Centre for Outcomes-Based Education

Report on work-based learning

Morag Harvey, Tim Slaughter, Lyn Norman

November 2005
Contents

Main findings and recommendations 2

1 Introduction 3
   1.2 What is work-based learning? 4
   1.1 Details of COBE's work-based learning development 4

2 Achievements 4
   2.1 Generic work-based learning model 5
   2.2 A 'sub-HE into HE' approach to work-based learning 5
   2.3 Foundation Degree development 5
   2.4 Work-based learning workshops 5
   2.5 Work-Related Advisory Group (WRAG) 6
   2.6 Regional initiatives 6

3 Discussion 6
   3.1 Looking forward 7

4 Recommendations 7

5 Summary 9

References 10

Conference Papers and Journal Articles 11
Main findings and recommendations

This report describes the findings of five years of development work carried out by COBE into the design of Foundation Degree frameworks, Graduate Apprenticeship frameworks and work-based learning courses.

Work-based learning can be delivered effectively and efficiently by distance learning

Recommendation 1
Course teams and programme committees need clear guidelines on developing work-based learning courses.

Recommendation 2
Course teams and programme committees can benefit from a generic approach to the design of work-based learning models which they can then contextualise into their own particular discipline and relevant occupational area.

Work-based learning can be delivered through a range of support frameworks

Recommendation 3
Course teams and programme committees need clear guidelines on the types of work-based learning support frameworks that are suitable for particular occupational areas.

Recommendation 4
Work-based learning support frameworks must take into account the needs of an occupational area and the assessment required by any associated occupational standards.

Foundation Degree frameworks can enable students to benefit from both theoretical and practice-based learning approaches

Recommendation 5
A programme approach to the design of foundation degrees is essential so that the outcomes of workplace learning and academic learning are linked together to enhance the student learning experience.

Recommendation 6
A clear link to relevant occupational standards or other professional standards is essential for the design of foundation degrees so that successful students can gain vocational recognition for their studies.

Work-based learning can enhance the higher education curriculum

Recommendation 7
Work-based learning should be seen as a way of enabling students to be independent, active learners, by helping them develop the skills, such as information literacy, planning and time-management, necessary for HE study.

Recommendation 8
Work-based learning gives students the opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes which show their ability to apply, as well as understand, theoretical knowledge. These outcomes enhance employability and should be seen as appropriate for degree programmes.
1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of work carried out in COBE to design new approaches to work-based learning for the Open University (OU) which meet the requirements of higher education awards.

COBE’s involvement in developing new types of work-based learning and support models began in 2000. At this time the announcement of a number of government initiatives, which focused on meeting the needs of employment in the 21st century, signalled the beginning of a growing interest in the learning potential of the workplace within higher education and COBE (previously VQ Centre until 2002) recognised that this learning potential could only be fully realised if new, cost-effective and time-effective models could be developed.

One of the new initiatives announced in 2000 was the foundation degree. This new award was an opportunity for uniting vocational and academic study, and an essential component was work-based learning. At this time COBE began researching and designing a foundation degree framework that would meet the precepts set out in the Foundation Degree Prospectus (HEFCE 2000) and could be delivered cost-effectively by distance learning through the usual OU systems. For most academic staff foundation degrees were unfamiliar territory; they were either not involved in work-based learning developments or had experience only of the mentoring model of support. Consultations within the OU and with employers’ representative bodies brought together expertise to inform new ways of developing work-based learning; this information was shared with faculties and course teams.

In 2001, COBE was awarded a HEFCE funded project to develop a framework for Graduate Apprenticeships. Again this award was heavily dependent on work-based learning as a key component of the students’ learning experience. Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) schemes had to be developed by a partnership of higher education (HE) and industry and were designed to improve the employability of graduates. (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

From 2000 to 2002, in liaison with faculty representatives and a group of consultants, a generic approach to work-based learning at both level 1 and level 2 was developed to address key areas relevant to all workplaces. During this time, a support model for work-based learning was also designed. At the beginning of 2003, COBE developmentally tested the approach in the areas of Early Years and ICT. The final report (April 2003) found that the generic approach to work-based learning and the low-level support model were academically viable and well-received by both students and employers. A number of OU courses have now used these models as a basis of their own work-based learning approach.

In 2004, COBE designed another model for work-based learning which enabled those students with an NVQ level 3 (or equivalent) award to undertake additional assessment so that they could be awarded 30 HE credits at level 1. This model was piloted with OUBS and is now available to students as B121 Managing in the Workplace.

1.1 What is work-based learning?

Work-based learning offers the student an opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes that are achieved through workplace activities and from additional reading, organisational, and review tasks designed to help the student link their work and academic learning experiences. The student has the opportunity to gain HE credit points for their workplace learning, and to use those points to access qualifications and other areas of HE study.

---

1 Mentoring: formal mentoring schemes require mentor training and evaluation in order to assure the quality of provision.
Work-based learning delivers its intended outcomes by enabling students to provide evidence of their practical experiences, for example through reflective accounts or learning logs, and assessing the student’s ability to link these practical experiences to relevant theories and perspectives.

Work-based learning enables course teams to offer students the opportunity to take part in a range of employability-related activities which will enhance their career prospects and practical skills; for example, Personal Development Plans (PDPs), planning, organising, time-management and effective communication.

1.2 Details of COBE’s work-based learning development

The driving force has been the development of activities and support materials which are cost-effective and relevant to different work settings. OU students work in a wide variety of work settings within particular occupational areas. In Early and Primary Years, for example, they might be employed as child minders, nursery staff, or care workers. Similarly in ICT students might be employed in technical, support or service roles. Although different areas may have their own occupational standards the aim has been to develop a generic assessment, learning and teaching framework for work-based courses that can be applied in different employment sectors.

The framework has been devised by examining the different aspects of the working environment and focusing on those areas relevant to all employees. Issues relating to Health and safety, access to resources, legislation policy, areas for workplace improvement and developing own learning can be applied to any work setting, and form the basis of a generic work-based learning approach.

It has been important to recognise that, as a large, national and international institution, the OU is not well placed economically or geographically to support individual workplace visits. An essential aim, therefore, has been to develop a framework which supports the student in identifying a workplace facilitator, and in negotiating their workplace activities. The workplace facilitator has a support and advisory role, but is not involved in assessment.

2 Achievements

Through a consultation process with faculties, and with external professional bodies, COBE has developed approaches to work-based learning that can be delivered through distance learning to a large number of students.

2.1 Generic work-based learning model

COBE’s generic work-based learning model incorporates a 'light-touch', or facilitator model of support which is specifically relevant for those occupations which do not require direct observation as part of the assessment strategy. Individuals working in areas such as ICT or public administration, for example, do not have to meet the same requirements for observation of appropriate skills as those learning to become nurses and teachers.

The model enables faculties to contextualise the generic framework and develop an accredited work experience component that enables the student to demonstrate:

- Specialist vocational knowledge underpinned by broad-based academic learning.
- Development of employability skills.
- Development of work-related skills as well as knowledge.
- Clear links between experience and study.
This work-based learning model has been developmentally tested. The findings indicated that ‘...the underlying principles of the support structure [...] are a viable method of delivering work-based learning in a distance learning framework.’ (Work-based Learning Developmental Testing Report, April 2003)

This model has now been used by a number of course teams in their development of work-based learning courses either as a clear framework, for example T121 Information and Communication Technologies at Work, or as a basis for further development, for example, E115 Personal and Professional Development: Early Years Settings, and M226 Computing: A Work-Based Approach.

For the future, COBE is supporting the development of the level 1 work-based learning course for the Foundation Degree in Health Sciences, the level 2 work-based learning course for the Foundation Degree in Information and Communication Technologies, and a work-based learning component for the Science Faculty's Postgraduate Diploma for Dosimetrists.

2.2 A 'sub-HE into HE' approach to work-based learning

COBE has also developed a 'sub-HE into HE' model of work-based learning which capitalises on awards such as the NVQ Level 3. NVQ Level 3 awards require students to show that they can carry out relevant practical activities and meet occupational competencies required for a particular vocational or professional role. This type of award is a 'licence to practice' qualification in occupations such as health and social care, and as such is gained by a large number of people. This indicates a clear market opportunity for the University.

COBE’s 'sub-HE into HE' model has been used by the Open University Business School to produce their new course B121 Managing in the Workplace. This development went from conception to pilot presentation in six months, and indicates that materials can be produced quickly and to an appropriate standard. The course is now in the University's presentation schedule. The 'sub-HE into HE' model has also been widely disseminated across the OU and, in liaison with OUBS, the course materials have been shared with other faculties to support further developments in this type of provision.

2.3 Foundation Degree Developments

COBE has supported the development of a range of Foundation Degrees across the OU; including:
- FD in Early Years;
- FD in Working with Young People;
- FD in Health and Social Care;
- FD in Computing and its Practice
- FD in Information and Communication Technology

COBE has also supported the development of foundation degrees which are required for a specific student market; for example, the Foundation Degree for the RAF. In relation to this development COBE has advised on the potential benefits of the 'Learning Through Work' programme designed by Learndirect.

For the future, the Centre for Widening Participation has invited COBE to help to develop a work-based learning component linked to a proposed Openings course in the area of Sports, with a view to developing a Foundation Degree in Sports.

2.4 Work-based learning workshops

COBE has run workshops for faculty staff to explain how to develop work-based learning courses, and how such courses might fit into foundation degree and honours degree
programmes. Workshops included sessions for Technology Staff Tutors in the London Regional Office to explain their role in monitoring and quality assuring students' activities in the new ICT work-based learning course (T121), and for the Science Faculty to help them explore the ways that work-based learning might enhance their curriculum.

2.5 Work-Related Advisory Group (WRAG)

In 2001 COBE established a Work-Related Advisory Group comprising external employer representatives, including large national employers, Sector Skills Councils and related government organisations, and OU representatives. WRAG aims to promote an effective channel of communication between occupational and business organisations and the OU. This group meets twice a year to discuss current work-related topics relevant to employers and the OU. The minutes of WRAG meetings are used to inform reports to the Foundation Degree Group.

To ensure that WRAG discussions benefit the OU an associated advisory group has been formed with a membership including associate deans, course managers and OUVS. Associate WRAG aims to ensure that employer viewpoints are disseminated across the OU and inform the University's work-based learning developments. This group also meets twice a year at an appropriate time after the WRAG meetings.

2.6 Regional initiatives

COBE has been involved in regional initiatives in collaboration with Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and Aimhigher projects to forge new relationships with other institutions and agencies. These projects are intended to explore new way to enhance the curriculum. During these projects COBE has formed close links with OU regional staff; for example, the current PDP for Life JISC project involves both COBE and R03 representatives.

3 Discussion

When COBE first began to research and develop cost-effective models of work-based learning in 2000, the level of interest in this type of learning provision within the OU, and within higher education across the UK, was focused mainly within pre-defined vocational areas such as education, and health and social care. In other subject areas the idea of providing students with an HE learning experiences related to the workplace was completely new and challenged established OU views, not the least being the well-accepted way of delivering learning through written text.

The aim of this work was the development of activities and materials to support work-based learning in a wide range of different work settings. The focus has been on demonstrating that work-based learning in the OU can:

(i) be cost-effective, quality assured and meet external needs;
(ii) carry HE credit.

There has also been the need to keep the student at the centre of activities and retain openness. Students must be able to gain HE credit points and be able to use that credit to gain access to other study and qualifications. The work has involved both external and internal consultation and liaison activities.

Externally, it has been important to develop links with organisations such as the new Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). SSCs are responsible for government initiatives relating to skills development across all UK employment sectors and are an important source of external validation. COBE has also kept in contact with other external agencies such as the Regional Development Agency, Learning Skills Development Agency, and Foundation Degree Forward by attending and contributing to discussion forums and conferences.
Within the OU these activities have been crucial in gaining commitment from faculties to engage with new types of learning opportunities. Although this has been a long process it has led to better channels of communication between COBE and CAUs, Student Services, Planning, and Marketing. COBE is now being asked to provide help and support for a new work-based learning initiatives, such as the level 1 work-based learning course development for the Foundation Degree in Health Sciences, the level 2 work-based learning development for the Foundation Degree in Information and Communication Technologies and a work-based learning component being developed by the Science Faculty for the Postgraduate Diploma for Dosimetrists. COBE is also forming close links with the new Practice-Based Professional Learning (PBPL) CETL to share the expertise gained through the last five years of work-based learning developments, and is represented on the CETL’s Advisory Group.

What has been learnt through these developments can make future developments easier and more cost effective. For example, representatives of WRAG have made it clear that employers are looking for courses that meet current business needs and therefore it is essential that the course production process for work-based learning courses, in particular, should be as short as possible. When employers have a current need for staff development they cannot wait for several years of course production to take place before a course is presented.

3.1 Looking forward

For the future, there is a need for wider dissemination and consolidation of work-based learning experience. COBE is involved in:

- working with course teams developing new work-based learning components;
- presenting work-based learning as part of an integrated programme-based approach that brings together the application of knowledge, skills development and employability;
- disseminating advice and guidance through a new website and the Practical Pedagogy series of booklets.

4 Recommendations

This final section presents a summary of the main findings from this work and offers recommendations for future work-based learning developments.

4.1 Work-based learning can be delivered effectively and efficiently by distance learning

COBE’s generic approach to work-based learning focuses on issues, such as health and safety, which are relevant in any workplace. This approach has benefits for the recruitment of students because the learning can support different occupational areas. When such generic material is contextualised into particular occupations and discipline areas it can deliver HE learning, and be effective and efficient in meeting the needs of the employer and student.
Recommendation 1
Course teams and programme committees need clear guidelines on selecting work-based learning models.

Recommendation 2
Course teams and programme committees can benefit from a generic approach to the design of work-based learning models which they can then contextualise into their own particular discipline and relevant occupational area.

4.2 Work-based learning can be delivered with a range of support frameworks

There is a range of work-based learning support models: from minimal guidance to full mentoring support. An appropriate model is one that delivers student support appropriate to the assessment requirements of the particular occupational standards involved. For example, observational assessment will require accredited and quality assured assessors.

The importance of developing new 'minimal guidance' models of work-based learning support should be viewed in relation to broadening the range of models that was available to the OU in 2000. Traditionally, work-based or practice-based learning has been presented in such areas as teaching and nursing where a high level of face-to-face support or mentoring, is required. Where such support is not required there is no need to incorporate mentoring into work-based learning courses.

Work-based learning course development should the following two key questions:
- What are the requirements of the relevant occupational standards, or professional guidelines?
- How best can the occupational standard be assessed and supported at a distance?

Course teams and programme committees should identify the relevant occupational area(s) to which their academic area applies, and address the appropriate occupational standards to ensure that their award gains external recognition.

Recommendation 3
Course teams and programme committees need clear guidelines on the types of work-based learning support frameworks that are suitable for particular occupational areas.

Recommendation 4
Work-based learning support must take into account the needs of an occupational area and the assessment required by any associated occupational standards.

4.3 Foundation Degree frameworks give students the opportunity to benefit from both learning in the workplace and learning from academic texts

Foundation degrees need to be specifically focused on an occupational area. To present a coherent learning experience for students it is essential that the foundation degree programme is designed with integrated and complementary theoretical and practice-based components. The way to achieve this is to take a programme approach to the initial design of the degree so that both the HE and occupational learning outcomes can be met throughout the students' studies.

In vocationally-focused degrees external occupational standards may need to be addressed in addition to academic learning outcomes. A danger is that HE and occupational learning outcomes will overlap or compete for prominence. Programme committees and course teams
should be aware of what can realistically be achieved, therefore, and guard against overload. The aim should be to minimise the overall number of learning outcomes, and not to view the work-related and academic-related outcomes as fundamentally different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A programme approach to the design of foundation degrees is essential so that the outcomes of workplace learning and academic learning are linked together to enhance the student learning experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clear link to relevant occupational standards or other professional standards is essential in work-based learning elements of foundation degrees so that successful students can gain vocational recognition for their studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Work-based learning can enhance the higher education curriculum

It is now recognised by work-based learning course teams that students should have the opportunity to carry out a range of activities that enhance the traditional undergraduate study experience. For example, supporting students’ development of information literacy so that they can find out about their own workplace resources and policies gives them a key skill that underpins further HE study.

Work-based learning gives students the opportunity to apply their skills, knowledge and understanding within a practical work setting, and to use this opportunity to record and demonstrate their employability skills. Skills such as time management, planning, and reviewing progress can be demonstrated through workplace activities, and students can relate their practice to relevant management theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-based learning should be seen as a way of enabling students to be independent, active learners, by helping them develop the skills, such as information literacy, planning and time-management, necessary for HE study;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-based learning gives students the opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes which show their ability to apply, as well as understand, theoretical knowledge. These outcomes enhance employability and should be seen as appropriate for degree programmes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Summary

Work-based learning in the 21st century is an important area for higher education. It offers an opportunity to provide students seeking employment in the commercial sector with the skills needed by UK businesses to compete more effectively in local and global markets. Work-based learning is also a key opportunity to provide students with recognised and valued employability skills to enhance their careers.

COBE’s work over the last five years has supported the development of work-based learning course and support models that enable course teams and programme committees to produce cost effective and high quality courses. Although some CAUs have developed courses specifically to match their own specialist programmes, COBE’s generic approach is
increasingly being used by course teams just starting work-based learning development (for example, the level 1 work-based learning course for the new Health Science Foundation Degree).

Resources (such as workshops, an operations manual, COBE publications and COBE website) are available to disseminate knowledge and understanding of these generic models. But there is also a growing demand from academic units for customised advice and guidance to support work-based learning developments. COBE is responding to this demand and will continue to act as a source of knowledge and information about both internal and external work-based learning developments.

References

COBE Foundation Degree Operations Manual (2005)
COBE website http://www.open.ac.uk/cobe/
COBE New Approaches to Work-Related Learning (working draft)

Conference Papers and Journal articles
Harvey, M; Norman, L (2005) 'Developing a distance-learning model for work-integrated learning' to be presented at International Symposium on Work-Integrated Learning, Orlando, Florida


Slaughter, T. and Harvey, M. (2002), 'Development of Work-Based Learning Courses Within Distance Learning Degrees at the Open University', Published in New Patterns of Learning in
Higher Education: Exploring issues from combining work placement and study, City University, London. ISBN 1-903957-01-X.