

Institution:	Writtle College
Programmes:	FdSc Land-based Studies, and most undergraduate degrees and Higher National Diploma programmes
Module:	Learning from Work Experience
Activity:	Case study
Level:	2
Learning hours:	150 hours of work-based student-managed learning with individual tutor support

Introduction

This is the second of two work-based learning modules that have recently been validated as credit-rated core components of the Foundation degree in Land-based Studies at Writtle College. This module is particularly valuable for part-time students, enabling them to gain academic credit from learning undertaken in the workplace.

Work-related learning outcome(s)

This module helps students to develop as independent learners in whatever area they are working, gearing their learning to their own aspirations and experience.

On completion of this module students should be able to:

- identify new knowledge, understanding and skills resulting from their period of work experience;
- reflect on the learning opportunities presented by their employment;
- identify how the work experience will impact on the remainder of their study programme.

Description of the teaching activity which achieves the learning outcome(s)

Students will be supported throughout the module by course and industrial tutors. The teaching strategy helps learners to become analytical and reflective, and there is a strong emphasis on the development of employment-related transferable skills.

A team of staff has produced the assignment brief for the module, together with a set of generic assessment criteria and guidance notes for students on how to put together a portfolio. In addition, Industrial Liaison Officers have produced a series of study guides relevant to particular disciplines. These have been very popular with students.

The majority of the current Foundation degree cohort already possess significant industrial experience and are therefore electing to follow a customised version of the module, tailored to their individual needs.

Rationale for the selection of the teaching activity

The module must be based on a significant period of work experience, such as a twelve-month sandwich or previous full-time employment. The module offers flexibility both in terms of teaching and the approach to meeting the learning outcomes, which students have found very valuable.

Assessment - approach and detail

Assessment is through a portfolio of evidence. The first section requires the student to produce a personal version of the module specification, identifying how they intend to meet the learning outcomes in the context of their individual function or career aspirations. This section must be approved by their tutor before further progress can be made. Where appropriate, specific assessment criteria can also be negotiated at this point.

A high proportion of Higher National Diploma and Honours degree undergraduates will base the module on a twelve-month sandwich placement. In their portfolio they will analyse the business where they work, evaluate what is required to fulfil their job function successfully, and critically reflect on the knowledge and skills they have gained from their work experience. This form of assessment emphasises personal development planning, which is part of our institutional strategy.

The assessment portfolio will normally (but not necessarily) include a contribution from the employer, focusing on employment-related transferable skills rather than on vocational competence. This represents a significant shift from the assessment of the traditional 'sandwich period', when 50% of the course was based on the 'Employer's Report' and had to be passed as a requirement for the final qualification.

Future Developments

This case study focuses the thoughts of both staff and students on the learning opportunities presented by work experience, rather than the traditional emphasis on vocational competence. In the long term, the success of this development will be measured by the enhanced employability of Writtle graduates and diplomates both within and outside the land-based sector.

In the short term this module is making a significant contribution to the institutional strategy which is seeking a shift from a 'teaching' towards a 'learning' culture across the College.

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