theory and practice; developing professional attitudes; developing personal, transferable skills to the almost indefinable (yet very real) development of maturity.

We cannot possibly state whether work placement enhances and enriches learning unless we define the outcomes of learning. Only when we have a reasonably clear idea of the competencies that are being sought can we assess whether those competencies are demonstrated by a person, and whether particular learning environments and situations contribute to the development of those competencies. I make two pleas. One is for the adoption of a competence-based approach to learning outcomes, with all that that means in terms of the reassessment and revaluation of the learning process. The other plea is for the adoption of profiles of achievement instead of, and I mean instead of and not in addition to, the conventional summative assessment. Both, I believe, are justified and necessary independently of issues related directly to work placement. But without them the value and the benefits of work placement cannot be agreed one way or the other.

Before I go on to say something about a competence-based approach, let me comment briefly upon personal, transferable skills. Every course would claim to develop, alongside the understanding of a corpus of knowledge, the ability to discriminate, to analyse, to think logically, to solve problems, to apply knowledge and to learn. Not every course would claim, or could claim, that it seeks to develop abilities to work with others, to lead, to propose solutions on incomplete information, to achieve tasks within time and resource constraints, to communicate effectively, and to be responsive to change. Yet no one can undertake a job of work satisfactorily without these abilities and, for the great majority of jobs, it is these abilities, rather than the mastery of a corpus of knowledge, that will determine success or failure, both for the individual and the organisation. Part of the problem is whether these abilities, these skills, are necessary attributes of the newly qualified graduate or whether they belong to what has come to be called 'professional formation'. Employers seem to be saying more and more that these are the skills they look for in newly qualified graduates and, all too often, they also say that they do not find them in sufficient measure. If the newly qualified graduates need these skills, then work placements must contribute to their development and must contribute, moreover, in a way that encourages both effective learning and effective transferability.

In making a plea for a competence-based approach to learning in work placements and, indeed, generally in education, I am not peddling a nostrum. I am asking, in the first place, for a recognition of all the work that is currently going on in vocational education and training, which is now proceeding on a vast canvas and is setting standards of performance and associated assessment methods which must have far-reaching implications for the work of education. This is the domain of the training or industry-led bodies. It is all about competence in employment, but not about narrowly job specific competence.

The concept of competence that is central to the standards takes in not only the ability to perform prescribed occupational activities to the levels of performance expected in employment, but covers also the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations. It encompasses the organisation and planning of work, innovation and coping with change, and includes qualities of personal effectiveness that are required in the workplace. This is a sufficiently broad concept to cover the requirements of professional competence for which work placements are provided.

There are a number of models of competence and they fall into two categories. There is the input model, focused upon the skills, knowledge and understanding required of the individual. And there is the outcomes model that is describing aspects of work roles and not the individual attributes of skills and knowledge.

The input model describes performance in terms of discrete elements of skills, tasks and

knowledge. The outcomes model describes the outcomes of work roles and functions.

An input model would seek to define the specific skills to be acquired, and the specific tasks to be undertaken, by the individual in the work placement. An outcomes model would define the whole work role and would set standards of performance associated with that role. We cannot say that one model is right and the other wrong. But we do need to know which model is being used as the basis for deriving standards and associated assessment. And we need also to take account of the fact that many standards models are being driven by the outcomes model, and that the vocational qualification system is incorporating standards derived by using that model in the approach known as functional analysis.

What is needed is a substantial programme of development bringing together a number of strands of work that have been kept apart for far too long. The major thrust of that development should not, in my view, be directed towards justifying the use of work experience, nor towards the analysis of particular outcomes of work placements, but rather towards a taxonomy of the various models of professional education and professional formation. There are, after all, significant differences between the models used for training teachers, accountants, architects, doctors, nurses, social workers, engineers and estate agents. Yet all these methods use work placements in some form. The methods of assessment vary also. Such a taxonomy would, in my view, need a competence-based approach, and the outcomes would be highly practical, in two areas in particular.

First of all, in giving a clearer idea of, and an enhanced importance, to the processes of preparation and induction of the individual in entering a work placement. Preparation should create an awareness of the learning opportunities in the placement and of the range of skills to be developed in the roles to be undertaken. Induction should familiarise the student with the organisation providing the placement, and with the setting in which work will be undertaken, and should give precise information on accountability.

Secondly, the type and range of support provided for the student on placement would benefit enormously from a clearer idea of the overall competence being sought, and of the learning processes necessary to develop these. All too often there is ambiguity, sometimes deliberate one feels, about the respective roles of workplace supervisor(s) and academic tutor(s). All too often the value of the placement experience to the individual student is a matter of chance or whim or personality. Dependable support to help in achieving targets that are real and relevant is often lacking, and without it work placements can be unhelpful experiences.

But it is in the whole business of assessment that a competence-based taxonomy would bring about real and effective progress. Conventional examinations test only that narrow ground of ability and interest that relates to scholarship and studentship. Project work, now widely used as a means of testing a wider range of abilities, does not normally give adequate opportunity for the assessment of personal, transferable skills. Assessments must satisfy the requirements of validity, reliability and convenience.

Conventional examination methods are reliable in that results are, by and large, reproducible. They are convenient to administer and cheap to run. But they fail to meet the essential requirement of validity since they do not provide a reliable measure of competence, of effectiveness in applying knowledge, of ability to cope with change, and of potential. We are entitled to ask of conventional examinations whose protagonists preach summative assessment - summative assessment of what? Is it reasonable or fair or, more importantly, is it valid to grade the performance of a graduate without at least giving some prominence to assessment of the ability to achieve complex tasks in which there is a choice of options for solutions, in which time and resource constraints apply, and in which there is some valid test of the ability to communicate effectively?

There are a variety of assessment methods currently in use in work placements; log books

and diaries, appraisal of performance of specific tasks, project work, self-appraisal of learning. Probably the most commonly used is appraisal of performance of specific tasks, and such appraisal is commonly expressed independently of academic assessment. In sandwich courses argument continues about whether assessment of performance in work placement should be separately expressed or included in an overall assessment grade. We must apply to assessment of performance in the workplace the criteria that should be applied to all forms of assessment - the criteria of validity, of reliability, of convenience. But I see little point in having separate recording or reporting of work placement and academic assessment. If there is no direct relationship in terms of learning between academic course work and work placement experience, then the two should not be included as requirements for the course as a whole. If there is a relationship then in fairness to the student, and to those who need to have information about the student's abilities, that relationship should be made plain.

I find it difficult to see how summative assessment can be made informative without the adoption of some sort of profile of achievement in which performance is recorded in terms of competence. Grading students upon exit must give way to a more informed statement of capability demonstrated during the whole course.

I am well aware of the problems that have to be surmounted if reliable and valid profiles are to be provided. I am also well aware of the serious and estimable objections, as well as the prejudices, of academics who express concern about what they regard as moving too much into the realm of the subjective. Furthermore, some will ask whether it should be any part of the responsibility of academic staff to forecast the employment potential and performance of students. But one is not asking for that.

What is being asked is that summative assessment should take account of the course as a whole, work placement included and, more importantly, that summative assessment should provide a much more informative statement of what has been assessed, including those competences that purport to be reflected in the final award. It is not so much a demand for the exercise of subjective judgement that is being made as a plea for the dropping of pretence about the claimed objectivity, reliability and precision of current, conventional assessment.

If education or, as I prefer to express it, learning, is indeed enhanced through experience (and indeed learning is surely impossible without experience) then it is not only assessment that needs to respond to what goes on in the formal part of the course and in work placement. The process of delivery needs to respond also, and all too often it does not or it responds insufficiently. On many courses work placements have too much about them of time serving, but lack structured learning opportunities that enable and empower students in a range of skills, competencies and aptitudes that are brought back into the formal part of the course and affect what is being delivered there. Just one example will illustrate my concerns here. In a work placement the student will almost always work as a member of a team, and without teamwork nothing gets done. The skills and the competencies that relate to teamwork are vitally important to the development of knowledge, to the achievement of goals, to the development of professional responsibilities. Yet where are the opportunities within the formal course for further developing and refining those skills and competencies? Where are the assessment methods that take account of group work and group performance? Where are the learning methods that build upon the need for group learning?

In many contacts with many course students over the years two comments by way of complaint were repeatedly made to me and stand out well above all other comments. One was that the student was not stretched in the work placement; there was an expectation that more would be demanded and there was a willingness to give more. That there was insufficient stretching is a comment upon the failings of supervision in the workplace and academically, and indicates yet one more failing of management. The other complaint was

that the academic course following on from a work placement contained virtually no recognition that a work placement had taken place. This complaint applied both to content and delivery. I believe that both complaints are justified. They do not undermine what, for me, are the undoubted strengths of sandwich courses, but they do point to the need to develop means of assessment that can properly be said to contribute to the maintenance of standards.

Work placement is an established and accepted part of many courses and is being extended to still more and more non-vocational courses as a means of developing personal transferable and employment related skills.

The demand for higher level skills, and for graduates able to make a rapid transition into employment, will mean that work placements in vocational courses become more significant and necessary.

The growing demands upon employers for work placements, coupled with a highly competitive economy, means that work placements must demonstrate clear cost benefits, just as for academic staff there must be cost effectiveness in the expensive business of their involvement.

The pressures are on, not so much in my view to prove that there are benefits in work placement, but to ensure that the benefits are properly recognised in the content, delivery and assessment of learning. That, after all, must be the real objective.

Paper 5

A Practical Approach to Assessing Work Experience

A LET Discussion Document

Original Paper by Andrea Adams

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Edited and updated 2014 by Dr. Mike Field OBE and Derek Hilyer BSc (Econ) MA

Introduction

The examples discussed in this paper are set in a Business Studies context, and discuss some of the perceived problems of the assessment of work experience in view of the need for reliability, validity and utility in assessment.

The underlying thesis of the paper is that the skills gained or developed during the work experience placement period should be assessed, and should play a significant role in determining the final classification of the qualification being studied.

The paper gives a practical example of an approach that can be used which will clearly strengthen the partnership between employers and educationalists in the assessment process.

Work Experience and Assessment

Many Business Studies programmes require the student to spend periods of their course in an industrial, commercial or public sector organisation. Within this provision differences occur; between those courses having a 'thick' period of placement and those which have two 'thin' periods of placement.

Historically the importance attached to the assessment of the student's 'academic performance' has excluded the assessment of the work-place element from the final assessment. Indeed, attention has seldom been focused on defining the competencies or learning content of placement, let alone profiling the student's performance whilst in it.

Surely the absence of criteria for assessing performance in the work placement is a paradox and raises the question as to why supervised work experience is not placed at the very heart of vocational education? Simulation exercises, while enabling coverage of some areas of the curriculum, offer no real substitute for on-the-job training. This being the case it is surprising that work experience has often been treated as an appendage to the academic course of study and remains superficial, optional or bolted-on rather than being planned and mainstream. This makes it possible for a student to graduate with an extremely good vocational qualification who may find it difficult to fit into the world of work.

Clearly educational institutions are prepared to describe work placements as a "good thing" and at the same time have not developed any clear rationale as to how it could most appropriately be assessed. Good assessment should always be related to the aims of the course and it is, therefore, inconceivable that the work experience element should be totally ignored in formal grading procedures.

In their research Baron and Chudasama² (1985) identified skills deemed by industry to be of particular importance. Such skills included creativity, motivation skills, numeracy skills, communication skills and social and interpersonal skills. Recent consultation with industry

² The Market for Sandwich Students - a Leicester Polytechnic Discussion Document.

(set out in Appendix A) has identified a range of skills looked for in industry. Not surprisingly these skills related extremely closely to the common skills statement³ which defines skills required by industry thus:

The abilities most valued in industrial, commercial and professional life as well as in public and social administration are the transferable, intellectual and personal skills. These include the ability to analyse complex issues, to identify the core of a problem and a means of solving it, to synthesise and integrate disparate elements, to clarify values, to make effective use of numerical and other information, to work cooperatively and constructively with others, and, above all perhaps, to communicate clearly both orally and in writing. A higher education system which provides its students with these skills is serving society well!

Given these pressures for change why is there still resistance towards making work experience 'count' within the grading of the final award? To do this would require a cultural shift in many educational institutions if employers were to become key participants in the assessment process. This is surprising given that experience clearly shows that employers are willing to contribute constructively and creatively to the partnership with education if they are given a proper voice in the ongoing discussion regarding work-based assessment.

Perceived Problems of Work-Based Assessment

All assessment carried with it 'problems'. It is usually claimed, however, that work-based assessment is fraught with specific problems that make the results of such assessment unreliable. Three of the major 'problems' seem to be:

1. Validity of the Placement

It is often asserted that because students on a particular course will undertake their placement experience in different organisations, assessment becomes at best extremely difficult and at worst almost impossible. Certainly academic staff are accustomed to assessing students in a more 'controlled' environment; the 'control' resulting from the fact that students are often given identical tasks to undertake which will be assessed by one tutor. Even this assumption is becoming less realistic as, with increased course numbers, several tutors often engage in assessing different batches of work.

Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that many degree courses have as a requirement the undertaking of a major project, the result of which counts (sometimes with double weighting) in the final award. Projects by their very nature are individualistic pieces of work. Is there anything to suggest that project assessment, which is not always based on clearly defined criteria, is intrinsically more reliable than the assessment of a student's learning from work experience, especially if the latter is based on clearly defined and agreed criteria?

2. Assessment by Employers

Linked to the previous 'problem' of the variability of the placement experience is the concern that employers are not the best group of people to make the assessment; and that the application of assessment techniques is a fundamental role of academic staff and that they should not abdicate responsibility for assessment to employers. Some academic staff claim that "employers have not been trained to assess". This is an unfortunate generalisation when one considers the highly developed appraisal systems adopted by many business organisations. It makes an assumption that academic staff are proficient assessors and fails to recognise that many academic staff are themselves

³ BTEC Common Skills .General Guidelines 1991.

inadequately trained to assess. Not a shred of evidence has been produced which even begins to suggest that academic staff are better-placed and more reliable in their assessment of business skills in the classroom than are employers in the work situation. Industrialists do not normally want to usurp the academic's judgment and decision, though they should at every opportunity be encouraged to contribute to such decisions as an equal partner in the assessment process.

3. **The Cost of Assessment to the Employer**

It is recognised that the growing partnership between education and industry is important and there is every reason to believe that "companies will be willing to participate in areas where there is a clear role for them".⁴ Nonetheless one needs to appreciate that methods of assessment and forward job planning agreed between a college, an organisation and the student must be cost effective. Assessment - especially of work-related skills - can be made extremely effective without being over complicated and time-consuming. An initial survey of organisations has indicated strong support for the approach to assessment as outlined in Appendix A. Minor modifications have been incorporated from the feedback received. The response has been most encouraging since it suggests that the method is both effective and user-friendly.

In reality the 'problems' of work-based assessment are no different in kind or substance from the general problems of assessment which are faced regularly within educational institutions.

What Is Being Assessed?

This question relates directly to the issue of the validity of assessing work experience. Do we really need to assess the placement experience of the student? Can we not with equal validity assess the student's college-based performance and derive from such an assessment a reliable measure of how the student will 'perform' in industry?

Typical of the aims of the work experience period are the following:

- To enable the student to learn how he/she can successfully manage the problems and stresses of practical business situations and to assume the necessary flexibility demanded by organisations.
- To learn the importance of co-operation necessary in successful teamwork.
- To enable the student to demonstrate organisational ability and responsibility under the constraints of working life.

Given the above aims it is difficult, if not impossible, to argue the case for using the surrogate criteria developed in a classroom situation rather than direct assessment within the workplace.

A Practical Approach to Work Experience Assessment

It is essential that the work experience be carefully and systematically assessed and that clear criteria exist for the assessment to take place. That academic staff, employers and students are involved in the assessment process is essential. There are normally two major elements to assess:

- The actual 'performance' of the student on his/her work experience. It is proposed that this be done by a profiling approach.
- The quality of any assignment/project work required.

⁴ Council for Industry and Higher Education; Towards a Partnership - Spring 1987.

The Profiling Approach

Appendix A gives one example of such an approach. The grading criteria, it will be noted, falls into six categories related to the normal classification used for degree purposes. It is not too dissimilar, however, to that used by many industrial and commercial organisations. For example, the Royal Mail had (at the time of the study) a four category overall performance system:

E: Exceeds the high standards expected of Royal Mail employees - achievement clearly exceeds that of most others at similar position levels.

M: Meets the high standard expected of Royal Mail employees - achievement which is expected from an experienced individual.

R: Relatively minor shortcomings which do not significantly affect job performances but which prevent the job holder from fully meeting the standards expected of an experienced and qualified individual.

U: Unsatisfactory - major shortcomings which severely affect job performance.

National Audit had a five-category classification and ICL a six-category classification system which closely relates to Appendix A.

The 'Process' of Assessment

- 1) The placement manager visits the host organisation and discusses in some detail the nature of the placement and the method of assessment.
- 2) On the first visit to the organisation by the placement tutor, the tutor in conjunction with the student's work supervisor and the student agree the tasks which will facilitate the fulfilling of the criteria to be used for assessment. A matter to be resolved at this point is any variation in the weighting to be given to the set criteria. The emphasis is on the performance. It is vitally important that every student has a clear understanding of the work objectives and responsibilities because performance will be measured against them. Regular discussion will take place between the student and the work supervisor regarding achievements, difficulties and performance. The work supervisor will normally be the line manager or one having direct contact with the student.
- 3) The second visit constitutes the first formal assessment and review. Prior to this meeting the work supervisor and the student will have formally met and agreed the performance profile on the basis of the 'weighting' agreed at the first visit. An overall performance grade is given. The placement tutor will seek to ensure consistency and fairness in the application of assessment standards. Performance will be assessed against the objectives previously agreed; good and bad points should be clearly brought out and shortcomings should not be glossed over. A development plan is then agreed for the next stage of the student's work experience. Where specific weaknesses have been identified these will be noted as being areas for more regular monitoring and opportunity should be given for shortcomings to be rectified and any individual objectives to be included in the forward plan. The student will automatically, during the placement preparation programme, have clearly defined a realistic personal development plan. The process at all stages combines diagnostic, formative and summative assessment.
- 4) The third visit will follow much the same format as the second, and a second

performance profile will be finalised and the results openly discussed with tutor and student.

- 5) Following the end of the placement period the employer and student will hold a formal final review and the employer will complete a third and final 'performance profile' with a suggested 'overall performance' grade. This is sent to the academic institution. Provided the 'result' is broadly compatible with what has been indicated on the previous performance profiles the grade is accepted without a further visit. Should a final grade be significantly out of line with expectations further discussion will take place with the employer and student.

It should be noted that in order to take account of the student's development over the whole period of placement the following weighting will apply:

First Assessment of Performance	-	a weighting of 1
Second Assessment of Performance	-	a weighting of 2
Final Assessment of Performance	-	a weighting of 3

This weighting system, with emphasis being given to the later assessments, takes into account the learning and progress made within the context of performance-based appraisal.

It will be noted that the whole process involves:

- (a) The setting of clear objectives.
- (b) The appraisal and review.
- (c) The performance rating via profiling.
- (d) A performance improvement and development plan.

The major element of this aspect of assessment lies with the employer. What, then, is the tutor's role? In large measure it is that of 'moderator'. Hence the requirement that the tutor visits several students who are on work experience in order to better facilitate this 'moderator' role. It is recognised that a programme of training is essential to better equip college staff to fulfil this role of managing the placement.

Assessing Project Work

Performance profiling as explained above is not the only method of work-based assessment, though it is claimed that it is the most valid and reliable. In addition, there are a variety of 'assignments' which different Business Studies degree courses appear to require from their students. These include:

- Keeping a weekly log book which tends by its very nature to be descriptive rather than analytical. (This may no longer be valid in its current form.)
- The preparation of more detailed and analytical reports at specific dates during the placement period.
- The preparation of case study material which forms the basis for further analysis during the final year of the course.
- A major project based on specific aspects of the organisation.

It is essential for students to keep a record of their progress; whether this is called a log book, or is given some other title is of little consequence. What is important is that it should include the following information:

- The criteria on which they are being assessed.
- Details of weighting.
- The job (and any amendments).

The student should use it to record the following:

- Specific examples of performance.
- Strengths and weaknesses evidenced.
- Thoughts on how to correct weaknesses and build on strengths.
- The extent to which objectives have been achieved.
- Specific problems encountered.
- Perceived training needs.
- Personal objectives for inclusion in a forward job plan.

Analysis of learning (action reflection model of learning).

This document will be critical for the appraisal and review process as well as an analysis of the learning taking place. It would be an advantage if the supervisor kept a similar record of specific aspects of the student's performance.

Far more consideration should be given to the project as part of the placement year, and by so doing ensuring that it is related to the host organisation and/or the industrial environment in which it operates. This gives added weight to the work experience element of the course - a fact which would be reflected in the degree classification obtained by the student. The visiting tutor would also be the project tutor and this would prove a real benefit to the host organisation, the student and the educational establishment. It is also highly likely that a representative from the host organisation would be involved in the assessment of the project and act as a 'second marker'. This suggestion of basing a project on the host organisation:

- Gives an extra dimension in the assessment of the work experience period.
- Almost certainly strengthens the partnership between employers and educationalists in assessment.
- Ensures that *all* projects are workplace based.
- Provides the opportunity for the inclusion of other subjects in the final year.
- Makes more cost effective the placement visits and project supervision.

How Much Should Work Experience Count?

Clearly, whatever proportion is decided upon can be no more than a value judgment. On many degree schemes, for instance, only the results of five or six final year subjects are taken into account for classification purposes. Other schemes give some weight to certain second year subjects.

It must be acknowledged that the placement experience will inevitably be utilised and reflected in the assessment of final year subjects. To the extent that this happens work experience already 'counts'. It is essential, however, that there is a more direct recognition of the value of placement. A proposal which seems balanced would be for work experience to have the weighting of two papers:

- Assessment of placement performance.
- Other assignment/project work associated with the placement.

In addition to the summative assessment which counts towards the degree classification the students will have the detailed performance profile.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to make a case for a more thorough assessment of learning from work experience, and, most importantly, an assessment which counts in the final degree

classification.

The case is made based on:

- The perceived current philosophy of business education.
- Government policy reflected at the time by the **National Council for Vocational Qualifications** (NCVQ).
- The need for reliability, validity and utility in assessment criteria.
- The feasibility from a practical point of view of introducing such assessment.

It is no longer legitimate to have a significant part of a course making little impact on the final degree classification.

Appendix A

Performance Profile

Circle the appropriate number in each row

Skill	Assessment criteria to be used	High				Low		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Self-Development	: Ability to appraise own performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Ability to learn from experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Planning, organising and completing tasks independently and under instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Self-management and personal presentation, punctuality and time management.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Adaptability.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Creativity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Enthusiasm and motivation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
: Determination/Persistence.	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Working with others	: Observes, listens and responds effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Gives and takes criticism constructively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Gives and accepts assistance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Contribution to team achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Shows sensitivity to the values, attitudes and practices of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Communication: Written	: Presenting information effectively for a particular purpose in appropriate format.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: General style and tone, vocabulary and grammar.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Oral	: Effectiveness - clarity, manner and tone (rapport).	1	2	3	4	5	6
		: Speaks confidently - holds interest (eye contact and nonverbal signals).	1	2	3	4	5	6
Problem Solving and Decision Making	: Analysing a situation and questioning assumptions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Identifying problems and defining tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Evaluating alternative solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Tackling problems effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Information gathering including Quantitative and Numerical Skills	: Evaluation of results.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Identifying appropriate information needs and sources.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Selecting and obtaining information by appropriate means.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Analysing, classifying, recording and evaluating information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Practical Skills	: Use of mathematical, numerical and graphical skills to analyse data.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Accuracy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Competence in use of computers and other electronic equipment	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	: Ability to discriminate with regard to design elements, colour, shape, special awareness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Overall Performance
Key Weaknesses:

1	2	3	4	5	6
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Key Strengths:

Development Suggestions:

General Remarks on the Student's Performance

Signed (Employer)..... Signed (Visiting Tutor).....

Signed (Student)..... Date.....

NB: Before completing this profile, please refer to the details of assessment grading system

Grade	Key to Assessment	Definition of Assessment	Degree Equivalent
1	Outstanding performance	Has met all objectives and requirements with an exceptionally high quality performance. Has made a significant impact on the total job	1 st Class Hons
2	Excellent performance	Has met all objectives and requirements to a high standard. Some notable achievements beyond the normal expectations of the job.	2 nd Class Division 1
3	Very good performance	A good balanced performance meeting objectives and requirements of the job. Consistent and professional performance.	2 nd Class Division II
4	Good performance	A competent performance. Has met most of the objectives and requirements. Exhibiting strengths but having some clear identifiable development needs requiring assistance.	Third Class
5	Acceptable	Has met some of the objectives and requirements. Needs to improve performance significantly. Has a range of development needs. The standard of performance is the minimum acceptable.	Pass
6	Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable. Most of the objectives and requirements have not been met. Exhibits a lack of commitment and ability to perform the tasks. A performance which would not be acceptable by a permanent employee at this level.	Fail

Paper 6

Learning Contracts

A LET Discussion Document

Original Paper by Iain S Marshall

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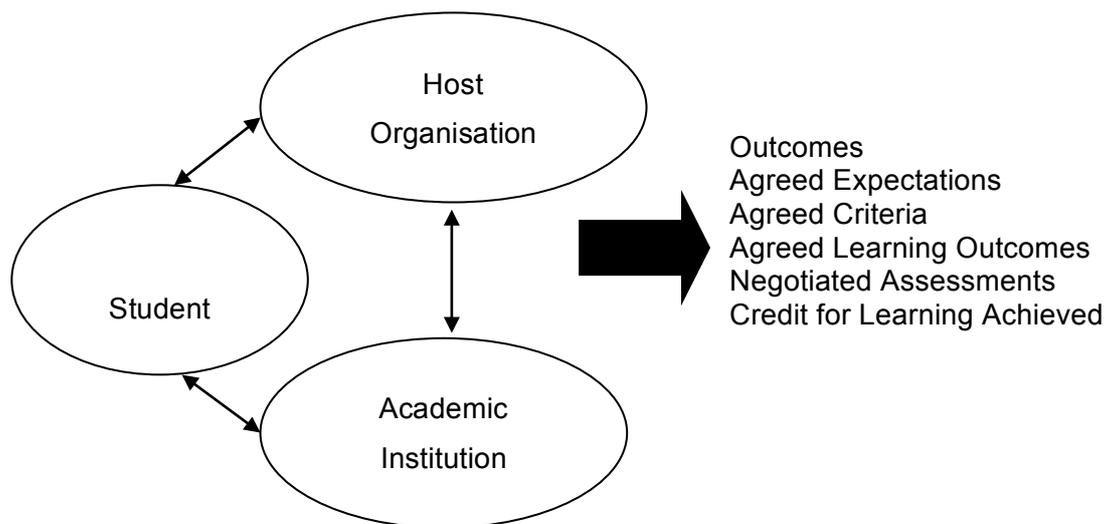
Edited and updated 2014 by Dr. Mike Field OBE and Derek Hilyer BSc (Econ) MA

Introduction

It is common today for education institutions to collaborate with employers or their trainers and their employees or students in developing three-way learning contracts which earn credit towards an academic qualification.

Such contracts are designed to encourage the students to take a large measure of responsibility for identifying what they want to learn from their placements, and provide the motivation for them to achieve their agreed learning outcomes.

These Student Driven Three-Way Learning Contracts usually include:

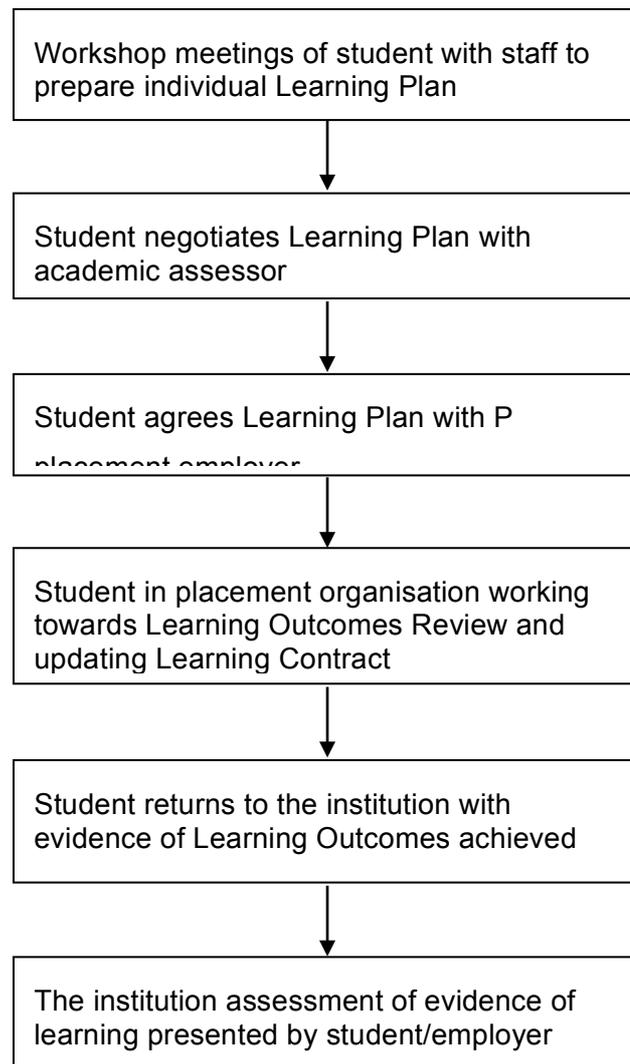


The model encourages ongoing re-negotiation by any of the three partners and, once they get the hang of it, students are keen to turn learning which they value into academic credit towards their qualification.

Small and medium-sized employers greatly appreciate students' negotiating what they hope to learn from their placement in advance. It saves time and avoids inappropriate matching of student and placement.

The approach can raise a range of staff development issues for the educational institution as it shifts the role relationship between staff and student towards greater learner autonomy.

An example of the process often used for Work-Based Learning:



There are good reasons why systems and procedures must be developed to enable students to earn credit which counts towards their qualification from work-based learning.

- Many of our students have an instrumental approach to course work. The award of marks or credit influences the effort they are prepared to put into an assignment.
- Where employers are participating actively in the process they express the view that students should be rewarded for achieving relevant learning outcomes.
- In academic institutions there is a tendency for resources to follow the award of credit.

Assessment of the evidence submitted by the student is central to the award of credible academic credit.

When using the Learning Contract model the following principles and conditions tend to emerge.

Assessment of Work-Based Learning

Some general principles:

1. That assessment be collaborative rather than unilateral.
2. That assessment be constructive and responsive to learners' needs.
3. That the conditions necessary for good assessment must be given priority in the allocation of time and other resources.

Some necessary conditions:

1. That there be clear learning outcomes which are agreed between learner and assessor as being relevant to the qualifications sought and valued by the learner.
2. That the credit awarded for evidence of learning should fairly reflect the quality of that learning.
3. That there be a policy regarding the nature of evidence of learning and a readiness to explore different instruments of assessment.
4. That there be mechanisms which take account of the views of the learner and the employer in arriving at a collaborative assessment.
5. That there be a policy for the professional development of teaching staff and of employer 'Mentors' in support of the work-based learner and in the assessment of the evidence of learning which is submitted.
6. That there be a structure within an institution where the senior academic body can evaluate programme's success in achieving its own stated aims and can adjust its practices appropriately.

The Learning Outcome

The fundamental element of the model of work-based learning is the learning outcome. This is achieved by encouraging the learner to reflect on their experience and the learning they have gained from it, or to identify learning they will achieve from their experience and the evidence they will need to support it.

Students are encouraged to group learning outcomes they plan to achieve from their placement under three headings:

- Job-related outcomes.
- Personal development outcomes.
- Course related outcomes.

During the planning phase before their placement students should develop a list of learning outcomes with the staff who will supervise them during their placement. A major consideration during the planning phase is that the learning outcomes should be judged to meet the content and levels required by their study programme. Each student should then agree with their assessor the evidence they will offer in support of the agreed learning outcomes.

The list of learning outcomes proposed by a student is used as part of the agenda during placement interviews with potential employers. Invariably, further negotiations occur which have to satisfy all three partners - the student, the company mentor and the academic assessor.

Throughout the placement experience the list of learning outcomes is regularly modified and renegotiated between all three partners to the learning contract.

One month before the student is due to finish the placement they should confirm the list of learning outcomes they wish to be assessed against. The company mentor receives a copy of this list in the form of an assessment grid which asks the mentor to confirm whether or not the student has in each case:

- accomplished the agreed learning outcomes;
- provided evidence of *understanding* against a scale 1-4;
- provided evidence of *adding value*.

The assessment by the mentor is discussed with the student and sent to the student's academic assessor who has his/her own assessment grid to question the portfolio evidence that the student submits in support of their claimed learning outcomes. Using this he/she makes the final judgment about whether the credit should be awarded.

In developing appropriate systems and procedures it is seen as crucial that the staff who are to operate the scheme are satisfied that they have developed a workable scheme. Where schemes are responsive to needs they are liable to vary between one course and another. This will be particularly noticeable in the early stages until examples of 'best practice' have been established.

In an example scheme a proportion of third-year marks are allocated to work-based learning and this total available mark is broken down as follows:

- 20% for the quality of the learning plan
- 30% for the assessment by the employer
- 20% for the portfolio evidence assessed by staff assessor
- 30% for the *viva voce* by the assessor.

In another case the course team had identified 'core' learning outcomes which the student should attempt to achieve, with additional self-selected learning outcomes submitted by the student. The three categories of learning outcomes are retained, and an agreed number of marks are allocated as follows:

- 30% for evidence of job-related outcomes
- 30% for evidence of personal development outcomes
- 40% for evidence of course-related outcomes.

It is interesting to note that these schemes attempt to record evidence of learning, and will discriminate between differing levels of achievement of relevant learning outcomes.

A danger in the move towards a credit-based schemes is that where units of credit are based on units of time (eg 1 credit = 8 hours of appropriate activity) then the discriminatory power of the model is lost. It seems that we must move on from the simplistic time-based unit of credit towards an acknowledgement of the relevant learning outcomes which can be realistically achieved and demonstrated by a learner. This would allow students to earn more or less credits towards their qualification by way of work-based learning. Where courses are *explicit* about the learning outcomes which are at present *implicit* within the syllabus, the issue of credit transfer, based as it would be on credit for learning outcomes achieved, is greatly facilitated.

A significant point which should not be overlooked is that the another course team have devised an assessment scheme for awarding academic credit and communicating both the procedures and the credit weighting to the students *before* they go on sandwich placement. This clearly has implications for the positive motivation of both academic staff and students involved. By comparison, another course team staff and students are much less clear, and one consequence of this uncertainty is some evidence of confused and demotivated

students on placement. A lesson being learned by the staff is that the students benefit from knowing in advance what they have to do to earn academic rewards for providing evidence of learning.

Staff in both of these courses are, through their involvement in the pilot project, giving their placement students much more support and monitoring than was previously possible. Both course teams continue to meet in workshops with project staff to devise appropriate systems and procedures for the award of academic credit.

Finally, the conclusion reached by the academic staff is that work-based learning must count!