Contents

1 How does work-based learning fit into higher education?

Ruth Helyer and Jonathan Garnett

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL:

▶ Look at the key characteristics of work-based learning
▶ Be introduced to the importance of experiential learning
▶ Be given an overview of some learning theories of particular significance for work-based learning
▶ Be introduced to Mode 2 knowledge and transdisciplinary learning
▶ See that both individual and organisational development arise from work-based learning
▶ Compare the similarities between work-based learning and other flexible pedagogies

▶ Work-based learning as an educational device

Work-based learning (WBL) is learning which takes place primarily at and through work and is for the purposes of work, although it is mediated through a higher education institution (HEI). Gibbs and Garnett define WBL 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, p. 411)

In the UK, WBL as an educational device is often associated with lower levels, but it can be at any level from 1 to 8 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (see Chapter 3). WBL at higher education (HE) level can range from a component of a course unit to entire qualifications at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels; it can be used to help

young people integrate work and learning to help them enter employment, or it can be the vehicle that mature students choose to facilitate part of their continuing professional development (Garnett, 2012). WBL focuses on the benefits of real learning from real work.

A work-based learner can be in paid or significant unpaid (for example, voluntary) work. The key defining feature for work-based learners who are studying with an HEI is that the work they are engaged in requires the development and application of high-level learning (levels 4–8) in order for them to be effective in their work. Some of this learning requirement might come from formal learning, but, in most cases, the main source of learning will be the experience of work. Many work-based learners will already be well established in their professional area and are likely to be engaged with HE-level WBL for continuing professional development. Such learners are prone to having considerable knowledge and skills relevant to their work, and so a HEI work-based programme that allows for this pre-understanding to be formally recognised and become part of an integrated programme of personal and professional development is very attractive. This is demonstrated by the following Case study 1.1, where a work-based learner uses his existing expertise to make HE work for him:

Case study 1.1 Work-based learner profile (A): Andrew, a project manager

Andrew is in his mid-forties and has been a project manager for a multinational information technology company for the last 15 years. He chooses an HEI's work-based learning programme as it enables him to gain recognition for his project management and technical abilities and to plan a programme which focuses upon real-life projects of interest to him and of potential value to his employer and does not require large elements of formal classroom attendance.

Andrew does not have a first degree, but, on the basis of his extensive work history, it has been suggested to him that he could benefit from undertaking a university module designed to facilitate the development of a claim for RPL (recognition of prior experiential learning). The module takes Andrew through a process of guided reflection upon his experience and helps him identify his prior learning in the areas of project management and construction quality assurance. Andrew is required to articulate his learning achievement and supply evidence of it, drawing upon real-life documents and artefacts. The learning described is measured against HE learning outcomes and shows that he is already demonstrating learning achievement beyond that normally expected at undergraduate degree level. As a consequence of this evaluation Andrew is able to gain direct entry with advanced standing to a master's programme.

Case study 1.1 Work-based learner profile (A): Andrew, a project manager *continued*

The next stage is Andrew to negotiate with the HEI and his employer a work-based programme of study that takes into account his own academic starting point and his personal and professional needs and aspirations. The programme is attractive to Andrew's employer as it does not require time away from work and provides HE-level support for Andrew to address a project of direct relevance to the company. The agreed focus of the programme is a review of the processes for project managers to report construction defects to the company. The aim of the project is to improve reporting so that the same mistakes can be avoided in the future.

This case study illustrates how RPL can provide the basis for a negotiated work-based programme that takes as its starting point the knowledge and capabilities of the individual learners and their employers, rather than being rooted in a rigid, prescribed programme of study.

Higher-level WBL in the UK developed from a range of initiatives funded by the Employment Department in the early 1990s (Brennan and Little, 1996) and benefited from a favourable policy context which valued graduate employability and sought to extend participation in HE (Mumford and Roodhouse, 2010). The employability and skills agendas have remained key to successive governments; their overlaps with WBL drivers are debated further in Chapter 10, 'Learning in the workplace globally', and Chapter 11, 'Learning to learn'. Although a small number of UK HEIs (notably Chester, Derby, Middlesex, Northumbria, Portsmouth and Teesside universities) have long-standing experience in delivering programmes created around work-based learners, it is still regarded as an innovative area of practice. Case study 1.2 illustrates the new and developing areas where WBL provides an ideal route for an innovative SME (small and medium-sized enterprises, with less than 250 employees) due to its flexibility, relevance and origin in the real-world workplace:

Case study 1.2 Innovative WBL routes: NAK Australia

NAK Australia is a wholesale distribution company that supplies hair care products. The company's mission is 'to supply hairdressers with an Australian-made range of hair care that exceeds the expectations of themselves, their staff and their clients in quality, value and service'.

The work environment is entrepreneurial, non-formal, non-bureaucratic and very fast. NAK management identified that their staff are a critical resource. The concept of learning to learn continuously and rapidly so as to keep abreast

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Case study 1.2 Innovative WBL routes: NAK Australia *continued*

of continual change in the sector is a key driver of the organisation. The most pressing problem was how and where did NAK Australia and its people acquire these ongoing skills without each member of staff undertaking many years of personal study within formal courses?

Over a number of years NAK staff had undertaken a range of vocational educational programmes, including a Diploma of Business and a Diploma of Management within a workplace environment. After completing these programmes some of their people decided to enrol on HEI business degrees; however, they found this more traditional education sometimes far too theoretical, removed from the workplace, irrelevant to NAK's needs and developed by academics not at the worface. They found methods of delivery inflexible in terms of learning styles and participants' previous skill levels.

They were introduced to the Middlesex University 'WBL' model by a consultant to the business; this programme was different, with learning focused on learning at work, learning through work and learning for the purpose of work. Through a Review of Learning module the programme recognised and awarded academic credit for previous learning and work-developed capabilities. Through NAK the Review of Learning module found recognition as a unique learning concept within the Australian HE system.

After taking part in the Review of Learning module, participants took part in further modules: Self-development Plan, Professional Practitioner Inquiry and the Work-Based Project.

The NAK students' success on the programme was related to several factors:

▶ The programme used 'WBL' methodology.
▶ The organisation was in support of developing its people.
▶ The HEI provided excellent resource materials to support the students.

The students were mentored and guided by a professional academic mentor who offered a combination of academic and practitioner credibility, together with a passion for developing people within a work-based environment.

The cohort all successfully completed the BA (Hons) (Professional Practice) and the general manager developed an Organisational Learning model with the following three strands:

▶ Accreditation and articulation
▶ WBL
▶ Mentorship

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▶ Practitioners learning from their authentic practice

WBL derives from learning activities anchored in authentic practice and focused upon developing the practitioner's ability to solve the problems of their everyday professional job roles (for more about what it means to be a

professional see Ions and Sutcliffe, 2015). Knowledge and skills developed whilst 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 (Collis and Margaryan, 2003, p. 726). Whilst this is not traditional classroom learning, it maximises learning wherever it occurs by combining the strengths of formal and informal learning opportunities and integrating work-based activities within formal courses. This can be seen to be a 'best of both worlds' scenario, which, if approached astutely by HEIs, can result in the creation of new, cutting-edge knowledge and an exceptionally appropriate and satisfying learning experience for the work-based learner, as well as the potential for learning and development for the HEI employees who get the opportunity to get closer to the workplace.

WBL cannot be 'taught' in a classroom sense; it arises from work practice and from actually doing rather than reading about it or only observing. Because of the nature of WBL, the tutor often acts as an architect, enabler and critical friend, rather than a subject expert. This change of role can cause difficulty for some academics, especially if they are accustomed to being the holder of knowledge that they filter out to their classes in a more traditional way. This method is not useful for work-based learners; with them the learning process becomes much more of a joint enterprise, where the tutor can potentially also learn a great deal about their student's jobs, industries and real-life work experiences. The most important role the tutor can take is that of learning facilitator, helping and advising their students about how to learn, how to gain credits and how to progress, building their confidence and demonstrating to them – using level descriptors, for example – that they are already operating in some areas at HE levels (see Chapter 2, 'Learning, teaching and assessment in work-based learning'). Often work-based learners do not realise or acknowledge how much they are learning at work, and WBL programmes can help them to make this implicit learning become explicit, as the following Case study 1.3 shows:

Case study 1.3 Making employees' WBL explicit: Articulating expertise in the construction industry

Ben was well known within his company as the expert on design and build contracting. The company was dependent upon him to such an extent that whenever they wanted to bid for design and build work, Ben had to be central to that process and whenever they had problems with a design and build project, Ben had to be on call. To expand their work in this area his employers realised they needed to understand more about the nature of Ben's expertise

continued overleaf

Case study 1.3 Making employees' WBL explicit: Articulating expertise in the construction industry *continued*

and how to share that within the organisation. They decided to facilitate this by sponsoring Ben's attendance at their local HEI, a university offering WBL programmes.

The programme commenced with an Initial Learning Review, which was designed to capture the learning from experience, at higher level, that Ben had acquired through doing his job and make it explicit. To achieve this Ben worked closely with a WBL adviser at the HEI to assemble a portfolio that evidenced his learning. This was made possible by actively reflecting on his experience and analysing this reflection in order to articulate what he had learnt. Ben provided real-life performance evidence of both his learning and the application of that learning within his portfolio. The WBL tutor supported and guided Ben through this process (see Chapter 5 for more on claiming credit).

The next stage was to use the supporting structure provided by a major work-based learning project module to produce 'A Guide to Design and Build', based upon Ben's learning from experience and to trial and refine this with feedback from a range of managers. The HEI provided support and scaffolding for this in the form of two modules.

The first focused upon the design of the project by considering the issues of practitioner inquiry and the second provided support for the actual implementation of the project – the creation of the guide. The role of the HEI's WBL tutor was critical at each stage in this process; as a critical friend during the Initial Learning Review the tutor was able to ask questions which helped draw out and make explicit the nature of Ben's knowledge and skills relevant to design and build contracting. The tutor was then able to facilitate the use of this information as the basis for the project work.

The resulting guide was not only academically rigorous but it was also exactly what Ben's organisation had hoped for.

▶ **Distinctive features of HE-level WBL programmes**

Boud and Solomon (2001, p. 1) identify a range of distinctive features of higher-level WBL:

▶ WBL is a partnership between an external organisation and an educational institution specifically established to foster learning.
▶ Learners are employees or have some contractual relationship with the external organisation and negotiate learning plans approved by the educational institution and the organisation.
▶ The learning plans are derived from the needs of the workplace and of the learner, rather than being predetermined by a subject disciplinary curriculum.

▶ The starting point and the level of the negotiated learning programme are established after a structured review and evaluation of the current learning of the individual.

▶ A significant element of the programme is WBL projects that meet the needs of the learner and the organisation.

▶ Assessment of the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme is carried out with reference to a transdisciplinary framework of standards and levels.

▶ Transdisciplinarity

The last point here mentions transdisciplinarity, a term increasingly used to describe the way in which work-based programmes at higher levels operate. Used in this context the term acknowledges that for work-based learners, research strategies and applications of theories will cross many disciplinary boundaries to create a universal, yet nuanced and hybrid approach, which is useful and appropriate for the context in which it is applied. As a term now increasingly used in academia and applied to scholarly activity, it recognises that much research focuses on problems that cut across disciplines and can refer to and utilise concepts, methods and theories originally developed by one discipline but which are now used much more widely. This has implications for the methods available to assess WBL and ensure that it is carried out within a quality-controlled framework of standards and levels.

A key feature of WBL-level descriptors is often the use of the word 'generic'; to reflect the transdisciplinarity of the work the descriptors integrate vocational, academic and professional aspects of learning, which can be applied to all learning contexts. WBL level descriptors therefore, usually have the benefit of general applicability to any specialist area of work/practice (Costley, 2015). (See also Chapter 3, 'Flexible frameworks and building blocks', and Chapter 8, 'Quality enhancement and work-based learning'.) However, the development of transdisciplinary approaches to work and learning is not merely a matter of WBL being applicable across differing work/practice contexts, but more importantly that transdisciplinary approaches support work/practice creativity and innovation.

▶ WBL methodologies

Along with a combination of research strategies and theory, WBL also utilises a variety of learning methodologies. Many of the learning approaches used in negotiated WBL have their origin in independent learning – a range of

learning theories and approaches to learning such as 'experiential learning', an interdisciplinary approach based on the premise that experiences framed by reflection will lead to learning (Schön, 1983). One of the most well-known approaches to experiential learning is that of Kolb, who suggests that educational achievement depends on an individual's learning style as much as it depends on abilities and aptitudes (Kolb, 1984). Kolb views experiential learning as an active, self-motivated way of learning based upon a cycle that is propelled by action then reflection, and experience then abstraction. The learning theories of experiential learning build upon the research and beliefs of prominent 20th-century scholars of human learning and development, such as William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and more. Combining the work of these founding scholars, Kolb proposed six features of experiential learning and cited learning styles as the consistent way in which a learner responds to, or interacts with, stimuli in a learning environment (Kolb, 1984; Loo, 2002, p. 252). Kolb and Kolb (2008) devised an experiential learning model based on the original six propositions, suggesting that experiential learning is:

▶ best conceived as a process
▶ not defined in terms of outcomes
▶ about re-learning
▶ best facilitated by drawing out the learner's beliefs and ideas so that they can be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more refined ideas
▶ driven by conflict, differences and disagreement
▶ a holistic process of adaptation to the world

Theories of andragogy are germane when working with work-based learners, as they highlight the importance of treating adults as capable of self-direction in the learning process, and taking seriously their life experiences, not only as a potentially rich source of learning but also as a potential source of bias and presuppositions (Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learners need to understand why they need to learn something. WBL draws upon the principles of andragogy by valuing (for example by accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)) the learning from the experience of the individual learner and making them key stakeholders in a negotiated programme of study which also typically needs to take into account the interests of their employer or other interested group (for example clients if the learner is self-employed). The performative nature of andragogy complements work-based learners as WBL explicitly addresses the knowledge and skill requirements of work (see also Chapters 4 and 7).

WBL is situated and constructed at work; it therefore generally has an impact that goes beyond the learner and their academic facilitator. Often

work based learners will be part of a community of practice (CoP), which is defined as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This often means that the work based learner is part of several communities of practice – perhaps one in the workplace, which is work-based, and another based at the HEI, where studying is taking place. This second CoP may well be made up of peers undertaking the same WBL qualification, although they do not necessarily have to share the same sector or subject background. Work-based communities of practice can provide a fantastic key resource for learning, as much learning happens in social settings and/or within a social context (See Chapter 9, and Smith and Smith, 2015). In this case 'social' does not necessarily mean leisure activities; it literally means shared and collective behaviours and events; however, learning can and will also occur in communities of practice which emerge around hobby and leisure pursuits, as well as the more professionally focused ones.

▶ Mode 2 knowledge and transdisciplinarity

Dalrymple, Kemp and Smith suggest that the more interactive and stimulating the pedagogical conditions, the more realistic, relevant and meaningful to participants the learning environment will be. Learning outcomes become beneficial rather than an afterthought, and the extent of inquiry and discussion goes beyond the level of defined academic content when work-based participants apply ideas to their own workplaces (Dalrymple, Kemp and Smith, 2014, p. 77). According to Revans, work-based learners will more readily take the risk of questioning their knowledge and practice when they have:

▶ freedom of informed choice
▶ a degree of control over the learning process
▶ responsibility for the learning outcomes
▶ the security and challenges of a group of peers (Revans, 2011)

In WBL the context and purposes of work are directly related to use of knowledge, and thus the nature of the value attached to that knowledge. This contests the supremacy of the role of the HEI in curriculum design, delivery and validation of knowledge and suggests that higher-level WBL should seek alignment with thinking and practice relating to knowledge creation and use in the workplace (Garnett, 2009; Abraham, 2012). HEI-constructed paradigms of knowledge and the systematic (research) process by which new

knowledge is created and judged are increasingly contested. Consideration of dominant research paradigms suggests that no one paradigm is adequate to frame work-based learning 'research'. Gummesson (1991, p. 15) defines a paradigm as 'peoples' value judgments, norms, standards, frames of reference, perspectives, theories ... that govern their thinking and action'. The empirical positivist paradigm associated with 'scientific inquiry' is deeply rooted in the accepted understanding of research and holds sway over much of the general research literature and assumptions and expectations of higher-level research. In this paradigm the researcher is a detached and objective observer of the object of study; the resultant research concentrates upon description and explanation and is conducted systematically and logically via well-defined studies, which are governed by explicitly stated theories and hypotheses (see Chapter 6 for more about the modes of practitioner research that work-based learners and their organisations find useful).

▶ Socially constructed knowledge

In contrast to the positivist paradigm, WBL is, by design and necessity, concerned with knowledge which is often unsystematic, socially constructed and action focused by the worker researcher in order to achieve specific outcomes of significance to others (Garnett et al., 2009). These characteristics appear to fit more comfortably within an interpretive paradigm in which the researcher is an actor involved in the partial creation (through assigning meaning and significance) of what is studied. Research concentrates on understanding and interpretation and is conducted recognising that the researcher will be influenced by pre-understanding (Gummesson, 1991). In the context of work the value of knowledge is performative; it thus follows that sufficiency and timeliness of information to inform or bring about action are key considerations for WBL. The following Case study 1.4 illustrates the kind of research a work-based learner might want to propose:

> **Case study 1.4 Linking the workplace and academia through WBL research: A proposal for a practitioner research project**
>
> **Project aim**
>
> The aim of my research is to investigate the ongoing factors that affect the implementation of health and safety legislation within a complex market environment in light of the recent legislative changes.
>

> **Case study 1.4 Linking the workplace and academia through WBL research: A proposal for a practitioner research project** *continued*
>
> **Issues of practitioner research and making the most of being an insider**
>
> I believe that my experience in managing large staff teams, and particularly managing people within the Silchester Market environment, will help me in enlisting the cooperation of the research subjects, especially the Market Tenants' Association, who do not trust 'outsiders' easily. For this reason, I believe my inside knowledge as a participant researcher will act as a clear advantage whilst carrying out this research, although I also acknowledge the disadvantages of participant observation, which I will look at in more detail later within this proposal. Equally, my knowledge of strategic and financial planning and managing operations will assist me in understanding and interpreting the qualitative data collected using a very simple pattern matching technique.
>
> **Research methodology**
>
> After discussing the practicalities of carrying out case study research with my line manager, including my positionality as a worker/researcher (which would allow me to make observations at liaison meetings, engage in email interaction and facilitate relatively easy access to both staff and tenants to collect the necessary data), I resolved that a single case study approach would be the best method to answer my research questions. I will gather data using the following techniques:
>
> *Direct observation*: I intend to carry this out by impromptu site inspections and by attending market committee and liaison meetings.
>
> *Focus groups*: I intend to hold two focus groups with frontline staff to obtain their views on the research questions.
>
> *Interviews*: I will be arranging six semi-structured interviews with senior staff and a further six semi-structured interviews with prominent market members to obtain their views on both subject areas. I am aware that these two groups may have very different views, which will need to be analysed and recorded.
>
> *Analysis of work documents*: I intend to review documentation such as Markets Committee reports, annual performance plans for the Markets Department and Food Standard Agency legislative guidelines.
>
> **Outcome**
>
> A report on the implementation of health and safety legislation in the market, which includes recommendations to improve future practice.

The work-based learner in Case study 1.4 has clearly focused on solving a defined problem. Nowotny et al. (2001) argue that since the latter half of the 20th century new forms of knowledge production have emerged which are context driven and focused upon real-life problem

solving. Such knowledge is labelled 'Mode 2' as in contrast to 'Mode 1'; it does not fit neatly in traditional subject disciplines. Mode 2 knowledge recognises a diversity of knowledge production sites (such as the workplace) and is argued to be transdisciplinary in nature (Gibbs, 2015) as it is rooted in the messy problems of real life and is thus primarily emergent, complex and embodied, involving a reflexive approach to 'actors' and 'subjects' where the status and value of knowledge are negotiated with 'producers', 'collaborators', 'disseminators', 'users' and so on (Nowotny et al., 2003). Nicolescu goes further to suggest that the development of transdisciplinary approaches to work and learning is also a key aspect of leadership. 'It is recommended to universities to make an appeal in the framework of a transdisciplinary approach … with the goal of developing creativity and the meaning of responsibility in leaders of the future' (Nicolescu, 2008, p. 9). Transdisciplinarity, as suggested above, offers us new and multifaceted ways to understand the intricate modern world, which are particularly valuable for constructions of WBL as a field of study as well as a mode of study (Garnett et al., 2009). This means that rather than taking as a starting point for practitioner inquiry the knowledge contained in the literature of a traditional academic subject, it is the real-life needs of work and the student as practitioner which drive the aim and the conduct of the WBL and possibly an entire WBL programme.

WBL provides an approach to individual development which:

1. is learner-centred; it takes the work context and work priorities of the individual as its starting point and allows the negotiation of a customised programme
2. provides recognition and accreditation of existing knowledge and skills
3. is located in the workplace and, therefore, does not require large blocks of time away from work
4. is focused on learning through work, which is relevant to both the individual and the organisation
5. provides a coherent framework for individuals to review and establish the lasting value of learning from short courses and experience
6. encourages and enables individuals to take responsibility for their own continuing development
7. enables the individual to be a creator of work-based knowledge of relevance and potential value to others

The following Case study 1.5 exemplifies (and is cross-referenced to) the above seven points:

> **Case study 1.5 Work-based learner profile (B): Acknowledging experiential learning**
>
> Karen is a personal assistant to a member of the executive team of a large HEI. She has over 30 years of work experience and has participated in many in-house development courses (5) but has no qualifications beyond a secondary school leaving certificate.
>
> Within the HEI Karen was well known as a highly effective and extremely knowledgeable professional, but she lacked confidence in her ability to undertake an HE programme and described herself as 'only a secretary'.
>
> With support and encouragement from her line manager, and from a work-based learning academic as a facilitator, she successfully completed an APEL portfolio (2) that demonstrated that she not only had knowledge and skills at undergraduate level but also had expertise which most closely mapped across to the learning outcomes of postgraduate modules in a master's in HE management (5).
>
> This formal recognition of learning had a transformative effect upon Karen's confidence (6); she went on to complete an individually negotiated (1) work-based master's programme in HE administration.
>
> The programme included major projects that impacted positively upon the HEI she worked for (3) by enhancing the administrative information contained within templates for memoranda of cooperation between the HEI and external partners. Karen was able to draw upon her years of experience and insight to work with colleagues from across all the central services as well as the academic departments of the HEI together with a sample of key partners to identify information gaps in the standard template.
>
> Revised documentation informed by the evidence from this research was produced and piloted. The outcome was increased efficiency for the HEI through greater collaboration with external partners who felt consulted and subsequently more involved (4 and 7).

As the above Case study 1.5 encapsulates, WBL is an approach that has the potential to combine individual and organisational development. It does this by:

i. providing a framework for the individual and the organisation to agree on WBL activities which contribute to the goals of the organisation and the aspirations of the individual
ii. recognising and developing the workplace as a source of learning, for example, through the recognition of formal training courses and learning gained from experience, which in turn is gained through work
iii. developing the individual as an effective work-based learner able to undertake research and development activity of direct relevance to work

iv. developing in the individual key abilities such as action planning, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, communication and reflection on practice

v. providing a structured approach to 'real' work-based projects, which enhances their potential to contribute to the development of the organisation at levels from local operational to strategic

vi. providing a means of facilitating and measuring the transfer of learning from formal training courses to application in the workplace

vii. aligning learning and development activity with the goals of the organisation through programmes of personal development, which are work-based and required to demonstrate added value to the organisation

viii. focusing on the importance of knowledge as a key resource of the organisation

▶ HEI and employer partnerships

WBL has proved to be an effective means of applying higher-level expertise to meet the business objectives of employers (Boud and Solomon, 2001). Such programmes require the development of a genuine partnership between the HEI and employer based upon an understanding of the business imperatives and the related knowledge and skill needs of the employer. The HEI must be genuinely willing and able to work in partnership with the employer as a provider as well as a consumer of high-level learning. For HEIs this might involve no longer seeing themselves as the monopoly provider of courses and other educational initiatives to augment the learning of employees, and instead recognising that the employer may also have high-level learning formalised in their own training programmes and organisational competency frameworks.

The following case studies (1.6 and 1.7) illustrate further how individual and organisational development can come together. Case study 1.6 refers to the bullets i–viii above:

Case study 1.6 Work-based learner profile (C): Embedding organisational change in the UK financial services sector

Part of the response of a national UK bank to extreme turbulence in the UK financial services sector was to introduce a major change initiative to increase the effectiveness of bank branch management teams.

The focus of the nationwide initiative was to improve local-level business planning and customer service. The bank worked with private sales training experts to design a national in-company training programme that was developed in partnership with an HEI (vii and viii).

Case study 1.6: Work-based learner profile (C): Embedding organisational change in the UK financial services sector *continued*

The HEI contribution was to design and support work-based projects to be undertaken by course participants, which reinforced the transfer of the sales and planning training to the real-life work situation of producing the business plan for individual bank branches. By making the real-life business plan the focus of work-based projects, the WBL programme brought to bear high-level skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation upon real-life issues critical to the success of the business (i, ii, iv and v).

A major evaluation of the programme was carried out by the bank which showed that those branches whose senior teams had been through the programme were achieving higher performance, using the bank's standard financial and customer service indicators, than the branches that had not participated in the programme (vi and vii). The impact upon individual members of staff was also significant as they greatly valued the opportunity to achieve an HE qualification and appreciated the relevance and value of what they were doing for their work (iii and vii).

Many commented that the WBL programme gave them a chance to gain an HE qualification that they would otherwise not have had. Senior managers also recognised and commented very favourably upon changes in their staff and how the use of 'reflection' had suddenly become a key tool for managers in their work (iii and viii).

Such were the business and personal benefits of the programme that the bank has sponsored over 600 participants.

Case study 1.7 Work-based learner profile (D): Organisational development – a company cohort undertaking a WBL programme

A WBL partnership between an Australian university and a leading retail bank was established in order to support and incentivise the professional development of a group of high-performing managers. The WBL programme enabled individual participants to claim academic credit for the learning that they had acquired through the successful completion of an intensive 'in-house' leadership development programme. Following a detailed programme review by the university, individuals completing the in-house programme were able to claim academic credit equivalent to a graduate certificate if they self-selected into a WBL qualification programme at a higher award level.

The bank recognised the importance of providing ongoing professional development opportunities as a means of retaining its high-performing staff and recognised that offering a development programme linked to the award of a university qualification would provide a powerful incentive. However, they were also aware that the significant financial commitment of supporting learners though an HE programme would be under regular scrutiny. If the value of the investment was not evident, the sustainability of the programme could be jeopardised. The

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Case study 1.7 Work-based learner profile (D): Organisational Development – a company cohort undertaking a WBL programme *continued*

view of a number of the bank's senior executives was that sponsoring university qualifications delivered little in terms of measurable performance improvement for the organisation.

The WBL approach provided an ideal opportunity for the bank to leverage its investment in their in-house programme and support the individual's ongoing development as well as enhance the organisation's business performance.

Upon commencement of the WBL programme, the employer and programme participants held detailed discussions to review business plans, and individuals' workplace performance requirements and professional development aspirations. Based upon these discussions, they identified either individual or team-based research and development projects, which were tied directly to the organisation's business plans. The supervision of an academic adviser would bring rigour to the way that the employees conducted their work-based research and ensured that this was appropriate to the chosen level of qualification.

For the bank, a mandatory requirement of these project proposals was that the work-based learners were able to forecast a return on investment from their work as well as meet the programme's academic requirements. The return on investment could take a variety of forms including increased revenues, improved productivity or cost efficiencies, but the anticipated value must equate to at least three times the cost of the employer's sponsorship of the qualification.

This approach was seen as a means of 'future-proofing' the university partnership and ensuring that the programme delivered measurable benefits to both the employer and learner.

Nicholas Shipley, Monash University, Australia

▶ WBL round the world

A number of UK HEIs have experience of providing WBL programmes outside of the UK, often with individual distance learning students or with collaborative partners or through their own international centres. A small number of international HE providers (notably in Australia and New Zealand) have adopted and adapted a WBL approach, and the underpinning educational philosophy of WBL has contributed significantly to more sector-wide developments relating to work-integrated learning and graduate employability (Hunt and Chalmers, 2012).

The following Case study 1.8 from Australia illustrates that the learning issues discussed here are global ones:

Case study 1.8 WBL alters the dynamics between 'tutor' and 'learner': Experience from Australia

Whilst educational concepts such as andragogy, Mode 2 knowledge and transdisciplinarity are increasingly features of individual units within HE qualifications in Australia, they are far less well known or understood as a valid basis for the attainment of an entire HE qualification.

These concepts present challenges to educators because they shift the emphasis of their traditional role from that of 'discipline expert' to a 'facilitator of learning', challenging the established perceptions and values of employers and students who are trying to reconcile the relative merit and worth of WBL when compared to traditional academic learning.

Research conducted in Australia to gauge the propensity of employers and learners to engage with models of higher-level WBL produced some unexpected findings:

▶ Employers appreciated the attractiveness of WBL models in terms of academic study aligning to workplace issues, and the enhancement of staff performance in the workplace.
▶ Fewer employers understood the relative value and portability of qualifications earned in a specific employment context.
▶ Employers generally did not understand the idea of awarding qualifications on the basis of learning acquired from an individual's professional experience.
▶ There was a general lack of awareness about higher-level work-based qualifications as a distinctive category of HE – with typical responses being, 'What is being recognised?' and 'Is this a real academic qualification?'

Just as HE educators are challenged by shifting their 'expert' role in the learning partnership, learners can also find it challenging to understand and accept their position as an 'expert practitioner' in the context of their work and as a generator of work-based knowledge.

For tutors, employers and students alike, the disruption to roles, relationships and accepted notions of HE learning requires an explicit repositioning of the work-based learning 'brand' as an HE offering. The process of education with WBL often extends beyond the learning programme itself to include a raising of awareness and acceptance of its fit with academic learning amongst a broad range of stakeholders at all stages of the engagement the process.

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▶ Where does WBL sit in HE?

WBL is flexible and innovative; it brings a different kind of student to HE. Barnett (2014) offers four critical components of a flexible pedagogy, and WBL pedagogies include these:

▶ Immersion (in a professional field)
▶ Reflection (analysing what is already learnt)

▶ Criticality (serious evaluation of learning experience)
▶ Interaction (listen, engage, collaborate)

Discussions around flexible learning often focus on the logistical processes rather than the philosophical debate as to 'why' we are doing this. Initiatives like WBL must be about more than a commercial response to students' busier lives (they cannot attend during the day and so on). It is about the evolution of learning and the realisation that knowledge can come from anywhere; it is not just housed in the HEI. What work-based learners know already, and bring with them to the HEI, has the potential for great collaboration, reciprocal learning and authentic knowledge exchange. HE is about making connections and progressing, and WBL certainly offers plenty of opportunity to do both.

SUMMARY

▶ Much learning occurs away from classrooms and other formal settings; WBL happens at work.
▶ WBL occurs at many levels; we are looking at HE level (4–8).
▶ Through WBL, learning from experience is identified and often awarded credit; no credit can be awarded for simply having an experience.
▶ Both individuals and organisations benefit from WBL.
▶ HEIs can offer structured frameworks to assist WBL students in creating their own HE awards.
▶ WBL draws on existing learning theory and is aided by social networks like communities of practice, which may also be virtual.
▶ WBL is happening around the world.

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