LTSN Generic Centre

Assessment Series No 11

A Briefing on Work-based Learning

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ltsn generic centre
Learning and Teaching Support Network

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Contents

Generic Centre Guides and Briefings

Welcome to the Learning and Teaching Support Network Generic Centre's series of Assessment Guides and Briefings. They aim to provide a series of overviews of important issues and practices in the field of assessment for the higher education community.

The Assessment Guides are intended for colleagues with particular roles and for students, as their titles suggest. The Briefings are primarily intended for lecturers and other staff involved in supporting learning.

The Assessment Series is a snapshot of a field in which development is likely to be rapid, and will be supplemented by specific case studies produced by the LTSN Subject Centres.

The series was developed by Brenda Smith and Richard Blackwell of the LTSN Generic Centre with the support of Professor Mantz Yorke. Experts in the field were commissioned for each title to ensure that the series would be authoritative. Authors were invited to approach the issue in their own way and no attempt was made to impose a uniform template.

The series editors are grateful to colleagues in LTSN Subject Centres and other senior colleagues who refereed the series, and of course to the authors for enabling its publication.

We hope that you will enjoy the Assessment Series and find it interesting and thought-provoking. We welcome your feedback and any suggestions you may have for future work in the area of assessment.

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Summary

Work-based learning is learning at higher education level derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work. It includes learning *for* work (e.g. work placements), learning at work (e.g. company in-house training programmes) and learning *through* work, linked to formally accredited further or higher education programmes. Hence a learner may undertake a part-time, taught education programme, the focus of which is the direct application of learning to real work issues and problems, using projects as the primary assessment tool. The principles of assessment such as validity, reliability and authenticity apply as much to work-based learning as to more traditional forms of study. Whichever assessment tools are used, they should be designed to measure key traits such as ability, knowledge, etc (construct validity) and the subject domain being taught (content validity). Assessment tools must also be consistent in what they measure so that, for example, two assessors of a work-based project should come to a similar judgement (inter-judge reliability) as to the quality of the piece. There should also be clear evidence that the work submitted is that of the author (authenticity). The use of vivas, presentations or similar oral demonstrations can help here.

The novel and innovative nature of work-based learning requires that non-traditional means have had to be found for assessing it, such as approaches that meet the (sometimes differing) needs of learners, employers and higher education (HE) institutions. The use of traditional assessment methods such as formal examinations is entirely inappropriate to the philosophy, educational objectives and adult target audience for work-based learning. It is assumed that work-based learners are self-directed, bringing personal experience and motivation to the learning situation. Assessment methods need, therefore, to be tailored to a student-centred, problem-based approach. Hence, such methods can include: self and peer assessment, assignments and projects, portfolio-building, presentations and the practical assessment of professional competence within the workplace. The link between a learner's objectives and the outputs of learning can be bridged through the use of learning contracts. While the development of work-based learning offers HE important opportunities for partnership with companies and organisations, the complex nature of assessment and accreditation present new challenges, both in terms of assessment and quality assurance.

11

What is work-based learning?

In recent years, work-based learning (WBL) has figured in UK government policy debates as a significant element of professional development and lifelong learning. Dearing (1997) discussed the need in HE for part-time modes of continuing professional development and for courses carried out in collaboration with employers. Recognising, assessing and accrediting learning from work at HE level extends opportunities to adults who would not necessarily have engaged with further study, and thus contributes to widening participation.

Work-based learning has been defined as learning at higher education level derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work (Garnett, 1997). Work-based learning, however, is the *means* through which a discipline is delivered, not the discipline to be studied. So work-based learning is not a subject for study – it is a *mechanism* for learning. Ebbutt (1996) has described work-based learning as a major constituent of a programme of study where students are full-time employees, and most of the research-based fieldwork is carried out in the learner's own workplace. The learner group meets regularly with the university tutors to discuss research methodology, share problems and develop thinking. This formulation of work-based learning as learning *through* work linked to an accredited programme of study, however, is not the only possible definition. Work-based learning can also be learning:

- for work (e.g. a work placement on a sandwich degree programme or professional development such as a teacher education course);
- at work (e.g. a company in-house training of personal development programme).

Learning *for* or *at* work has a long pedigree. Work placements, for example, have a relatively long history at HE level, with the use of 'industrial years' as part of sandwich courses, through which undergraduates gain experience and knowledge (within their subject domain) of the world of work. Learning at work, through, for example, training programmes, are again an established part of the staff development territory, but usually these programmes are neither assessed nor therefore accredited. It is formally assessed learning *through* work, however, that is relatively new and innovative and on which this briefing will mostly focus.
In many ways work-based learning (and as we shall see, some of the assessment processes associated with it) can be distinguished from accepted, traditional approaches. Raelin (2000) has argued that work-based learning is different to classroom learning in a number of important ways:

- Firstly, work-based learning is centred around reflection on work practices; it is not merely a question of acquiring knowledge and a set of technical skills (though these can be important), but a case of reviewing and learning from experience;
- Secondly, work-based learning views learning as arising from action and problem-solving within a working environment, and this is centred around live projects and challenges to individuals and organisations. Work-based learning also sees the creation of knowledge as a shared and collective activity, one in which people discuss ideas and share problems and solutions;
- Finally, work-based learning requires not only the acquisition of new knowledge but the acquisition of meta-competence – learning to learn.

Principles of assessment and work-based learning

11

All of these elements have implications for assessment, which will be addressed later. Many companies have been eager to embrace work-based learning, not particularly because of its connections with any notion of lifelong learning of the individual *per se*, but because of its recognised importance to what Senge (1990) termed the 'learning organisation'. The learning organisation is one in which the learning and talent of individuals is encouraged and promoted so that the organisation itself begins to shape its future. This further underlines the need for developing the higher level skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis as well as the ability to be an independent learner and in Schön's (1983) term, a 'reflective practitioner'. But then, a number of fundamental questions arise:

- Should these higher level skills, including reflection, be assessed?
- What should the balance be between these higher level skills and other skills such as knowledge and comprehension?
- In practical terms, how is it possible to assess these skills, particularly in settings such as companies that are outside the physical boundaries of HE institutions?

Before addressing these issues, we need to look at some of the essential principles of assessment so that they can be applied to a work-based learning context.

Boud (1995a) provides a warning that there is probably more ignorance of significant issues in assessment than in any other area of higher education. What makes this so problematic is that while students can, with difficulty, escape from poor teaching, there is no escape from poor assessment.

Should we merely assume that all programmes in HE, whether work-based or otherwise, should always be assessed? Most people, particularly those teaching in HE, and probably students as well, seem to view assessment as part of 'the system'. Cynical proponents of assessment might argue that it exists because it ensures that learners take courses seriously and that it therefore helps ensure the respectability of a programme. But assessment also exists for more positive reasons since, according to Brown et al (1994), it can:

- diagnose a learner's strengths and weaknesses so that the latter can be addressed through further learning and tutor support;
- provide learners with feedback on their progress and achievements;
- provide teachers with feedback on the success of their teaching;
- motivate learners;
- provide a means of selection for further courses.

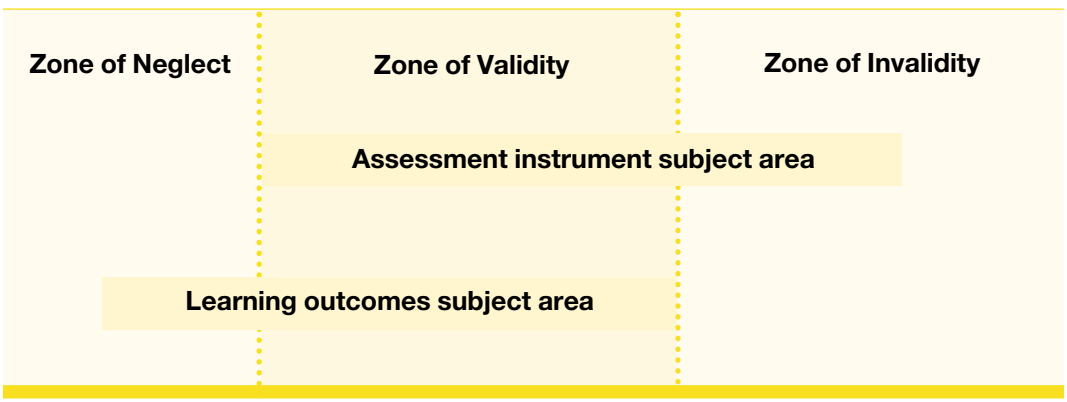
But what should a work-based learning programme assess? As Gonczi (1999) shows, in recent years the focus of interest in work-based learning has moved onto competency standards, sometimes specifically occupational

and employment-related. This means that courses are defined in terms of *outcomes* to be achieved by students. In turn, assessment is linked to the criteria expressed in the competency standards. A number of implications flow from this. Firstly, assessment takes on a problem-centred rather than merely a knowledge-based orientation. To prove competency means having to *demonstrate* the attainment of skills and attitudes, not just having to write about them. Secondly, assessment becomes not merely a means of judging knowledge and performance, but an integral part of the learning process itself. According to Gonczi (1999), the emergence of performance-based assessment suggests that we are moving towards assessment that is:

- standards or criterion-referenced. Judging outcomes against these pre-defined standards is relatively straightforward;
- direct and authentic, related directly to the work situation. This has the potential for motivating learning, since learners can see a direct relevance between what is learnt and what is assessed.

But there are inherent dangers in only assessing observed behaviours and reducing complex behaviours to a series of what could be construed as trivial tasks. Furthermore, while contextualised assessment may be ideal where the constructs being assessed can be clearly defined, where this is not the case, the assessment of more decontextualised knowledge may be more appropriate.
There are other dangers inherent in competence-based assessment. Nicholls (2001) warns that it is a binary system in which judgements are restricted to whether an individual is competent or not. This type of assessment can be viewed as inappropriate to most forms of professional knowledge. Yet, most initial teacher education and professional training within, say, the Health Services is based on this model. What is needed is a system that assesses not only the *products* (outputs) of learning, but also the processes (reflection and self-direction). Hence, although it is possible to agree with Hadrill (1995) that professionalism *implies* competence (her italics), this is a necessary but, perhaps, an insufficient measurement. It is to these measurement issues that we now turn.

Figure 1: Relationship between assessment instrument and defined learning outcomes and the issue of validity



Measurement issues in assessment

While Boud (1995b) warns that discussions of assessment in work-based learning are often reduced to a discourse on measurement, an understanding of measurement issues is just as essential to work-based learning as any other form of learning. We will look in turn at the essential measurement criteria of validity, reliability and authenticity.

Validity and assessment

To ensure validity, an assessment instrument must measure what it was intended to measure. This may sound like an obvious statement, but it is not difficult, in designing assessment tools, to stray away from the central goal.

Figure 1 shows how the mapping of learning intentions and assessment processes can become mismatched. Some learning outcomes have not been addressed by the instrument (Zone of Neglect), while other parts of the assessment instrument cover issues of no direct relevance to the research study at all (Zone of Invalidity). To achieve validity, the research instrument subject area and operationally defined subject areas must exactly match (Zone of Validity).

The issue of validity, however, is much more complex than this. At a basic level, it can be classified as three types: construct validity, content validity and predictive validity.

Case Study 1: Validity in assessment

A work-based learning project is being undertaken as part of a work-based learning module in marketing. The learning outcomes of this module are that the learner will be able not only to describe a range of alternative marketing models, but to select an appropriate strategy and design as well as implement and evaluate a small-scale marketing campaign. Given these outcomes, an assessment instrument is written which specifies not only the planning, implementation and evaluation of the marketing campaign, but that the learner also builds a database to record the reactions of those clients who respond to the campaign. At first sight, this might seem a valid and appropriate activity. But if we examine the module's original intended outcomes, the issue of client databases and software design is not even mentioned. If, in hindsight, it is felt that such an issue is important, then it should be written into the module's outcome criteria so that these and the assessment specifications are mapped onto each other.

Construct validity

Construct validity is concerned with the measurement of abstract concepts and traits, such as ability, anxiety, attitude, knowledge, etc. Given that one of the objectives of work-based learning is to encourage the development of the reflective practitioner, then the abstract notion of 'reflection' could, in principle, also be measured and assessed. Before any trait can be measured, however, it has to be operationally defined. Taking each trait, the programme developer proceeds to elaborate on all of the characteristics that make up that trait. For example, using our example of reflection, this could be characterised as the ability to recognise one's own strengths and weaknesses, to value one's own positive achievements and to produce plans for new action and self-development based on previous reflection.

Content validity

Content validity is an estimate of the extent to which an assessment tool takes items from the subject domain being addressed, including not only cognitive topics but also behaviours (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1984). For this to be achievable, it is necessary to define accurately the content domain and its boundaries. So, for example, producing a test on how to use the drawing facility in Microsoft Word might be relatively straightforward since this is a routine procedure. But taking a work-based learning topic such as 'project management' might not be so simple. The subject domain is broad and complex. Is there such a thing as project management in the abstract, or are the subjects of project management in engineering and project management as a management tool for business planning quite distinct? The principles and practice of project management may be quite different according to the operational context.

Predictive validity

This shows how well a test can forecast a future trait such as job performance or attainment. It is little use a test having both construct and content validity if it fails to identify, say, those who are likely to be 'high performers' in a key work role. It could be argued that predictive validity is of particular importance to organisations that are sponsoring their staff through work-based learning programmes. For most organisations, and particularly those operating in a commercial environment, the financial 'bottom line' is paramount. Like any other activity, sponsorship of a work-based learning programme is seen as a means by which the skills and aptitudes of staff can be developed for the commercial benefit of the organisation. It is important, then, when work-based learning assessment processes identify someone as a 'high performer', that this is translated into high performance activity in the workplace.

Reliability

According to Oppenheim (1992) for an assessment instrument to be reliable it must be consistent. If we were to take, say, a ruler, how sure can we be that it is always a reliable measuring device? If it is made of metal, does it expand in extreme heat and therefore give different readings on hot and cold days? Alternatively, we might use it on two different days with similar temperatures, but do we mark off the measurement of a line on a piece of

paper with the same degree of care and accuracy? For an assessment tool to be reliable we would expect it to give us the same results when something was measured yesterday and today (providing the underlying trait(s) being measured have not changed). Similarly, we would expect any differences found in traits between two different people to be based on real differences between the individuals and not be due to inconsistencies in the measuring instrument. If an assessment instrument is unreliable, it cannot be valid.
Like validity, there are several types of measurement of reliability. Black (1993) describes a number of them, including:

Stability. This measures the scores achieved on the same test or assessment instrument taken on two different occasions and will be the same or similar. The problem here for work-based learning is that it is difficult to ensure that the same aspects of the same task can be assessed on different occasions in the workplace. Indeed, since one of the objectives of work-based learning is to develop competence during placements or on a work-based learning programme, it is change rather than consistency that is required.

Inter-judge reliability. This compares the consistency of observations when more than one person is judging. An example would be where two assessors judge the quality of a work-based project. The reliability of the observation is provided by the degree to which the views (scores) of each judge correlate.

Work-based learning, when involving the judging of competencies, usually requires the collective opinions of both HE tutors and work-based assessors (usually experienced professionals).

Intra-judge reliability. This is the extent to which an assessor is consistent when judging across a range of people – for example, marking a batch of projects from a particular module. Gonczi (1999) argues that for a competency-based assessment system, a variety of assessment methods need to be used if reliability is to be addressed. These could include a mixture of assignments, projects, presentations, etc. The range of possible assessment tools is discussed in the next section.

The reliability of assessment will be improved by assessors agreeing in advance a set of guidelines for marking. Case Study 2 presents some guidelines suggested by Mehrens and Lehmann (1984), with some additional ideas added here for work-based learning.

Case Study 2: Guidelines for improving reliability of marking with specific application to work-based learning

General guidelines	Application to Work-based learning
Before marking, check marking criteria against a few randomly selected papers to determine appropriateness of criteria	Since work-based learning assignments and projects are contextualised to specific work situations, these criteria will tend to have to be rather general
Strive to maintain consistency in marking over time	Set dates for hand-in of projects so that they can be marked together or at similar time
Arrange papers in random order before and after marking to minimise the influence of good papers on bad, and vice versa	As applicable to work-based learning as any other subject domain
Mark one question on all papers to reduce the effect that responses to other questions could have on the one being marked	Assessments can be 'phased' over the duration of the work-based learning module or programme to reduce this effect
Mark all students' work to an assessment task at one sitting, as marking over time increases chances of variation in marking	Set dates for hand-in of projects so that they can be marked together or at similar time
Have students' names removed from scripts to avoid prejudices, positive and negative	Difficult to achieve in work-based learning since the work focus of assessments may reveal the source of the writing. If assessment includes a presentation, impossible to achieve
Strive to distinguish between content and style, as some students are more articulate and/or rigorous with their grammar than others, which can influence marks	The professional and problem-solving focus of work-based learning means that style can often be very important since projects and assignments may later be put to practical use by organisations. Whether style is assessed and accorded marks is a matter for debate
Have two independent markers or mark on two separate occasions	Often addressed through the use of internal or external moderator who may need to have both academic subject knowledge and knowledge of professional competence. Especially important where assessment is against professional standards
Give comments on errors to provide feedback	Particularly important where the development of professional competencies is involved

(Source: adapted from Mehrens and Lehmann, 1984)

Authenticity

Authenticity means there is certainty that the work being assessed has been produced through the intellectual endeavour of the learner. With traditional subjects, and particularly when the subject is being assessed in traditional ways (such as through formal examinations), authenticity is virtually guaranteed. It is prudent to add the rejoinder 'virtually' because there are many stories, some of them even true, about the ingenious ways in which students over the years have 'cheated the system'. On the whole, however, examination-based assessments can be construed as relatively authentic when it comes to identifying the work as that of the candidate.

Many traditional subjects, however, have moved to a combination of both formal examinations and continuous assessment. Since assignments and projects are completed outside the scrutiny of assessors, there is, in principle, wider scope for unfair practices. The World Wide Web now contains a growing cottage industry of sites where one can find (at a price) a range of completed assignments on a wealth of subjects – a veritable virtual community of plagiarists! Since assessment in work-based learning is also largely based upon live projects (rather than closed examinations), then the danger of plagiarism must also be present. This, then, raises serious issues for HE staff who are assessing and HE institutions that are accrediting work-based learning programmes. It could be argued, however, that given the unique nature of most work-based projects (unique in the sense that they are individual to a particular company or a particular department or task), sharing or copying of information may be difficult. Furthermore, steps can be taken to check the authenticity of work through a number of quality assurance procedures, that are standard to most programmes that involve elements of continuous assessment, including:

- the moderation of all written assessments by members of the work-based learning course team;
- providing the external examiner with access to all written assessments;
- an oral examination, so that the assignment or project has to be defended by the learner.

But, in addition to these, work-based learning may also use employers' representatives, programme sponsors within the organisation, mentors or line managers to authenticate the originality of assignments. It should be borne in mind that this process will also be serving the interests of the sponsoring organisation which wants new, creative and original thinking to emerge from the programme – not the duplication of ideas.

Methods of assessment in work-based learning

Assessment methods in work-based learning tend to differ from those used in more traditional teaching and learning environments, in part at least because they are delivered to an adult audience. It was Knowles (1980) who coined the term 'andragogy' to argue that in contrast to children, adults are more self-directed, that they bring personal experience to the learning situation and that they want to solve problems and to apply their learning. If this is so, then assessment methods used in work-based learning require more of a focus on problem-solving, and also that students have more of an ownership of the assessment process. The following assessment methods illustrate this learner-centred and problem-centred approach. In each case, an indication will be given of the scale of effort demanded of assessors.

Self and peer assessment

Self assessment can involve students in either evaluating their own work or even grading it against criteria set by a tutor. Brown and Knight (1994) argue that self-evaluative skills are important in developing in students an awareness of their own abilities, making for more competent learning. Indeed, becoming a reflective, self-directed learner is the basis of becoming a lifelong learner. Of course, the reliability of such self-grading is open to question, but the research quoted by Brown and Knight shows no consistency of over- or under-grading across gender or learner age groups. But self assessment is not necessarily about grading, it may also be about reflecting on the learning process itself.

Some of the potential problems of self assessment, such as reliability, also apply to peer assessment. Peers are probably more likely to over-grade a learner's work than under-grade, and the danger of collusion is always present. Sometimes lazy or less able students will attach themselves to more proactive groups in order to hide their own weaknesses. In order to ensure that problems such as this are minimised, it is important that assessment criteria are decided on in advance and used. Brown and Knight (1994) provide a useful case study of how this can be achieved in practice. (see case study 3.)

Assessment effort: low/moderate. Clearly, the onus for the assessment process is on learners themselves. Tutors, however, still have a role to play in helping learners to establish assessment criteria and in facilitating the reflective process.

Assignments and projects

The assignment, of course, is quite a traditional mode of assessment, often a class of learners answering a set question. In work-based learning, however, the question may be posed in only general terms, with the work context of the learner providing the setting and much of the subject matter. Since work-based learning has a practical focus, assignments may be called projects. To achieve more reliability in the assessment process, it may be useful to specify a range of marking criteria and weightings (see case study 4). This sort of framework helps both tutors (particularly if double-marking or moderation is carried out) and also students, who are given a much clearer idea of what the assessor is seeking. In setting the question, the assessor may need to relate learning outcomes to one of the following categories:

- Operational context;
- Knowledge and understanding;

- Cognitive and intellectual skills;
- Practical skills;
- Key/transferable skills.

Case study 4 provides an example of a work-based learning module, the learning outcomes of which have been mapped against these categories. To achieve both construct and content validity, assessment tools are then mapped onto these learning objectives. It should be noted that it is not only assignments that should be mapped against module level descriptors, but all work-based learning assessment tools.

The case study provides a set of learning outcomes for a module that contains two assessment tools: a presentation and an assignment. It illustrates both the learning outcomes for the module as a whole (Assessment Brief) and the way in which some of these outcomes are then selected for one of the assessment tools, the assignment (Assignment Brief). Note that there is a set of specified learning outcomes at the end of the Assignment Brief, but that the learner is permitted to include additional learning outcomes from the Assessment Brief (reflecting the learner-centred philosophy of work-based learning and in line with notions of negotiated learning).

Assessment effort: high. Considerable tutor effort is required, initially in devising and negotiating learning outcomes with learners, then in marking the material. Work-based learning assignments make particular demands on tutor time because they are usually contextually unique. Typically, it may take between one and two hours to mark a 3,000 word assignment, and to provide constructive feedback.

Case Study 3: Peer group assessment (the Egg game)

To gain experience in the peer group assessment process, students are divided into small groups and asked to make a container to carry an egg which can be dropped from a height without breaking the egg. Firstly, the groups must decide on the criteria on which they are to be assessed. Once these have been established, the groups decide how much weighting is to be allocated to each criterion. Next, the groups have to decide whether what they are assessing is product or process, and who it is that will do the assessing: the tutor, the individual (self assessment), peers in their own group (intra) or peers in other groups (inter). Once these stages have been completed, the students are ready to complete the container. As this task is undertaken, the tutor scribes a flipchart of issues that are occurring so that they can be discussed at the end of the exercise.
The exercise helps students to think about the process of peer assessment and to face issues such as collusion, fairness and validity. After this, they are able to go on to use peer assessment as part of the formal assessment process.

(Source: adapted from Brown and Knight, 1994)

Case Study 4: Module level descriptors and assessments

Assessment Brief

Module Title: Market Development **Level:** 3

Number of assignments required: 2

This assessment brief gives you an overview of how you will be assessed for this module. The Assignment Briefs will give you further information

Aim of module: To understand the issues, processes and decisions involved in developing markets for new and existing products and services.

Learning outcomes for module: At the end of the module, you should be able to meet the following learning outcomes:

KU.1	Define relationship marketing and identify appropriate models for relationship development	**knowledge and understanding**
KU.2	Describe, illustrate and analyse market segmentation and targeting	
KU.3	Describe and evaluate marketing information systems	
KU.4	Synthesise market development information, concepts and techniques in the introduction of a new product or service into the market	
CS.3.1	Critically analyse and evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources without guidance, using a wide range of appropriate techniques	**intellectual/ cognitive skills**
CS.3.2	Critically review evidence supporting conclusions/recommendations including its reliability, validity and significance, and investigate contradictory information, identifying reasons for contradictions	
CS.3.3	Generate ideas, with minimum guidance, through the analysis of information, abstract data and concepts towards a given purpose and design novel solutions	
CS.3.5	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing	
PS.1	Plan and evaluate the introduction of a new product or service into the market smoothly and profitably	**subject-specific practical skills**
PS.2	Identify, and use, appropriate marketing information systems subject-specific practical skills	
KS.3.1	In self appraisal and reflection on own practice, be confident in the application of own criteria and judgement	**transferable/ key skills**
KS.3.2	Manage own development of learning and performance with minimum guidance, using a full range of resources, seeking and making use of feedback	
KS.3.3	Communicate effectively in an appropriate and professional manner and format	
KS.3.6	Work with, and meet obligations to, others; negotiate in a learning/professional context and manage conflict	

Assessments

Assessment tasks	**% of marks**
Assignment 1: Presentation	20%
Assignment 2: Work-based project	80%
TOTAL	**100%**

Note: You will be negotiating the focus and context of the two assignments. You need to ensure, with the tutor, that across the two assignments all the learning outcomes are met.

Assignment Brief

Module Title: Market Development **Level** 3 **Assignment: 2 of 2**

Assignment: Negotiated work-based project

Format of assignment presentation

Written, 4,500 – 5,000 words

If there are circumstances which prevent you presenting this assignment in word processed or hand-written format, then please discuss this with the tutor to agree an alternative format.

Weighting:

As you will have seen on the assessment brief, this assignment contributes 80% towards achievement of this module.

Process:

You will be negotiating the focus of this assignment with your tutor. During that negotiation you will be considering:

- the rationale for undertaking the project;
- what you wish to achieve for the organisation;
- what you wish to achieve for yourself;
- how you will undertake the project;
- which of the learning outcomes you will meet.

After an initial discussion, you will be asked to complete the Project Agreement, and there are guidelines to help you in this process.

The tutor will then review the agreement, and return this to you either confirmed, or with any comments or suggestions.

If you wish to word-process the project agreement and would like a copy, let us have details of your email address and we will send it as an attachment.

Hand-in date:

Please ensure that you include a copy of your project agreement with the assignment.

Notes on completing the Work-based learning Project Agreement

1. Title

This will be determined by the overview of the project, and you may find it easier to complete the rest of this agreement, and then return to the title.

2. Overview of the Project

What is the purpose of the project? What is the intended focus/subject? This may be the first (or other) stage in a larger initiative. You need to be realistic about what you can achieve in your anticipated time scale.

3. Rationale

Why are you undertaking this initiative, for the organisation? What is the current position in your organisation?

4 A Organisational objectives

What are you hoping to achieve for the organisation through the project?

B Organisational success criteria

How will you know if you have been successful?

5 A Personal development objectives

What personal development objectives do you have for yourself in undertaking this project?

B Personal development success criteria

How will you know if you have been successful?

6. Overview of intended plan of action

Please give brief details of:

- the actions you intend to take;
- the information you anticipate you will need, and where you will get it from;
- who you will involve.

If it is of use, there is an action plan proforma attached.

7. Target date for completion

This date will be negotiated with the group. On a taught programme, this is usually four weeks from the end of the final taught session.

8. Module learning outcomes

A number have already been identified, namely:

CS.3.1 Critically analyse and evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources without guidance, using a range of appropriate techniques

CS.3.2 Critically review evidence supporting conclusions/recommendations including its reliability, validity and significance, and investigate contradictory information, identifying reasons for contradictions

CS.3.3 Generate ideas, with minimum guidance, through the analysis of information, abstract data and concepts towards a given purpose and design novel solutions

CS.3.5 Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management junctions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing

KS.3.1 In self-appraisal and reflection on own practice, be confident in the application of own criteria and judgement

KS.3.2 Manage own development of learning and performance with minimum guidance, using a full range of resources, seeking and making use of feedback

KS.3.3 Communicate effectively in an appropriate and professional manner and format

The remainder, mainly from Knowledge and Understanding, and Subject Specific Practical Skills, will be identified through the process of agreeing the focus of the project and the objectives.

Memorandum Report

This involves the learner summarising the results of a research study in one or perhaps two sides of A4 paper. Not only is this type of assessment method relatively quick to mark, it forces learners to be succinct and focused on the essential issues. The memorandum report also encourages the kind of summarising skills that are valuable in business, emulating the function of a management summary in a business report. A typical memorandum report might contain:

- a title that is instructive and illuminates what the report is about;
- administrative details such as the author's name, the tutor's name, the course module name and the date;
- terms of reference, including the background to the research and its objectives;
- findings, including graphs, tables, figures and appendices.

Assessment effort: low. While the background and results might be unique, this is a relatively short and succinct piece of work.

Portfolios

Portfolios are used to present evidence of achievement, and comprise the amalgamation of documents, including reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, email communications and perhaps also tape recordings and videos and graphical material. Students will need guidance on what to include and what to omit, and on the size of the portfolio. It is important, however, that students are not just required to present this evidence of what they have done, but to also provide an overarching account of what they have learned in the process. This should include references to the documentary material. Portfolios are the usual tool used for the assessment of evidence provided for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

Assessment effort: very high. Portfolios contain large volumes of material and usually an 'overarching' piece. The originality of a portfolio make it difficult for an assessor to reduce the assessment burden by relying on previous knowledge of the subject. Student guidance is also likely to be heavy.

Dissertations and theses

The dissertation or thesis has a long history in academic writing, but is still of value to a more work-based setting, because it requires the use of higher level skills of critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation. While proof of authenticity may sometimes be an issue, this is often less the case with work-based learning, because of the original context and setting of the subject matter. If there are concerns about originality, then assessors might wish to include a viva into the assessment proceedings so that the written work has to be orally defended. This might be an opportunity for both academic assessors and work-based managers or sponsors to work together in the assessment process. Higher education tutors will, clearly, be concerned with academic standards, the appropriate formulation of research objectives and research methodology. Business sponsors may tend to focus on results that have some practical impact on the organisation.
Due to their length, and the fact that academic processes have to be observed, work-based learning students may feel nervous about the practical value of dissertations and theses. It may be appropriate to produce a short, additional, more business-focussed summary of the dissertation that concentrates more on findings and recommendations and less on the literature and research methodology.

Assessment effort: very high. Relatively large volumes of materials will require assessment, and student guidance is likely to be heavy.

Presentations

Presentations are an ideal vehicle for demonstrating the findings or recommendations of a project and can be assessed either by the tutor or by a peer group. It is important, however, that valid assessment criteria are specified before the presentation. Presentations can add to confidence that the work undertaken by the learner is original and authentic. If used as one of the summative assessment tools at the culmination of a programme, it may be appropriate to involve supervisors, mentors or line managers. In co-operation with the university tutor, this assessment panel can provide constructive feedback on the outcomes of a study, so ensuring that this is a learning as well as an assessment process.

Assessment effort: low. Mainly confined to helping to draw up assessment criteria and completing the assessment pro forma (or getting this completed by the presenter's peer group).

Poster displays

Often used in group settings, getting students to produce a poster display can be more interesting and innovative then setting a written report. Learners are set a task or problem and asked to present the findings on a single A1 sheet of paper. This kind of activity, particularly if performed with groups, can get learners to:

- work collectively and constructively in teams;
- summarise information succinctly but in a way that is visually appealing and attention-grabbing.

Before the activity, the learners might be required to negotiate and agree a set of assessment criteria that may later be applied by a peer group to each other's work.

Assessment effort: low. Mainly confined to helping to draw up assessment criteria and completing the assessment pro forma (or getting this completed by the presenter's peer group).

Placements

Placements have long been used as the 'sandwich' element of, typically, four-year degree courses, but in the past were not always assessed, at least in a formal sense. Today, with the move towards competence-based learning, placements are seen as an essential element in forging links between theory and practice. Often, a learning contract will be drawn up which specifies appropriate learning outcomes against which the student must collect evidence of achievement over a period of time. These achievements are then verified by the workplace supervisor or mentor against the agreed standards.

While on placement, the student may be required or encouraged to keep a learning log or diary. This will not only detail events, but also the student's feelings and reactions to them. The diary may include critical incidents, that is, events that produce an emotional reaction (either positive or negative) in the learner. When undertaking a programme of professional development, it would be usual for these critical incidents to be brought to the attention of the learner's peer group for discussion and assistance. While reflective journals can be formally assessed, this may be inappropriate where issues of a very personal nature are discussed. Boud (1995b) recommends self-assessment, involving an assessment of whether the learner's personal goals are being met, and how new activities can help towards meeting these goals.

Assessment effort: high. May require detailed knowledge of professional competence criteria, involvement in learner preparation for placement, visits to observe learner on placement and discussions with placement supervisors.

Learning contracts

Learning contracts are used to construct an individual programme of learning based upon an assessment of learners' current competencies, compared to what level of competence they want to achieve. Brown and Knight (1994) specify four stages in learning contract development:

- the skills, knowledge and understanding profile which can be constructed using specifically designed proformas;
- the needs analysis, specifying the learning outcomes learners need to achieve;
- action planning either individually, in small groups or with a tutor, to identify what learners are going to do, timescales and resources (particularly tutor and peer support) required;
- evaluation of how successfully, or otherwise, learning outcomes have been achieved. Particularly where outcomes have not been achieved, this may lead to further action plans and activity (and evaluation).

Typically, a learning contract may involve the clear identification of the following criteria:

- the learner's personal objectives;
- their professional objectives;
- any potential work-based projects or initiatives they wish to deal with;
- any potential APL or APEL claim;
- the specification of an academically coherent set of modules or learning opportunities, addressing the learning objectives;
- an agreed timetable;
- evidence of support and resources that can be accessed at work and in the University;
- evidence of support as a learner within an organisational context (for example, from a sponsor, mentor or line manager). The validity and reliability of work placement assessment may be enhanced by the verification of learning outcomes by these placement supervisors or mentors.

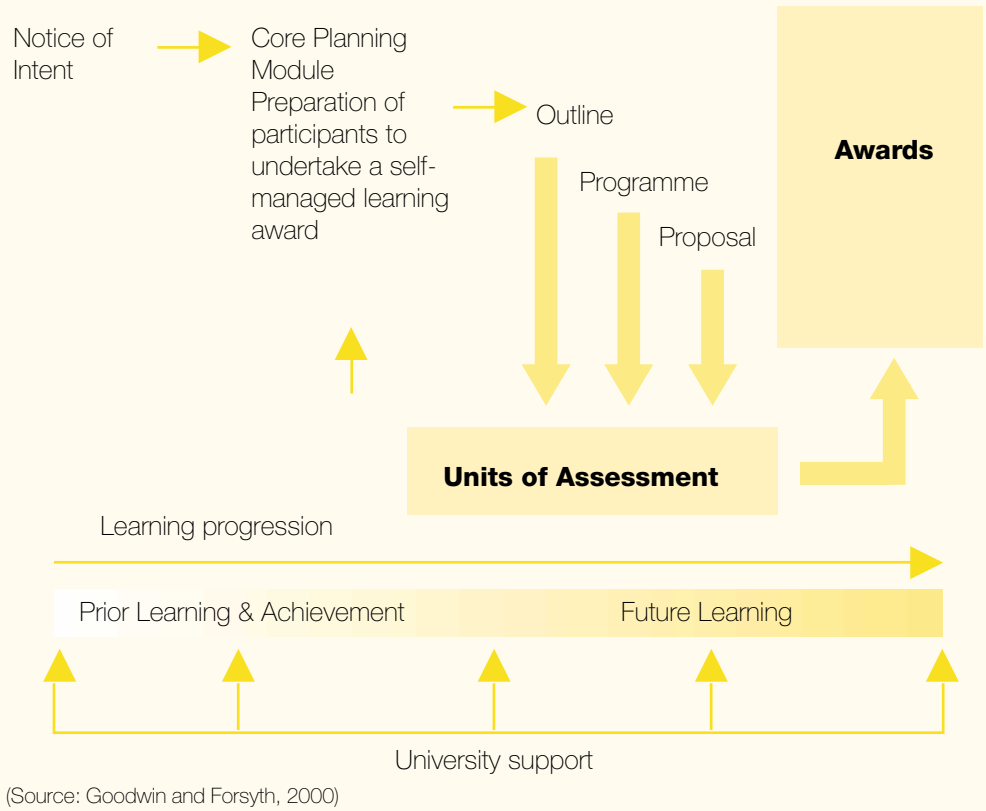
Goodwin and Forsyth (2000) argue that learning contracts allow learners to negotiate non-standard programmes of learning that reflect both their own professional needs as well as the needs of their employer. Case study 5 provides an example of how prior learning and learning contracts for future learning can be combined as part of a professional studies award.

Case Study 5: The Professional Studies Award Model

Learners begin by completing a Notice of Intent, which gives an indication of their aspirations, curriculum vitae, their current job role and employer support. This provides important background information for the Core Planning Module which allows learners to undertake a programme of self-managed learning based upon a series of learning agreements, which include both an Outline Programme Proposal (development plan) and Unit Assessment Agreement (action plan). The Awards are mapped against clearly articulated generic level descriptors, which provide a benchmark for assessment, planning, monitoring and reflection. Up to 50% of the credit required for an award may be achieved through APEL. Each learning agreement is supported by tutors who work with learners both individually and in groups, while specialist tutors support particular learning areas. The programmes are underpinned by online resources such as email, discussion groups, chat lines, bulletin boards and C&IT-based curriculum material.

(See Figure 2 below)

Figure 2: Assessment process within Negotiated Award framework



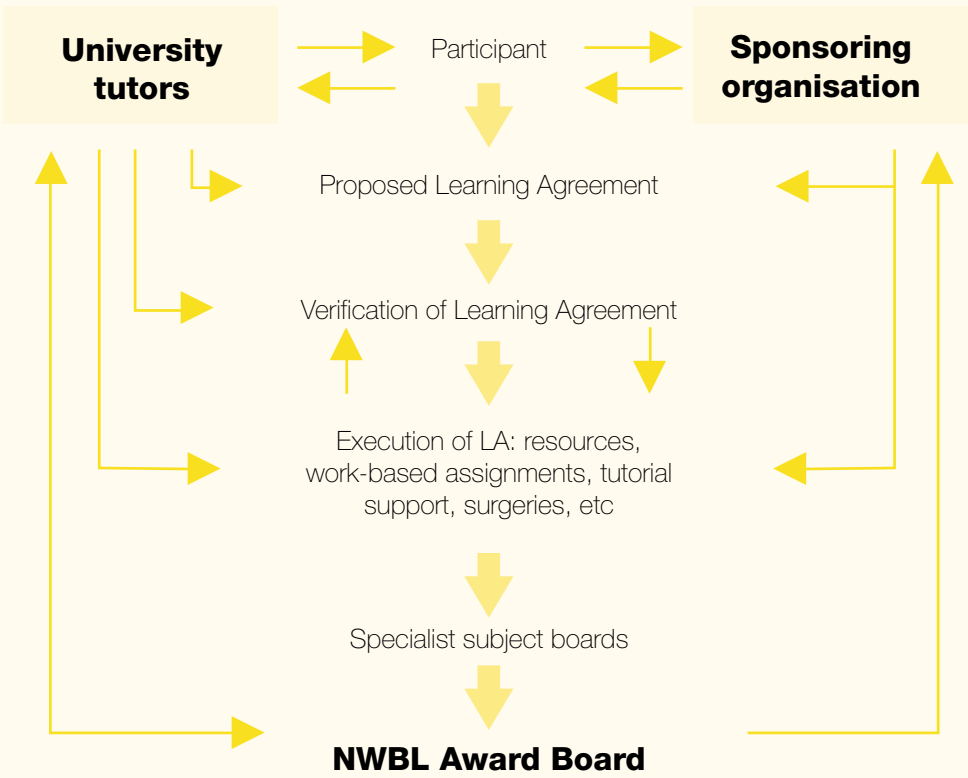
(Source: Goodwin and Forsyth, 2000)

Significantly, learners are asked to comment on the validity of their programme at all stages, building encouragement for self-ownership of the programme, but also providing the university with an evaluation mechanism. The achievement of learning outcomes, specified in the learning agreements, is verified by Specialist Subject Boards (see Figure 3), but shows the tripartite nature of the partnership: the university, learners and their employers. For example, the learning agreement must have the approval of both university tutors and the learner's sponsoring organisation.

Thus, we can see that learning contracts can provide the framework for a programme of learning, whereby learning objectives and resources are identified by the learner and both the contract and its achievement are verified by university academics.

Assessment effort: high. Although it seems as though much of the curriculum planning and execution passes to the learner, the assessment load on tutors is merely shifted from being a provider of knowledge into a supporter and facilitator of student-directed learning.

Figure 3: Profile of a Learning Agreement



(Source: Goodwin and Forsyth, 2000)

Conclusion

11

Work-based learning at higher education level that involves learning through work raises new challenges for higher education. Since its main audience is adults in full- or part-time employment who wish to study part-time, the philosophy of work-based learning is to regard learners as self-directed problem-solvers who bring their personal skills, knowledge and attitudes to the learning situation. However, another group are those students who engage in work-based learning from within a programme. These students may have different needs, expectations and approaches to study. The aim of work-based learning is also to develop a dynamic synergy and dialectic between academic learning and work-based practice. Assessment methods, therefore, reflect all of these elements. They specify what the learner will achieve (outcomes) but not necessarily the means. They encourage learners to solve important work-related problems, and to understand and use academic theories and models in doing so. They expect learners to be self-motivated but also self-reflective, to work with others (perhaps in peer groups) and even to assess both their own performance and that of their peers.

The measurement issues of validity, reliability and authenticity are just as important to work-based learning as to more traditional subjects. But, in many ways, work-based learning makes these issues easier to address. Assessment tools require the delivery of outcomes of direct relevance to the workplace (content and predictive validity). There is a significant array of assessment tools available and several can be used to assess each work-based learning module (reliability). The authenticity of work can be demonstrated through the use of vivas and presentations, often involving the contribution of managers or programme sponsors. Indeed, assessment processes may change from being the sole remit of the academic tutor into a partnership between tutors, employers and even learners (through critical self-reflection).

Work-based learning is becoming increasingly important both for organisations which need professional development to create a dynamic, flexible workforce, and to higher education institutions that recognise the workplace as a legitimate site of learning. Assessment processes lie at the centre of this relationship. For them to work effectively and constructively, it is essential that learners, sponsoring organisations and HE institutions negotiate collectively to put in place assessment tools that meet the vested interests of all partners in the learning process.

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