Examples of good practice

This is an Employability CETL resource which draws upon existing good practice in the faculty of Development and Society (D&S). It comprises examples of good practice, questions which teams can collectively consider and discuss as well as recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation. It draws evidence from evaluative work on the validation documents submitted by course planning teams in 2007 and is intended primarily as part of a pack for teams preparing for validation.

Examples of good practice

Work-based learning is an important element of the Employability Framework. Students' experiences in the workplace contribute to their understanding of the demands of the world of work. Students build up such an understanding through gaining experience in managing employment relationships (both with the employer and with fellow employees), through actively seeking, negotiating and accessing such opportunities for learning within the workplace and through delivering work of the appropriate standard and quality.

Examples of good practice in writing for validation were found in documents which explicitly stated where in the programme of study students would be able to access opportunities for work-based learning:

'The programme incorporates opportunities for work-related (sandwich or volunteering) experience and responsibility designed to develop both learner autonomy… and the student's employability.'

(BSc (Hons) Geography, 2007: 15)

It is further evident that a relationship is shown between WBL and the expected benefits of the experience in terms of autonomy and employability. However, the WBL experience is always highly specific to the kind of subject studied and therefore it is difficult to predetermine a curriculum (Boud and Solomon, 2001: 46). In some areas it is easier to identify the specific activities which would form the core value of WBL activity than in others:

'During the Postgraduate Diploma phase students engage in classroom-based research which takes them from practitioner to explorer and then ultimately to rigorous researcher-practitioner in the dissertation phase. Each of these tasks builds on earlier work and is designed to give students an overall experience that develops their professional

understanding and practice in a systematic and logically sequenced way.'

(MA TESOL, 2007: 28)

In this example, the activity is classroom-based, which is also the intended workplace for these students. There is a clear rationale of how the activity is to be structured and how students are expected to benefit from each of the distinct phases of work-based learning. This account could be enhanced however by discussing opportunities for learning which are inherent in a workplace, such as (in this example) interaction with staff at the school and learning through being part of a team within the workplace; learning through interaction with pupils and having a realistic experience of and learning to work towards meeting the demands of the intended workplace.

Another good example comes from BA Hons Early Childhood studies, where learning while on placement is said to allow opportunities for students to '*apply your learning about policy, theory and principles of practice directly to experiences in your placement.'* (BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies/BA (Hons) Children and Playwork/BA (Hons) Childhood Studies, 2007: 4)

A direct relationship is made between the theoretical content of the course and practice in the workplace. This not only makes explicit the value of work based learning, but also makes this evident to the students which would in turn result in greater engagement on students' side - where they see theory applied to practice they would readily engage in the learning content.

In addition, the approach used to implementing WBL in the curriculum is pedagogically grounded: '*This approach demonstrates an emphasis on experiential learning and real life problem-solving which links to aspects of employability.' (*BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies/BA (Hons) Children and Playwork/BA (Hons) Childhood Studies, 2007: 4). Here is a very good example of how a rationale for work-based learning can be articulated.

Questions to consider/discuss

In establishing good practice in WBL programmes several questions could be considered to help develop a positive learning experience for students:

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- How could course planning teams ensure that learners are appropriately briefed prior to the WBL experience about learning in the workplace.
- How could students' prior learning and achievements be brought into the workplace (see example from BA Hons Early Childhood studies, 2007)?
- To what extent could the outcomes of learning and achievement in the workplace be elicited?
- How can productive dialogues be created between the learner, academic supervisor and workplace supervisor?
- What support is available for the ongoing learning of students in the workplace and how is this reflected in validation writing?
- How could students be encouraged to reflect critically in the workplace and to record this reflection in a meaningful way?

Recommendations for addressing the employability agenda when writing for validation

As the forms of WBL vary in the length, nature and outcomes of the experience, the work-based learning experience does not readily lend itself to being highly structured to an explicit pedagogical approach, or to eliciting specific outcomes at the outset of the experience (Boud and Solomon, 2001: 46). However, there are aspects of the experience which can be evaluated and which it would be useful to refer to within validation documentation. These aspects primarily concern the kind of support which would be available to students when engaging in work based learning. Boud and Solomon describe the work-based learning experience as a three way agreement between academic supervisor, workplace supervisor and learner (2001: 51). This implies the need to negotiate the programme of study, with input from all key stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders has active roles and responsibilities within the WBL process. It would be useful to make explicit within validation writing how these responsibilities would be communicated amongst the three key stakeholders. In other words, how will the necessary dialogue be facilitated? This point is relevant regardless of the length or the nature of the work experience. ASET, the placement and employability professionals' body, has published a code of good practice for placement management which can be referred to when writing this section:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section9/PlacementLearning.pdf.

While there cannot be a rigorously structured curriculum in delivering WBL, as the examples of good practice given here demonstrated and as research literature confirms, there are opportunities to write about WBL in a way which would be useful in eliciting the best of the WBL experience for students. A WBL activity adds value in the following ways:

- Making learning explicit
- Appreciating existing achievements

- Acknowledging one's knowledge base
- Exploring desired outcomes
- Planning for knowledge acquisition
- Critically reflecting on understanding
- Learning cooperatively with others and documenting achievements

(Boud and Solomon, 2001: 47)

The authors further make recommendations for how WBL activity can be optimally considered/ supported. These recommendations can be successfully integrated when writing for validation:

1. Establish work-based learning as a learning opportunity

2. Address the diverse range of knowledge and skills possessed by students at the commencement of work-based learning

3. Locate the outcomes of work-based learning in a framework of levels and standards of achievement

4. Promote the development and negotiation of a programme of activities

5. Support the ongoing learning of students *in situ*

6. Encourage critical reflection throughout the programme;

7. Document learning in a form that can be assessed in terms of the frameworks previously established.

(Boud and Solomon, 2001: 48)

References:

1.   ASET (2007) *The Placement and Employability Professionals' Body.* [Internet] Sheffield, ASET, PDF document available from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section9/PlacementLearning.pdf> [Accessed 27th February, 2009].

2.   Boud, D. & Solomon, N. (eds) 2001, *Work-based learning: a new higher education?* Open University Press.

References to definitive documents:

1.   BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies/BA (Hons) Children and Playwork/BA (Hons) Childhood Studies revalidated April 2007.

2.   BSc (Hons) Geography validated February 2007.

3.   MA TESOL/Postgraduate Cert in TEAP/Professional Foundation Scheme revalidated May 2007.