

Staff guide to work-based learning

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Introduction to Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is used to describe programmes of learning where the learning which takes place is undertaken primarily at and through work and is for the purposes of work. Gibbs and Garnett define work-based learning as:

“A learning process which focuses university level critical thinking upon work (paid or unpaid), in order to facilitate the recognition, acquisition and application of individual and collective knowledge, skills and abilities, to achieve specific outcomes of significance to the learner, their work and the university.

(Gibbs and Garnett 2007:411)

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The work-based learner can be in paid or significant unpaid (for example voluntary) work provided that the work requires the development and application of high level learning. Some of this learning requirement might come from planned formal learning but in many cases a main source of learning will be the experience of work. WBL derives from learning activities anchored in authentic

practice and focused upon developing the practitioner's ability to solve the real problems of their work roles. Knowledge and skills developed while carrying out work-based activities are acquired in the situation and context in which they will be subsequently used, rather than in an abstract context. This approach maximises the capacity for learning wherever it occurs by combining the strengths of formal and informal learning opportunities, and integrating work-based activities within formal courses.

Work-based learning has proved to be an effective means of applying higher-level expertise to meet the business objectives of employers. Such programmes require the development of genuine partnership between the University and employer based upon an understanding of the business imperatives and related knowledge and skill needs of the employer. WBL is particularly relevant to the Degree Apprenticeship agenda in the UK as it focuses University level critical thinking upon real life work projects and allows for a high level of employer involvement in the design and implementation of the work-based learning programme.

The University of Hull Work-Based Learning Framework

The University of Hull Work-Based Learning Framework facilitates the negotiation of work-based programmes leading to all the major awards of the University. The standard WBL Framework award title has the generic stem “Professional Practice in” and is followed by the work based focus of the programme. For example, a major financial institution might work with the University to design a Postgraduate Certificate “Professional Practice in Financial Management”. The award is in the Work-Based Learning field of study and demonstrates the achievement of the learning outcomes described within the validated Work-Based Learning Framework.

The WBL Framework uses the modular structure of the University with 20 credits as the standard module size. Framework modules have been developed within four broad strands of learning activity:

1. Learning Review and Professional Development (LRPD): these modules enable learners to reflect on current practice and develop action plans for continued personal and professional development. This is a 20 credit module available at levels 4 to 7.
2. Designing Practitioner Research: these modules introduce learners to practitioner research approaches and issues and supports their development of a work-based research proposal. This is a 20 credit point module available at levels 4 to 7.
3. Negotiated Learning: these modules allow learners to undertake negotiated learning on a topic which is related to their work and has been formally agreed as part of the programme approval process. Negotiated learning modules are available as 20 or 40 credit modules at levels 4, 5 and 6 and 20, 30, 40 or 60 at Level 7.

4. Work-Based Project: these modules allow learners to undertake a project of a research and development nature which is directly related to their work. The content of the module is formally agreed as part of the programme approval process. Work based learning project modules are available as 20 and 40 credit modules at levels 4, 5 and 6 and 20, 30, 40 and 60 credit modules at level 7.

Student Handbooks

Each of the four strands of learning activity identified above are supported by a Student Handbook. The Handbooks are designed around a series of learning tasks and are generic in nature. The learning tasks feed into the assessment requirement for the module and in the case of apprenticeships may also have the potential to generate evidence required for the “end point assessment” of the apprenticeship. The Handbooks are available in soft copy and can be used as they stand or they can be customized to a particular employer or occupational area. The Handbooks are not written on the basis of a standard form or pattern of delivery but it is recommended that they be used as part of a blended learning approach.



Learning Review and Professional Development

Typically, a work-based learning programme will commence with a review and planning stage. This will normally take the form of a “Learning Review and Professional Development” module.

This module is about the learner planning their own personal and professional development through a programme of work-based learning supported by the University of Hull. The module is designed to help the learner think about their personal and professional development needs and to plan an academic programme which not only meets their personal objectives but is also of relevance to their employer (or other work based stakeholder such as major client if they are self-employed). The Learning Review and Professional Development module provides the structure and support for learners to plan their work-based programme of study.

The module Handbook provides an introduction to reflection and learning tasks to develop reflective practice. Learners undertake a personal learning review as the starting point for the construction of a higher education programme which is typically the product of a three-way negotiated learning agreement between the student, their employer/ sponsor and the university. In some cases, the learning review stage may indicate the potential for the learner to claim for recognition of prior learning and if this is the case the standard University procedures apply.

A programme level learning agreement will typically include negotiation of the:

- timing and duration of the programme;
- programme composition, including the rationale for the inclusion of any accredited prior learning; and
- content and output of negotiated and work-based project modules.

Facilitation of the construction of a learning agreement focuses upon supporting the identification and consideration of stakeholder interests and requirements as well as the use of the key resources of time, information and materials. The challenge is to produce a WBL programme designed not only to meet the academic requirements of the university but also to be of value to the employer or stakeholders and in the case of degree level apprenticeships to enable the learner to demonstrate they have achieved the appropriate apprenticeship standard. The learning agreement identifies the learning that will be undertaken in the form of negotiated work-based learning, work-based projects, and/or, taught subjects where applicable. A key role of the academic facilitator is to advise upon the alignment of the proposed learning and the proposed outputs for assessment. Particular attention needs to be given to negotiated and project modules to check that what is proposed is appropriate for the level of module and the module learning outcomes. If the programme underpins an apprenticeship, then additional attention needs to be given to ensuring that the proposed programme is generating evidence that will enable the student to pass the apprenticeship “end point assessment”. A template for a Learning Agreement and examples of programme planning at undergraduate and postgraduate level are given in the Learning Review and Professional Development Handbook.

Designing Practitioner Research

The “Practitioner Research” module focuses upon the student as a practitioner (worker) designing a research project to be carried out in their work context. The module is designed to introduce research and to help learners to think about research and how it relates to their professional development and their specific work context. The Handbook introduces the concept of research paradigms and some major research approaches and data collection techniques.

A key role of the academic facilitator is to stimulate project ideas and consideration of the work-based context, the work-based inquiry and its intended use. The following series of questions provide a good start to promote individual or group consideration of work-based projects.

- What do you want your project to achieve?
- What is the potential for impact on the organisation of the project activity as well as the project outcome?
- What difference does it make that it is YOU undertaking the project? Ideally you want to focus on something which you know already is a major issue for you. How might you personally benefit from the project? Is there a downside?
- What sort of knowledge are you drawing upon – including your own pre-understanding? What sort of knowledge are you trying to create? For example, is it a question of knowing what to do and how to do it? The work context will often mean that knowledge of ‘who’ and ‘time when’ will be far more important aspects of knowledge than in traditional subject-based research.
- In what ways might your project need to draw upon the learning resources of the workplace? This might include knowledge of key individuals, professional knowledge, procedural knowledge held by an employer or professional body. In what ways might your project enhance the knowledge of others in the work context? How can you take this into account in your project design and activity as well as outcome?

- Who else is involved? What is in it for them? Are they fully informed? Are they active participants?
- Are there individuals or groups which may see your project as threatening? If so, how are you going to deal with this? How can you construct your enquiry in a way which will be ethical and provide an appropriate duty of care to individuals acting as ‘informants’ to your inquiry?
- If your project is to have significance for your organisation do you have to convince key decision-makers? If so, what sort of case do you need to put forward? What is the decision-making process? Be aware that the espoused process for decision making may not be what actually happens!
- How might the knowledge you have created be used, disseminated, and updated when your project is finished? How might this have implications for the type of data you collect and how you analyse and present it?

The Designing Practitioner Research Handbook contains a template for a research proposal and learning tasks which feed into different sections of the template. Assessment for the module is based upon a research proposal which will then be put into practice by the learner as their main work-based project module.



Negotiated Learning

The negotiated learning modules enables the learner to plan areas of work-based study as part of a programme of work-based learning (WBL) supported by the University of Hull. The negotiated learning modules are designed to provide a structure for the learner to develop modules designed to focus upon the work context in order to develop new knowledge and skills.

The Negotiated Learning Handbook provides a template for planning a negotiated learning module and then provides an example of the use of the template. The key questions which the academic facilitator is helping the learner answer are:

- What do I want to learn and how does it fit within my overall WBL programme?
- What will I need to do to achieve this learning?
- What support or resources will I need?

- What evidence of learning achievement will I be able to provide?
- What is the timescale?

Learners will often need assistance in identifying how their workplace might also be a source of learning. For example, a negotiated module might include:

- Participation in short courses organised by the employer, professional body, union or the university;
- Conference attendance;
- Work shadowing and observation;
- Visits to other organisations;
- Short secondments to other units/departments;
- Directed reading.

The academic facilitator should pay particular attention to the proposed evidence of learning achievement to ensure that it is aligned with the learning outcomes of the module.

Work-based Project

This module is designed to help the learner to think about the design, implementation and reporting of their project. Where the project module is the final major project of a Work-Based Learning programme it will be the implementation of the research proposal developed as the outcome of the Practitioner Research module. The Work-Based Projects Handbook develops the concept of a work-based project and focuses upon project planning, implementation, outcomes and review.

Work-based projects are often the capstone of a Work-Based Learning programme and have the potential not just to be of major significance to the individual learner but also to provide insight or even bring about change in their professional area or organisation. Depending upon the level of project and the work context the work produced to meet the project assessment requirements may vary. In cases where the learner is exploring an existing situation, perhaps with a view to making a case for change, then it is likely that a report format with conclusions and recommendations is likely to be most appropriate.

Where the project has focused upon the development of a "product" for use in the workplace then it is likely that what would be required for assessment is the work "product" plus a critical commentary aimed at the assessors. For example, a firefighter working as a training adviser might produce a concise technical document for use by fellow firefighters at the scene of an accident. The technical document would form part of the submission to the University but would have to be accompanied by a critical commentary covering the need for the technical document, the research and development that underpinned its development and plans for implementation and possible ongoing review. In cases where there are a range of work products the final project submission might take the form of a portfolio of evidence with a substantial critical commentary on the evidence explicitly showing how the evidence and the critical commentary meet the learning outcomes of the project module.

The academic facilitator needs to help the learner maintain a focus on the project outcomes and their alignment to the learning outcomes of the module.



Assessment of work-based learning

The University of Hull has approved WBL academic level descriptors (see Appendix 1) and the modules within the WBL Framework have learning outcomes which are aligned to these descriptors. The learning outcomes are generic in nature and can be used across different occupational and discipline areas. The learning outcomes focus upon:

1. Identification and application of knowledge to work;
2. Understanding and application of ethical principles to work/practice;
3. Analysis and evaluation of work-based information and concepts;
4. Reflection on work-based practice and learning;
5. Work-based inquiry, action planning and problem solving;
6. Communication;
7. Leadership and responsibility for self-directed learning.

The emphasis throughout the WBL Framework is on the use of a variety of assessment methods designed to support the development of the learners' knowledge and understanding. The guiding principles are that assessment is explicitly aligned to student learning, is clear and equitable and enables learners to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Learners will use their own work place as a resource for the forms of written assignments. This provides an opportunity to compare theory and practice in an applied context relevant to their area of expertise. Assessment is based on the work context and is likely to include real life work "products. Across a major work-based learning award a wide range of assessment tasks will be employed.

When presenting evidence from the workplace it is vital that learners clearly explain the significance of the evidence they have chosen to put forward for assessment. Evidence should be accompanied by a critical commentary which provides information on:

- The context of the work evidence.
- The purpose of the work evidence and how the evidence illustrates the achievement of the work purpose and the learning outcomes of the relevant WBL module.
- The role played by the learner in the production of the evidence.

In totality the work evidence and the commentary upon it must be:

- **Valid:** Evidence must be directly related to the learning outcome(s).
- **Authentic:** It must be clear that any evidence submitted is produced by the learner or relates specifically to the learner/work undertaken by the learner.
- **Current:** Evidence should primarily be drawn from the period of activity covered by the WBL module and be dated if possible.
- **Sufficient:** The learner must submit enough evidence to cover the range of the learning outcomes of the module.

It is important to highlight to learners the need to be ethical in their use of evidence drawn from their work. For example, the WBL Handbooks stress the need for the learner to always seek to protect any person or organisation named in their evidence by keeping them anonymous, unless they get written permission to use the names of individuals or organisations.

Uses of the Work-Based Learning Framework

The Work-Based Learning Framework can be used in a variety of ways including:

1. **The construction of programmes using various combinations of Work-Based Learning Framework modules.** An entire programme of study can be constructed using modules from the WBL framework. This is most likely to be applicable at postgraduate level when working with advanced practitioners or at undergraduate level where WBL is being used as a top up for a learner who already has substantial prior learning (eg from a Foundation Degree or HND).
2. **The integration of subject specific modules within Work-Based Learning Framework programmes.** This is likely to be most applicable in cases where there is a need for a substantial taught component of a work-based learning programme. Where appropriate modules already exist within the university these can be included as part of a work-based learning programme provided they account for no more than 50% of the credit required for the relevant award.
3. **The construction of programmes which are mapped onto external standards.** Work-based learning is particularly suitable for the construction of programmes which are mapped on to external standards such as professional body requirement or higher and degree level apprenticeship standards.


4. **The integration of WBL modules into existing programmes.** WBL modules can be used within other programmes to provide flexibility and work focus. For example, within an existing Masters programme it might be desirable to offer Designing Practitioner Research followed by a 60 credit point work-based project as an alternative to a traditional research methods module followed by a dissertation.

The following example is based on a draft prepared by Dr Sarah Shaw. The example shows the use of the WBL Framework in combination with existing subject specific modules to provide a work-based route to a BSc (Hons) Professional Practice in Supply Chain Leadership. The BSc is designed to meet the standards of the level 6 Supply Chain Leadership Apprenticeship. Note the use of the Learning Review and Professional Development module at the outset of the programme where the individual learning review and introduction to reflective practice is particularly appropriate. Ongoing use of negotiated learning modules at levels 4, 5 and 6 is envisaged and the programme concludes with a strong focus upon the workplace through the Designing Practitioner Research module and a major 60 credit point project.



Year 1					
Trimester 1		Trimester 2		Trimester 3	
Level 4 (Certificate Stage)					
Learning Review and Professional Development	Taught subject module	Negotiated Learning module	Taught subject module	Taught subject module	Taught subject module
20 credits Reflective e-portfolio of supply chain professional practice (strengths, gaps and weakness, which then inform their NL modulues) My showcase as a CPD and porfolio building tool Linda Whicker	20 credits Logistics & Supply Chain Management Sarah Shaw	20 credits Accounting & Finance TBC	20 credits Supply Chain Project Management 1 (*see list of options/ electives) TBC	20 credits World Economy TBC	20 credits Business Environment TBC

Year 2 (Diploma Stage)					
Trimester 1		Trimester 2		Trimester 3	
Level 5					
Negotiated Learning module	Taught subject module	Taught subject module	Negotiated Learning module	Taught subject module	Taught subject module
20 credits Leadership and change Project 2 (*see list of options/ electives) TBC	20 credits Supply Chain Strategy & Network Design Alessandro Creazza	20 credits Logistics Customer Services & Marketing David Grant	20 credits Business Process Improvement Project(*see list of options/ electives) TBC	20 credits Procurement and Supply Chain Operations Alessandro Creazza	20 credits Supply Chain Information Management and Big Data Prevaiz Akhtar

Year 3 (HonoursStage)			
Trimester 1		Trimester 2	
Trimester 3			
Level			
Designing Practitioner Research	Negotiated Learning	 Work Based Synoptic Project (60 credits min of 6 months)	
20 credits	20 credits		
Research Methods (bespoke to practitioner applied and action learning)	Global Logistics and Port Management	Prep Phase	
Giles Hindle/ Sarah Shaw	Claudia Colocchia	Negotiated Learning	
		20 credits	
		Supply Chain Sustainability and the Environment	
		Claudia Colocchia	

The development of programmes using the WBL framework is detailed in the University Code of Practice for the WBL Framework. A diagram from the Code showing how the use of the WBL Framework fits into the University approval procedures is attached as Appendix 2.

References & resources

References

Gibbs, P. and Garnett, J. (2007) Work based learning as a field of study. *Journal of Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 12(6), pp. 409-421.

Recommended further reading

Helyer R (Ed) (2015) *Facilitating Work-Based Learning: A Tutor's Handbook*. London: Palgrave.

Level	Identification and application of knowledge to work
4	Identification and application of knowledge demonstrates an understanding of the context of own work/practice.
5	Identification and application of knowledge demonstrates a broad understanding of its current limitations in a range of work/practice contexts.
6	Identification and application of knowledge demonstrates a critical understanding of the inter-relationship between theory and work/practice.
7	Identification and application of knowledge, demonstrates systematic and critical understanding of theory at the forefront of professional practice.
Level	Understanding and application of ethical principles to work/practice
4	Understanding of underlying ethical concepts demonstrates an awareness of how they relate to own work/practice.
5	Understanding of established ethical concepts and principles demonstrates knowledge of the broader contexts of own work/practice.
6	Understanding of key ethical principles demonstrates a coherent and in-depth knowledge of how they apply to the work/practice of self and others.
7	Critical understanding of ethical principles demonstrates a systematic knowledge and coherent application of professional codes of conduct to the work/practice of self and others.
Level	Analysis and evaluation of work-based information and concepts
4	Analysis of information and/or ideas contributes to the development of an informed evaluation of own work/practice.
5	Analysis of a range of established information and/or theoretical perspectives contributes to the development of evidence-based evaluation of own work/practice.
6	Analysis and synthesis of a range of information, including some advanced theoretical perspectives, informs judgements and contributes to a critical evaluation of own work/ practice.
7	Systematic analysis and synthesis of a range of information and advanced theoretical perspectives informs the development and critical evaluation of innovative work/practice.
Level	Reflection on work-based practice and learning
4	Reflection is informed by the work/practice of others and contributes to the recognition of own work-based learning.
5	Reflection is informed by engagement with other practitioners and provides insights that enhance own work-based learning.
6	Reflection is becoming an established aspect of own practice, is informed by critical engagement with a community of practice and contributes to the coherent development of own work/practice.
7	Reflection is an established aspect of own practice and leads to significant transformative insights which have the potential to impact on the work/practice of self and often others.

Level	Work-based inquiry, action planning and problem solving
4	Inquiry methods are selected and applied to own work/practice leading to appropriate action planning and/or problem solving.
5	Inquiry methods are selected and applied to a range of work/practice contexts and lead to effective action planning and/or problem solving of potential significance to self and others.
6	Methods of inquiry, action planning and/or problem solving are critically evaluated and - applied to enhance the work/practice of self and/or others.
7	Methods of inquiry, action planning and/or problem solving are systematically and critically evaluated and applied to the work/practice of self and/or others in complex contexts.
Level	Communication
4	Ideas and information are communicated appropriately for identified work/practice and/or academic audiences.
5	Ideas and information are effectively organised and communicated for a range of work/practice and/or academic audiences.
6	Ideas and information are coherently constructed and communicated for a range of work/practice and/or academic audiences.
7	Ideas and information are systematically managed and persuasively communicated for professional work/practice and/or academic audiences.
Level	Leadership and responsibility for self-directed learning
4	The ability to take partial responsibility for own learning is demonstrated in the context of own work/practice.
5	The ability to take responsibility for the quality of own learning is demonstrated in a range of individual and/or group work/practice contexts.
6	The ability to take lead responsibility for the management of individual and/or group learning is demonstrated in individual and/or group work/practice contexts.
7	The ability to lead and be accountable for individual and/or group learning demonstrates critical reflection and analysis of personal motivations.
5	Reflection is informed by engagement with other practitioners and provides insights that enhance own work-based learning.
6	Reflection is becoming an established aspect of own practice, is informed by critical engagement with a community of practice and contributes to the coherent development of own work/practice.
7	Reflection is an established aspect of own practice and leads to significant transformative insights which have the potential to impact on the work/practice of self and often others.

