

Unlocking Work Based Learning: What's the key?

*Characteristics of and approaches to the
employer engagement agenda for higher
education*

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Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

1. **Work-based learning**
2. **Higher level**
3. **Qualifications**
4. **Credit**
5. **What's new?**

Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

Work-based learning:

1. Based on and complementary to work
2. Directly relevant to the workplace
3. Takes work and professional practice as the starting point for curriculum design
4. Benefits for learner, company and university
5. Not supply-side; learner and employer are key partners

Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

Higher Level

1. Recognisable as Higher Education
2. Aligned with QAA qualification descriptors
3. Robust approaches to QA
4. Combining academic and theoretical knowledge with work-based skills
5. Assessment fit for academic and professional purposes

Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

Credit

1. Codifies higher learning in a recognisable way ...
2. ... as learners relate the familiar circumstances of their work contexts to the requirements of academic award
3. Recognises many legitimate sites of higher level knowledge production
4. Formal recognition as “higher level”
5. APEL – valuing what the learner brings

Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

Qualifications

1. Rigour and challenge equivalent to any other HE award
2. HE qualifications – even short ones – have a positive impact
3. Enhancing an individual's skills
4. Exchange or generation of new knowledge
5. Increased confidence in work

Unlocking Work Based Learning – What's the Key?

What's new?

What's currently significant ... getting attention ... generating interest ...

What questions are being raised?

1. Disaggregation
2. Frameworks
3. Systemic take-up
4. One institution's response
5. Will the WBL agenda survive a change of government?
6. ... later!

Disaggregation

- Achievement ... progression ... retention. What do these terms mean for part-time, work-based HE learners?
- The impact of “bite-sized” programmes of work-based learning in HE on individuals and their organisations far outweighs their value in terms of the credits required for a major award.
- Are disaggregated awards better at responding to employers’ needs than longer programmes?
- Are disaggregated awards at level 4 the way to acknowledge achievement and provide ‘stepping stones’ for progression from level 3?
- But are they only recognised as deficits of the “normal” 120 credit full-time year of study?

Frameworks

- A longstanding focus of interest and development, but developments are gathering momentum and pace ...
- CPD focus ...

Systemic take-up

- How does the system respond to issues like self-paced learning?
- Who is involved in market making?
- Where are we on the continuum between systemic take-up and isolated examples of good practice where dedicated people do interesting things?

University of Derby Corporate: one institution's response

- Highly visible
- Runs as a devolved structure within mainstream university procedures
- Bespoke, but not 'new every time'
- A portfolio of distinctive tools from which to develop customised learning solutions for business
- A learning repository containing re-useable curriculum resources
- A customer relationship management tool
- A customer and delegate Portal to capture all delegate information relating to enrolment, assessment, retention and achievement

University of Derby Corporate

- **A new, single mission business model** for University level Employer Engagement
- **Workforce Development Fellows**
 - A new, well respected and supported academic career pathway at the heart of the institution
- **A Business & Enterprise Centre**
 - Purpose built to fill a gap in the sub-region's learning and development infrastructure

Workforce Development Fellows

Provide professional academic guidance and support to employers and employees

- Working to **understand employers'** workforce development needs
- Developing **bespoke 'teaching/training' proposals** to meet those needs
- Contributing to **quality delivery** of programmes to meet agreed learning outcomes
- Developing **sustainable relationships** with employers to continuing the 'upskilling' and development process

Workforce Development Fellows

Support academic colleagues within the University and in the wider field of Work-based learning

- Identify and **encourage academic colleagues** who wish to work on employer engagement projects
- Provide **guidance on the context and environment** of work based learning
- Ensure that the latest **academic research is integrated** into our Employer Engagement programmes
- Provide direction for the development of **innovative and inclusive delivery platforms** for our programmes

Workforce Development Fellows

Undertake Marketing and Promotion

- Use and engage in research to **understand Employer needs**
- Develop **programmes and 'products'** that meet employers needs cost effectively
- Develop and **promote 'points of distinction'** that provide University of Derby Corporate with a competitive advantage
- Find **innovative ways of improving the profile** and reputation of the University of Derby
- Develop a programme of **internal marketing** to encourage academic staff to fully engage with employer engagement

Workforce Development Fellows

Engaged in UDC Operations

- A **fully integrated team** within the UDC framework
- Developing **innovative learning approaches** for employers and employees
- A source of **academic guidance and rigour** with the broader UDC team
- A team to **cement cohesive working** relationship between UDC and faculties

As we approach four years post-Leitch ...

- Have WBL developments been deflected by the recession and the current increases in full-time students?
- Is there an increased focus on HE for those currently working?
- How often will the current workforce need to re-skill during their working lives?
- **Will the WBL agenda survive a change of government?**

Well ...

- Leitch (2006) crystallised a growing view that enhancing the higher level learning achievements of the current UK workforce was an essential element of improving business performance.
- The percentages ... 40%; 45%; 29%; 70%
- Such views have been sustained in the years post-Leitch. For example:
 - CBI / Universities UK / HEFCE: *Stepping Higher* (2008)
 - UKCES: *Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK* (May 2009)
 - *Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through effective employee engagement* (BIS, July 2009).

And ...

- The change of UK government in May 2010 does not change the need to improve the UK skills base.
- This was the starting point of Leitch (2006:39) which reported that, despite recent improvements the UK's skills base remains: '*... mediocre by international standards*'.
- The aspiration in 2006 was for the UK to be a world leader in skills by 2020, equivalent to 8th out of 30 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- The latest date for the next UK General Election is May 2015.