



Strategic Development of High Level Learning for the Workforce In Wales

Part 2

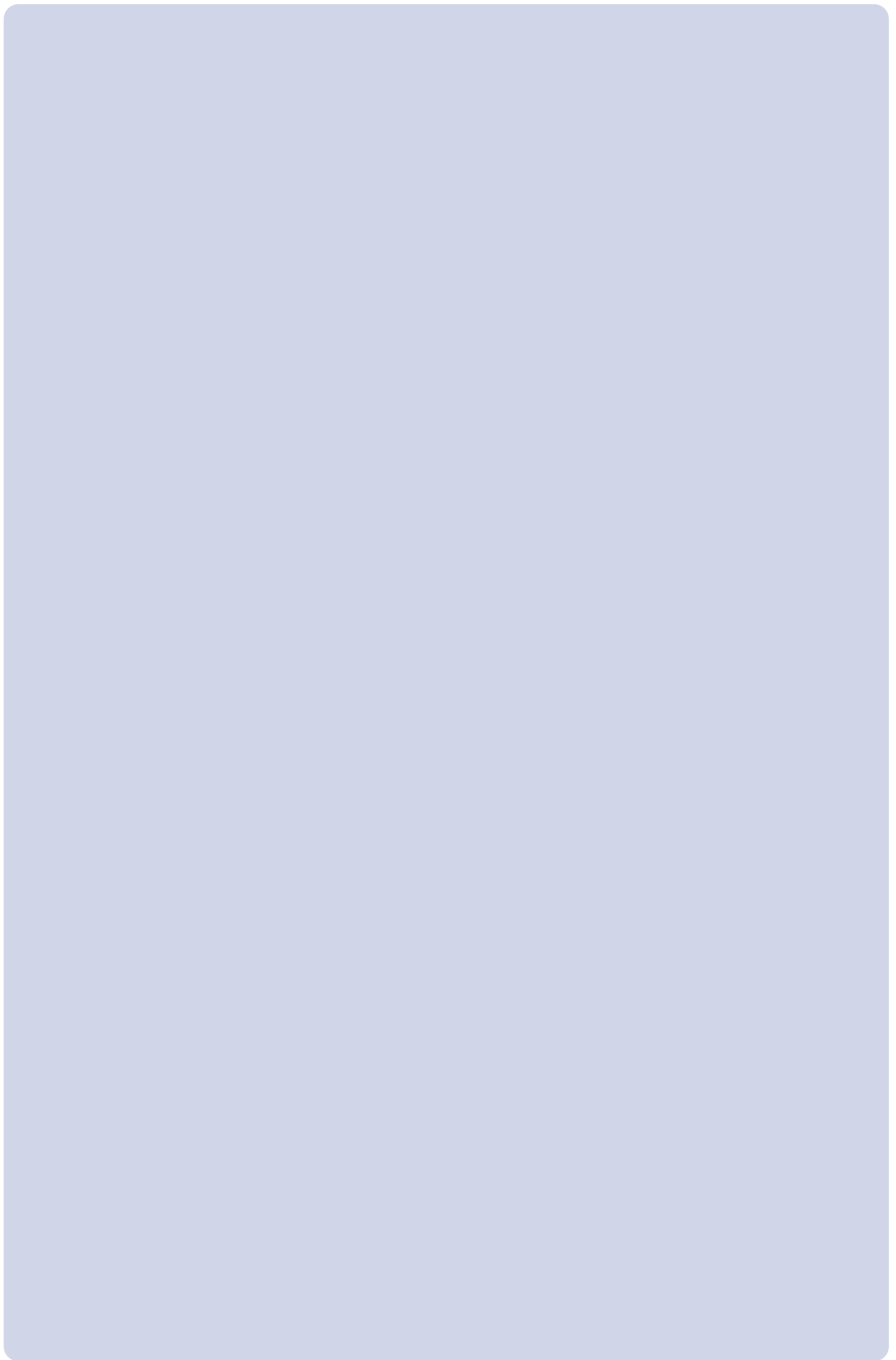
The Micro Projects

A project produced for HEFCW

Peter Treadwell and Dr Barrie Kennard

Cardiff School of Management,
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

May 2009



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Strategic Development of High Level Learning for the

Workforce in Wales:

S1: A Critical review of current workforce development activities between the business and the university sectors in Wales and mapping the extent of accredited prior experiential learning development [APEL/LR] activity within HEIs in Wales

A scoping project carried out by the College of Education and Lifelong Learning, Bangor University

2008

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Summary

Lifelong Learning policy is shifting its focus from the formal qualifications systems to other, more flexible routes. Validation of informal and non-formal learning begins to make visible learning that is gained outside learning institutions. APEL is significantly important, not only with qualifications such as Foundation Degrees but also in relation to developing the workforce.

HEIs in Wales have built strong business links with employers. Many offer a range of learning opportunities for businesses.

The findings suggest that there are pockets of APEL activity in some schools within HEIs in Wales but overall it appears that the extent of APEL activity is marginal.

Nevertheless, it seems that there is a sense of recognising the potential advantages of developing this area of activity amongst HEIs and that HE can play a fundamental part in workforce development. The development of a simplified, less complex process would be beneficial to the economic success of Wales. There are substantial gains for learners, HEIs and employers in Wales if consistent and clear processes were further implemented. It seems all HEIs have the foundations in place to progress and enhance APEL activity within their own institution and tap into the potential employers/employees market to develop higher level skills in the Welsh workforce.

The findings so far highlight possibly the need for alternative assessment methods if APEL is to thrive, including the use of simulation performance, live on-the –spot testing of applicants, and workplace observation. E-APEL projects which use e-technology to allow potential students to self-assess their prior experiential learning and receive an indication of the credit they might be able to claim, e-portfolio services etc appears to have its advantages and disadvantages. This is a new concept and needs to be further explored for the benefit of this research. The general feedback so far for a „one stop shop“ Workforce Development Centre is positive but that it needs to be pragmatic and usable.

1.0 Summary of Key Terms

Accreditation: is a term frequently used as a synonym for the recognition of learning as defined below. However, it is perhaps more properly used to signify the most formalised and widely practised forms of recognition.

Accreditation of prior learning (APL): a process for accessing and, as appropriate, recognising of prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it.

Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL): a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

Recognition (of learning): any process that acknowledges and establishes publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place and can be assessed to have done so.

Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) embraces all post-16 and higher education in Wales and is being established jointly by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

National Qualification Framework

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)¹ for Wales, England and Northern Ireland sets out the levels at which qualifications are recognised. The NQF has 9 levels, from entry level through to level 8, which is equivalent to a doctorate.

Credit Transfer

Institutions and Awarding Bodies have recognition arrangements that can allow learners to transfer relevant credits they have been awarded. Learners may be able to transfer the credits they have been awarded as part of one study programme to another, offered by the same institution, and/or transfer credit when moving from one institution to another within Wales, UK and Europe.

¹ In the review being carried out by QCA "APL and the QCF" it is anticipated that the Qualification and Curriculum Framework will replace the existing National Qualification Framework [NQF] in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the summer of 2008. See the descriptions and definitions (December 2007) at <http://www.qca.org.uk/qca>

Workforce Development

Workforce development is defined as “the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees”².

1.1 Introduction/Context

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) funded Workforce Development project aims to develop higher level learning in the Welsh workforce in order to boost the economic competitiveness of Wales. It aims to extend the opportunities for mature adults in the Welsh workforce of engaging in a graduate education in a variety of different ways via the use of innovative blended learning and learning recognition activities. This will allow Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in a collaborative context to play to their strengths in designing, assessing and accrediting higher level work based learning. The Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning plays a key role in tapping into the potential market of HE learners to develop higher level learning within the Welsh workforce.

This scoping project by Bangor University is part of a wider UWIC-led project that will review current workforce development activities between the business and university sectors in Wales with a particular attention to mapping out current use of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (AP(E)L) within HEIs in Wales.

1.2 Aim

This scoping project hopes to review current workforce development activities between the business and the university sectors in Wales and map the extent of accredited prior and experiential learning development [APEL] activity within HEIs in Wales. It will explore links that HEIs in Wales currently have with the business sector and map out the extent in which APEL is being used effectively within each HEI.

1.3 Background

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is evidenced in the 1980’s as a tool for admission to higher education programmes. The use of APEL within HE developed from the pioneering work of the Learning from Experience Trust. Initially the primary purpose of APEL was to increase the supply of students to higher education.³ It is argued that the development of APEL across HE has declined over the years. Nevertheless, it seems APEL, in various forms continue to feature within the academic profile of many Universities.

1.4 Literature Review

There is a wealth of literature, reports and reviews on the development of AP(E)L within HEIs in the UK. AP(E)L appears to be considered mainstream and is long established within HEIs in the UK. However, despite these developments, it appears that there is little AP(E)L activity within HEIs and that it is

² HE Academy (2006) *Work-based Learning: Illuminating the Landscape*

³ *Bridging Rhetoric and Reality: Accreditation of prior experiential learning in the UK*, Garnett, J, Portwood, D; Costley, C:2004

predominately used only for access with advanced standing and that it is still regarded with scepticism on resource and academic grounds⁴. This paper will explore whether this is mirrored within Welsh HEIs.

1.5 Benefits of AP(E)L

Among the benefits of APEL cited in the literature^{5 67}are:

- Provides a framework for recognising, assessing and accrediting different forms of learning
- Facilitates arrangements for institutional admissions in respect of access to higher education and entry with advanced standing
- Allows for easy incorporation into modular and credit-based individual programmes
- It can lead to pioneering developments between HE and employers
- Offers scope for innovative practice for experimentation in programme delivery
- Enhance the quality of learning where HEIs and Employers work in collaboration –this can result in developments in assessment procedures, improvement to content and delivery and arrangements for assuring quality

One of the main reported benefits of APEL is its potential to support and empower individuals whose learning has taken place in contexts other than that of educational institutions. It can be used directly in the employment market. Within the labour market, APEL can be used as a tool to allow those to progress to higher level learning based on their informal experiences gained at work, community or volunteer experience. By converting informal learning into certificated learning, APEL provides cost effective routes to qualification. In relation to the workforce, an employees experience can be assessed with the same rigour as any other learning would be at HE level and awarded credit.⁸

This project will explore the use of AP(E)L within each HEI setting in Wales.

1.6 Flexible Learning

Lifelong Learning policy is shifting its focus from the formal qualifications systems to other, more flexible routes. Validation of informal and non-formal learning begins to make visible learning that is gained outside learning institutions. This represents a vast untapped resource of invisible knowledge and skills that will lead to significant economic and social benefits for individuals, communities and countries.

⁴ *Bridging Rhetoric and Reality: APEL in the UK*, Garnett, J, Portwood, D, Costley, C (2004)

⁵ *Social Inclusion Through APEL*, Cleary, P, Whittaker, R, Gallacher, J, Merrill, B, Carette, M (2002)

⁶ *Embedding APEL: Encouraging APEL Provision in Continuing Education*, Cox, E, Green V (2001)

⁷ *Mapping APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in English Higher Education*, Merrifield, J, McZntyre, D, Osaigbovo, R (2000)

⁸ *Learning from Experience Trust* (2002)

Among the instruments to support flexibility, transparency, mobility and academic quality are a range of tools and processes that recognise prior learning. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the most widely used term in the UK for recognising learning.

1.7 Recognising Learning

The European Guidelines for the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning in 2007, „Validation of learning, no matter where and how it happens, is generally good for the individuals who have their learning validated. In the context of the workforce development project, firms also benefit from knowing the full potential of people and using their learning to support the development of work practices (and therefore further learning) and productivity. Much learning is validated through formal learning situations- and this will continue to be the basis of qualifications systems-however most non-formal learning that happens alongside these formal learning situations is not validated and remains invisible. Similarly, the range of informal learning is generally not validated and is also invisible“⁹

1.8 Credit and Learning

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) was launched in 2003¹⁰ and brings all recognised learning into a single unifying structure. The framework merges the concepts of learning achievements (credit) and the demands made by that learning on the learner (level) to create a system that is able to embrace all types and styles of learning and all qualifications.

Learning that takes place in the workplace can also be formally recognised for the award of credit by HEIs. This is done through processes known as APL/RPL.

1.9 The fundamental principles¹¹ underpinning validation

- 1) Validation must be voluntary
- 2) The privacy of individuals should be respected
- 3) Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed
- 4) Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- 5) Systems should contain mechanism for guidance and counselling of individuals
- 6) Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.
- 7) The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- 8) Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek a balanced participation.
- 9) The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of

⁹ *The European Guidelines for the Validation of non- Formal and Informal Learning (2007)*

¹⁰ *Credit and Learning in Wales: An Introduction, WAG (2007)*

¹¹ *The European Guidelines for the Validation of non- Formal and Informal Learning (2007)*

interest.

- 10) The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

1.10 Defining Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL is the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning and can be defined as the process by which appropriate un-certified learning is given academic recognition to gain exemption from study of a specific module (s).

APEL is defined by the Learning from Experience Trust as “The award of credit for learning based on prior experience, including from work, community or volunteer experience-which has not previously been assessed and/or awarded Credit”¹²

The process of APEL involves reflecting upon experience and, on the basis of this reflection, identifying learning outcomes, which can be awarded credit. Credit will be awarded on the basis of evidence of the learning that has been identified.

This evidence may take a variety of forms, including documents, artifacts and products. The whole package of evidence is generally referred to as a „portfolio“.

APEL has been used as the basis for demonstrating competence in vocational qualifications such as NVQs for many years. However, it also has a significant track record in higher education in areas of professional programmes such as Health Care programmes and Business and Management.

Experiential learning includes knowledge, skills and behaviours attained in a planned or unplanned way, in particular through work.

APEL is often closely associated with and at times included within APL which is Accreditation of Prior Learning and can apply to both certificated and uncertificated learning.

1.11 The Welsh Position

Knowledge and skills are playing an increasingly important role in economic development and as stated in the recent consultation document „*Skills that Work for Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy*“

„...a successful Wales needs to invest in skills at all levels“

Fewer than half of people with no qualifications are in employment, compared with 9 out of 10 people who hold qualifications at National Qualifications Framework¹³ levels 7-8. Employees with qualifications at levels 7-8 earn on average 74% more per week than those qualified to level 3 or below.¹⁴

¹² *Mapping APEL: Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning*, Learning from Experience Trust, (2000)

¹³ The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)¹³ for Wales, England and Northern Ireland sets out the levels at which qualifications are recognised. The NQF has 9 levels, from entry level through to level 8, which is equivalent to a doctorate

Lord Leitch's review of skills highlighted that the UK must improve its skills base at all levels in order to deliver economic growth and social justice and that it should aspire to „world class“ skills by 2020¹⁵

Wales continues to have a higher proportion of adults without qualifications compared to England or Scotland with fewer people with high-level skills.¹⁶

The table below shows the level of highest qualification held by adults of working age,2006¹⁷:

	No Qualifications	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 +
Wales	16	17	22	20	26
England	13	18	21	19	29
NE	14	18	23	22	24
London	13	17	17	16	37
SE	9	18	20	20	32
Scotland	14	13	19	19	34
N. Ireland	22	12	22	19	25
UK	14	17	21	19	29

In the *Learning Country: Vision Into Action*¹⁸ the Welsh Assembly Government set out the target of the adult population to be qualified to level 4 or above by 2010.

APEL could have a potential impact on increasing higher level skills within the Welsh Workforce. Indeed it has been referred to as a „sleeping giant“ by Gunning (2008)¹⁹

Higher-level learning and Skills

¹⁴ The Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales 2006. WAG (2007)

¹⁵ *Prosperity for all in the global economy-world class skills*. Leitch Review of Skills, 2006.

¹⁶ *Skills that Work for Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy*, WAG(2008)

¹⁷ *Annual Population Survey 2006-The Levels of Highest Qualifications of Working Age Adults*, WAG (2006)

¹⁸ *Learning Country: Vision Into Action*, WAG (2006)

¹⁹ Gunning, P *Challenges facing Wales: a strategic policy analysis enquiry into the future for lifelong learning*, Cardiff, April 2008

2.0 Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was conducted with the research in gathering evidence of AP(E)L activity within Welsh HEIs. The HEIs approached to participate in this research included:

1. Aberystwyth
 2. Bangor
 3. Cardiff
 4. Glamorgan
 5. Lampeter
 6. NEWI *
 7. Newort
 8. Open University
 9. Swansea *
 10. Swansea Institute*
 11. Trinity College, Carmarthen *
 12. UWIC
- * Nil response

Utilising the qualitative data collection methods, the research was conducted in two main phases:

Phase 1

- A literature review of AP(E)L
- Electronic and hard copies of a Workforce Development questionnaire²⁰ and letter²¹ were sent to all Academic Registrars in all HEIs in Wales to identify the extent to which APEL policy and practice are united within each institution. It was also an opportunity to question each HEI on how important AP(E)L is in relation to workforce development for HEIs, the business sector and learners in Wales. As well as aiming to identify initial AP(E)L activity within each institution, this initial first contact would enable the HEI in question to signpost key departments and members of staff involved with AP(E)L processes to allow us to continue with the second phase.

Phase 2

- Structured interviews²² with AP(E)L informants within each HEI
- Following the initial feedback from those who replied to the first stage of the research, telephone interviews were conducted with those involved with the processes of AP(E)L within each HEI setting/department/school.

²⁰ Copy of questionnaire (Annex 1)

²¹ Copy of letter available in Annex 2)

²² Sample of types of questions asked available in Annex 3

- Face to face interviews with some AP(E)L informants where possible were also conducted as well as electronic communication with various AP(E)L informants throughout the project.

2.1 This review of APEL activity within HEIs will explore the current extent of APEL activity within each Higher Education Institution in Wales and aim to identify and explore APEL in context of the following areas:

- Business Links
- The extent of APEL activity within each HEI
- Defining APEL
- APEL policies and practice within Welsh HEIs
- Perceived barriers to APEL
- Perceptions of APEL
- APEL advisers role within each HEI
- Examples/Models of good practice
- e-APEL
- Current marketing of APEL within HEIs
- LRD productivity model
- Expanding APEL

2.2 Mapping AP(E)L within Welsh HEIs

Mapping the extent of any prior learning within each specific Welsh HEI proved problematic for a number of reasons:

- **Response**
Some HEIs were slow to reply to the questionnaires and letters sent out even following initial follow-up letters. This was mainly due to personnel issues, staff turnover and staff on annual leave etc
- **Statistical evidence**
Obtaining statistical evidence from all HEIs on APEL claims proved problematic. Few institutions collected relevant statistics on APEL claims centrally.
- **Terminology**
The language of APEL proved a barrier when trying to identify key APEL informants within each HEI. Some members of staff did not recognise what APEL meant and were unclear on who were the relevant key staff members involved with APEL claims.
- **Internal Collaboration and Communication**
There was a lack of communication between Departments/Schools/Faculties about APEL policies and procedures. Academic Schools were aware of APEL within their own field but might not be aware that different Schools also dealt with APEL within the same Institution

3.0 Findings/ Workforce Development Activity

From the responses received and interviews held, a range of valuable information came to the forefront as the following illustrate.

3.1 Business Links

It was reported that HEIs in Wales have built strong business links with employers and that many offer a range of learning opportunities for businesses including distance learning or short courses. Welsh HEIs account for only 5% of higher education in the UK, in the 2005/06 academic year they earned 11% of income earned by UK HEIs from collaborative research and almost 9% of income from consultancy contracts with SMEs.²³

The Welsh Assembly's recent response to the Leitch review acknowledge:

"We will build on these growing links, encouraging Higher Education Institutions to work with employers to develop programmes that meet their higher-level skills needs"²⁴

It appears the majority of Welsh HEIs reported that their Institution have established links with some of the following examples:

- Strong links with local community and local SME businesses
- The Probation Service
- Social Services
- NHS Trust
- Awarding Bodies
- County Councils
- Careers Wales
- Care Council Wales

3.2 Higher Level Learning Activity

- The majority of HEIs (excluding Lampeter University) who responded offer work related high level courses, ranging from NVQs level 4 & 5 and Foundation Degrees to Work Related Degrees and Masters programmes. A variety of subject areas were reported (from fields of Business, IT, Health, Community, Sciences and Law to Foundation Degrees in Coaching, Rugby, Creative Industries and Estate Agency) with Glamorgan on the forefront offering over 50 Foundation degrees/certificates in a variety of industry related subject areas. The potential to utilize AP(E)L further here is evident, but information on how much AP(E)L was currently being awarded was difficult to obtain.

²³ Higher education-business and community interaction survey 2004-05 and 2005-06 HEFCE. (2007)

²⁴ *Skills that Work for Wales: A skills and employment strategy* consultation paper, 2008, page 2

3.3 Key AP(E)L Informants/Advisers

- Initial responses from the Registrar were unable to identify key APEL advisers within their own institution. On closer inspection the role of the „AP(E)L adviser“ usually falls on the course/academic co-ordinators for specific subject areas offering AP(E)L within each School. According to those who responded to our questionnaire, there are no dedicated full-time APEL advisers/coordinator employed at any Welsh HEI. The role is usually added onto the role of course directors/co-ordinators etc. The research suggests the extent of APEL claims as it currently stands would not justify a need for a full time individual to carry out this role. However, this could potentially be reviewed pending the success of the Virtual Development Centre where demand regarding AP(E)L claims would be likely to increase. One Institution reported that the model of having a dedicated APEL adviser within the School would be viable but felt that they want a shared understanding of APEL across the whole Institution.

3.4 Statistical Information

- Little evidence such as statistics were provided relating to students numbers for APEL claims within each HEI. Some HEIs report they „simply don’t track them“ suggesting numbers are low. For example, the School of Lifelong Learning at Bangor University reported only approx 30-40 have been made for claims over the last 10 years. The School of Nursing at Bangor have had approx 26 claims awarded within the last 2 years. Registry should have a record of where APEL claims have been awarded but none were supplied by any HEI.

3.5 APEL policies and procedures

- All HEIs who responded have APEL policies in place which are readily available to download on their website. Some Schools within each institution also include them within their Students Handbooks. The policies are usually considered by a Quality Assurance Committee and/or a Pro Vice Chancellor with regulations produced by the Regulations and Examiners Committee. All state that they are clearly written and easily accessible for staff and students and are available to view on their website, within student/course/academic handbooks etc. However, they are not actually that easy to locate on their websites with some dated, currently under review or probably in need of updating.

HEIs in Wales appear to follow the Guidelines²⁵ on the accreditation of prior learning from the Quality Assurance Agency with regard to APEL.

²⁵ *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, (2004)

3.6 Subject area for APEL claims

The following areas are some examples of the subjects areas where claims for APEL credit were requested for:

- Business & Management
- Health and social care/nursing routes
- Social Studies
- Combined Studies
- Literature & Creative Writing

- Fine Art
- Agriculture
- Information Studies

This perhaps reflects a range of subjects popular among mature and part-time students who are generally more likely to consider making AP(E)L claims.

3.7 National Qualification Framework

- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)²⁶ for Wales, England and Northern Ireland sets out the levels at which qualifications are recognised. The NQF has 9 levels, from entry level through to level 8, which is equivalent to a doctorate.
- All Welsh HEIs appear to be using /or will be implementing the new National Qualification Framework levels (Level 4,5 etc) with some Schools within each Institution still on the old levels.

3.8 Advanced Standing

Most HEIs evaluate evidence in the terms of the following when determining if credit may simply allow entry to the beginning of an award or entry with advanced standing.

Authenticity - that the applicant has undertaken what is claimed

Directness - that the learning is specific, relevant and has been identified and categorised

²⁶ In the review being carried out by QCA "APL and the QCF" it is anticipated that the Qualification and Curriculum Framework will replace the existing National Qualification Framework [NQF] in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the summer of 2008. See the descriptions and definitions (December 2007) at <http://www.qca.org.uk/qca>

Breadth - that the learning took place in a wider theoretical and vocational context which was understood by the applicant;

Currency - the learning is sufficiently recent to be relevant to currently proposed award

- Most Welsh HEIs recognise and provide credit exemption from an undertaken programme. The most popular of examples which were highlighted were generally credit allowance (usually 60 credits awarded) for those who held higher level NVQs at Levels 4/5 in fields such as Business and Management.
- It appears that most HEIs prefer the more straight forward route of „Credit Transfer“ as portfolio evidence based on experiential learning creates further complexities with regards to staff time and resources. Some institutions argue that the reliance on portfolios is counter-productive as a lot of staff time and resources would be spent supporting the applicant to collate the required evidence and applicants can sometimes lose interest in the process.
- Some schools within Institutions reported that they intended to tighten the APEL processes and will be utilising an APEL sub-board committee further to assist and simplify claims for APEL. One institution noted that one way of doing this was to seek advice and guidance from the APEL sub-board committee 3 times a year with the aim to identify processes which are simple, transparent and do not set the learner up for a fall whilst maintaining a simplified, less complex system for APEL claims („the application process“) from the students perspective.

3.9 Language of academia/Recognition outside training and education

- The majority of those interviewed agreed with the comment that APEL is regarded with uncertainty by HE academic community and that it is not well understood outside of training and education. As one academic commented:

“Opinions are changing slowly. APEL is a vast area and unfortunately will take time for people in HE to embrace”

One APEL adviser commented that they thought the concept is understood in some areas of the workplace (ie HR departments), but not known as APEL. There are however many areas of the workplace where experiential learning is not recognised, even though it is taking place.

One academic commented:

“I believe that individuals themselves may not fully understand the concept of APEL and those that do may be put off by the bureaucratic processes attached to the application. For many students returning to learning or coming into higher education as mature students, the concept of accreditation itself may be difficult to understand let alone the concept of APEL, so I believe that information about APEL needs to be made as clear and as helpful as possible and HEI’s need to be prepared to resource this facility adequately and thoroughly .”

3.10 Marketing

	Yes	No	Unsure
<i>Is AP(E)L seen as part of your higher education admissions process?</i>	7	1	4
<i>Is AP(E)L positioned within the marketing strategy?</i>	6	1	5
<i>Do you include information on AP(E)L in your prospectus?</i>	6	1	5
<i>Is the information regarding APEL procedures/claims supplied by your institution clearly written and readily available?</i>	7	1	4

- Positively, the research highlighted that over half the HEIs in Wales confirm that information regarding APEL claims were generally seen as part of their HE admissions process and that it is clearly written, readily available and incorporated within their marketing strategy at some level. However it is important to add that during discussions with some institutions a mixed response was given on whether or not information about APEL is designed with the potential student in mind. Amongst some HEIs it is generally felt that individuals/potential students do not fully understand the concept of APEL. There is also a concern that over marketing APEL could result in an influx of claims from applicants without the resources at HE level to meet demand.
- Also, it would be important to identify at this point, that a lot of HEI websites appear to be very student focused. An area of development with regard to the workforce development project would be to develop HEI websites to engage more with employers.

3.11 The importance of APEL

Discussions with key members of staff within each HEI identified how important they felt AP(E)L was to learners, HEIs and employers in Wales.

- **Learners in Wales:**
All HEIs who responded specified that APEL is „very important“ to learners in Wales
- **HEIs in Wales :**
HEIs generally thought APEL was „Important“ in replying positively to the Leitch and Webb Review.

However it is important to note here that some HEIs argued that if HEIs meet their credit targets, then APEL could be considered „not at all important.”

This is clearly a significant impediment to the wider use of APEL which would need to be addressed at a funding council, rather than institutional level.

- **Employers in Wales-:**

The Majority of HEIs appear to agree that APEL is „very important” to employers in Wales

3.12 Barriers to developing AP(E)L

Common themes that the research highlighted regarding perceived barriers to APEL included:

Marketing and Communications

- APEL needs to be marketed more effectively to learners, HEIs and businesses in Wales
- HE websites not Employer focused enough
- There is also a concern that over marketing APEL as entry into HE/or to gain credit transfer could be unrealistic in some cases and mislead the learner.
- Not well recognised outside education and training
- Highlights a need to be promoted further by Government initiatives
- Highlights need for a European approach to expanding APEL/LRD
- Non-collaboration between Schools within same institution
- Need for APEL to be marketed more effectively within Institutions as well as externally/ develop materials to assist students and staff throughout the process of making and assessing a claim

Beliefs/Attitudes

- Attitudes-the need for APEL to be valued as an integral part of the academic process/Academic community not embracing APEL
- HEIs who meet their Credit target might not see APEL as important at all

Language

- Terminology /Language needs to be simplified to engage with learners and employers

Resources/Application process

- Costly & time consuming-a need to find a reliable and cost-effective means of administering and assessing AP(E)L
Excess work prior to learner signing up to programme- often learners fall through. As one academic put it:

“By the time the learner has gathered the relevant evidence to „APEL” a module, they might as well have completed the module!. They lose interest and fall through the net”

- Complex application process

3.13 One Stop Virtual Shop

The majority of HEIs consulted within this research responded positively to the idea of a Virtual Workforce Development Centre to extend their reach with employers. Generally, all HEIs were in agreement that this could be used to promote the fact that HE can play a fundamental part in workforce development as well as a useful means of disseminating information on their courses and tap into the workforce. Other comments included:

- It would provide a comprehensive “register” of courses/modules in a central point which could be easily accessed
- It could raise awareness of available provision in Wales.
- It could help HE and FEs to identify provision and avoid replication.
- It could support the Webb reviews recommendation which advocates closer collaboration between employers, and HE/FE providers.
- It could identify Professional Body requirements
- It could provide information and guidance about relevant National Occupational Standards
- It could enable a forum to disseminate and share good practice and procedure as regards APEL.

3.14 e-APEL

The majority of HEIs supported this as potentially a way of simplifying of assessment claims. However, some co-ordinators highlighted the presumption that all learners are competent in using technology.

“This process however assumes a certain level of technical ability on the part of the student. I suspect someone applying through e-APEL would have to be a confident person and those who are not familiar or confident with on-line technology would need to be strongly supported”

3.15 Overview

Although the findings suggest that there is marginal APEL activity within HEIs in Wales, it appears that there is a sense of recognising the potential advantages of developing this area of activity amongst HEIs and that HE can play a fundamental part in workplace development. The development of a simplified, less complex process would be beneficial to the economic success of Wales. There are substantial gains for learners, HEIs and employers in Wales if consistent and clear processes were further implemented. It seems all HEIs have the foundations in place to progress and enhance APEL activity within their own Institution and tap into the potential employers/employees market to develop higher level skills in the Welsh workforce.

It seems all HEIs do and will have all the APEL policies in place, but they are reluctant to use them/or do not like to use them. It appears the general response is that APEL is time consuming and costly, and there are no specialist teams or units that can handle the complexity of the work especially if there would be an increase in demand for APEL via the Welsh workforce. Lecturers, course co-ordinators within schools/faculties have to get involved as they are the only assessment specialists.

The findings highlight the need for alternative assessment methods if APEL is to thrive, including the use of simulation performance, live on-the –spot testing of candidates, and workplace observation. E-APEL projects which use e-technology to allow potential students to self-assess their prior experiential learning and receive an indication of the credit they might be able to claim, e-portfolio services etc appears to have its advantages and disadvantages. This is a new concept and needs to be further explored for the benefit of this research. The general feedback so far for a „one stop shop“ Workforce Development Centre is positive but that it needs to be pragmatic and usable.

4.0 Expanding APEL/Suggested Ways Ahead

4.1 Learning Recognition and Development Productivity (LRD)²⁷ Model

Within the LRD model there are three main groups that constitute the active sectors of the model. These are the Lead Agency, the APEL Forum and general stakeholder. They also provide shared funding. The accumulated efforts of these three groups bring about benefits in the form of targeted outputs to individuals, organisations and HEIs.

²⁷ Refer to Annex 4 for LRD diagram

Developing APEL within Welsh HEIs through a Learning, Recognition and Development Model such as the one developed by Derby University is reported to have many benefits to the employer.

Reported benefits of such a model to employers include:

- Precision about their workforce training needs
- Provides a sophisticated tool to analyse and diagnose the skills required and training required
- Cost effective as employers can target training more accurately and identify the potential of employees that have been previously unknown
- LRD model links training programmes to organisational objectives
- Whilst qualifications might not be of high priority to an employer they have an important role in motivating individuals and stimulating lifelong learning-APEL can be a good starting point for negotiating an individual learning programme

4.2 e-APEL: e-Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning

As this review has already highlighted, most HEIs policies for APEL appear to closely follow the Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning from the Quality Assurance Agency. The research into APEL activity within Welsh HEIs have identified some of the main barriers to aligning APEL policies to practice include the complexities of operating a manual APEL system. A forward thinking e-APEL project (JISC Capital Programme- Cross-Institutional use of e-learning to support lifelong learners) led by the University of Derby is currently leading the way to address this through the use of e-learning technologies. The e-APEL project²⁸ aims to specifically use:

- e-assessment technology to allow potential students to self assess their prior experiential learning and receive an indication of the credit they might be able to claim.
- Gather additional information from potential students to enable a well informed discussion to take place with an APEL academic advisor
- Guide and support applicants in the compiling of their APEL claim using e-portfolio services

Further advantages of such a model which have been highlighted as barriers to the development of APEL during this research would be:

- By allowing potential students to self assess their prior learning the cost of advising individuals on the likely outcome of an APEL claim are alleviated. They will also gain knowledge and understanding of how APEL works.
- Help students to secure employer support and sponsorship. Employers would be able to review the outcome of the process and see evidence of their employees relevant experience and commitment to study.

²⁸ www.derby.ac.uk/e-apel

- e-Apel will give the employer and the prospective student a clearer idea of the level which the employee is working at. It will highlight current gaps in capability and provide clearer insight into the new knowledge and skills that could be acquired to underpin career progression.
- Lack of employer knowledge and understanding of APEL is a barrier to the wider uptake of APEL. By making the process more transparent and by incorporating opportunities for employers to participate, e-APEL will directly benefit employers too by supporting them in a cost effective and flexible form of staff development.

The outcomes from this project in 2008 will be a valuable example that could be utilised as a model for the potential development of the use of e-APEL within HEIs in Wales.

4.3 European Approach to APEL

The European dimension and the recognition of informal and formal learning, the Bologna Declaration/process and the European credit framework will have increasing importance in the UK regarding APEL. There are currently a number of European projects looking at the differences and commonalities between countries and the potential for a European approach to APEL.

The French system is on paper the most developed and clearly articulated of the two systems having been brought into being through legislation, and is reasonably well-resourced at the level of the state. In France, all applicants have a statutory right to be able to present an APEL claim up to a 100% award. Because the HE system in France and the UK are very different it would not be possible to directly transfer the French system to Wales, but the model is a radical and interesting one.

4.4 Conclusions

Whilst the vast majority of HEIs in Wales support the concept of AP(E)L and lifelong learning, its implementation is hugely complex.

The fact that no concrete statistical evidence could be provided on claims made for APEL suggests comparatively small activity within Welsh HEI. There is a need for further research into quantifying what the economic benefits for Wales are.

The findings indicate that there is little APEL activity within HEIs in Wales. However, it appears that there is a sense of recognising the potential advantages of developing this area of activity amongst HEIs and that HE can play a fundamental part in workplace development. The development of a simplified, less complex process would be beneficial to the economic success of Wales. There are substantial gains for learners, HEIs and employers in Wales if consistent and clear processes were further implemented. It seems all HEIs have the foundations in place to progress and enhance APEL activity within their own Institution and tap into the potential employers/employees market to develop higher level skills in the Welsh workforce.

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) offers a vast range of benefits to HEIs in Wales to play a full part in workforce development. However, even though most HEIs in Wales have strong links with the business sector and APEL appears to be long established within HEIs in Wales it continues to be an underused tool for engaging the potential market of the workforce in Wales.

The general consensus is that although the majority of HEIs are likely to have APEL policies in place within their own institution-this does not equate to substantial numbers of students gaining APEL credit. This was highlighted in the national Survey by the Learning from Experience Trust in 2000²⁹ and appears to continue to be present eight years on within the findings of this research.

Whilst there are strong business links and marginal APEL activity within specific schools within some institutions, there is a lack of broader collaboration of APEL development and understanding within Institutions as a whole. If lifelong learning is to thrive, institutions need to take responsibility to ensure positive developments and embrace flexible learning pathways and formally recognise the potential that the employers market could add within mainstream higher education provision. Institutions should ensure positive developments and should not develop overcomplicated, time-consuming systems which could deter academics as well as employers and employees seeking recognition for their skills.

As is evident throughout this report APEL/LRD is significantly important in terms of developing the workforce.

**** Since the drafting of this report the QCF is expected to replace the existing NQF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the summer of 2008.
refer to paper)***

²⁹ *Learning from Experience Trust, Merrifield et al 2000, page 2.*

Work-based learning and the potential for recognizing prior learning in the voluntary and public sectors in Wales: case studies from South East Wales

Kathryn Addicott, Andrew Jones, Julianne Mortimer, Rob Payne and Danny Saunders.

**University of Glamorgan Centre for Lifelong Learning and
Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching**

**Draft Report
May 2008**

This research was undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales as part of „Strategic development of high level learning for the workforce in Wales“ project S2: work based learning and the potential for recognizing prior learning within the public and voluntary sectors in Wales.

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales Project S2: work based learning and the potential for recognizing prior learning within the public and voluntary sectors: Case Studies from South East Wales

1. Introduction and Background

This report provides an overview and results from case study research into the depth and breadth of work-based learning and accreditation of prior learning (APL) in a number of public and voluntary sector organizations in Wales. Research was undertaken by the University of Glamorgan as part of Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) funded project entitled „Strategic Development of High Level Learning for the Workforce in Wales“.

1.1. Aims and Objectives

This study is defined as a scoping exercise which then informs a series of micro-projects on workforce development associated with higher education support in a variety of sectors. It investigates higher level work-based learning defined at level 4 and above within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). This includes the accreditation of in-house training programmes, the provision of bespoke programmes by universities, and the potential of recognising prior learning (RPL) within the public and voluntary sectors in South East Wales. For the purposes of this study RPL is associated with (i) prior certificated learning through involvement in previous training, or (ii) the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) by candidates who may have informally achieved advanced learning outcomes but without actually attending formal training courses. Specific objectives were to:

- Identify the broad curriculum content of higher level training within key organisations
- Provide a profile of organisations engaged in higher level training
- Estimate current interest in credit rating and qualification outcomes for such training
- Gauge accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) expertise and capacity of trainers working with not-for-profit workplaces
- Develop a resource plan for supporting HE accreditation of workplace learning within public and voluntary sector organisations

1.2. Methods

Research was conducted between autumn 2007 and March 2008. This was an investigative study and used a case study approach for the collection of primary data. The use of case studies provides a useful way of studying areas of interest within an organisational context and is particularly useful for studies of an investigative nature.

The original project specification required case studies for three voluntary and three public sector organisations. In an endeavour to provide the best possible picture of the depth and breadth of work-based learning and potential for accreditation in the public and voluntary sectors in Wales, a total of 12 case studies (five voluntary sector and seven public sector) were completed. Additionally, a further case study of a private sector training provider with extensive experience of working within voluntary and public sector organisations has been included. The samples selected for inclusion within this research were considered to be sufficiently varied in size, function and type to provide valuable insights into voluntary and public sector organizations in Wales.

Table 1: participant organizations

Case Study	Sector	Organization	Additional comments
1	Voluntary	Wales Council for Voluntary Action	infrastructure organization
2	Voluntary	Voluntary Action Cardiff	infrastructure organization
3	Voluntary	Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales	infrastructure organization
4	Voluntary	British Red Cross	large national charity
5	Voluntary	Llamau	Wales-based charity
6	Public	Public Services Management Wales	infrastructure organization
7	Public	Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	corporate training provision
8	Public	Companies House	central government (UK) agency located in Wales.
9	Public	South Wales Fire and Rescue Service	investigated linking organizational roles to higher level HE accredited provision
10	Public	Educational and School Improvement Service	infrastructure organization
11	Public	Ysgol Hen Felin	community special needs school
12	Public	Primary and secondary schools – combined case study	representatives from 5 schools in south east Wales.
13	Private Sector	Case Study 13: Pi Associates	private training consultancy

Analysis focused on one or more of the following.

- Learning provided by the organization for its own staff.
- Learning provided by the organization for other concerns within the public and voluntary sectors (termed „infrastructure organizations“).
- Specific programme(s) that have been developed with the HE sector to meet specific organizational/sector needs.

Research was conducted within the ethical guidelines and procedures of the University of Glamorgan; every effort has been made to preserve anonymity of individual respondents in the case studies presented. Where organizations have been named, approval has been provided by key interviewees within the case studies. Individuals and organizations participated in the research in one or more of the following ways:

- Participation in face to face interviews
- Participation in telephone interviews/discussions
- Participation in focus groups
- Provision of information for desk study

All case study data were systematically recorded through note taking and key information clarified during interview/focus group processes. Draft case study reports were validated with relevant individuals/organizations.³⁰ In addition to the case study organizations, telephone discussions were held with other organizations and individuals within the public and voluntary sector in Wales. In the case of the voluntary sector, these discussions revealed valuable insights into the research but were not considered suitable for inclusion as case study research at this stage. In some cases organizations did not have the capacity to provide training to a sufficient extent to fulfill project objectives. In larger organizations accreditation was linked most frequently through Open College Network (OCN) and the Institute for Leadership and Management (ILM). In the case of Health and Social Care, accredited training (often NVQ-based) was delivered by local authorities.

In the case of the public sector, three challenges were noted within a number of organizations contacted: operational demands, impending reorganization; and availability of staff. In direct contrast to the voluntary sector, the scale of delivery was not a limitation in itself, however, gaining access to appropriate individuals with a sufficient strategic overview proved difficult. It is emphasized that this was not due to any reluctance on the part of organizations. In addition, where appropriate individuals were identified, access within project timescales was not always feasible due to heavy diary commitments. The term „public sector“ can create the impression of a single learning community. In reality public services are multi-industry, multi-functional and multi-disciplinary in nature; approaches to learning, ethos, values and cultures differ vastly both amongst and within organizations.

³⁰ Note: Of the 13 case studies, final validation approval is still pending in four cases. This is due to organisational requirements and protocols and as such should not be considered to be in the public domain . Any amendments are likely to be minor and will be included in the final version of the report.

1.3. Samples

Bearing in mind the above, combined with financial and time constraints, a direct contact approach was used to select final case study organisations. The main criteria for selection were that:

- organisations were undertaking significant amounts of training likely to be at level 4 and above;
- were willing to participate in the study; and
- were accessible to researchers within the timescale.

The sections that follow provide an overview of organisations included in the research.

1.3.1. Voluntary Sector Organisations

Five voluntary sector organisations participated in the case study research. These included one large national UK wide and one Wales-based charity. Three of the voluntary organisations studied were what we have termed „infrastructure organisations“. Their main purpose is the provision of support and the facilitation of development in other organisations within sector-specific areas (for example a particular locality such as Cardiff, or Wales; or for specific groups such as black minority ethnic populations). Participant voluntary sector organisations are listed below.

- Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) – case study 1
- Voluntary Action Cardiff – case study 2
- Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales –case study 3
- British Red Cross – case study 4
- Llamau – case study 5

1.3.2. Public Sector Organisations.

Three public sector organisations representing local authority; fire and rescue; and company registration were selected. Alongside this it was considered essential to include Public Sector Management Wales in the sample as it provides a range of training and development opportunities throughout the sector. Three additional case studies relating to the education sector were also included. Participant organisations are listed below.

Public Sector: General

- Public Sector Management Wales (PSMW) - case study 6
- Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council – case study 7
- Companies House – case study 8
- South Wales Fire Service – case study 9

Additional contextual information relating to some of the above studies was gained through informal discussion with staff from the relevant awarding body (ILM) and staff responsible for designing/managing higher education related programmes.

Public Sector: Education

- Educational and School Improvement Service (ESIS) – case study 10
- Ysgol Hen Felin – Community Special Needs School – case study 11

In addition a focus group was held with representatives from five schools (two primary and three secondary schools). This case study has been titled „primary and secondary schools combined case study“ (case study 12) and included the following schools.

- Porth County Community School
- Aberdare Girls School
- Maerdy Infants School
- Maerdy Junior School
- Craig Yr Hesg Primary School

1.3.3 Private Training Provider

An additional case study was undertaken with a private training consultancy as it was considered that this would provide additional and important insights. Pi Associates was selected for this purpose and is included as case study 13.

It should be recognised that the samples taken were small and this limits the general applicability of findings on a widespread basis across the sectors studied. However the authors are confident that the samples selected were sufficiently varied in type, function, and size to provide a reasonable –but far from complete- picture of the diversity of the sectors. The studies provide a range of examples illustrating the depth scope and breadth of work based learning and potential for accreditation in the voluntary and public sectors in Wales. Case studies are contained in the appendix to this report

2. Voluntary sector case studies: findings and discussion

2.1. Voluntary sector profile

In Wales there are approximately 25,000 voluntary organizations in operation³¹. Of these, approximately 11 per cent have a primary function of providing training and learning, for example to its beneficiaries, service users etc. The voluntary sector therefore act both as providers of educational opportunities to others and as employers providing learning opportunities to their staff. In addition according to a recent survey of learning in the voluntary and community sector in Pembrokeshire, organizations offer a huge range of courses from sport, arts and crafts, health and safety, personal skills, community development, computer skills, social care and management skills³². There is also a great

³¹ Collins, B. (2005) *Voluntary Sector Skills in Wales*. Elwa and WCVA, Cardiff.

³² Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (2006) *Learning in the Voluntary and Community Sector: Research and Review of Adult and Community Based Learning Provision*

diversity of duration and type of course along with a mixture of informal and accredited learning, although non-accredited learning is still predominant in the voluntary sector. The chosen case study organizations from the voluntary sector typify this dual role of training and education provider, along with the diversity of subject and nature of learning opportunities on offer.

Analysis of the interviews undertaken, and scrutiny of associated documents provided an interesting insight into training provision in the voluntary sector, and the potential for developing accredited work based learning and APL/APEL processes in line with needs of the sector. The studies provided a clear illustration of the diversity within the sector in terms of the nature of voluntary organizations and the kinds of training they provide. The research also highlighted a number of common themes and issues shared by the range of participating organizations.

2.2. Training delivery and accreditation in the voluntary sector

Four of the five selected organizations delivered the majority of its training „in-house“, using existing staff as trainers, and (to a lesser extent) outside consultants. Notably one voluntary organization did not run any of its staff training in house, they used instead external consultants and trainers - some from the public sector but most from private sector providers.

All case study organizations delivered a mixture of non-accredited and accredited courses, with non-accredited dominating. The exception was the UK national charity (British Red Cross) which due to the nature of its service provision provides many accredited courses leading to proof of successful training. All organizations provided certification for its non-accredited courses as a means of recognizing and acknowledging learning, and perhaps as a motivational tool for staff and particularly volunteers.

2.3. Perceptions/credibility of higher education and potential for partnership

There appeared to be some apprehension and uncertainty about higher education involvement with the sector and its training. For most of the voluntary organizations there were reservations about the credibility of HE partners who might not have adequate knowledge and understanding of the voluntary sector. The need for greater understanding of the structure, culture and values of voluntary organizations and the impact these have on learning needs and processes, was identified as vital when developing accreditation mechanisms with the sector.

Interestingly, in contrast, this was not the case for the larger, UK operating organization (BRC). This was the only organization that cited the need for Headquarters „buy in“ to the process as being the most significant factor in future development. This entailed especially the involvement and support of central management. The other case study organizations were more autonomous and could potentially take the decision to go ahead - accessibility, appropriateness and resources permitting.

A number of voluntary organizations interviewed highlighted their preference for the HE sector to embark on further meaningful consultation (for example, by holding focus groups with voluntary organizations themselves, their managers, trainers and learners). This could inform any process of access to accreditation provision for the sector as a whole, to ensure their needs are identified and met for example in terms of appropriate methods of delivery, assessment and selection of tutors. Infrastructure organizations such as WCVA could be utilized to help facilitate this kind of consultation.

2.4. Limited Resources and capacity

There was consensus amongst all voluntary organizations interviewed that capacity and limits on resources were significant factors. Although each organization differed in size and level of funding, they agreed that embarking on APEL and new credit rating processes would depend on additional resources being identified. The issue of accessibility of accreditation processes continually emerged as a common theme. In addition, the need for reduced levels of bureaucracy and administration associated with these processes was highlighted, and one infrastructure organization suggested that it would be possible and potentially beneficial if this organization were able to act as a conduit to facilitate the accreditation process. This would enable smaller voluntary organizations to avoid the demands of full administration of an accreditation system, yet benefit from access to accreditation through a single central voluntary organization.

Although only one of the organizations interviewed had staff experienced at APL/APEL currently, all felt that their staff had the capability but would need appropriate training, guidance and additional resources.

2.5 Evaluation and Quality Assurance of training

An interesting theme that echoed throughout the interviews was the challenge of evaluation and quality assurance in training provision. There was a difference in the extent of evaluation between those smaller, locally based organizations and the national large scale organization. All organizations use the standard method of „reaction“ evaluation forms that were completed by participants (and in some cases by external trainers) at the end of workshops. However, there was an identified need for greater or more formal quality assurance of external training consultants, particularly by Llamau who rely entirely on outside providers. There is often a word of mouth, personal knowledge or recommendation process used for the identification of external consultants. There was agreement that a more rigorous, consistent process of evaluation would be beneficial to ensure more effective quality assurance was in place. The largest organization interviewed which provided significant accreditation internally had the most formal quality assurance processes in place.

WCVA (2007) identified in their recent qualitative research into this issue that “the development of quality assurance systems for training providers in the third sector lags behind that of the public sector”³³. It is problematic to transfer public sector designed quality systems to a voluntary sector full of very diverse and often small scale organizations. The research concludes that there is increasing demand for accreditation for courses currently being delivered, yet this places a potential increased or

³³ WCVA, (2007) *Quality assurance in training provision: Third sector experience in Wales*. WCVA and Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff.

restrictive burden on resources as it is administratively intense. The research also notes that there is an opportunity to develop a general set of quality standards for the delivery of training by third sector providers in the form of a kite mark or quality mark. Further investigation of partnership models and consultation processes is needed to create a process which would enable smaller providers to use a common quality assurance system.

2.6 The ethos of volunteering

All case study organizations identified the importance of meeting the needs of the „volunteer“ dynamic – a workforce made up of practitioners and volunteer managers of organizations. The majority of organizations in the voluntary sector have a voluntary management committee structure and hence this would be an important consideration when engaging with the sector and its training needs. Issues which include flexibility and time constraints have a particular bearing on take up by these particular stakeholder groups.

An important tension which emerged from this research was the notion that offering accreditation could potentially affect the volunteer ethos which is vital to the sector and to its volunteer and paid workforces. Whilst increased accreditation opportunities was clearly acknowledged as a potential benefit and recognition for volunteers and paid staff, this would need to be balanced with and be sensitive to the complexity of motivation that underpins the volunteer relationship and ethos.

This tension was probably best expressed by the largest voluntary organization interviewed. The organization highlighted its commitment to continuously developing opportunities and ways to recognize and thank volunteers for their time and commitment; and viewed accreditation as a valuable potential method. However, the view was expressed that this needed to be carefully handled (and marketed) because of the complex volunteer - organization relationship. The following extract from the organization's volunteer handbook illustrates this:

“Voluntary Service – You are now part of a voluntary relief movement, committed to helping people in need and not prompted in any manner by desire for gain”³⁴.

This ethical principle is an important one and will be a crucial factor throughout other volunteer organizations due to the values driven culture and nature of the sector.

2.7. Delivery and „people orientation“

There was a strong consensus amongst organizations that the nature of the accreditation process, and the delivery and assessment of courses would need to be transparent, flexible, and accessible. It should include some choice of methods and be tailored to meet needs of diverse potential participants (which include paid staff and volunteers). A common experience of all organizations interviewed was that training is invariably face to face; indeed, this continues to be the preferred method for the sector. There may be a number of reasons relevant to the culture of the sector: it is people orientated, there is a

³⁴British Red Cross (2005) *Volunteer Handbook*. British Red Cross, London. p4.

strong emphasis on interpersonal skills, and there is a desire to share good practice and network during training and learning opportunities. In addition, there is a need to discuss and reflect sector/organizational values and attitudes during training which tailored face to face methods can provide.

Each organization had limited experience of providing „on-line“ electronic support for training and learning. When probed, it was clear that organizations would be open to exploring more „blended learning“ approaches. There were provisos however: issues of accessibility to ICT have to be taken into account; an element of choice should be built in; and face-to-face methods should remain central. It appeared that blended methods had the potential to contribute towards the flexibility and accessibility the sector seeks.

This is reinforced in the research commissioned by the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce Hub (2005) which investigated the learning development needs for voluntary sector managers in Wales³⁵. The research concluded that e-learning and blended solutions should be offered to meet the needs of managers in the sector; and that there is a demand for formal recognition of learning and development of managers such as MBA for the voluntary sector. Other key findings were that managers felt that they were not 100% confident in their management competence due to lack of formal management training. They identified three categories of current learning needs: technical, interpersonal and information areas of their job. This corroborates the findings below in terms of potential curriculum areas the HE sector should focus on in any accreditation process for the voluntary sector.

2.8 Potential for Future Development

The research revealed a significant potential to develop higher level accredited work-based learning within the voluntary sector in Wales. Specific areas for potential development are presented below.

Management and human resource skills

There is significant potential for higher level accredited training particularly in relation to management and human resource (HR) skills as a need for the sector. This is most likely to be taken up by larger voluntary organizations with resources to send paid middle and higher managers on such courses. Some of the case study organizations deliver management training with endorsement from accrediting bodies at present (for example ILM), but full accreditation has yet to be implemented. There appeared to be much potential for the setting up of progression routes which would link existing unaccredited or part accredited learning to HE provision. HE providers have an array of existing management courses which could be utilized/adapted.

Housing

There is also significant potential for higher level accreditation of training re: Housing, Community Housing, and Housing Management, for voluntary organizations working in this area and in particular

³⁵ Lewis, J. (2005) *Learning Development Needs for Voluntary Sector Managers*. Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce Development Hub and WCVA, Cardiff. (March)

their managers and support workers. This work would be far-reaching to the whole of the Housing Sector as indicated by Community Housing Cymru, particularly in relation to the new Welsh Housing Quality Standard. Although not examined in this study it seems possible that other key functional areas relevant to voluntary sector service provision (for example, working with vulnerable people) may provide similar potential and this would be worthy of further consideration/investigation.

Training related to BME sector

Another key area of potential highlighted by a number of voluntary organizations, and in particular BVSNW is for accreditation of courses specifically for BME voluntary sector and organizations or individuals that engage with BME populations. Sensitivity to issues of culture and language would further impact on the need for tailoring provision and process. The need for support with basic skills of literacy in English also cuts across the need for higher level skills. A two pronged approach is therefore needed in working with BME voluntary sector to make accreditation and progression accessible to its workers and beneficiaries, tackling both basic and higher skills. This implies successful partnership working by further and higher education providers. Subject areas that are of particular relevance include management, equal opportunities, and mentoring. Again it appears that this principle may apply to other areas of equality and human rights and would be worthy of further investigation.

Interpersonal skills

There is also potential for higher level accreditation of training related to interpersonal skills such as counselling, anger management, and assertiveness. It appeared likely that these kinds of subject areas would have a high take up in the majority of voluntary organizations, due to the people oriented culture and emphasis in the voluntary sector.

2.9 Working with the Voluntary Sector: Issues for Higher Education

This research provides an important insight into the diversity of training provision in the voluntary sector. This includes providing educational opportunities to service users and general public as well as learning and development opportunities for staff. Courses vary in terms of type and duration of delivery with face-face and non-accredited learning dominating in the majority of voluntary organizations.

The research identified clearly that there is significant potential for developing accredited work-based learning and APL/APEL processes in line with the needs of the voluntary sector. However, it was also clear that the HE sector can only do this successfully if the needs of the sector are taken into account in a genuine and inclusive way. The research identifies a number of common issues which would need to be addressed by the higher education sector in order to successfully develop and progress the higher level learning, work based learning and accreditation agenda and processes with the voluntary sector in Wales

Understanding of the sector

Firstly there will need to be a greater understanding and knowledge of the voluntary sector and its culture, in particular the „volunteer“ dynamic and its impact on provision. In order to overcome the

potential barrier of uncertainty of credibility of HE sector as partners and providers, a commitment will need to be made to become more informed about the structure, culture and values of voluntary organizations and the impact these have on learning needs.

Flexibility

Following on from this, there is a need for flexibility of provision. Providing diverse, appropriate, accessible and tailored methods of delivery and assessment will be vital to the take up by the diverse range of stakeholders in the voluntary sector. Key issues include timescales, appropriateness and knowledge of tutors, teaching strategies, and having a choice of assessment methods. These will all impact on the feasibility of participation in accredited courses, and progression.

Administrative ease and resources

Allied to the above is the need to reduce the levels of bureaucracy involved in accreditation processes. The success of developing accredited work-based learning in the voluntary sector will depend on streamlining administrative processes with which individual voluntary organizations have to engage. This links to the need for additional resources – both financial and human - that for voluntary organizations to take part in these processes. The challenge for the higher education sector is how to overcome this resource issue, e.g. by reducing individual institutions' administrative requirements and/or setting up a hub for accessing accreditation across the HE sector.

Multi-layered approach to basic skills

There will need to be a multi-layered approach for working with the BME voluntary sector to encompass both basic and higher skills. Here tailoring of provision will be vital to ensure the relevance and accessibility of courses and processes to workers and beneficiaries of BME voluntary organizations. Providing progression routes from basic literacy through to higher level skills in subjects such as management and mentoring will be important to the level of engagement with this sector. This multi-layered approach may also be relevant to other areas within the voluntary sector.

Genuine involvement and consultation of the sector in curriculum development

There are a number of different curriculum areas highlighted above such as management, interpersonal skills, and housing that would be attractive and relevant to the voluntary sector which need further research and discussion in terms of existing and gaps in provision by higher education and other providers.

Further meaningful consultation with the various stakeholders within the voluntary sector will be essential to inform the development of accreditation processes thereby ensuring the diverse needs are identified and met. Any intervention (including stakeholder consultation) by higher education in relation to this sector must be considered carefully and sensitively. It will be important that methods of consultation are agreed collaboratively with representatives of the sector and led by individuals that have an understanding of the sector. Methods such as focus groups would be useful to consult with

managers, staff, volunteers and volunteer management committee, as would utilizing the services of umbrella „infrastructure organizations“ to liaise and consult with the sector.

3. Public sector case studies findings and discussion

3.1. Sector profile

Current estimates of the size of the public sector workforce in Wales suggest that 23% of the total workforce in Wales is working in the sector³⁶. Case study 6 noted discussions with Welsh Assembly Government staff which revealed that they currently estimate that 306,000 people are employed in the public sector in Wales. The sector covers a vast range of public services throughout the principality. Public sector organizations are complex entities and could be further divided into sectors in their own right (for example, health; education; police; fire and rescue; housing and so on). The way training and learning is organized and delivered in the public sector therefore varies considerably and in many cases take account of National (UK) considerations as well as Wales-specific and local dimensions.

In a general sense, decisions related to training and accreditation can be made at a number of levels. For example, some organizations may be encouraged to „buy in“ to National programmes that are sponsored on a UK-wide basis, as well as to develop local provision which could be provided in-house, in collaboration with other public sector organizations and/or in collaboration with private training and education organizations and/or further education and higher education providers. In all the cases studied budgets for training and development were held locally and decisions to purchase training taken at a local/regional level.

3.2 Interpretations of work-based learning

It was clear from all case studies that work-based learning was generally interpreted to mean learning that can be directly applied in a work-role or occupational context. It appeared that the context and application of learning (often in outcome terms) were more influential than the method of delivery. This broad understanding of work-based learning was present to some extent in all public sector case studies, but probably highlighted best through the wide range of learning activities supported through PSMW (case study six). If higher education institutions are to effectively engage in work-based learning and its accreditation in the public sector the challenge will be to develop effective (and quality assured) ways of recognising the full range of work-based activities that are meaningful to individuals and deliver results. In this sense, academic debates relating to definitions of (and what constitutes) training, learning and (more recently) work-based learning³⁷ whilst important in higher education, should not

³⁶ For example, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>; <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/economy>; www.learningobservatory.com.wales (accessed 28th April 2008).

³⁷ Definitions vary considerably between and amongst stakeholders and have done for many years. See for example Campanelli, P. and Channell, J. (1994) *Training: An exploration of the word and the concept with an analysis of the implications for survey design*. Employment Department Research

overshadow the fact that from individual and employer-perspectives the central issue is that the learning is meaningful, effective, can be applied in a work context and can deliver tangible results/outcomes.

3.3 Learning training and delivery in the public sector

Approaches to learning, training and its delivery across the sector vary considerably and these variations are illustrated in the public sector cases studies developed during this research. Typically organizations use a full range of diverse methods and media, providing a range and combination of accredited and unaccredited learning; on and off the job methods; formal and informal learning; in-house organizational delivery; programmes „bought in“ from private providers or educational institutions, as well as programmes delivered in partnership with private training providers and /or educational institutions.

E-learning and computer-based approaches featured highly in two of the studies, and appeared to have the potential for significant development. In particular the use of electronic assessment methods, and the potential for evaluating effectiveness, appeared to be underdeveloped. However, development of such innovations would need to be carefully considered as it was clear that in the case study organizations „job competence“ and genuine engagement in learning was considered to be superior and far more important than „number crunching“ or „head counting“. Voluntary self-assessment was considered to be more effective than „enforced and rigid assessment requirements“ which were considered to be mechanistic, „tick-box-based“ and may undermine confidence and participation of learners. This needs to be balanced against the advantages of accreditation and rigor of quality assurance requirements.

3.4 Accreditation of learning in the public sector

Accreditation of learning was a feature in all public sector organizations to some degree. In one instance (case study 11) this was organizationally led in partnership with a local training provider and was a strong feature of in-house provision. In other cases accredited programmes were „bought in“ from either private training providers or higher/further education institutions. In one case (study 7) accreditation was also achieved by a joint partnership with other local authorities.

Types of accreditation ranged from NVQ programmes, ILM programmes through to Masters Level with future plans in place to extend this to doctoral level. In general, attitudes to accreditation appeared positive – although in one case (study 7) benefits of accreditation to the organization were not immediately apparent.

Where training and learning were non-accredited these tended to be either short programmes of learning; or learning that was self-assessed (for example, computer based learning case study 7; and a number of learning opportunities highlighted in case study 6). It appeared that unaccredited (and often informal) learning was likely to account for the majority of work-based learning within the sector. In many

Series, Employment Department, Sheffield; Riding, R and Mortimer J (2000) A study of on the job training in manufacturing companies *International Journal of Training and Development* 4 (2) 111-123. For discussion specific to work-based learning and higher education see UVAC (2005) *Integrating Work-based Learning into Higher Education. A guide to Good Practice*. University Vocational Awards Council, Bolton.

cases short programmes appeared to be favoured over more lengthy ones and this will impact on the size of learning outcomes with associated implications for credit rating.

3.5 Credibility of the higher education sector and potential for partnership

Clearly much work is being done across the public sector through partnership with higher education institutions. At present this appears to be with individual institutions with only one example (case study 6, PSMW) of major cross institutional collaboration. There does appear to be a general understanding amongst organizations studied that formal accreditation of learning is attractive to learners, however, accreditation requirements do not always reflect organizational needs and this can present some tensions for some organizations. In some cases, it is perceived that many higher education institutions tend to present programmes they have on offer, rather than investigate organization needs and develop appropriate programmes to meet requirements. In this sense it appears that for some organizations, the flexibility of high quality private training providers and consultancies can be deemed more flexible and appropriate. There was also some evidence to suggest that traditional images of higher education as „lecture and essay“ based delivery and assessment persist.

A number of positive examples were found of successful partnerships with higher education. However in the context of Wales these were rarely „cross-institutional“.

Interestingly significant differences were found in both customer (employer) requirements and HE delivery levels for development for the same roles within different UK regions in the fire and rescue service (case study 9).

It appeared that private providers and consultancies that were used by the public sector were generally very highly regarded and considered to be responsive to employer needs. There appears to be significant potential to develop partnership approaches that clearly acknowledge and maximize the value of collaboration between organizations, private sector providers and higher education institutions.

3.6 Resources and capacity

The case studies revealed that in the public sector there are considerable variations in terms of resources and capacity related to learning and training. In relation to APL and APEL some organizations studied estimated that there would be considerable levels of expertise present and others suggested this would not be the case. In all cases it was acknowledged that training and additional guidance on this aspect would be welcomed.

3.7 Organizational culture and values

As discussed previously the public sector spans an enormous range of services and embraces a whole spectrum of cultures styles and values. The „one size fits all“ cannot be effective to the extent that even within an organization or service different approaches may be required. Clearly understanding of the specific context of learning will aid learning and accreditation processes. This in itself can provide some significant challenges for higher education institutions if it is considered that bespoke customized

programmes are likely to increase in future. Recent policy imperatives from government ³⁸ have underlined a desire to move towards employer and demand-led provision. It is therefore probable that facilitative and consultancy-based approaches to learning will become more relevant and common-place. Employers may want much more organizational specific relevance, but this can create tension within universities based on a desire to pursue theoretical and academic objectives associated more with "education" than "training". This is one reason for the popularity and success of private training providers within applied workforce development. One solution to what is an age-old education verses training debate involves the development of action learning methods and techniques in order to encourage live project work which has direct relevance to all concerned. The facilitation of learning sets and the production of helpful learning resources - alongside appropriate portfolio-based assessment strategies – therefore demands substantial continuing professional development amongst higher education providers in order to ensure successful work based learning support.

3.8 Potential curriculum content areas for development

Notably (and perhaps predictably) much of the discussion on areas for curriculum development centred around broad generic areas including soft skills such as leadership and management skills, as well as continuous personal/professional development. Specific job-related skills outside these included administrative skills (case study 8) and specific job-related training related to the primary and secondary education sector (case studies 10, 11 and 12).

A key message from the public sector aspect of this research is that terms like „curriculum content“ are not generally in use within the sector and not a priority. The sector as a whole have a huge variety of development needs locally, regionally and nationally and where these are categorised and planned for across public sector organisations they are more likely to be either in professional and technical areas related to job specific skills, or more generic such as „delivering change“, „modernising service provision“, „innovation“, or under the broad banner of management and leadership development. This is not to say that specific content based programmes are not highly regarded and indeed the case studies included here illustrate this and the previous sections highlight some key content areas for development. However to suggest that higher education institutions in Wales focus narrowly upon such areas would be misleading. If the higher education sector is to effectively engage in workforce development and accreditation of work-based learning in the public sector in Wales a sea-change in approach will be necessary.

4. Emerging themes and areas for further consideration

The purpose of this research was to:

- Identify the broad curriculum content of higher level training within key organizations
- Provide a profile of organizations experiencing higher level training

³⁸ See for example *The Leitch Review* (2006) HMSO Treasury, London; *The Webb Review of Further Education* (2007) and *Skills that Work for Wales* (2008) Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff

- Estimate current interest in credit rating and qualification outcomes for such training
- Gauge accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) expertise and capacity of trainers working with not-for-profit workplaces
- Develop a resource plan for supporting HE accreditation of workplace learning within public and voluntary sector organizations

We conclude this study with discussion of the main themes and issues that emerged from the research process. It should be recognised at this point that the sample size was small and confined mainly to South East Wales - thereby limiting the general applicability of findings on a widespread basis across sectors and geographical regions. However, the studies and emerging findings have interest and validity in their own right and provide an important – though incomplete- insight into the diversity of the voluntary and public sectors.

Evidence has been gathered for the depth, scope and breadth of work-based learning for a variety of workforces; and the potential of accreditation at intermediary and advanced levels. A key query concerns whether the messages from this research are unique to the individual case study organizations, or whether they reflect themes and patterns that are universal to other workforces. The research has raised some fundamental issues and exciting challenges which will need to be addressed if higher education institutions in Wales are to genuinely engage in the strategic development of higher level learning for the public and voluntary sector workforce in Wales.

4.1. Organisation and sector perceptions of higher education

Implicit from this research is that, in a general sense, higher education institutions in Wales are not perceived to be responsive or receptive to meeting the needs of the public and voluntary sectors in Wales. In a number of instances this negative perception refers to the extent to which higher education institutions lack any real understanding of workforce development priorities as set by public sector employers and voluntary sector leaders. These perceptions will seriously limit the extent to which higher education can effectively and credibly engage in work-based learning and workforce development. Attention is drawn to recent workforce research by Felstead et al³⁹ which is now documenting a wide range of detailed employer and employee perspectives on skills development. This exciting research is recognising conflicts and dilemmas within organisations, including expectations and concerns about effective training and staff development. It is also helping higher education institutions to focus on workforce perceptions across the board; an inevitable advantage for future university based work-based learning practitioners who would like to promote accreditation at advanced levels.

Sensitivity and understanding of the complexity, variety, nature and scope of the various components of the public and voluntary sectors will be a pre-requisite to effective engagement. This needs to be achieved in a visible and tangible way. Inextricably linked to this observations is the extent to which higher education institutions co-operate with each other. In the public sector in particular, collaboration between universities was regarded as the exception rather than the norm, with competition inhibiting genuine collaborative and innovative approaches. This comes as no surprise to the higher education

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community in Wales, given current resourcing strategies for the sector . It does however present an enormous but exciting challenge in terms of responding positively and proactively to incoming demand-led systems which will inevitably upset a provider-convenient status quo.

4.2. National occupational standards

Occupational standards and competencies are a strong feature in public sector organisations throughout Wales and they are increasingly gaining momentum in the voluntary sector. Having said this the voluntary sector will find it difficult to gain as much momentum when there is no dedicated sector skills council representing their interests through establishing a sector skills agreement for community and voluntary sector workforces.

In some areas these are linked to NVQ routes, in others they are embedded through (or due to be incorporated into) performance management and professional or personal development systems. Such standards attract criticism and debate amongst both the academic and wider education and training communities, based on a mundane pre-occupation with assessment rather than learning, and the use of mechanical and uninspiring competence checklists for the recording of achievement. The message from this research is that interest in developing and promoting a wide range of vocational skills is a fact of life in public and voluntary sectors in Wales. If higher education institutions are to genuinely engage in meaningful workforce development within sectors this vocational priority needs to be fully embraced and acknowledged, whilst also making links with underpinning knowledge and underlying theory.

4.3. Credit rating

There is a prevalence of relatively short and sharp training programmes on specific topics and themes in both public and voluntary sectors. Such programmes are rarely evaluated beyond „reaction level“ and appear to be highly valued by both individuals and their organisations. Clearly much higher level learning that is valued by the sectors is context-relevant and outcome related. The scope for accreditation is vast although demand is uncertain. The key query is instrumental and pragmatic: what are the tangible benefits of any accreditation gained by organisations and workforces? An interesting dilemma emerges between public sector employers and their workforces. Employees who accumulate credits and qualifications gain transferability through enhancing their promotion prospects whilst also increasing their job satisfaction. Their managers may view accreditation as either irrelevant or too resource intensive given their short-term budget constraints. There is also the more sinister possibility of employers not wanting to lose staff once they are qualified at more advanced levels.

The present authors view a very different scenario for staff within community and voluntary organisations, where a volunteering principle prevails amongst unpaid workers who may have less interest in their own career advancement, and more of a concern with the ethos and overall purpose of their specific organisation. The situation is complex because there are also many people within a voluntary workforce who develop career aspirations and ambitions once experience has been gained, and skills are either developed or recognised as in need of development. In essence the route to accreditation involves reconciling volunteering principles with individual priorities. They may be more

slowly perceived as having value, and support systems for such journeys are less well defined or resourced.

Evidence suggested that in the public sector much valuable higher level learning occurs through work-based activity - often associated with project work and developing new practices in a variety of settings – thereby defining a series of learning trajectories for employees and their managers. Whilst much of this may be regarded as informal and incidental, it is nonetheless highly regarded. In addition, more formal „off the job“ learning activities –including short courses - facilitate relevant action research activity once learning gains momentum. Much of this is currently not recognised through available accreditation systems and procedures. Further meaningful learning lying outside accreditation frameworks is rarely assessed or evaluated in a way that would be currently compatible with higher education quality assurance requirements. We argue that there is now a need for developing a work-based learning toolkit for higher education practitioners which includes (i) the production of resources to assist in the development of work-based activity and live projects; (ii) the facilitation of learning sets either directly or through „training the trainer“ cascade systems within workforces; and (iii) development of a range of methods designed to facilitate assessment of learning.

4.4. Blended learning

Whilst not central to this study it is clear that e-learning and blended⁴⁰ approaches (where a mixture of technologies and face-to-face delivery is used) are underdeveloped, particularly in relation to the evaluation of training methods, learner support, and the potential for assessment. Again this is an area where higher education could provide considerable expertise through rolling out existing virtual learning environments that have been pioneered with more conventional undergraduate populations. Blended learning –in theory at least- has the potential to meet the desire for flexibility as well as deliver results without embroiling organisations in the bureaucracy associated with formal assessment and accreditation processes. Such developments are likely to require innovations in assessment as well as registry practice; this includes the accreditation of byte sized learning based on the successful achievement of individual learning outcomes. With reference to the voluntary sector, issues related to accessibility to required technology - and associated training - require further exploration.

4.5. Partnership approaches

This research suggests that the higher education sector in Wales is viewed by some as a collection of competing and predatory institutions that rarely co-operate with one another.. Partnership and genuine collaboration has the potential to deliver enormous benefits ranging from improved public image through to less duplication of administration and bureaucracy. As noted previously however, current funding structures clearly add to the competitive drive between institutions. If higher education is to engage with the workforce development agenda then it will benefit from demonstrable and genuine collaboration across the sector in Wales. These authors point to the success of consortium based accreditation of

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private sector training activity in England⁴¹, based on increased employer confidence in accreditation processes when groups of universities speak with one voice. It should however be noted that these pilot programmes have benefited substantially from HEFCE funding via the Lifelong Learning Networks – an initiative that Wales has not engaged with to date.

Moving forward with partnership working will require new ways of thinking and working for many organizations and individuals both within and outside the higher education sector. For example, whilst higher education organizations in Wales have a long history of working with further education through partnerships such as franchise arrangements, and through supporting a range of community regeneration and education consortia⁴², engagement with private training consultancies is considered likely to be relatively rare. So too is the shared accreditation by a group of universities of the same public or voluntary sector training programmes. Developing trust, understanding and mutual respect will be an important pre-requisite that needs to be reinforced by new resourcing strategies and priorities.

4.6 Professional development for higher education

Higher education involvement in work-based learning and indeed higher level workforce development in Wales is unlikely to become a reality without serious sustained commitment and investment (including financial resources) in its own staff. Professional development and training will be an essential ingredient at every level of higher education in Wales if the sector is to meet the significant and exciting challenges ahead.

As a first step and as a final comment, the authors suggest that consideration be given to funding five small action-learning projects facilitated by independent experts (drawn perhaps from PSMW or the HEA) which would be cross-institutional and would encourage stakeholders both within and outside higher education to engage in a genuine way. It will be important that participants in these projects are either at a senior level in higher education or have clear commitment from and agreed access to senior decision-makers in institutions.

- Organisation and Sector cultures and perceptions of higher education
- National occupational standards
- Credit rating
- Blended learning
- Partnership and collaboration within and across the higher education sector

Brennan L (2005) Integrating work-based learning into higher education – a guide to good practice UVAC and LCCI Commercial Education Trust: Bolton

⁴² See Morgan A, Saunders D and Turner D (2004) Community Consortia and post-compulsory education; a local approach to local problems *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 56 (2) , and Saunders D, Payne R and Davies L (2007) Partnership working via community consortia: a higher education perspective *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 13 (1) 88 - 100

**HEFCW PROJECT – THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF
HIGH LEVEL LEARNING FOR THE WORKFORCE IN WALES**

PROJECT REPORT

**PROJECT S3: A REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICE IN WORK-
BASED LEARNING CONTRACT FRAMEWORKS**

Liz Wilson, Trinity College Carmarthen

Rob Hamilton, University of Glamorgan

January 2009

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Executive Summary

This review of existing practice of work-based learning contracts in Wales forms one of the 10 micro-projects for a HEFCW feasibility study into the establishment of an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development. It uses qualitative data collection methods to consider the extent to which learning contracts are prevalent in Welsh HEIs; to review the use of learning contracts in the UK and internationally; to identify good practice; and to discuss specific issues arising from the use of such contracts.

Following a brief review of the increasing importance of higher level skills and workforce development for the policy agenda in Wales, the findings start by considering a range of definitions and variations in form, which evidence a continuum of practice. It goes on to identify the use of learning contracts for work placements, for the development of skills and competences and the use of learning contracts to negotiate both individual modules and whole programmes of study. Examples are provided from the University of Glamorgan, the Open University, Trinity College Carmarthen and UWIC as appendices.

Finally there is a discussion around the perceived advantages of using learning contracts: collaboration, relevance, autonomy, and clarity of the roles of stakeholders together with limitations around their suitability for all learners and issues of control and power. The discussion notes the increasing use of e-contracts and concludes with an analysis of the implications for institutional development, particularly those of changing staff roles, the need for staff development, implications for programme management and for more responsive academic and administrative structures.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report forms one of 10 micro-projects undertaken as part of a Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) feasibility study into the establishment of an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development. Each of the micro-projects investigates various issues around higher-level workforce development in Wales, and falls broadly into three themes: the scope of existing provision, markets and future potential, and establishing appropriate delivery structures.

1.2 The University of Glamorgan and Trinity College Carmarthen have been commissioned to undertake this particular scoping project, which has the remit of considering existing practice in learning contract frameworks in Wales.

2. AIMS

2.1 Following meetings of the Management Board the aims of this project have been agreed as

- primary research into the extent to which learning contracts are prevalent in HEIs in Wales
- reviewing the use of learning contracts in UK and internationally from secondary sources
- primary research into good practice in the UK
- discussion of the issues arising from using learning contracts to address the specific needs of the workforce in Wales.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The purpose of this project is exploratory, to find out what is happening in the field of contract learning in Wales and elsewhere and to provide examples of good practice. Utilising qualitative data collection methods, the research was conducted in two main phases.

3.2 The first phase concentrated on a literature review on the principles and use of learning contracts together with contact with HEIs in Wales to identify key staff involved with learning contracts. Consultation outside of Wales took place with Ufi/learnirect and a range of HEIs leading in the field of work-based learning.

3.3 The second phase took the form of case study production from unstructured interviews in person and by telephone, together with electronic communication and document collection. A range of data collection methods were used to provide an in depth analysis and to probe issues. The investigation was extended outside of Wales with visits to the University of Derby and Middlesex University, both leading exponents of the use of learning contracts.

3.4 The sample can be described as an opportunity sample, that is, those universities who were willing and available to the researchers. Findings from this research cannot be generalised, however the case study approach has enabled the researchers to gain rich data from a number of institutions and to

allow a thematic analysis of the findings. These case studies are shown in the Appendices and have been limited to examples of learning contracts used in the context of provision in Wales.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The following analysis will indicate the increasing importance of higher level skills and workforce development in terms of the policy agenda for Higher Education in Wales. The focus is on Higher Education, that is learning at level 4 and above, rather than Further Education, training and development up to level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework and what many think of when the term „work-based learning“ is used. Of necessity the analysis will concentrate on skills linked to employment such as leadership and management, together with entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills. However, it is clear from the literature that much of the discussion around learning contracts covers a broader range of curriculum areas.

4.2 The UK Government’s high level skills strategy has two main goals, the generation of more, and more employable, graduates (in terms of quality and quantity) and to raise the skills and capacity for innovation and enterprise of those already in the workforce. To inform the development of this strategy the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) held a consultation *Higher Education at Work – High Skills: High Value* which reported in October 2008 and found a need to foster co-operation and collaboration between HEIs and employers, moving from a transactional to a more continuous working relationship. They concluded that for HEIs to be more responsive to business need an institutional change in attitude is required and this is most likely to result from the provision of compelling case studies with quantifiable results. They also argued for an emphasis on the incorporation of leadership, entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills into courses.

4.3 In the same month, there was the publication of *Stepping Higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership* (2008), a joint publication by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Universities UK and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which demonstrates the potential benefits to employers of working with higher education. The report identifies 12 key issues for effective workforce development partnerships and actions that need to be taken by employers and HEIs.

4.4 In January 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government launched their skills and employment strategy *Skills that Work for Wales* for consultation which sets out a clear direction to drive up higher level skills and increase the economic activity rate. Its key measures include strengthening the voice of employers in the skills and qualifications system, primarily through the creation of the Wales Employment and Skills Board, the work of Sector Skills Councils and re-directing funding to support the total national investment in skills. This resulted in a Delivery Plan in August 2008 entitled *The Leading Edge for Welsh Businesses – Enhancing Leadership and Management Skills*, which sets out the actions to be taken by the Welsh Assembly Government to meet the challenges in Wales.

4.5 *Promise and Performance*, also known as the Webb Review, was published by the Welsh Assembly Government in December 2007. While its main focus is the Further Education sector in Wales, it has some relevance for work-based learning in Higher Education. It asserts that the Welsh

economy has suffered a long period of low skills equilibrium and that there are specific high and intermediate skills gaps in Wales. It argues for employer-led training, funded by an Employer Entitlement Fund, and an increase in Welsh-medium, Bilingual provision and Welsh language learning.

4.6 *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, the final report of *The Leitch Review of Skills* (2006) argues for improvements in the provision of work-based education and training to businesses. Leitch argues that the proportion of adults with level 4 and above skills will need to be increased to 40% by 2020 if UK companies are to remain competitive. With 70% of the 2020 working age population actually in work now, it is important that HE is able to engage with these learners for these targets to be achieved. *Skills That Work for Wales* (2008) is the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Leitch Agenda.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Definitions and variations in form

5.1.1 Much of the early literature around learning contracts derives from the work of Malcolm Knowles and his work on self-directed learning and the shift from a pedagogical to an androgical model. Knowles *et al.* (1986) emphasises the fact that a learning contract is essentially a „process plan“, that is a means of designing a learning activity with the focus on the learner rather than the subject or the „teacher“. Anderson *et al.* (1998) define a learning contract as „a negotiated agreement based upon both the learning needs of the individual undertaking the contract as well as the formal requirements of the course or institution involved. It is a plan of action as much as a statement of expected outcomes“ (p. 4).

5.1.2 Stephenson and Laycock (1993) favour the term „negotiated learning plan“ to „learning contract“, suggesting that the latter „might imply a legalistic, bureaucratic approach to learning“ (p. 17). These legalistic connotations have resulted in many synonyms being developed and users may call them „learning plans“, „learning commitments“, „study plans“, „negotiated learning agreements“, or „self-development plans“. Evidence gathered from the University of Wales, Newport suggests that there are legal aspects should be considered before committing to a learning contract:

As an institution, a committee looked into the possibility of establishing „learning contracts“. These would have been applicable to all students (part-time and full-time). However, after seeking advice with solicitors, the committee felt it necessary to back away from „learning contracts“ or even „learning agreements“ because of the legal implications of the word „contract“ and the status of the document as that - a legally binding contract. Subsequently, a „code of conduct“ has been drawn up, which will be put in place next year. However, this is very generalised - for example, no specific agreements are established between the tutor/provider and the student regarding their progress as a learner.

5.1.3 Further information on how a formal learning agreement may affect the legal relationship may be found in the paper by Jones and Gaffney-Rhys (2008) from the University of Wales Newport for the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

5.1.4 The findings of this research report have been organised into the main forms we found, which indicate a continuum of practice across Wales, the UK and internationally. At the most basic level it could be argued that when a student enrolls on to a course/module/programme/award, they are in fact agreeing to abide by the rules and conditions set out in such documents as handbooks produced by the organisation that inform the student of the requirements of passing, progressing, and even behaviour. An example of where this aspect has been developed further is at the University of Glamorgan on the HND Management and Business Scheme, whereby during the induction process at the beginning of each academic year the staff and students on the scheme agree a set of conditions. Examples of issues negotiated in respect of students include attendance, deadlines and behaviour; for teaching staff, timekeeping, relevance of materials and appropriate and timely feedback; and for scheme staff, responsiveness to student needs, timetabling and general scheme management. These types of contracts are important in terms of setting parameters within which people can work but do not involve the student in what is learnt or the outcomes within modules. The balance of the findings from this point forward concentrates on student learning experience.

5.1.5 The primary and secondary research has indicated that the term „learning contract“ has been utilised by different organisations to describe activities within which certain conditions are negotiated between the tutor(s) and the learner(s) and, in some cases, the employer. Its form varies considerably from one context to another and on a number of factors including:

- the type of course in which it is being developed
- the stage or section of the course being undertaken
- the nature of the learning goals/objectives
- the types of outcomes expected
- the preferences of the learner
- the preferences of the adviser
- the formal requirements of the course or institution (Anderson et al., 1998, p. 55).

5.2 Learning contracts and work placements

5.2.1 In the United States, learning contracts are used for internships (work placements) although the complexity of these contracts varies considerably. In the case of the University of Washington students on an internship experience (in some cases part of a work experience year termed as the Co-operative year) gain credits for a General Studies module which is governed by a learning contract: (<http://depts.washington.edu/leader/genst350/samplecontract.html>). The module aims to connect theory that has been learned in the classroom to a community based project. In addition to this the student, academic sponsor and the site supervisor agree a series of statements that determine the behaviour of each of them during the course of the module. Similar contracts are also found to be in use in the University of Greensboro (<http://csc.dept.uncg.edu/internships/students/learningcontract/>) and Rutgers University in New Jersey (<http://sebs.rutgers.edu/co-op/pdfs/contract.pdf>) in the US. These contracts are

part of the work experience programme (called the Co-operative Education course in the US) similar in nature to our sandwich year on undergraduate degrees.

5.2.2 In Wales Bangor University provides examples of some four year sandwich courses in the sciences that include a 12 months" placement. These are covered by a Code of Practice found at <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/ar/main/regulations/BUCode07-v200801.pdf>. In addition International Students choosing to study at Bangor are required to complete a learning agreement between the student, home institution and host institution (Bangor University). An example of this contract may is found here: <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/international/erasmus/ects/learningagreement.pdf>

5.2.3 A variation of the work placement programme can be seen in the Network 75 Professional Academy at the University of Glamorgan (see Appendix i) whereby in addition to the award that the student is studying, they undertake a training programme that is negotiated between their workplace supervisor, the student, and the Network 75 Professional Academy representative. Irrespective of the discipline involved, the student would be expected to undertake some form of managerial/project based work to enhance career development. However these outcomes are merely monitored and are not used as part of the assessment on reaching module marks or final classification of award.

5.3 Learning contracts and the development of skills and competences

5.3.1 The authors found a number of examples in Wales whereby a contract is entered into between an institution and an employer on behalf of a group of employees. For example, the Research and Enterprise Department at the University of Wales Newport advertise and liaise with businesses to provide short courses, but the negotiations and contractual agreements are not with individual learners. *Stepping Higher* also gives case study examples where leading HEIs contract to provide specific leadership and management programmes, such as the OU's „Leading for Results“ work with Addaction (pp. 60-65), and the University of Derby's work with the Institute of Quarrying (pp. 84-89).

5.3.2 The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) are one of a number of Awarding Bodies that offer a range of courses that have been designed with a focus on management development. Although not designed specifically for an individual, there is a degree of flexibility that can be determined by the employer/employee/ILM approved centre. These programmes range from level 2 to level 7 in the National Qualifications Framework and can be delivered by approved centres, be they FE/HE or private training providers. However the modules are designed around management and leadership competencies, and whilst the learning methods may be variable the objectives and outcomes are determined by the modules, so there is limited opportunity for negotiation of individual learning outcomes.

5.3.3 Similarly the competence framework approach is one that is adopted by centres offering National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), although the majority of these are at FE level. As an example of this, Leicester City Council offers an NVQ Level 3 in Youth Work. While the approach to learning is flexible (the centre provides an extensive learning resource pack) the outcomes are determined by the structure of the NVQ framework. Here the contract focuses more on the behavioural aspects of the learner, assessor, NVQ centre and the line manager. A case study available from Chartered Institute of

Personnel and Development describes a learning contract for employees in Surrey County Council who undertook the European Computer Driving Licence, a level 2 qualification. Here the learning contract was between the individual and manager to pursue the qualification. Support was given in the form of a CD Rom, access to ECDL reference material, in-house courses and a clinic/coaching session. ECDL testing was conducted by external consultants. In this case the outcomes are very prescriptive in terms of key skills in information technology.

5.3.4 In terms of Higher Education, the Trinity College Curriculum Framework includes opportunities to accredit competences, National Occupational Standards and Key Skills, together with NVQ language units in Welsh. Bangor University use learning contracts in courses which lead to professional accreditation, such as in Nursing, Social Work and Education, and examples can be found across Wales such as in Swansea University's School of Health Science's clinical learning contract

5.4 Negotiation of individual modules and complete programmes of study

5.4.1 In many institutions, as in the case of the UWIC awards in Applied Professional Practice at Foundation Degree and Master's levels, there have been efforts to include modules that incorporate a learning contract as part of the award/scheme on offer. There are full details of the learning contracts involved in the appendix (iv).

5.4.2 There are then those modules/courses that have specific learning outcomes attached but allow for a degree of flexibility in terms of what is expected of a student or a group of students, in terms of the processes that they go to in order to demonstrate the achievement of those learning outcomes. Typical of these are project based modules in which the student is engaged with an organisation to solve a particular problem that an organisation has. These are offered in many HEIs in Wales. Because each organisation's problem is different in terms of the context and the outcomes, the processes that student undertakes may be different and dependent on the needs of the organisation. However the overriding factor is the assessment targets that the students must attain. These types of projects are typical of Foundation Degree programmes and dissertations on undergraduate programmes.

5.4.3 The Open University's module BU130 (appendix ii) differs from the learning contract approach of universities such as Middlesex, Derby and Trinity College Carmarthen in that it captures learning done in work, rather than designing a whole programme of learning. The former Course Chair identifies the issue thus:

There is a significant difference of understanding in these two approaches. The OU method maintains a link to academic disciplines (although it treats the boundaries as pretty porous) whilst, especially Middlesex, sees learning FROM work as being a discipline of its own. In this way, the learning contract at the OU becomes more of a pedagogy, a way of approaching a need for learning and then managing the learning journey. This becomes even clearer in the new learning contract process for B204.

5.4.4 In Wales, Trinity College offers an opportunity to negotiate a complete qualification by means of a learning contract for individuals or a cohort learning agreement for groups of staff (appendix iii). It

acknowledges the support of two leading universities in this field, Middlesex and Derby, who have provided professional guidance on designing the complete curriculum. Examples outside of Wales can be found in the University of the West of England's Faculty of Health and Social Care, another Ufi/LearnDirect Learning through Work University, as is the University of Derby; and Middlesex University which enables Professional Doctorates to be gained through this method. Other notable examples include the Kingston University offers a Master's Degree (MA/MSc) by Learning Contract (<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/learning-contract/>) and in a similar approach the University of Brighton offer an MA/MSc by in Science and Engineering by learning contract.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Perceived advantages of using learning contracts

6.1.1 Collaboration

Learning contracts provide opportunities for effective collaboration. The literature review in the CBI's *Stepping Higher* identifies the use of learning contracts as a means by which to deal with the multiplicity of aspirations and need by all parties. It stresses the importance of ensuring „the learning outcomes are identified and agreed upfront by the employee, employer and the university, and that these outcomes form the basis of a “contract” which can also take account of prior learning and qualifications“ (p. 11).

6.1.2 Relevance

Relevance to the learner has been identified as a key advantage of the use of learning contracts. Anderson *et al.* (1998) suggest that learning activities are likely to be more relevant, meaningful and interesting; hence motivation and commitment are likely to be higher (p. 10). Learning contracts can allow learning to take place that is responsive to the needs of employers and employees and offer the opportunity of reconciling these needs with the formal assessment requirements of an educational institution or other accrediting body.

6.1.3 Autonomy

Learning contracts encourage learners to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning and to become less dependent on direction from others. Again, Anderson *et al.* suggest that learners develop many generic skills that are important in all fields of professional practice, and that such learners are „more likely to use analytical and reflective approaches to learning“ (p. 11). These skills may enable students to build confidence in their own ability and personal effectiveness. Stephenson and Laycock (1993) go as far as to suggest „the greater the scale of responsibility – for complete modules or even for complete programmes – the greater the potential academic and personal benefits for the students (p. 18).

6.1.4 Clarification of roles

They help students to recognise and clarify the roles of the different stakeholders in their educational development, such as tutors, employers and fellow-students (Stephenson and Laycock, p. 18).

6.2 Perceived limitations to learning contracts

6.2.1 Anderson *et al.* conclude that „learning contracts must be judged not only by what they deliver in the best circumstances, but what is possible in the typical context“, a factor which limits their use in practice. They argue that „learning contracts can help students work with others and encourage substantial initiatives in promoting learner autonomy, but often lapse into an accountability procedure for the recording of student projects“ (1998, p. 134). We make recommendations to avoid this situation in the final section of this report.

6.2.2 The extent to which learning contracts are appropriate for all learners

It is generally considered that learning contracts are less suitable

- if the subject matter is totally new to learners and so they cannot build on their prior experience;
- where the programme of learning is skills-based or highly technical and so regular systematic feedback is require.
- where students prefer a more directive approach, either because they are more comfortable with traditional learning methods or they lack the self-confidence to negotiate their learning with a member of staff
- where students face language or cultural barriers to the idea of negotiating their learning. Anderson *et al.* give examples where students may consider to question the adviser is disrespectful, or that admitting to gaps in knowledge may result in a loss of face, or where students are working with a new language in a new setting.

Piper and Wilson consider that „while students engaged in independent study should be encouraged to question received wisdom and to follow their personal interests, this can only be achieved from a foundation of established disciplinary knowledge and academic confidence...students cannot enter into a meaningful contract without a reasonable awareness of both relevant procedures and regulations and also of the academic and conceptual framework within which they are intending to work. To permit them to do so would appear to be both unwise and unprofessional“ (1993, p. 41).

6.2.3 Issues of control and power

As with all education transactions, issues of status and power are implicit, although few commentators go quite so far as Gibbs and Ojukwu in suggesting that „the notion of the contract is not based on fairness and equality, but is designed to reinforce and reproduce practices of oppression and exploitation central to neo-liberal notion of work within the field of education“ (2007, p.75):

- some critics suggest the method has a strong socio-economic bias, promotes an excessive individualism, and „reflects the values and aspirations of educated, middle-class, white society...it can be seen as a form of what is becoming known as the “new contractualism.” Anderson *et al.* p. 136. However, in defence of learning contracts they do point to their success in fields that are not notably individualistic such as nursing and health science.
- an alternative view is that the learning outcomes or assessment criteria may reflect a mechanistic and systemised approach to training, and that the humanistic „façade may in fact disguise attempts to mould people in approved organizational or institutional ways (Newman, 1994)” in Anderson *et al.* p. 138.

- in addition Anderson *et al.* identify the inherent tension between learning that is unique to an individual and the need for recognition by the awarding institution, which raises the question of where control actually lies. They assert that the contract method is not primarily about assumptions around self-directed learning, as suggested by Knowles; rather it is a *negotiated* agreement which seeks to balance formal course requirements with individual learning needs. This balance is much at odds with Gibbs and Ojukwu's claim „almost of serf-like dependence by the student on the employer and educational institutions which contradicts any notion of fairness...the discourse of the document is that of peasantry and lord, not of emancipated learner and collaborator“ (2007, p. 77).

6.3 Increasing use of e-contracts

Ufi/learndirect has been involved with a number of HEIs through their Learning through Work (LtW) programme, most notably the University of Derby whose staff have published extensively in this area. LtW HEIs have access to an online learning contract negotiation platform designed to support work-based learning, and Trinity College Carmarthen uses this platform and is a member of the Ufi/HEIs Group. Minton (2007) provides case studies in its use, particularly in the field of healthcare professionals. The University of Derby has also received JISC funding to further develop e-APEL programmes to support work-based learners in their claim for Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning.

6.4 Implications for institutional development

Clearly there are needs for institutions to change if they are to provide a context where learning contracts can flourish. Although learning contracts are dependent on the ability of learners and staff to negotiate, the prevailing institutional ethos may be supportive or otherwise of this process.

6.4.1 Changing staff roles

The needs of the learner, with particular reference to the level of study that is covered by HEIs, vary considerably. It is possible for HEIs to engage with students from level 4 to doctorate level and this could have significant impact on the role of staff within the HEIs. A number of universities have developed specific job descriptions/person specifications for the new roles of Programme Adviser (Trinity College) or Workforce Development Fellows (University of Derby). Staff involved in learning contracts need to have a level of communication skills different to that normally encountered in staff/student interactions, with strong negotiating skills.

6.4.2 Implications for staff development

As far back as 1981, Knowles identified that there needs to be a re-orientation of Higher Education towards the process of learning rather than the transmission of content. He claims this „is a concept foreign to most educators. It has not been part of their training...It requires a redefinition of their role away from that of the transmitter and controller of instruction to that of facilitator and resource person to self-directed learners. It is frightening. They do not know how to do it“ (p.8). Staff involved in learning contracts need to be aware of the very diverse needs of learners and be able to use the contracts in way

which are sensitive to their needs, in addition to being adept at programme design and implementing APEL procedures. Indeed in many cases academic staff also need considerable knowledge of the organisations within which the learner is situated, or circumstances within which the learning is taking place, in order to evaluate or assess the experience.

6.4.3 Programme management implications

It is clearly important that negotiated learning needs to be carefully introduced to both learners and staff, after some time has been taken to understand the challenges that will face all parties. It is not possible to stress enough the importance of support mechanisms for tutors; the OU's *Working and Learning – Tutor Resource File* is an example of good practice here.

6.4.4 Changing, more responsive structures

Practical changes will need to be made to administrative support systems for learning contracts to function effectively. This will include changes to Registry (APEL), examination boards, MIS/systems, and other administrative systems.

6.4.5 In conclusion, the authors remain optimistic about the potential value of learning contracts in developing the autonomy, intellectual and personal skills to meet challenges in the life of learners, be those of their career or in their wider life. What now needs to be judged is the feedback from all parties of their experiences of learning contracts, including the support through the medium of the Welsh language. It appears imperative that learning contracts will be a successful methodology only if adopted by staff, learners and employers who appreciate what is both explicit and implicit in their implementation.

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University of the West of England Learning Contract Link

Appendix (i) University of Glamorgan Network 75 Professional Academy

The Network 75 scheme at the University of Glamorgan is an innovative and successful approach to enabling students to undertake work experience while attaining an academic qualification.

Background

Established in 2000 the scheme created a network of 75 companies to support and attract able young people into Higher Education. The scheme allows students to study for two days a week while being „employed“ in a subject relevant position in an organisation. Originally set up for engineering and technology students in the University, the scheme has been broadened to include any subject discipline as long as there is a demand from companies and includes any subject area or faculty.

The scheme is available to any company, irrespective of size and type, which buys into the concept that helps them grow through the utilisation of knowledge transfer from the University through the student and their studies. The student on the other hand gains valuable insights into the nature of the work that their chosen subject offers them and helps with the personal and professional development.

The Contract

The scheme works on an agreement between the University, the student and the organisation. The employer pays a fixed amount into the scheme enabling the student to receive a bursary of initially £5000 in the first year which rises by £500 each subsequent year. The student agrees to only work for that employer and is not allowed to undertake any other form of work, and for their part the organisation agrees to provide the student with a professional training and development programme which has relevance to their studies.

The Process

Students apply for the Network 75 scheme either directly to the University from School or college, or after having already studied for a period of time in the university. Students who go directly on to the scheme normally take 5 years to complete the programme while those who join during the course of their studies will take between 3 and four years to complete dependent on the stage at which they enter the programme.

Applications are accepted at any time of year but the placements normally start at start of the next available academic year. Prospective students apply directly via an on-line application form and if the Network 75 staff are happy with the quality of the applicant they will be interviewed by the scheme. At this stage a decision is made to accept them on to the scheme only.

The successful applicants are then matched with relevant, prospective employers and will undergo an interview with those employers to ensure their suitability. As there may be more than one student deemed suitable for an employer the interview process with that employer becomes competitive.

Once the employer has agreed to accept a student an initial meeting is held to discuss the training and development plan which is designed to assist the student in their chosen programme of study, a copy of which is made available to the employer to inform them of the subjects being studied.

Review sessions are held, between the employer, the student and representatives from Network 75. There is a standard agenda for the meeting which is as follows:

- Review progress on plan
- Review objectives
- Review performance (both academic and work)

As well as the progress of the student the meetings attempt to solve any issues that may have been resolved. A final review meeting is held at the end of each academic year.

Conclusion

With the high retention rates, student performance and the employability of the students on completion, Network 75 (now re-branded the Network 75 Professional Academy) has expanded in recent years and that there are a large number of employers in the area using the scheme to good effect.

The employers are gaining valuable knowledge transfer and the students developing their working knowledge and being able to apply the theory covered on their academic programme.

Although time and resource intensive, in relation to other programmes that attract large numbers of students, the fact that it has continually grown since its inception in 2000 is testimony to its success. This success of the Network 75 programme at the University of Glamorgan, and its expansion, is down to the rigorous selection process and the continual review that is undertaken ensuring that at all times the student and employer are developing in line with the philosophy of the scheme.

Appendix (ii) Open University – BU130 Working and Learning

Background

This course, first introduced in 2006, provides an introduction to the skills of work-based learning and aims to help learners to build a career and give them the skills to improve their performance at work. To do this, the course includes the creation of a personal learning contract that students develop as they work through the course. It includes access to Ufi/learnirect's Learning through Work (LtW) materials, particularly their online course „Working and Learning“. It does not, however, make use of their Learning Contract, unlike the example from Trinity College Carmarthen.

The Contract

The course includes the following learning outcomes. „By the end of the course you will be able to:

- understand your own learning, its role and impact in the workplace so as to plan and manage your learning towards the achievement of aims and objectives that fit your career
- engage in reflective learning by reflecting on, evaluating and applying experiential learning in your own professional, occupational and workplace contexts
- focus your learning on important issues in your day-day work.“

Students complete two Learning Contracts over the period of this 6 month course, one for each work-based learning topic. The first topic is set, time management, and the second is one chosen by the students from five topics of inquiry: work-life balance; self and career management; influence and persuasion; making decisions; or working relations and communications.

The Learning Contract consists of three stages: identification of learning objectives, learning strategy and resources, and demonstrating your learning, each with a linked series of questions in the form of a Learning Contract wizard.

The Process

Students taking BU130 have both hard copy materials (a *Study Guide* and a *Reflective Practice Booklet*) together with online access to the Learning through Work website, topic guides and an online Learning Contract, not LtW but the OU's own version. They have the support of a tutor, can attend two day schools (the first of which deals explicitly with issues around learning contracts) and have access to a Tutor Group Forum (TGF), an online discussion forum.

Staff are supported by a Tutor Resource File, which explicitly deals with the difficulties students (and staff) may have with the process.

The Course Team encourage students to see themselves as self-directed learners but warns tutors about the dangers of „giving too much personal advice to an individual, since this may lead to time problems when all 20 students in your group ask for detailed advice!“.

Conclusion

This contract differs from those used by universities such as Middlesex and Derby in that it is a contract to capture a piece of learning done in work, rather than a way of designing a programme that includes work-based learning. A similar approach is being planned for a new course B204 *Making it Happen! Leadership, Influence and Change* which starts in February 2009 and uses an electronic version of a learning contract.

Appendix (iii) Trinity College Carmarthen „Learning through Work“ e-learning contract and Cohort Programme Agreement

Background

Trinity College Carmarthen has validated Learning Contract modules at levels 4-7, known as a Work-based Learning Programme Plan to form part of a Framework in Professional Practice. This also includes Cohort Programme Agreement, a Learning Contract with an organisation for a group of their employees. It also provides a framework where learners may negotiate a range of flexible provision at different credit levels and values such as accreditation against competences and National Occupational Standards, work-based learning projects and independent studies.

The Contract

The aim of the individual learning contract is to engage learners in the initial phase of work-based learning enabling them to create an individual learning plan which may include, where appropriate, a claim for credit under Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

The module has the following learning outcomes, in that by the end of the module learners should be able to:

- develop an individual learning plan using the Ufl/learndirect e-learning platform;
- review their current competences and articulate how these relate to what they need and want to learn;
- devise and write specific learning outcomes for their individual learning programme;
- demonstrate an awareness of the need to explore the theoretical knowledge underpinning workplace practice.

Each learner is assigned an academic tutor whose main role is to provide the appropriate academic framework within which the negotiated learning plan will be set. Advice may be given on aims, objectives, activities, timescales, intended learning outcomes, proposed evidence and relevant level indicators.

The language needs of learners will be identified at the commencement of the process and linguistically appropriate support will be available throughout. In addition there will be opportunities to discuss, negotiate, to have tutorial support and to undertake work based activities through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

Where a programme is developed with an organisation then it is a requirement that a Cohort Programme Agreement is negotiated between the organisation and Trinity College. However, individual learners would be expected to be involved in some negotiation, for example, in agreeing the focus and detail of their work-based project.

The Process

In terms of the process for individuals, a potential learner will receive advice and guidance on the work-based learning framework from staff at Trinity. Enquiries may be directly to the College or, more often, generated from the Learning through Work website. If suitable the applicant registers with Trinity College, is allocated a Programme Adviser, and will complete a Work-based Learning programme plan module. The learner undertakes the module and negotiates and develops a plan including aims and objectives, resources and timescale. The learner may also complete, if appropriate, a claim for APEL using a Recognition and Accreditation of Learning module. This is an iterative process and the plan will be formally submitted for assessment, where it achieves 15 credits at the appropriate level following an Examination Board. Online communication is central, but is combined with telephone and/or face to face tutorials. The learner embarks on the full programme of learning. Small modifications to the learning plan are possible but major changes that affect award type or the focus of the programme will require re-approval. The learner is supported on programme by the Programme Adviser and much of the provision can be offered through the medium of Welsh.

The Cohort Learning Agreement involves the employer and Trinity College negotiating an Accreditation Proposal at the initial stage then programme documentation is developed in response to organisational need. An accreditation contract is drawn up and, when approved, the Proposal is assessed by an Accreditation Board at an approval event. A Memorandum of Cooperation is then drawn up which governs the use of the accredited activity and the programme commences. Learners gain credit for their completion of assessment tasks and the accredited activity is monitored through the Programme Annual Review process.

Conclusion

This programme provides an individualised programme of study for both individuals and their employers within a quality assured framework associated with the award of academic credit. Learners and employers can access the programme at any time as the programme responsive to individual needs and is not linked to traditional semesters.

In all cases the learning is relevant to and based on the work of the learner, and extends and develops their understanding of the underpinning theories and concepts related to their work.

Appendix (iv) University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) Foundation Degree and Master's Degree in Applied Professional Practice

Background

The above awards have been developed within the context of a number of reports which highlight the need for the strategic development of higher level learning within the Welsh workforce. They have been created with a view to satisfying the perceived needs of employers in all sectors, with the ultimate aim of boosting the economic competitiveness of Wales. The Framework is a separate and explicit outcome of this HEFCW study on establishment of an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development.

The Contract

The Masters level Work-based Learning Project 1 (worth 40 credits) module requires the students to produce a 12,000 word report based, on a field of study identified within a learning contract that has been drawn up with the module supervisor. In addition to identifying the subject matter of the report, the negotiation between the student and the tutor also identifies within the learning contract the learning outcomes, the learning process and the assessment strategy.

In the case of the FdA/FSc in Applied Professional Practice, students undertake the module Work Based Learning Project 1 (WBL105U) in the Autumn Semester of the first year of study after having studied 4 modules during the Spring and Summer semesters that require attendance to seminars, tutorials, lectures, in addition to the use of self- directed study and other support materials and systems.

The Process

Whilst the two awards have been created for students with differing prior learning and qualifications, the basic structure of the awards are similar in that there are a number of modules that focus on the need to situate the learning within the workplace, underpinned with theoretical modules. This has led to the programmes using a combination of face to face tutorials, lectures, blended learning, negotiated study, self-directed studies, support of the Blackboard Managed Learning Environment.

In addition to the WBL105U module, in which the content, process, outcomes, and assessment are the subject of a learning contract, there is another Foundation Degree module, Building Reflective Practice at Work (WBL202U) that does not specifically require a learning contract but requires negotiation between the student and the module leader. This negotiation is undertaken to develop learning outcomes through independent research, work based experiential learning, reflective dialogue with mentors or buddies from within their immediate work context or outside. Neither of these modules includes mention of the employer as being involved in the outcomes, however given the nature of the award and the module titles this involvement would be seen as implicit.

The MA/MSc in Applied Professional Practice has a module at the Diploma stage that is almost identical to the module on the FdA/FSc. The module on this award, Work-based Learning Project 2 (WBL405), does have a difference in terms of the most significantly in terms of the assessment which is split into three parts:

- Development of a Learning Contract (1500 words, worth 25%)
- Report (3000 words, worth 50%)
- Presentation (15 mins, worth 25%)

The outcomes relate to two areas which are classified as general and specific. The general outcomes relate to the developmental needs of the organisation and the theories and practices at the forefront of the discipline area to their organisation. The specific outcomes are determined by the learning contract itself. In order to facilitate the development of the learning contract the student would have already undertaken a Learning Contracts Theory and Practice module (WBL402U) which is delivered at the Certificate level. This module is worth 10 credits and is one of a number of modules that are used to underpin later modules. Once again these modules use a combination of face-to-face contact and blended learning to support the student in their studies.

At the Masters level of the award students are required to undertake a dissertation which is split into two modules:

- Work-based Learning Project 2 – dissertation proposal and academic paper review (WBL408, worth 10 credits)
- Dissertation (WBL409, worth 50 credits)

The Work-based Learning Project 2 requires students to prepare for their Dissertation through a taught module that involves the student in presenting a critique of an article (15 minute presentation, worth 50%) and producing a Research Proposal Report (2000 words, worth 50%).

The Dissertation itself requires the production of a piece of work that is an investigation onto some aspect of professional practice within their own place of work, their discipline or field of study in their profession. Whilst there are specific learning outcomes that make no mention of a learning contract, the nature of the learning, through independent study and tutor led formal and informal discussions suggest that there is some flexibility in terms of these outcomes.

Conclusion

These awards are currently under development and are due to begin in February 2009. The modules outlined above suggest that there is a degree of flexibility in terms of the method of study, learning outcomes, learning processes and assessment for a significant proportion of each award. This framework is an important outcome and achievement for the HEFCW project.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Project Board , namely David Holifield (UWIC), Brec'hed Piette (Bangor University), Ian Roffe (University of Wales Lampeter), Rhys Rowland-Jones (Glyndwr University), Danny Saunders (University of Glamorgan), Charlotte Williams (Cardiff University), Lowrian Williams (Bangor University), together with those Board members indicated by an asterisk below who made specific contributions:

Ioan Ap Dewi	Bangor University
Kathryn David	Swansea Metropolitan University
*Viv Davies	University of Wales Newport
Richard Evans	Cardiff University
Jonathan Garnett	Middlesex University
*Oliver Hewer	University of Wales Newport
Rob Humphreys	Open University Wales
*Barrie Kennard	University of Wales Institute Cardiff
Jo Madden	Aberystwyth University
Jean O'Neill	Middlesex University
*Tahseen Rafik	University of Wales Institute Cardiff
Caroline Ramsey	Open University
Kirsten Reid	Open University
*Clare Sinclair	Cardiff University
Helen Stacey	University of Glamorgan
Chris Talbot	Swansea University
Steve Thomas	University of Glamorgan
*Peter Treadwell	University of Wales Institute Cardiff
David Young	University of Derby

MF4: A critical review of the main „barriers to learning“ with regards
to workforce learning and development training

Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning
University of Wales, Newport

October 2008

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Executive summary

1. Introduction

Feasibility study

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has funded a feasibility study into the establishment of an all-Wales centre for higher-level workforce development. Undertaken by a partnership of higher education institutions in Wales and led by UWIC, the feasibility study comprises 10 micro-projects. Each micro-project looks into various issues surrounding higher-level workforce development in Wales, and are arranged within the overall study to investigate the following broad themes:

- the existing scope of workforce development in Wales („Scoping projects“)
- the market and future potential for upskilling the Welsh workforce („Markets and futures projects“)
- establishing curriculum and administrative structures around which an all-Wales centre for higher level workforce development can be founded („delivery structures projects“)⁴³

Micro-project MF4

The University of Wales, Newport has been commissioned to undertake one of these micro-projects, coded MF4, as one of the three projects looking at „markets and futures“. Housed by the University’s Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning (CCLL), the project aims to research and present a critical review of the main „barriers to learning“ with respect to workforce development.

2. Aims

The basic aim of this micro-project is to review „the key challenges and barriers to learning in and for work“, i.e. learning and training done in order to develop the skills of people *in work*, specifically related to their organisation’s needs and their role within the organisation. In particular, this research seeks to explore the issues from the following four broad perspectives, which, during the course of the research, have been slightly modified from that initially explained in the project proposal:⁴⁴

- businesses
- staff members/the individual learner
- provision
- dispositional factors (general issues concerning the nature of employment, the workplace, the worker and the provision of training which cannot be attributed to the other perspectives)

Given the aims and objectives of the feasibility study, higher-level (Level 4+) workforce development is the integral issue to address. However, the whole extent of workforce development opportunities (in

⁴³ UWIC 2007

⁴⁴ UWIC 2007: 17

terms of qualification level, the type of training and learning, etc.) should be taken into consideration when assessing the difficulties firms face in developing their staff members.

An important objective for this micro-project is input from the key stakeholders – in particular businesses. A „demand-led“ system is considered in current policy agendas to be an imperative contribution in the establishment of a strong culture and cogent mechanism of workforce development in the UK (see for example, Leitch 2007: 74). This idea maintains that the supply of training and education should reflect the demands and needs of the „customer“ (i.e. businesses and workers) – not just dependent on what providers decide they should supply. An appropriate way to approach this, then, is to weigh up the issue from the views of the customer.

In addressing the issues faced by businesses, questions arise concerning not just their ability to engage with workforce training, but also their willingness to engage and indeed the appropriateness of their engagement. All of these facets require investigation herein.

Given the time and resource limitations of this micro-project, the scope was narrowed down in terms of what sort of businesses to interview. According to literature, private-sector SMEs (less than 250 employees), and particularly micro-businesses (those with less than 10 employees) are less likely to train staff and more likely to report difficulties in accessing and engaging with staff training. Therefore it was considered appropriate to gain primary data from these firms – those „least likely to“.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this micro-project involved:

- A literature review
- Consultation with universities and other key informants
- Consultation with businesses

A number of studies into Welsh, English, and UK workforce development have gained quantitative data about reasons for not training (such as Future Skills Wales 2006; LSC National Employer Skills Survey 2005). A quantitative study would be beyond the resource capabilities of this review, therefore the empirical aspect of this study has focused on qualitative information.

Literature review

A review was conducted of academic and policy literature dealing with workforce development, barriers to training, and labour market trends among other themes. This was used as a basis for further empirical research, and the review of literature was ongoing throughout the study.

While the skills surveys of England⁴⁵ and Wales⁴⁶ discussed quantitative data in considerable detail, when it came to reasons for not training, both focused on asking only those firms who had *not* provided

⁴⁵ NESS05

off the job training in the prior 12 months. Therefore, information about difficulties faced by firms who were providing training was overlooked. In this study the best effort was made to investigate firms' reasons for not developing staff and existing difficulties in undertaking development opportunities for staff.

Consultation with key informants

Short interviews were conducted with members of university departments in Wales who dealt with external businesses. The interviews probed a number of key questions, investigating the difficulties faced in providing development for businesses from their experience, and also their perspective on barriers for businesses, employees/learners and dispositional issues.

A number of these interviews were with Business Schools who directly delivered curriculum to the workplace. Another department did not directly deliver to the workforce but were the institution's key department in identifying, establishing and managing relationships with external businesses within their geographical remit. Other departments were involved with external businesses as Lifelong Learning centres – perhaps less specialist in terms of curriculum than executive business modules; however, their expertise in engaging “non-traditional” learners make them well placed in overcoming „barriers” to non-participation.

Two employer-led organisations representing business, one authority on higher education and the labour market who was affiliated to a university research department, and one other learning broker (not a university) were also consulted. Geographically, all of Wales was represented.

Consultation with businesses

Interviews were conducted with private sector SMEs, with no more than 20 staff members. All firms contacted were in the Greater-Gwent area, and had been either previously involved in research activities of our university department, or were encountered at business networking events in the area. These interviews used themes drawn from existing literature, probing methods of development they used, difficulties faced in developing staff, attitudes towards development, and attitudes towards university provision.

These interviews were only pilots, and further development is needed before a wider audience is consulted. Had time permitted, group interviews and focus-groups with firms in Wales would have been executed, however time and resources did not accommodate this. Further information was gained through discussions with firms at business networking events in the local area.

⁴⁶ Future Skills Wales 2006

Limitations

Since the study was carried out by university (a key stakeholder) questions of bias arise. As much care was taken as possible to treat the evidence objectively to present a rounded and impartial overview of the problems that arise for all stakeholders concerned.

The sample group of businesses consulted was small and restricted to the local area. A number had had previous correspondence in UWN's research activities. However the primary goal of the study was not to undertake a substantial quantitative survey of Welsh firms, rather it was more to get a flavour of what Welsh businesses thought about undertaking workforce development activities. Therefore, the qualitative data gained provides the study with a useful indicative base for further investigation. If anything, it indicates that further detailed and comprehensive collection of primary data for the Welsh labour market and higher education's place in it is thoroughly needed.

4. Background

Three background factors are important to take into account when looking at workforce development in Wales:

- Policy
- The Welsh labour market
- The place of higher education within this climate

Policy

The development of workplace learning in higher education is an active part of the current political agenda. The Leitch Review of Skills (2007) argues that Britain needs a strong base of high level skills and knowledge by 2020 in order to compete economically. Leitch states that 70% of Britain's 2020 workforce is already in work (i.e. has already left education), and therefore upskilling the current workforce is vital in achieving this goal. Indeed, a recent WAG consultation document also argued that, with regards to the increase in Wales' skill levels,

"Skills will make the biggest difference to the prosperity of Wales when they are used effectively in Welsh workplaces."⁴⁷

Welsh Labour Market

According to the Future Skills Wales survey, 75% of firms in Wales are micro-businesses (between 1 and 9 employees). Fifteen percent of firms are classed as „public admin/education/health“, yet this sector employs just over 30% of all workers in Wales.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ WAG 2008: 18

⁴⁸ FSW 2006: 18

Statistics from ELWa suggest that the need to increase economic competitiveness is more pronounced in Wales compared with the UK and EU averages. The UK's productivity (output compared with hours worked) is 89.8% of the EU average – suggesting a need for improvement – however in Wales productivity meets only 71% of the EU average.⁴⁹ Further to this, 23% of working age population is economically inactive.⁵⁰

To these figures can be added statistics concerning the qualifications of the adult population. In Wales, 22.5% of adults are qualified to Level 4+, less than the 25.1% UK average, and the Level 3 average is slightly lower than that of the UK. Perhaps more noticeably, 17.8% have no qualifications, 3% higher than the England average, and higher than the overall UK average.⁵¹

However there is evidence that picture is less drastic than these figures from ELWa suggest. While Wales has higher levels of basic skills needs, higher levels of people in elementary or semi-skilled occupations, and more people in low-paid jobs (taken as a marker for a low-skilled occupation), these differences are only slightly more pronounced than the UK overall.⁵² The UK offers 87% of workers continuous vocational training in comparison to the EU average of 62%, with Wales conforming to the UK trend.⁵³ Furthermore, according to ELWa, 69% of Welsh firms arranged training opportunities for their employees, higher than the 50% UK average, and the report also shows that sectors fare differently.⁵⁴

Recently work by Felstead has pointed out that from 1986-2006 there has been a fall in the number of high-skilled jobs in Wales and a rise in the number of low-skilled jobs (requiring no qualifications), contrary to trends appears in the rest of Britain. Furthermore, at all levels of qualification (Levels 1 – 4, especially regarding the latter), the supply of graduates and qualified persons outweighs the demand for them in the form of job vacancies in Wales.⁵⁵ Fortunately, the trend has seemed to slow in recent years.

These figures are from the pre-Leitch labour market, and gradually as stakeholders are responding to Leitch, the situation may be differing. Regardless of this, the picture suggests that though Wales fares poorly in terms of productivity, and suffers high levels of economic inactivity, Welsh firms have been more active in providing training for its workforce. Even though the population on the whole fares less well in Wales regarding educational attainment (gaining qualifications), there appears to be an abundance of the working population who are well- (if not *more-than-*) qualified to do their job.

The place of Higher Education within this climate

⁴⁹ ELWa 2005: 23

⁵⁰ ELWa 2005: 19. „*Economically inactive*’ = “people who are out of work, but who do not satisfy all the International Labour Organisation criteria for unemployment... because they are either not seeking work or are unavailable to start work” (ONS – Office for National Statistics; <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/guides/LabourMarket/concepts/inactivity.asp> accessed 12 April 2008)

⁵¹ ELWa 2005: 21

⁵² Sloane, O’Leary and Watson 2007: 82-3

⁵³ ELWa 2005: 24

⁵⁴ ELWa 2005: 49

⁵⁵ Felstead 2008: 6-14

Representing a sector providing skills and education at the high-end of the market, it is important for universities to provide for and work with businesses to achieve this skills-driven economic boost. The Graham Review of part-time Higher Education in Wales stresses the importance of higher-education for businesses and their workers, arguing that

“the relationship between these two key players is central to many of the economic and educational aspirations for Wales and that will be increasingly the case as the demography and the age and skills pattern of the workforce change”;⁵⁶

and that,

“if Wales is to achieve the economic success it aspires to, the private sector will need to be engaged significantly with training providers and, in the vast majority of cases that will involve part-time provision in response to employment needs.”⁵⁷

The CBI state that

“Successful relationships between business and higher education can be a source of innovation, specialist skills, world class research and development and increased productivity.”⁵⁸

There is also a „widening access“ element to the provision of higher education (HE) in the workplace – it is a valuable way of making education accessible to a greater number of people. Offering HE accreditation for people already in work allows skills and knowledge gained through work to be recognised, and to give people the opportunity to gain HE qualifications who may not have been able to do so via the traditional route of spending 3 years on a full-time HE course. Expanding and widening progression routes into HE, specifically via vocational routes, was highlighted in the Graham Review (2006). It also advocates the importance of HE in lifelong learning, which was encouraged in the Welsh Assembly Government documents The Learning Country (2001 and 2007). Not only a benefit to the firm, but the process of learning has wider benefits to the individual going through the process - it is not just „workforce“ learning.⁵⁹

It is in response to these suggestions that a partnership of higher education institutions in Wales is undertaking this feasibility study into workforce development and the place of HE within it. One of the most significant aspects of achieving this interaction and engagement between business and HE involves understanding those factors which may discourage and hinder such a relationship – hence this micro-project’s focus on the „barriers“ to workforce development.

Regarding universities’ role in delivering for the workforce, emphasis been placed on the concept of „work-based learning/WBL“ - a type of curriculum this feasibility study is actively developing. However,

⁵⁶ Graham 2006: 91

⁵⁷ Graham 2006: 45

⁵⁸ CBI 2003b: 1

⁵⁹ Helyer and Hooker 2007: 70

since this is very much an academic concept limited at this moment to those businesses who have experience of it, no focus will be placed on assessing business' views of WBL in the empirical aspect of this study.

5. Definition of terms

It is necessary to define briefly the following terms and concepts that feature prominently in this study:

- „barrier“
- „employer engagement“
- Types of learning - „learning“, „education“, and „workforce development“

„Barrier“

Gorard *et al.* point out that barriers are commonly referred to in policy as factors which “prevent those people from participating in education who would benefit from doing so”.⁶⁰ They emphasize the idea that a barrier is an „impediment“, or something that is „in the way“. Kitching and Blackburn neatly make the distinction between actual „barriers“ or obstacles which make it difficult for a firm to allow their staff to be trained, and a cognitive factor which means the firm „lacks the perceived need to train“. ⁶¹ A lack of perceived need does not necessarily presuppose that there are things „in the way“ – a firm could simply consider training unnecessary. A business' unwillingness to train may then become a barrier for employees wanting to train, however it is not a barrier in itself for the firm – it is simply their own view.

In light of this then, we can adhere to the following lines of inquiry with regards to businesses:

- obstacles or barriers which make it difficult for a firm to develop staff
- a business' lack of perceived need to develop its staff, or an attitude which makes them disinclined to do so

„Employer engagement“

Cooper *et al.* (2008) maintain that „employer engagement“ is very much a concept coined by the supply-side – essentially those providing or promoting a service and intending to achieve some sort of involvement, take-up or buy-in from businesses (the intended customers). They usefully summarise their understanding of the term as

“any form of contact between any organisation and an employer, that attempts to effect a change in the knowledge, understanding or behaviour of either...”⁶²

⁶⁰ Gorard *et al.* 2006: 9

⁶¹ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 55

⁶² Cooper *et al.* 2008: 7

Types of learning

A useful synopsis of the difference between „education“, „training“ and „workforce development comes courtesy of the Social Care Institute for Excellence – a charitable organisation aiming to share knowledge and good practice in social care management:

“Workforce development sits between training (narrow focus) and education (broad focus)... it overlaps with aspects of organisational design, such as the remodelling of services and the redesign of roles and jobs. It is concerned with the development of new skills and capabilities within the workforce as part of an organisational development process.”⁶³

Two other projects (S1 undertaken by Bangor University, and MF6 undertaken by University of Wales, Lampeter), have followed a definition by the Higher Education Academy, which explains workforce development as:

“the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees”

Therefore we can understand

- „training“ as a focused, perhaps task-specific mode of learning;
- „education“ as a broad concept for any type of learning; and
- „workforce development“ as a broad definition of learning which is still specific to the organisation and job role. It can be seen as a „catch-all“ term.

Though these terms are often used loosely, it is important to understand different modes of workforce development and to take into account all appropriate methods of learning when undertaking this review.

6. Findings & Analysis

The research investigated factors which inhibited the take up for workforce development along the following streams:

- 6.1 businesses
- 6.2 employees/learners
- 6.3 provision factors
- 6.4 dispositional factors (general barriers concerning the nature of employment, the workplace, the labour market in Wales, the worker and the provision of training)
- 6.5 proposed solutions to the barriers

⁶³ SCIE People Management website, <http://www.scie-peoplemanagement.org.uk/resource/docPreview.asp?surround=true&docID=209> [accessed 17 November 2007]

6.1 Businesses

The largest survey of firms in Wales, the Future Skills Wales Survey, asked firms who had not provided off-the-job training in the last 12 months why they had not. The survey identified that 58% of firms had provided off-the-job training in the last twelve months, with 42% asked having not provided any. Of firms who had identified a skills gap, 64% had provided off-the-job training, compared with 56% of those who considered they did not.⁶⁴ It lists the following reasons for not providing training:

Reason	%
Staff have sufficient skills	83
Other training methods preferred	60
Time constraints	38
Lack of information available	26
Costs of off-the-job training	24
No money available for off-the-job training	23
No suitable training available	21
Trained staff will be poached	20
Others	2
Don't know	2

(from FSW 2006: 81, Chart 5.2)

The Wales Management Council (WMC) briefly addresses barriers to management and leadership development. They divide what they call „key constraints“ into two categories – „resource“ (which also includes practical constraints) and „attitude“.⁶⁵ This neatly takes into account the issues which are discussed by Kitching and Blackburn (above), in that it accommodates for the fact that a physical „barrier“ may not be the reason why a firm does not want to develop its staff. However, it is important to elaborate and expand on these two categories. One key element to take into account is that issues can come from the „demand side“ or the „supply side“, though often these differences are linked. On the basis of the research conducted, the following themes will be discussed:

- resource/practical constraints on the firm*
- „supply side“ issues
 - inaccessibility of provision
 - relevance and quality of what it on offer
- attitude and perceived need to train*

* „demand side“ issues

Before discussing these themes in more detail, a general note on the information gained through interviews with businesses. Each firm's view on workforce development was idiosyncratic to their own needs and position – for example some thought it was expensive, some thought that there was not

⁶⁴ FSW 2006: 75

⁶⁵ WMC 2007: 9

enough information, some did not consider development necessary. On the whole, there was not a holistic understanding from most firms on the difficulties faced in undertaking development - their willingness to develop their workforce came down to weighing up the pro's and con's they were faced with individually.

Resource constraints

Cost/financial issues in general

Firms may feel various financial issues which hinder their ability to undertake development for their staff. One firm interviewed noted that they would be less inclined to use universities because they find them too expensive. The general economic climate also needs to be taken into account, sometimes affecting a firm's willingness to invest in development opportunities – including those looking to work with providers to take on apprentices (this specifically affected another firm interviewed). A number of firms noted the financial losses associated with allowing staff release, resulting from decreased productivity or restricted ability to operate. The willingness to invest depends on the firm's perception of how beneficial the provision is – some interviewees were willing to invest regardless of (or perhaps *despite*) the cost, if it were a programme they needed and wanted.

The cost of off the job training was listed as a response by 24% of firms who had not provided „training“ in the Future Skills Wales survey.⁶⁶ In another (albeit smaller) survey of firms in England by Winterbotham and Carter, financial issues were more commonly reported by firms who had provided training as a barrier to providing *more* training (22%) compared to only 5% of those asked who had not provided training at all.⁶⁷ Though this does not give away any specifics about how cost is an issue, the following factors are worth discussing further:

- courses are too expensive
- no money available for development/lack of subsidies

Courses are too expensive

Though this is a „supply side“ factor hindering firms from developing staff, it is discussed here along with other financial difficulties faced by a firm. As mentioned the price of a workforce development programme itself can be off-putting. This obviously depends on the provider, but packages can be expensive. To put this in the context of higher education, searching through online information about fees for a full MBA⁶⁸ at a university in Wales showed costs ranging from between £5,500 and close to £15,000, a number of them costing just above £11,000. Shorter programmes, such as individual 10 credit modules cost much less, yet a complete degree programme, offering a comprehensive and rounded content, is very expensive.

⁶⁶ FSW 2006: 81

⁶⁷ Winterbotham and Carter 2006: 88

⁶⁸ This example has been chosen because the Review of Skills emphasises the fact that only 41% of managers hold a Level 2+ qualification (Leitch 2007: 90)

No money available/lack of subsidies

Many firms may not have any funds available in their budget to spend on workforce development. The NESS05 survey showed that only 33% of all organisations had a training budget. When taking into account business size (i.e. the number of employees), smaller firms are much less likely to have a training budget – 29% of firms with less than 25 employees had a budget, compared with 71% of those with 25+ employees.⁶⁹ According to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), small businesses would be more inclined to allow staff to undertake workforce development programmes if there were more grants or wage compensation available.⁷⁰ This is something which emerged also from Kitching and Blackburn's survey.⁷¹

Though the workplace *can* be an opportune and welcome environment for workforce development, the fact that many firms do not budget for staff training, and the remark that there is a lack of subsidy for training emphasises the notion that training or learning is not the *primary* function of the workplace. Not all firms think it necessary to include a training budget in their planning because production of goods and services (not training or education) are their goals.⁷²

Timing & workforce constraints

Timing and workforce constraints are issues associated with the financial constraints faced by firms. Of firms interviewed, some required training/development programmes to be held at times of the day (e.g. evenings) and at times of the year when productivity is affected least, since they are unable to commit to courses/programmes held during normal operating hours, which conflict with shift patterns, and which occur at the firm's busiest times. Workers themselves are affected by the timing of programmes – because staff members had personal commitments such as childcare it was felt important for one firm to be able to arrange training at times when their staff were able to commit.

Again, loss of productivity while staff were away on training was brought up in interviews – some could not afford to let staff have the time off to train, because time spent training is time and labour which would usually be used working towards producing goods or delivering services and thus ultimately generating profit – resulting in an actual fiscal sacrifice for firms. The issue of *need* is reiterated in regards to time-constraints – a number of firms acknowledged that it was difficult to have staff off on training, however they accepted that they needed the training (sometimes required by law), so were willing to invest the time and money to do so. One MD remarked „*there are some problems with timing but (these courses) have to be done, we have to work with it*“.

„Time constraints“ was listed by 38% of firms in the FSW survey,⁷³ but this does not distinguish between the numerous ways in which timing or workforce constraints can be a hindrance, including:

- lost working time while staff away on courses

⁶⁹ NESS05: 132

⁷⁰ Cited in King 2007: 14

⁷¹ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

⁷² Rainbird *et al.* 2005: 27

⁷³ FSW 2006: 81

- inability to cover work of staff away on courses
- lack of time to organise workforce development
- varying shift patterns, fluctuating periods of productivity
- difficulty committing large numbers of staff (for bigger firms)
- difficulty motivating staff to commit, especially in their own time

Lost working time

In Kitching and Blackburn's survey, 39.9% listed „lost working time“ as a reason for not providing *more* training.⁷⁴ Like cost, Winterbotham and Carter's survey again showed that this factor was more commonly reported by those who had *already* provided training for staff as a barrier to providing more training (20%), than those had not provided training at all (only 6%).⁷⁵

Inability to cover work while staff away on courses

It may be even more difficult for firms to cover for more skilled positions than lower positions. Among owner-managers of small firms asked by Kitching and Blackburn about their own training, the „inability to cover work while being trained because of the skilled nature of the work“ was ranked second most important constraint on training after „lost working time while being trained“.⁷⁶ Regarding established workers, the same study showed that „lost working time“ and „inability to cover work...“ were also highly-ranked constraints.⁷⁷ Given that universities deal with higher-level skills, this issue becomes highlighted regarding the ability of small firms to undertake university-level development.

Varying shift patterns, fluctuating periods of productivity

A university staff member interviewed, who was involved in providing training for external firms, noted that it is difficult to arrange provision around firms' shift times, both for the firm and the provider. Therefore, while much can be done in providing programmes outside of „normal“ operating hours to accommodate for firms' lack of time, firms who operate at less conventional hours may still face difficulties in fitting in development programmes for all their staff. Furthermore, timing of provision can be an issue over the course of a year – for example the start dates and times of courses by providers.⁷⁸ For some firms who want to develop staff, finding and organising it to suit yearly ebbs and flows in productivity can be a hassle. For small firms with staff members who have childcare responsibilities, arranging programmes according to school term-times comes into account, as one business mentioned when interviewed.

⁷⁴ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

⁷⁵ Winterbotham and Carter 2006: 88

⁷⁶ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 28

⁷⁷ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

⁷⁸ NESS05 lists „start dates/times inconvenient“ as a reason for not using FE college (NESS05: 131)

No time to organise workforce development

In both NESS05,⁷⁹ and in Kitching and Blackburn's survey,⁸⁰ a small number of firms responded that they lacked the time to organise training. NESS05 showed that 2% of firms who had not provided training within the previous 12 months answered „employees too busy to give training“.⁸¹ Establishing a bespoke course is not an immediate process and requires partnership, planning and consultation. University education in general can be time consuming, since there is a lot to fit into the curriculum to fit the level of qualification - which also goes for the planning. It also means potentially more time is spent away from the workplace while training. This is even the case when it comes to 10-credit modules, with one university arranging shorter, 5-credit modules for businesses who had less time to spare for training.

Difficulty committing large numbers of staff

Research has shown that cost and time restrictions to providing *more* training are more common responses among larger (500+) firms than smaller ones.⁸² Smaller firms (SMEs and micro-businesses) who are inclined to train may either feel the need to just accept the fact that time spent training will halt (or at least significantly slow) productivity or service (since a higher proportion of its labour would be absent from operational work), or dismiss the possibility of developing their staff due to the limited resources at their disposal.

Difficulty motivating staff to commit, especially in their own time

A firm interviewed encountered difficulty motivating its staff to learn, something reiterated in the NESS05 survey as to why firms have not used an FE college to train. The responsibility of undergoing a workforce development programme ultimately lies with the individual staff member, so even if a firm does want it, its staff need to be willing. It may be even more difficult to encourage staff to undertake development opportunities if they fall outside of the remit of their job role, and if they are away from the usual environment or normal working hours, because the practical/resource difficulties and pressures are then offloaded on to the staff members themselves. A university staff member interviewed had dealt with a firm who had established a training suite to use for its employees, and encouraged its employees and their families to use it. However, they did not have the capacity to allow staff to use it during their normal working hours, so had to allow it in the evenings. Encouraging staff to do this was difficult – they were not willing (or could not commit) to learn in their own time.

⁷⁹ Both generally (NESS05: 114), and regarding reasons for not using a FE college (NESS05: 131)

⁸⁰ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

⁸¹ Distinguished from „employees too busy to go on courses“ (NESS05: 114). The meaning of this is ambiguous and it is not explained in the report, though it can be taken to mean that the employees who would normally be *giving* the training to others are too busy to do it.

⁸² Winterbotham and Carter 2006: 89

„Supply-side“ issues

Inaccessibility of provision

Practical or logistical issues over which a firm does not have responsibility or control can be conveniently understood by the term „supply-side deficiencies“.⁸³ It is also useful to think of these factors in terms of „accessibility“. Three practical factors can be discussed here which make provision inaccessible to businesses and their workforce:

- location
- information
- inapproachability and availability

It is worth noting that cost can also be considered a supply-side deficiency – if firms are priced out of expensive training programmes (see examples of pricing for higher education, above).

Location

Approximately one in ten small firms asked by Kitching and Blackburn noted that providers/courses being „too far away“ was a reason for not providing more training.⁸⁴ This is especially likely to be an issue for firms in rural and sparsely populated areas, though it also depends on the relevance of providers/courses within a reachable distance. For example, this has been reported in relation to HNCs (Higher National Certificates) for workers in the construction industry.⁸⁵ In regards to higher education provision in Wales, firms in South East Wales and along the M4 corridor in Wales are somewhat spoilt for choice – Newport, Cardiff, UWIC, Glamorgan, Swansea and Swansea Met, and also Bristol and University of the West of England (UWE) operate in this area with relatively well developed transport links. Though other parts of Wales are served by higher education providers – for example Bangor, Harlech and Wrexham (not to mention in large cities nearby such as Liverpool and Manchester) in North Wales, a firm which does not operate in or near a university campus would be faced with a logistic hurdle, especially if the majority of courses available to them are delivered on-campus. Firms in more rural areas such as West, Mid- and parts of North Wales may be faced with the prospect of deciding how far they are willing to travel to get what they want (this was raised by one university interviewee), and something a firm also needs to take into account is how far is reasonable to send its staff. The Lambert Review pointed out that „proximity does matter“, especially for SMEs, and that business-focused, research-intensive universities in areas with strong „business clusters“ affect regional economies greatly.⁸⁶

Information

Another issue which potentially makes training inaccessible to a firm concerns the information available. One firm interviewed had encountered difficulties regarding information, noting that there was „no

⁸³ Stone and Braidford 2008: 5

⁸⁴ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

⁸⁵ Little 2005: 137

⁸⁶ Lambert 2003: 65-71

obvious starting point“ for small businesses concerning opportunities available to them and how to go about it. While there was no shortage of organisations offering services, it was felt that the lack of centralisation of information about these services available made it difficult.

Inapproachability

Once the relationship is established between a firm and a university, further difficulties can be encountered which make the potential for engagement with a university inaccessible to a business. A study of 50 of the UK’s largest firms by the CBI reported that the most common factor that made collaboration difficult was „managing the relationship“. Poor customer service, and unhelpful attitudes from universities enforced this difficulty. The CBI report proposes that knowing the most appropriate institution to go to, and then the right person within an institution to go to, were further difficulties, particularly for SMEs – making universities often „unapproachable“.⁸⁷

Relevance and quality

Further to the practical issues which make workforce development opportunities (and particularly university provision) inaccessible, the quality and relevance of courses on offer can hinder the uptake of university provision by firms. These issues include:

- professional awards are preferred to university education
- university provision is considered either poor quality, or,
- it is considered inappropriate in terms of content and delivery
- „Other methods“ of workforce training and development are preferred

Professional qualifications preferred to university education

A number of firms interviewed, in various industries, noted that they looked for professional qualifications rather than traditional university awards (e.g. a degree or credits towards such a qualification). Though the preferred qualifications were sometimes (if not often) delivered by a university (in areas such as law, accounting, computing and engineering qualifications), they are a professional award as opposed to a university award. With some professions (*cf.* those areas just mentioned), qualifications are necessarily regulated and set by bodies to which firms (and the services they provide) are either held accountable or measured against in terms of quality, relevance and aptitude. For example, a firm in IT may want a Cisco IT course⁸⁸ as opposed to a university’s own module with a university award, because a Cisco award, though delivered by a university, is directly applicable to Cisco computer networking systems, and more *„recognisable in the trade“* (one firm interviewed mentioned this). A study by Little (2005) showed that with certain industries (such as IT), university education is less valued, although other industries such as construction seemed to be moving towards

⁸⁷ CBI 2003b: 3-4

⁸⁸ For Cisco Career Certifications, see http://www.cisco.com/web/learning/le3/learning_career_certifications_and_learning_paths_home.html These are sometimes offered by universities, for example Newport Business School http://nbs.newport.ac.uk/displayPage.aspx?object_id=8082&parent_id=8081&type=PAG [accessed 01 May 2008]

using HNCs – vocational higher education qualifications awarded by Edexcel⁸⁹ – as a means of workforce development. A preference towards professional or industry-awarded qualifications, while not necessarily discounting university awards, emphasises that universities need to do a lot to prove to industry that the awards they can deliver are up to scratch with what industry needs. It will be interesting to see how Foundation Degrees fare in comparison.

University education is not relevant and poor quality

A firm interviewed felt that, after hiring someone on the basis of a good university degree, university education did not provide them with the relevant skills they needed as a firm. In the CBI survey of large businesses who work in collaboration with universities, 24% responded that „low quality students, (with) lack of industry awareness“ was a problem, and 14% mentioned that the relevance of the course was a problem.⁹⁰ This does depend on the industry, though in some cases there is a „mismatch“ between what skills/knowledge universities teach their graduates and what the industry needs.⁹¹ Little (2005) suggests that businesses were critical of higher education courses which they felt were becoming more academic and less vocational.⁹² Traditional university education is „academic“ and focuses on knowledge, and is often separated from task-appropriate or vocational learning styles⁹³ (skills required by firms). Garnett notes that in an organisation, „knowledge has no intrinsic value; it must have a performative value i.e. the knowledge has to contribute to the aims of the organisation“.⁹⁴ Little also points out that certain industries (such as IT) „tend to be critical of HE provision generally, since it is seen as insufficiently responsive to meet employers“ skills requirements. Nevertheless, they continue to seek (first degree) graduate recruits in preference to those with HNDs.“⁹⁵

These are points which require attention. Industry’s opinion of higher education is sometimes based on experiences of the abilities of graduates after leaving conventional university education (such as 3 year bachelor’s degrees) – therefore, this will affect the perception of businesses towards university provision aimed at the existing workforce. Although a full higher education programme may be preferred over an intermediate one, it is viewed unfavourably compared with professional and more vocationally relevant programmes of education, because it is not responsive to the needs of business or even fully aware of these needs. The implication is that universities need to do a lot more if their own curriculum is to be held in high regard by industry – in terms of „stepping outside the box“ regarding the nature of its provision (academic knowledge versus skills for business), and need to be responsive to a firm’s development needs (not just provide what the university thinks the firm needs).

⁸⁹ Directgov, „Higher National Certificates and Diplomas“
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039026 [accessed 11 July 2008]

⁹⁰ CBI 2003b: 3

⁹¹ Lambert 2003: 107

⁹² Little 2005: 139

⁹³ O’Neill 2007: 66

⁹⁴ Garnett 2007: 22

⁹⁵ Little 2005: 135

Preference of other methods in achieving a skilled workforce

Firms may prefer methods other than using external providers (such as a university). For example, formal training programs may not always be considered necessary at all, whether in-house or from an external provider. For one firm interviewed, staff were trusted and left to their own devices to learn new skills and abilities if the job required it (a firm with three staff members, with a different specialist role each).

In the FSW survey, „other methods“ was listed by 60% of firms as a reason for not using external training in the last 12 months. Though there was no information available from the NESS05 survey about reasons for not using universities, the second most common response for not using a Further Education college was that the firm „preferred to train in-house“.⁹⁶

Of the firms asked during the course of this research as to how their staff learned the skills required of their role, a number mentioned that staff were trained before they were hired. This was especially if the job was what NESS05 considered „professional“ or „associate professional“⁹⁷ they were hired on the basis of their educational background (for example law, IT, accountancy, engineering, graphic design). This was also reported by 20% of firms asked by Kitching and Blackburn as to why they may not provide *more* training.⁹⁸ The preference of firms to hire new staff members with appropriate skills and experience over upskilling existing staff is something which requires further investigation. Regardless of this, issues have been raised about the relevance of higher education in serving the needs of business, especially if they go about achieving a skilled workforce in other ways. As one interviewee from a firm remarked, they needed courses to „fine-tune“ abilities – higher level training was not relevant to them.

Attitude and perceived need to train

This leads us to discuss another „demand-side“ issue – regarding firms“ attitudes or the „perceived need“ about development for their workforce. Commonly reported issues include the following:

- The firm does not want or need training or any *more* training
- Staff are already qualified or already have sufficient skills
- No perceived need to „train for training“s sake“
- Further training will not help our business
- Trained staff will be poached
- Firms do whatever development they need when they need it

Further development not wanted or needed

Overwhelmingly, in a number of significant and large-scale surveys of workforce development, **the most common answer to why firms may not have trained their staff recently is that they felt training was not needed**. This could be because staff are already trained, or already have the skills and

⁹⁶ NESS05: 131

⁹⁷ It designates „professional“ as occupations almost always requiring a degree or higher qualification, „associate professional“ as occupations often requiring higher level vocational training. (NESS05: Appendix A7, 184-5)

⁹⁸ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

expertise to do the jobs required of them. This can be seen, for example, in the FSW survey, where 83% of those who had not trained their staff in the previous year responded that their staff *already had sufficient skills*.⁹⁹ This is also reflected in the NESS05 survey, where the most popular reason (71%) for not providing training in the previous 12 months was the same – all staff are fully proficient.¹⁰⁰ In the same survey, the next most common reason („staff learn from experience“) was mentioned by just seven percent, followed by some of the resource- and supply-side deficiencies (mentioned above), with none tallying more than three percent. To reiterate an earlier point, these surveys only asked those who had *not* provided „training“ in the last 12 months.

The feeling that further workforce development/training would not produce any benefits or further benefits to the business is perfectly illustrated by a quote from the Wales Management Council, in an assessment of the difficulties in encouraging management and leadership training among SMEs:

*“I’ve built my business with no help from anyone over the last 30 years. What can you tell me that I don’t know already?”*¹⁰¹

This is a valid point. It was also reiterated by a firm interviewed during the course of research, whose manager expressed the view that within their small firm of three staff members, two had been in that specific industry for 20 years or so, and therefore knew what the business and the industry entailed. Such a firm may find it surprising then, for the government and/or a university, to suggest that the firm needed to do the job better to further the country’s economy (in the case of the former) or that they could teach the firm how to do the job better (in the case of the latter).

Fear of poaching

One firm interviewed expressed the concern of poaching, the director having experienced this in the past. If a firm is investing money, time and resources into affording a development opportunity to a staff member, the fear that the staff member now has the ability to gain work elsewhere, demand more money or even set up a rival business themselves are legitimate concerns. This is more apparent if the training programme is not directly relevant to the staff member’s operational duties or unique to that firm (and one that could be seen as a personal career development opportunity). The director pointed out that, especially for small businesses *„they just want someone to do the job, otherwise they could take their skills elsewhere“*. Funding higher-level development for their staff could amount to *„training people to be competitors“*. This poses a further difficulty for firms – it comes despite evidence that opportunities for personal growth are seen as strong incentives for recruiting, retaining, and satisfying staff.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ FSW 2006: 81

¹⁰⁰ NESS05: 114

¹⁰¹ WMC 2007: 7

¹⁰² „Keeping staff happy is the bottom line“ - The Times Top 100 Employers 2008. *The Times*. 29 June 2008. Online. Available from http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/career_and_jobs/best_100_companies/article4231810.ece [accessed 04 July 2008]. I am grateful to the anonymous comment made at a workshop given at the UALL annual conference in York, March 2008, which pointed me in the direction of this data.

Other difficulties act as disincentives

For firms who do not want to develop their workforce, any slight inclination to do so may be jettisoned because of the constraints listed above (for example cost, time, staff cover, relevance and availability). A report about improving employee literacy by the Conference Board of Canada neatly refers to factors as *disincentives* for a firm to develop its staff.¹⁰³ This off-putting scenario for a firm trying to take up training/development (or considering it) for its staff members only serves to reinforce a view that for the firm itself „training for training“s sake“, while presenting the individual with something worthwhile (such as transferable skills, experience and qualifications), may be more hassle than it is worth. In this scenario, the need to develop the workforce would become a dimmer and less fruitful prospect facing the firm. Conversely, there is the notion that firms who do not see the need to train anyway are less likely to report „barriers“ or difficulties in accessing and undertaking development programmes for their workforce.

Firms do what they need when they need it

From this we can conclude that firms do what they need to develop their workforce – reiterated by more than one firm interviewed. Many firms have to undergo constant development to keep up to date with their industry, and professional qualifications are mandatory parts of this development. A firm pointed out that they „accept that (we) have to pay for training“ and that „all professional staff have to train as part of their career“. Others remarked that they would train their staff with a provider if they did a good job regardless of the cost. Sometimes development involves using external providers, and sometimes informal and *ad hoc* methods suffice. But industry on the whole is not an obvious and unwavering customer base for the provision of higher education.

6.2 Staff members (or individual „barriers“)

Some of the issues emerging concerning staff members themselves (who would be the actual individuals undergoing development or training) include:

- Personal commitments such as childcare, money and time constraints
- The pressure of development; which is amplified regarding higher education
- Staff themselves do not want to learn – they are happy just doing their job
- Lack of support from line managers
- Certain types of worker are less likely to be given the opportunity (such as those in lower skilled occupations and/or with lower levels of qualification)

Personal commitments

There are personal and practical constraints for the individual faced with the prospect of undergoing a course outside of their normal work duties or hours. A firm interviewed endeavoured to arrange its

¹⁰³ CBC 2002: 21

training activities around school term dates, taking on board its staff members' personal commitments. An individual may also experience difficulties meeting costs of training if it is not paid for by their company (including latent costs such as travel to and from an off-site training course), and the costs and commitments of childcare or other family obligations.¹⁰⁴

Results from the Skills At Work survey¹⁰⁵ showed that relatively small percentages of employees mentioned that training caused stress (16%) or pressures on family commitments (12%) – both higher among female respondents – although the report does not comment on the nature of the training and when it was held. If it were short, on-the-job training, which was directly applicable to the role or responsibilities of the staff member, this may not have many extra pressures attached. However, for higher-level development, which is not directly relevant to the operational duties of the worker, or which may give staff members more career prospects (which is, incidentally, the sort of staff development that employers on the whole seem most reluctant to invest in) this may not be the case, and the pressures felt by the individual may be heightened.

One interview with a university staff member raised the point of how learners/staff felt about their learning experience and the time of day at which this occurred. Some students reported that the opportunity to learn during the day was highly valuable – they found it easier to learn, commit, less pressure and less tiring when they were not obligated to do it in their own personal time.

Pressure of returning to education, particularly at a higher-level

Interviewees working in higher education mentioned that some individuals found it difficult to „return to the classroom“. This pressure may become more acute when it comes to higher education – they „assume they can not do it“ (especially if they had „breezed through school“). The progression into higher education is a challenging demand if an individual has no previous experience of it. A recent report by the GWLAD project in North Wales has suggested that even learners progressing from further education found it difficult entering into higher education.¹⁰⁶ Concerning the provision of higher education for the workforce, a department who provided shorter 10-credit courses (at the request of businesses) reported that the students of these short courses found it difficult cramming the amount needed for a higher education qualification into such a small amount of time. As well as the pressure of undergoing a formal training course, those who have had to take a break in employment for various reasons (again, for example, family commitments) may have less confidence in existing and „tacit“ skills or knowledge than those who had been continuously in work.¹⁰⁷

One interviewee from a university pointed out that some learners feel their shortcomings may be exposed in the job if they underwent a formalised course which they were being tested and examined on. There is also the stigma of having to undergo a formalised course in something which an individual may feel well experienced in and well learned in. Hager argues that to be a learner in work can involve being

¹⁰⁴ Evans and Kersh 2006: 11

¹⁰⁵ Felstead *et al.* 2007

¹⁰⁶ GWLAD 2007

¹⁰⁷ Rainbird *et al.* 2005: 2

seen as not having sufficient knowledge or skills and thus less power, authority and recognition.¹⁰⁸ With regards to higher level occupations such as management positions, interviewees from both business *and* higher education reiterated the point that often in a mature organisation these positions are occupied by individuals who had got there through experience – not qualifications. MDs and managerial staff may also feel disinclined to send their subordinate managers on high-level courses which would make them more recognisably qualified than them. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that managers of small firms may play down their own role as a learner.¹⁰⁹

Staff themselves are reluctant, or do not even want, development

Ultimately, the pressure and responsibility for getting the most out of a learning experience lies with the individual taking on that experience. Therefore, learning must also be responsive to the needs of the individual learner – in terms of manageability, relevance to the job role, relevant in terms of career prospects, and appealing in terms of interest. A university lifelong learning department who had had success through TU Learning Representatives (Union members whose role is to encourage and to help facilitate learning for other Union members in the workplace) still found that encouraging a culture of learning among workers was not a given – potential learners had to be shown they had the ability and that they could enjoy it (the learning experience needed a „*selling point*“).

The issue that a business already has the skills and knowledge it needs, either through the previous accumulation of knowledge from learning or from experience, is one which can be equally apparent in the views of its employees. For example, recent survey evidence from Scotland (figures for Wales are currently unavailable) found that while those who *had* undergone training in the previous 12 months thought it had improved their abilities at work, those who had *not* thought they already had the sufficient skills to do their job and that additional training would not be beneficial (over 70%) or just did not want it (nearly 50%).¹¹⁰ Individuals themselves are often happy doing the job they are paid to do, and extra obligations due to training are sometimes unwanted. One firm interviewed raised the point that they found it difficult to motivate their staff to learn, and this has also been mentioned in larger quantitative surveys.¹¹¹

The Skills at Work survey has suggested that more people enter into jobs either expecting to be given good training opportunities or not knowing about prospective training opportunities within the organisation, than expecting *not* to be given training opportunities. The figures were slightly higher for those entering into managerial, professional or associate professional than in elementary occupations such as plant and machine operatives.¹¹² However, from the same study, statistics indicate that good training provision and promotion prospects were valued less by respondents than doing a job in which they are able to use their abilities and initiative, which is paid well, which is secure, and with good relations with colleagues and supervisors, and most importantly an occupation which they enjoy. Less

¹⁰⁸ Hager 2004: 26

¹⁰⁹ Kitching and Blackburn 2002

¹¹⁰ Felstead 2007: 15-16

¹¹¹ for example, NESS05: 131; Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 57

¹¹² Felstead *et al.* 2007: 149

than a quarter responded that the ability to improve their skill through training in a job was „essential“, less so still among part-time workers.¹¹³ This may vary depending on class of occupation.¹¹⁴

Lack of support from the firm or from line-managers

Evidence from the FSB (Federation of Small Businesses) suggests that higher education is something that small businesses would be less inclined to pay for – the expectation would be on staff members themselves to pay for a higher education programme.¹¹⁵ This was partly due to fear of poaching (mentioned, in relation to higher education, by a firm during the interviews – see above).

From studies of apprenticeships, it can be seen that the most can be gained from such learning experiences when they are undertaken in expansive learning environments – where learning is encouraged and not restricted. If not, the benefits to the individual, and indeed the learning outcome, can be hindered.¹¹⁶ Eraut *et al.*, in a study looking at the importance of managers and line-managers in encouraging learning in the workplace, point out that even managers who are supportive of learning can find it difficult within their company to persuade other managers to let their staff progress and develop.¹¹⁷

Certain types of worker/job role are less likely to be given the opportunity

Some workers are more likely to be given training than others. Keep (2000) points out that workers on atypical contracts (temporary staff, flexible workers, and part-time workers), and older workers are less likely to be offered training by their employer, as well as those with lower skill levels, in lower-level occupations and those working in SMEs.¹¹⁸ Kitching and Blackburn found that new recruits were also more likely to be given training than existing staff members, more common among firms with more than 20 staff.¹¹⁹ This therefore suggests that initial training is considered more favourable by firms than longer development opportunities.

The lack of opportunity for those with lower qualifications and in lower skilled jobs is especially apparent. An interviewee whose work involved brokering learning opportunities for people in work noted that people who had lower levels of skill or qualification, and in lower skilled jobs are denied opportunities perpetually. The Skills at Work survey supports this – it asked employees who had had training in the last year if they got it because they asked for it themselves, or if it was the employer that first suggested it. Though it was possible that both types of training could have happened, this was rarely the case, and more often training was instigated by employers. It was more common for managers and professionals to instigate training (about 50% of each group) than in lower level occupations – with only 18% of

¹¹³ Felstead *et al.* 2007: 146-8

¹¹⁴ Unfortunately information is not given concerning the attitudes of managers, professionals or associate professionals about the importance they placed on training (Felstead 2007: 148)

¹¹⁵ cited in King 2007: 11

¹¹⁶ Rainbird, *et al.* 2005: 3

¹¹⁷ Eraut *et al.* 1999: 22

¹¹⁸ Keep 2000: 5

¹¹⁹ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 6

„operatives“, 22% of „sales“ and 28% of „elementary“ workers instigating training themselves.¹²⁰ Also, it was more common for training to come from employers’ impetus in wholesale/retail, hotels/restaurants, transport, and „manufacturing“; as opposed to real estate/business services, health/social work, personal services, public administration, and education, where personal choice was more substantial.¹²¹

This evidence is corroborated in the larger labour market surveys of England and Wales. The NESS05 survey suggests professionals and managers most likely to receive off the job training – 36% of managers as a proportion, 53% of professionals and 47% of associate professionals. Lower skilled occupations mainly receive on the job training, while workers in higher level occupations (managers, professionals and associate professionals) are much more likely to receive off the job training.¹²² The Welsh data from the Future Skills Wales survey also suggests that managers were the most likely recipients – 65% of firms who gave off the job training reported that managers had been given provision. However, the percentage of respondents who gave off the job training to professionals was only 25%,¹²³ much lower than in England. Therefore, those in lower skilled occupations are unlikely to be given development opportunities that are not directly relevant to their immediate job role. This has further connotations, as the FSW survey report states:

“if there is an inclination against providing lower skilled occupations with off-the-job training this may have impacts on productivity improvements amongst the lower skilled and the ability of these workers to move on to more highly skilled jobs.”¹²⁴

6.3 Provision factors

This section explores barriers and difficulties in the provision of higher-level workforce development, and those which stem from supply-side deficiencies. A small study of Work-based Learning (WBL) providers’ views of their links with employers identified the following barriers faced by providers,¹²⁵ many of which are broadly comparable to those faced by employers in undertaking workforce development opportunities:

- „funding arrangements do not allow for such links“
- „Jack of staff to link with employers further“
- „Jack of flexible provision on offer“
- „Jack of other resources (e.g. equipment)“
- „Jack of information about employers’ needs“
- „Jack of human resources to provide up-to-date quality training“.

Some of the issues raised from consultation with providers and facilitators of learning were as follows:

¹²⁰ Felstead *et al.* 2007: 151

¹²¹ Felstead *et al.* 2007: 151

¹²² NESS05: 121

¹²³ FSW 2006: 75

¹²⁴ FSW 2006: 79

¹²⁵ McCoshan, Costello and Otero 2005: 39, tab.4.1

- Preference of businesses to go for professional courses
- Preference of skills over knowledge and qualifications (especially university level), and preference of training (relevant to role) over education
- Universities are seen as „remote“, with their „head in the clouds“, and with not much practical relevance
- Businesses and learners are put off by HE (some assume they can't do it)

Some of these issues have already been noted, such as the preference of firms to go for professional (industry-recognised) awards, the view that universities are remote, and that businesses and learners are put off by higher education (see above). However, some other issues were raised which require further discussion:

- Limited market for higher education in the area
- Businesses may go elsewhere for specialised courses
- The difficulty in recruiting a cohort to make a decent sized group for a course
- Difficulty in knowing what a firm wants, and in providing flexible, relevant programmes (because it is a strain on resources)
- Providing „lifelong learning“ for those in work is difficult

Limited market for higher education in some areas

From the perspective of one university, there was not a huge market for a knowledge economy (i.e. of higher level knowledge and skills) in their area, and that even if a firm was interested the majority of their staff was likely to be in a low-skilled occupation. The logistics of where the university was situated (a rural area), plus the university infrastructure, limited the capacity for establishing partnerships with firms in the area. In providing certain specialist curricula, some needs could be catered for but not others – there were not many „bridges and ladders“ (e.g., the provision of management skills for engineering firms, but not relevant and specialist engineering skills for managers in engineering firms).

Businesses may go elsewhere for specialised courses

Even universities in less rural areas may face a limited market for the services they provide. Larger cities like Cardiff or Swansea, or even Bristol, who have universities with a bigger infrastructure and a bigger reputation, may be preferred. A business school mentioned that bespoke requests to his department were often „run of the mill“ and not very specialised, and pointed out that when specialised courses were needed, businesses may tend to go for national if not international providers for specialist provision. To illustrate the international market for MBAs, one South Wales university claims to recruit cohorts which are on average 90.7% made up of international students.¹²⁶ Though this may distort perceptions about take-up of MBAs from the Welsh labour market, it is a worthwhile figure to bear in mind. Turning this factor on its head – if the take up from international students is that high, a business school may feel there is less need to focus on the local (or national) labour market – only serving to enforce criticism from industry that universities do not cater for local firms' individual needs.

¹²⁶ <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/carbs/programmes/mba.html> [accessed 20 August 2008]

Difficulty in raising a cohort for specialised or bespoke requests

If requests for specialist training were few and far between, the ability to raise a cohort (to make a bespoke course financially worthwhile for the provider) is also difficult. However it was also posited by more than one interviewee from higher education that a standardised or unified curriculum, with a respectable nationwide reputation, delivered in regional learning centres (a model upon which a national centre of excellence for WBL could be based), could potentially remedy this. Consequently, the need for this centre to be of a high quality to ensure a good reputation, would be imperative.

Difficulty in knowing what firms want, and difficulty in providing flexible, relevant programmes (because it is a strain on resources)

An interviewee (university) raised the issue that businesses often speak to one academic when looking for provision from a university, and argued that therefore businesses are not met with much objectivity from the university. This may enforce a tendency to „shoe-horn“ a business“ needs into an already existing programme or curriculum – this does not require any new accreditation or validation so is therefore not as time-consuming for the university. This was echoed by another respondent who noted that MBAs are profitable to a university when sold as a „standardised product“ – from experience even executive MBAs (which can be expensive for a firm) can be negative earners.

A number of departments had arranged courses at more flexible times to fit around working hours – for example at weekends and evenings. However, from one member’s experience, some students who had been given the opportunity to study a work-related course during normal working hours reported that they felt much less pressure than they had when doing a course outside of working hours. This was partly because they did not have to undertake this work commitment in their own time (thus being less restricted by their own personal commitments), but also because they felt it was less tiring, easier to learn, and easier to commit to learning in general. Another issue was raised in that fitting a higher-level curriculum into a short space of time presents further pressures and difficulties, to both the individual learner and the provider trying to plan the course.

This therefore has implications for the scheduling of work-related training and learning outside of normal working hours – if students find it more fruitful to learn at times more convenient for them (i.e., not in their own time on top of operational working commitments), potentially more could be gained from the learning experience. After all, a successful outcome of a course or learning opportunity relies not just on attendance but on digestion and understanding of the content. This is something which requires further inquisition, and is outside the remit of this study.

Providing „lifelong learning“ opportunities to individuals in work is difficult

Reiterating the issue that learners may face barriers to learning if their firm was unsupportive (see above), subsequently these become difficulties for providers trying to provide lifelong learning to individuals in work. The issues of organisation, time, cost, lack of demand from firms and learners, and encouraging learning were all mentioned as difficulties in trying to provide „lifelong learning“

opportunities¹²⁷ (especially those that are not directly relevant to their job roles) for those in employment. Potentially therefore lifelong learning in the context of workforce development is viewed differently – with industry and „neo-liberal“ economic policy seeing individuals as economic units, rather than individuals with aspirations and goals.¹²⁸

6.4 Dispositional factors

This section will discuss general „dispositional“ aspects of business and employment and the labour market which affect the take up of workforce development, and thus, the place of higher education and lifelong learning within this. The following issues are important:

- Staff more likely to be given more training opportunities are those in higher level occupations and with higher levels of qualification
- The private sector and SMEs are less likely to provide training
- „The business of business is business“
- Research suggests that Wales in particular has greater lower skilled job and many private sector SMEs
- There is a fragmented market for learning in business
 - o Which suggests concentration should be on certain skills and types of firm
 - o But this may exclude many and polarise skill levels in the labour market

Lower level staff, and lower level qualifications are less likely to receive development

To reiterate an earlier point, staff in lower occupation levels and with lower levels of qualification are less likely to be given workforce development opportunities – particularly off-the-job programmes, or those which are not directly relevant to their role in the firm.

The private sector and SMEs perform less well in providing training opportunities

The private sector, and particularly SMEs, are also less likely to provide development opportunities which are not directly relevant to what they see as their needs (i.e. only opportunities to enable staff to perform their immediate roles better).

„The business of business is business“¹²⁹

Firms do not employ people to learn „for the sake of it“, as they would be able to in an educational setting – firms employ people to do a job. Some industries and many occupations require a certain amount of skill and/or knowledge – and thus training or development in order to bring staff up to these skill/expertise levels – but this will only be done if the firm recognises a potential benefit. These benefits

¹²⁷ To condense Hager (2004: 22), this can be taken to mean learning for the sake of learning and a „humanistic“ learning society, in this case for adults in work.

¹²⁸ Hager 2004: 23

¹²⁹ A quote credited to American economist Milton Friedman (1912-2006)

could take a number of forms, for example increasing staff satisfaction through personal development, or increasing staff expertise and skill and therefore possibly improving productivity.¹³⁰ Many firms in Wales do not recognise a need to undergo any more training or development other than that which they have identified themselves.¹³¹ Furthermore, as has been discussed, employees themselves may not want to undergo development programmes due to various pressures or barriers.

The Welsh labour market has many low-skilled jobs and private sector SMEs

Recent research by Felstead has suggested that the number of high-skilled jobs in Wales has been falling and low-skilled jobs rising over the last twenty years.¹³² Wales under-performs in terms of basic-skills needs and the number of high-skilled jobs, but this is not drastically different to the UK.¹³³ Though the public sector employs the highest proportion of workers (31%) in Wales, most establishments are private sector SMEs.¹³⁴ Therefore, the market for higher education provision for Welsh industry appears limited, perhaps even more so than other parts of Britain.

The fragmented market for higher-level learning suggests focusing on specific occupations and firms

This would suggest the need for higher education to focus on certain types of professions, industries or sectors. For example, the University of Teeside's degree in „Work-based studies“ mainly attracts education professionals (or those with an educating or training role), engineers, business professionals and police officers.¹³⁵ According to this, higher-level provision for the workforce could be targeted at, for example:

- those working in the public sector,
- those in managerial, professional or associate-professional positions
- owner-managers of SMEs (unlikely to recognise their role as a potential learner)

Leitch points out that universities should work more closely with employers to provide for “highly-skilled workers”.¹³⁶ However, bearing in mind the difficulty many individuals find when faced with the prospect of undertaking higher education – especially if they have had no prior experience of it – the market for higher education becomes narrower. To use the example from Leitch, 41% of managers in the UK do not even have a Level 2 qualification.¹³⁷ In response to this point, the Wales Management Council ask, “if we focus on “higher skills” (arguably Level 3 and above) are we completely missing the point about the real needs of the market? And are universities best placed to meet those needs?”¹³⁸

¹³⁰ Kitching and Blackburn 2002: 17

¹³¹ Evidenced, for example, by the 83% of firms responding „staff already have the skills they need“ (FSW 2006: 81)

¹³² Felstead 2008: 11

¹³³ Sloane, O’Leary and Watson 2007: 82-3

¹³⁴ FSW 2006: 22

¹³⁵ Helyer and Hooker 2007: 72

¹³⁶ Leitch 2007: 25

¹³⁷ Leitch 2007: 90

¹³⁸ WMC 2007: 9

This may exclude certain audiences and workers

However, although targeting provision is sensible, it would still be exclusive and the charges of university education being inequitable will not be reconciled. This feasibility study advocates accessible and „lifelong“ learning opportunities for the Welsh workforce¹³⁹ – it is important therefore to maintain accessibility and equitability for those in work on the whole. Otherwise, this is anathema to what „lifelong learning“ and „widening participation“ agendas (and the university departments which address them) set out to do – break down barriers to higher education for those who for whatever reason cannot access it.

Focusing on those who are in favourable positions (and even able) to receive higher-level development could disenfranchise further those on the opposite end of the spectrum. Recently, the OECD noted that equity is falling when it comes to higher education:

„In terms of the outcomes - the difference it makes to people's life prospects - those at the high end are having better prospects, those at the lower end are paying a higher price. The spectrum of society is becoming more polarised“^{140, 141}

In Wales, if jobs are indeed predominantly low skilled, and where there are high levels of economic inactivity, this is important to bear in mind. Furthermore, the Graham Review placed considerable importance on achieving greater accessibility and equitability of higher education through enhanced progression routes,¹⁴² therefore maintaining this aim of accessibility and equitability for the workforce is imperative.

6.5 Proposed solutions

Universities need to be able to show businesses and workers that the development opportunities they can offer are worthwhile. For more detailed information, consult the other reports within this feasibility study. In response to the difficulties in developing the workforce, particularly at a higher level, the following remedies can be proposed:

Solutions which will enable universities to enhance their reputation as providers of workforce development:

Relevant and accessible provision which is also **responsive** to the needs of firms and individuals.

To do this, a higher education provider needs to implement the following:

¹³⁹ UWIC 2007: 4

¹⁴⁰ BBC News, 9 September 2008, „Student growth risks widening gap“, interview with Andreas Schleicher, OECD analyst, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7604631.stm> [accessed 9 September 2008]

¹⁴¹ This situation was also reported by the OECD seven years ago. BBC News, 13 June 2001, „UK education gap „frightening““ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1386487.stm> [accessed 9 September 2008]

¹⁴² Graham 2006

Better dialogue between universities and businesses, particularly SMEs so that universities can

- i. work with firms individually
- ii. identify what they can provide
- iii. identify who in the organisation they can provide for
- iv. show how they can help.

Assistance for businesses in identifying their gaps and needs for higher level skills in order to help firms budget and plan for investment in higher level workforce development.

Affordable development packages. This would help

- i. SMEs on limited budgets
- ii. larger firms having to send greater numbers on development programmes.
- iii. individuals in work paying for it themselves.

Easily attainable and understandable information regarding the services available. This would tell firms where to go for the right services, and how to access them.

Local provision and distance/virtual learning methods for firms who are unable to travel further afield to source the services of higher education institutions. This would also relieve individuals of personal pressures regarding commuting to a course which is delivered off-site.

Flexible methods of delivery and curriculum for firms and learners in terms of timing, informal or on-the-job delivery, and the course content and length. **Work-Based Learning (WBL)** packages, which include reflexive research and study that is directly applicable to the individual's immediate role within the organisation, and **shorter programmes** (such as 10 or 20 credit modules) which can link in to bigger awards (Foundation Degrees, Bachelors or Masters Degrees or higher), have a big part to play in this.

Equitable routes of progression into higher education for individuals in work. This is imperative in trying to counter issues of polarisation between the haves and have-nots. **APEL**, and more informal modes of assessment criteria through which students would be allowed on a course, would negate the necessity for a learner to have prior qualifications and potentially encourage individuals of their own ability in attaining higher level qualifications.

7. Summary and recommendations

Summary: a typology of difficulties

It is useful to address supply-side, demand-side, and dispositional issues in terms of how they affect businesses, workers/learners and providers. It is therefore necessary to summarise and classify the issues discussed in the following table:

	Businesses	Workers/learners	Provision	Solutions
Demand side deficiencies	Resource constraints Workforce constraints Perceived need and want	Personal constraints Pressure Perceived need and want	-	Affordable and flexible provision Better progression routes and flexible delivery Better dialogue between universities and businesses
Supply side deficiencies	Inaccessibility of provision Irrelevance of provision Universities inapproachable	Inaccessibility of provision Irrelevance of provision Universities inapproachable and unobtainable	Resource constraints in making provision more accessible and tailored to an individual firm - if it is not the normal mode of delivery	Better dialogue and flexible delivery to increase employer investment Responsive and bespoke provision Better dialogue and information and progression routes

Dispositional factors	Firms only want what they recognise is needed and beneficial (not for the sake of it) Private sector SMEs more so	Lack of support from managers because the company generally doesn't want or see the need to invest in staff development Lower skilled jobs less likely to be given training	Limited and fragmented market for higher level workforce development in Wales Concept of „lifelong learning“ in the workplace is not obvious	Encouraging business to see the benefits of higher level education - see points above
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Recommendations for further investigation

If successfully established, an all-Wales centre for higher level workforce development can not only provide responsive provision for Welsh industry and workers, but it will also be an opportune environment for further research into workforce development. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to briefly note the following possibilities for further research that have emerged from this micro-project.

This micro-project, and the overall feasibility study, has made considerable in-roads into studying the potential of higher education in workforce development for the Welsh labour market. However, more investigation is needed in areas beyond the capacity and remit of this study. Recently a colleague pointed out the potential opportunities for including key questions in large, numerically significant surveys of workforce development in Welsh firms such as the Future Skills Wales survey. Building into surveys of this kind lines of questioning which investigate attitude towards and potential for higher education, would be useful in informing developments in the planning of higher education provision and curriculum for the workforce. Detailed quantitative data on firms attitudes and perceptions of higher level development, with breakdowns on firm sizes and types and industry sectors, would be highly advantageous.

While this micro-project has discussed some of the difficulties facing individuals and attitudes which hinder take up of higher level education for work, primary data was not gained. Because the responsibility of going through a higher level workforce development programme lies essentially with the individual learner, it is important for an all-Wales centre for higher level workforce development understands the needs of individuals. Though the combined expertise and experience of the lifelong learning departments on the partnership provides a wealthy knowledge base to start with, continuing investigation into the issues for individuals is another potential benefit to the establishment of an accessible, attainable and successful centre.

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List of acronyms:

CBI:	Confederation of British Industry
DELLS:	Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
DfES:	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS:	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
ELWa:	Education and Learning Wales
FSB:	Federation of Small Businesses
FSW:	Future Skills Wales
GWLAD:	Gaining Work, Learning and Advice in rural areas
HE:	Higher Education
HEFCE:	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW:	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
NESS05:	National Employer Skills Survey 2005
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SMEs:	Small and Medium Enterprises
UVAC:	University Vocational Awards Council
WAG:	Welsh Assembly Government
WBL:	Work-Based Learning
WMC:	Wales Management Council

Strategic Development of High Level Learning for the Workforce in Wales

MF5: Study of industry „needs“ for CPD and build effective liaison and partnership with employers via Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to meet local, regional and national leadership and management skills gaps.

Cardiff University
February 2007

List of Acronyms

CEML	Council for Management and Leadership
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CU	Cardiff University
DfES	Department for children, Schools and families
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ELWa	Education and Learning, Wales
MSC	Management Standards Centre
NOS	National Occupational Standards
SME	Small to Medium Sized Enterprise
SSA	Sector Skills Agreements
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency
UWIC	University of Wales Institute Cardiff
WMC	Wales Management Council

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Executive Summary

Background

The Welsh workforce is increasing. In particular the number of managers and senior officials is projected to increase 1.1% per annum over the next few years. Skills gaps are prevalent through Welsh organisations, rather than skills shortages. Employers across Wales are thought to invest £3-4 million each day on employee related training.

Anticipated direct impact of training

Organisational size has an impact on the amount and type of management and leadership training employees receive. The most common reason for training (of any sort) was to increase productivity and make staff better at their jobs. The return on investment for training is not as good as it should be. No reasons for this have been identified. It is difficult to find meaningful ways to measure and evaluate management development and training for individual businesses. The more qualified a manager, the more effective they are. Management and leadership programmes are important as they allow managers to provide better leadership.

General workforce development

Research suggests a by-product of training is increased organisational performance. The most common cause of the relatively high failure rate of SME is the lack of management and leadership skills. 85% - 95% of organisations with less than 10 employees never pursue management and leadership qualifications. Economic theory suggests organisations will invest in specific non-transferable skills and are averse to investing in transferable skills.

Skills being developed

There is a lack of conclusive research into what management and leadership skills are being developed. SkillsActive highlight that within management and leadership it is the people skills where most training is focused, including time management and communications. 17% of employers utilise courses leading to management and leadership qualifications. SkillsActive have stated that there is currently too much emphasis placed on formal management education, often at the expense of informal opportunities.

Skills and profile of those being trained

There is a lack of research available covering the skill and education profile of those receiving management and leadership training. Many classed as „managers“ by the Labour Force Survey hold low-level qualifications. 41% of managers hold a qualification of level 2 or below. The majority of SME owner-managers do not hold a formal qualification and many have no prior management experience. According to The Skills for Business Management Standards only 20% of UK managers have a relevant management qualification.

Barriers to take-up

Time and cost are principal barriers to training. Much research has been conducted into barriers to training. Different research highlights slightly different barriers. The WMC state the four main barriers in Wales are time, cost, quality and motivation. 10% of employers have reported problems finding suitable training. Managers have difficulty in identifying specific training needs and how they might best be met.

Current supply

Estimates of the current number of managers in Wales vary between 144,000 and 155,000. Research by SkillsActive shows there is a general lack of demand for development from managers, particularly among SME owner-managers. Research by Cardiff Business School identified 1600 providers of management and leadership development and 10,000 different programmes or offerings. This equates to roughly one course for every 12 managers. The volume and array of training on offer inevitably leads to confusion among managers. Organisations with more than 50 employees are more likely to use business schools and universities for management training and development. Research by WMC has identified that the mean training each manager receives is 6.5 days a year. This equates to 550,240 (estimate) management training days in Wales, with a total spend of £138 million. MSC and SFEDI have both identified lists of problems with the current provision.

Future provision

As 80% of current employees will still be in the workforce in 10 years time there needs to be increased focus on upskilling them. Most SSA reports highlight the need for a skills broker to put employers and providers of HE in contact and to devise innovative ways of attracting funding. From looking into the available research the likely future management and leadership skills will include:

- managing and using technology,
- leadership, entrepreneurship,
- use of time,
- having an open mind,
- partnership working,
- personal development and ability to manage change and uncertainty.

The future of management and leadership training does need to be more demand-led, flexible and appropriate.

1.0 Introduction

This project by Cardiff University is part of the wider UWIC-led project „strategic development of high level learning for the workforce in Wales“ funded by HEFCW. This mini-project is a desk-based research project into industry needs for CPD, in particular management and leadership.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of this project is to investigate the current and anticipated Management and Leadership CPD/short-course training needs of employers. It was envisaged that through working closely with SSCs in Wales an active support-network for training development would be established. A secondary factor of this project is to build effective liaison and partnerships with the SSCs, mainly through meetings, emails and phone calls.

1.2 Background

The Welsh workforce is projected to increase by 60,000, to 1.4 million in 2014. At 0.4% per annum, “this represents a marginally slower growth rate than the UK average of 0.5% per annum.”ⁱ The Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales 2005 states that “Around 80% of employees will still be in the workforce in ten years” time; so much greater emphasis must be placed on lifting the skills of those currently in employment”ⁱⁱ

Research by Future Skills Wales has shown that Welsh employers are facing a problem of skills gaps and not skill shortages. As emphasised in *Wales: A Better Country*, priorities for Wales include creating better jobs and skills. This would include improving the current training and education systems, or up-skilling the current workforce.

ELWa’s workplace learning review 2004 featured the key messages:

- learning must provide employer-responsive provision;
- greater bespoke provision for employers;
- a drive for quality; and improved learning products;
- improved processes to deliver such learning.

The need for increased skills in the workplace is evident. The questions this report aims to address, particularly in relation to management and leadership, are

- what are the direct impacts of training including the benefits,
- who is being trained,
- what are the barriers to training,
- what is the current supply of management and leadership training,
- future predictions for management and leadership CPD / training.

1.3 Methodology

The emphasis of this research was to discover industry needs for CPD. Looking at existing research and speaking with SSC representatives was the main method of collecting the required data.

2.0 Key terms

2.1 Workforce Development

Workforce development is defined as “the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees”ⁱⁱⁱ. This can take many forms, including off-the-job training, on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching.

In 2004 ELWA stated it “spends approaching £1 million per day on training in support of workforce development. Across Wales, employers and others are thought to invest a further £3-4 million each day in employer related training.”^{iv}

2.2 Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent employer-led organisations, each covering a specific sector. Each SSC has four goals:

- To reduce skills gaps and shortages
- Improve productivity, business and public service performance
- Increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector’s workforce
- Improve learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards.

The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) is responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring the network of SSCs. The SSDA also provides minimum cover for those sectors without a SSC.

Most SSCs have a representative responsible for Wales. It is with these representatives that liaison and partnerships have been built.

2.3 Sector Skills Agreements

Each SSC is tasked with producing a Sector Skills Agreement (SSA). SSAs map out the skills employers need their workforce to have and how these skills will be supplied. Essentially, they are “about getting the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time”^v SSAs are signed up to by everyone who supplies, funds and plans education and training. The five stages in SSA development are:

1. Sophisticated assessment is made of each sector to determine short-term, medium-term and long-term skills needs and to map out the factors for change in the sector
2. Current training provision across all levels is reviewed to measure its range, nature and employer relevance
3. The main gaps and weaknesses in workforce development are analysed and priorities are agreed
4. A review is conducted into the scope for collaborative action – engaging employers to invest in skills development to support improved business performance – and an assessment is made into what employers are likely to sign up to
5. The final outcome is an agreement of how the SSC and employer will work with key funding partners to secure the necessary supply of training.

Most of the SSAs looked at highlight the lack of and need for increased leadership and management skills within the specific sectors.

2.4 Continuing Professional Development

“Continuing Professional Development is the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of personal competence throughout your working life...a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and continuously seeking to improve. It is the key to optimising your career opportunities, both today and for the future.”^{vi} How this CPD is carried out varies considerably, whether it be a short course, a masters qualification, mentoring or on-the-job training.

Tamkin et al (2004) note that most training periods are short. Much of it is driven by statutory requirements such as health and safety rather than business needs, and only about half of it leads to formal qualifications.

The definition of CPD is flexible and means different things to different individuals. For the purpose of this report CPD will include standard training, mentoring, seminars and qualifications.

2.5 Skills Gaps

Skills Gaps occur when employers do not have the skills required in their existing workforce. “19% of Welsh employers report a skills gap”^{vii} Employers state that skills gaps cause:

- Loss in quality service
- Loss of business to competitors
- Loss of efficiency^{viii}

Bridging the skills gap has been recognised as a “fundamental tool in building a more prosperous Wales”^{ix}

The Wales Management Council and Cardiff University state “Inevitable skills gaps will exist in technical and functional areas of management like IT and finance, but it is in the area of inter-personal and motivational skills that the biggest gaps often exist, and these are often the hardest to measure.”^x

Future Skills Wales give an indication of the problem in Wales stating that “40% of establishments with skills gaps indicated „management skills“ as lacking”^{xi}

2.6 Skills Shortages

These are defined as employers being unable to recruit the people with the required skills.

2.7 Management and leadership skills

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for management and leadership, approved in 2004, states that “The key purpose of management and leadership is to provide direction, gain commitment, facilitate change and achieve results through the efficient, creative and responsible deployment of people and other resources.”

NOS define what individual workers need to do to achieve the key purpose. They also specify the knowledge and skills required. The NOS for management and leadership have categorised skills into six headings, within which are 47 units of NOS

- Managing self and personal skills
- Providing direction
- Facilitating change
- Working with people
- Using resources
- Achieving results^{xii}

As highlighted in several sections throughout this report organisation size will influence the needs of the organisation and those within it. Owner-managers require a different set of competencies to the larger organisations. The Small Firms Enterprise and Development Initiative (SFEDI) is consulting on a revised suite of NOS, the key areas will be:

- Essence of Entrepreneurship
- Business Direction and Improvement
- Run the Business (Business Infrastructure, Business Location, Business Supplies and Equipment, Money and Legislation)
- The Business and People (Yourself, Other People)
- Win and Keep Business

Needs of other organisations will also vary, for example voluntary organisations, this report will not document all the differences.

The Wales Management Council believes “the amount of management and leadership development that takes place is very important for the economic health and success of Wales.”^{xiii} This is backed up by the Leitch Report which states “Good management is a prerequisite to improving business performance, a key aspect of which is effective use of workforce skills.”^{xiv}

An indication of the size of the potential problem in Wales is that “40% of establishments with skills gaps indicted „management skills” as lacking”^{xv} This is backed up by the SSCs, most of which state that within their sectors Management and leadership skills are lacking and need developing. The SSA review has identified over 150 management and leadership issues reported by employers to SSCs. These are grouped into the following areas:

- Working with people – developing high performance teams
- Providing direction and leadership in a rapidly changing world
- The effective use of resources
- Developing individual contributors into effective first line managers^{xvi}

2.8 Leitch Review of Skills

In December 2006 the Government published the Leitch Review of Skills’s Final Report *Prosperity for all in the global economy*, which is likely to exert a key influence over the skills policy until 2020. Wales is yet to publish its response to The Review.

The main themes for management and leadership include:

- The increase to 40% of adults qualified to level 4 and above.
- Recognition of the key role leaders and managers has in driving improvements in skills.
- The strengthening of SSCs to approve the content and delivery of vocational qualifications.

2.9 Skills That Work for Wales

This report provides a response to the Leitch Review of Skills. *Skills That Work for Wales: A skills and employment strategy* does highlight that in a “global economy, skills are critical to the success of individuals, business and communities.^{xvii}” The theme of globalisation is important to higher level skills. The highly developed countries are increasing their pursuit for ever increasing higher skills as a means of competition. As the Report states “If we fail to improve workforce, management and leadership skills, Welsh businesses will gradually find it more difficult to compete. Wales’ economic growth will diminish.^{xviii}”

3.0 The Welsh economy

Wales has a population of 2.9 million people, with the greatest concentration located to the South East and the North East. The total population of Wales is “projected to increase by over 100 thousand, between 2004 and 2014, to reach 3.07 million.”^{xxix} Workplace employment is expected to increase by “about 55 thousand to reach 1.3 million by 2014”^{xxx}. In particular employment in managers and senior officials is projected to increase 1.1% per annum^{xxxi}.

The Public Sector is the largest employer across all the Welsh regions. According to the Small Business Services organisation, 99% of businesses in Wales are Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), employing less than 250 people; and the majority of these businesses are classified as micro-organisations i.e. businesses with less than 10 employees.

The following table is based on DTI statistics for the number of private sector enterprises in Wales from the start of 2005

Employees	Enterprises		Employment		Turnover	
		%	000s	%	£million	%
No	123,115	70.2	141	20.1	6,291	9.8
1-4	36,340	20.7	107	15.2	8,118	12.7
5-9	8,590	4.9	61	8.7	4,934	7.7
10-19	3,805	2.2	55	7.8	4,000	6.3
20-49	2,380	1.4	74	10.5	5,866	9.2
50-99	705	0.4	48	6.8	4,244	6.6
100-199	290	0.2	41	5.8	4,875	7.6
200-249	55	<0.01	12	1.7	1,391	2.2
250-499	110	0.1	40	5.7	4,623	7.2
500+	70	<0.01	125	17.8	19,577	30.6
Total	175,460	100.0	703	100.0	63,919	100.0

The statistics of key importance include:

- 52,000 enterprises in Wales have more than one employee
- 99% of enterprises have less than 250 employees

According to *Working Futures 2004-2014: Spatial Report* managers and senior officials are projected to show an increase in employment. With this projected increase, it follows that skills in these fields will be more in demand by employers, hence an increased demand for CPD training in management and leadership.

3.1 Variation in company size

Management development varies in relation to the size of the company. Research conducted by the WMC suggests that it is the size of the organisation, and not the sector, that most impacts management and leadership training. “Small companies may provide frequent development opportunities but do not

utilise such a range of methods as larger organisations. Also, Medium-sized organisations seemed to be particularly vulnerable in the UK with low levels of development across a range of methods^{xxii}

In a survey conducted on behalf of the WMC, 36% of respondents with less than 10 employees reported they do not undertake any management development. The WMC report goes on to state that small companies devote more management development resources to developing strategic thinking. This could be attributed to owner-managers being more involved in strategic decision making.

The preferred learning methods relate to the organisation size. "In small firms owner-managers prefer informal learning such as mentoring, work shadowing and networking."^{xxiii} Research does suggest that small firm-managers want formal qualifications, but need short courses and flexibility. Medium and large organisations look for management and leadership in a wide range of ways including short task based courses, management development programmes, substantial qualifications-based courses and stand alone or blended e-learning.

4.0 Anticipated direct impact – what do employers look to gain from CPD/training? Are these goals achieved?

Employers invest their resources and time into CPD training expecting to gain some direct impact, whether to the employee’s work, company/organisation performance, meeting regulations or improve profitability. DfES commissioned a report into *Workforce Training in England* in 2006. While this report centres on England, it is useful as no Wales equivalent exists. When looking into the main reasons for training the most common was to increase productivity and make staff better at their jobs (49%). Legislative requirement (26%) and improve the quality of good and services (23%).

Research conducted in 2000 indicates the factors that encourage and stimulate management training and development^{xxiv}:

Encouraging factors	1-5 scale
Ability to do job	3.79
Company strategy	3.77
Potential to progress	3.69
Staff motivation	3.58
Cost if management development	3.55
Retention of personnel	3.40
Technological advances	3.40
Structural change	3.36
Demand from managers	3.32
Company culture	3.26
Others in sector	2.72
Investors in People	2.52

According to the Council for Management and leadership (CEML) significant amounts of money are invested into management and leadership training, but “the return from this level of investment is not as good as it could or should be”^{xxv}. No definitive reasons for this failure have been identified.

Reports from the CEML^{xxvi} highlight the difficulty of finding meaningful ways to measure and evaluate the impacts and outcomes of management development and training on individual businesses. “The impact of training on business performance has attracted much interest from policy makers and academics, but there is very little formal quantitative analysis.”^{xxvii}

Evidence does suggest that “more qualified managers tend to be more effective”^{xxviii}. Management and leadership development programmes are “very important because if the training agenda is properly targeted on these skills, it can enable managers to provide better leadership.”^{xxix}

Chris Mabey's 2005 report for CMI, based on a sample of 500 Human Resource managers and 500 non-HR managers, claims to have evidence that Management Development Works when it is:

- A clear organisational priority with employers taking responsibility
- Linked to business strategy with established processes and frameworks
- Designed to build relevant competence and behaviours
- Focused on long-term tenure of employees
- Driven strategically within the organisation, with Board-level support and strong links to organisational business objectives
- Competency-driven in that it is designed to address manager's abilities, motivations and potential to meet business needs^{xxx}

5.0 General workforce development – are there other benefits for such investment by employers?

Looking into the perceived impact of training, companies have reported the greatest impact has been on labour productivity. A recent report by DfES declares that one in ten private sector employers state that training had a large impact on profit margin (12%^{xxxix}). Evidence from this report also shows that as the size of establishment increases, so too does the perceived impact of training on staff retention and productivity.

The link between training and job satisfaction is complex. Different surveys have produced very different results, for example the Skills Survey 2001 which does not suggest any direct link between training and job satisfaction. The Workplace Employment Relations Survey suggests that being able to use acquired skills on the job does have a positive impact on job satisfaction.

Workplace satisfaction has a significant impact on lowering absenteeism. Hence a by-product of investing in employee training would be a lower rate of absenteeism amongst staff.

A by-product of training would appear to be increased organisation performance. No objective data is available to support this claim. However there is subjective evidence from management stating that productivity and financial performance does increase following employees training.

Training can have a direct impact on economic performance if it serves to make the individual more proficient at his or her job, but it can also have an indirect effect if it increases job satisfaction by, for example, making it easier to perform the job or making the employee feel valued.

From research, the SSSA have concluded that training participation affects the chances of establishment closure. The more training an organisation invests in the more likely they are to continue trading. As Professor Ewart Keep states in the SSSA document, *Market Failure in Skills* “for employers, investment in skill can lead, for example, to the ability to produce higher quality goods or greater productivity”^{xxxix}.

Job satisfaction is impacted by training, “Those who have received training in the past year are significantly more satisfied on all satisfaction indicators than those who have not.”^{xxxix}

It is clear that a number of sources cite the benefits of management and leadership training and development to both the individual and the organisation. However, quantifying this can prove difficult. This is particularly true for SMEs who are time-poor and cannot devote the required time to evaluating management and leadership training and development.

According to the Wales Management Council the lack of management and leadership skills in SMEs is one of the most common causes of the relatively high failure rate that continues to weaken the Welsh economy.

6.0 Type of skill being developed

There is a lack of conclusive research into what management and leadership skills are being developed in Wales. WMC, when investigating the management and leadership skills being developed in Wales, reported that statistical evidence is weak in this area.

For Wales, skills in managing and leading people scored highest, above managing self, leading direction and culture and managing relationships in WMC research into the skills being developed. More emphasis is given to these skills by larger organisations than smaller ones.

17%^{xxxiv} of employers utilise external courses leading to management and leadership qualifications, while 10% utilise courses not leading to a qualification.

Management development that takes place off-the-job includes courses that lead to qualifications. WMC have explored which awarding bodies are most often used for such qualifications, including business schools, universities, Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD), Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), Chartered Management Institute (CMI). Their research highlighted a large difference between large and small companies. Large organisations (with more than 50 employees) were found to be more likely to use business schools and universities. "Between 85% and 95% of organisations with less than 10 employees never pursue qualifications from any of these awarding bodies. Only a small minority use CIPD, ILM or CMI."^{xxxv}

Skillsactive suggest that there is "too much emphasis on formal management education at the expense of informal opportunities such as action learning, case study based learning, coaching, mentoring, etc."^{xxxvi}

Skillsactive highlighted that within management and leadership it is the people skills where most training is taking place^{xxxvii}. Examples include Time Management, Communication and Decision Making.

"Economic theory suggests that employers will be more willing to invest in training that is specific to their firm and therefore less transferable, and more averse to investment in more transferable general training."^{xxxviii}

Proskills have cited that more than "four out of ten"^{xxxix} of the sector's employers believe that the skills required by their workforce are changing annually or more rapidly, making investing in skills difficult, especially for smaller organisations with limited or no training budgets.

7.0 Skill and education profile of those being trained

As in the last section, there is a lack of research into the skill and education profile of those receiving management and leadership training.

A great deal of those classed as „managers“ by the Labour Force Survey hold low-level qualifications, more so than in other „higher“ level occupations, such as the professional. For example, 41% of managers hold less than a level 2 qualification, with this figures varying significantly across sectors and firms. SSCs including GO Skills have attributed the high number of managers with formal qualifications to those individuals who have moved through the ranks within an organisation to become a manager, rather than being recruited to take on a management position. This is backed up by SEMTA^{xl} who have developed competence-based training to appeal to those managers with very different backgrounds.

With such a high percentage of managers not having any formal higher level qualifications, it would be too much of a jump to expect them to take on an MBA. Instead, they are more likely to want smaller more flexible bite-sized training.

“Previous qualifications increases the likelihood of training, but if the worker is over-educated for the current job (as defined by the employee), this reduces the likelihood^{xli}.”

The *DfEE Skills Task Force*, 1999^{xlii}, concluded that the vast majority of SME owner-managers do not hold formal qualifications; many also have no prior management experience.

According to the Skills for Business Management Standards only 20% of managers and leaders in the UK have a relevant management qualification, let alone know about the NOS that exist for the sector.

8.0 Barriers to take up

There is some evidence to suggest barriers to training are increasing. The Future Skills Wales 2003 *Generic Skills Survey* noted more employers reporting barriers to training in 2003 than in 1998. Time and cost were the principal barriers noted by the survey.

In 2000 a UK-wide report provided ranked factors that discourage management development^{xliii}

Discouraging factors	%
Time pressures	82
Cost of management development	58
Covering for absence	51
Lack of support from Board/senior management	46
Lack of support from line managers	43
Lack of enthusiasm of managers	39
Availability of appropriate training	37
Company culture	34
Availability of accessible training	32

The DfES *Workforce Training in England 2006* report looked into barriers to training, they found the following barriers amongst organisations:

Lack of funds for training / training expensive	22%
Can't spare more staff time (having them away on training)	20%
Hard to find the time to organise training	5%
Staff not keen	4%
Lack of appropriate training/qualification in the subject areas we need	3%
Lack of (good) local training providers (e.g. courses full up)	3%
Difficulty finding training providers who can deliver training where or when we want it	2%
Staff now fully proficient / don't need it	2%
High staff turnover / train staff then they go to competitors	1%
None (no barriers)	39%

While these figure and finding are England specific, the barriers to training in Wales are highly likely to be similar.

A WMC report *Management and leadership Development and Training in Wales*, states the four barriers to training are time, cost, quality and motivation. It goes on to say "Expenditure on training in SMEs in Wales is low. But across UK the underlying problem is that among SMEs negative attitudes are the major constraint on management development."^{xliiv} SMEs by their nature do tend to be short-term focused often they can not see the longer term benefits of investing in management and leadership training.

Different sized organisations face different barriers. Sue Hook, Management and leadership Programme Manager for Skillsactive, believes that SMEs cannot see the value of training. They see the business and its needs as separate from their own. SMEs face more problems as they are cash and time-poor.

The barriers faced by businesses do vary according to size, “just over half (59%) of very small businesses (employing 1-4 people) provide on-the-job-training. A third (33%) provide off-the-job-training compared to almost all (98%) of very large businesses (employing 500 or more people).”^{xlv}

Maureen Davies of Skills for Justice stated that one of the barriers to training is the “leanness”^{xlvi} of businesses and organisations. She highlighted the example of the prison service, where major problems would arise should one person be away from work taking part in training and another off work ill. In cases such as these, the training is the first to be scraped.

In a survey carried out by the WMC, employers were asked what needed to change to increase the take-up of management and leadership development in Wales. Those given the highest scores were:

- “Learning approaches more closely aligned to the development needs of the business
- Training that fits seamlessly into the way organisations work normally
- Learning approaches that integrate on and off the job training
- Evidence that management development is a profitable investment”^{xlvii}

As reported by The Council for Industry and Higher Education “Businesses are, in the main, more focused on providing informal or on-the job training for employees (and often the more senior staff) to meet short term needs of their businesses, or not training at all, rather than looking to the longer term skill needs of the whole workforce and the needs to upskill”^{xlviii}

Investing in staff who then leave and take their skills with them, or can be poached by other employers, is often quoted as a perceived barrier although there is in truth a limited amount of evidence that this happens.

In 2003 about 10%^{xlix} of employers reported problems finding suitable training, many were unable to locate a course locally. In 1999 the DfEE Skills Task Force produced a research paper on management skills, one of the conclusions of which was that many managers have difficulty in identifying the specific training needs and how they might best be met.

9.0 Current supply

The management and leadership development market is a vibrant and diverse one, offering academic qualifications, professional qualifications, National Vocational Qualifications and unaccredited provision.

Estimates of the number of managers in Wales vary, as do who are classified as managers. The Wales Management Council estimates there to be around 144,000 managers in Wales, while the Small Business Service estimates the figure at 155,000.

Evidence collected by Skillsactive, the SSC lead for management and leadership shows that on the demand side there is “a general lack of demand for development from leaders and managers, particularly amongst SME owner managers”ⁱ

“In terms of quantity and availability, the system currently appears to be skewed towards the supply side”ⁱⁱ Research from Cardiff Business School “identified 1600 providers of management and leadership development, and 10,000 different programmes or offerings”ⁱⁱⁱ. This equates to roughly one course for every 12 managers. With such an array of providers and programmes on offer, the question of where do companies turn when investigating management and leadership CPD? This high level of available programmes will certainly lead to confusion from managers trying to identify the most suitable for their specific needs. The Small Firms Research Unit at Cardiff Business School states that in 2004 there were over 500 „courses” available from FE and HE.

10%^{liii} of employers reported they experienced problems locating suitable training, while many were unable to find a course locally.

Research carried out by the WMC suggests that employers look to colleges and universities for information about management and leadership training. WMC suggest that “Universities “should be encouraged to maximise the impact of their “third mission” activities by selling their services and courses even more enthusiastically to a receptive business audience”^{liv} For off-the-job management development, employers with more than 50 employees “are more likely to use business schools and universities”^{lv}

The Small Firms Research Unit at Cardiff Business School compiled a report in 2004 on the provision of management and leadership training in Wales. This report noted that “to boost Management and Leadership Development (MLD) in Wales will necessitate an increase in the demand-side in terms of encouraging increased take-up of skills development programmes and raising awareness of the benefits of training to both the company and the individual.”^{lvi}

The WMC investigated how much management training each manager received each year, the mean being 6.5 days^{lvii}. In total this gives an overall estimate of 550,240 management training days in Wales with a total spend of £138 million. According to ELWa this is roughly 10% of the estimated total employment related training spends.

“There is an argument (disputed by many within universities) that at the highest level the degree programmes run by university business schools are insufficiently grounded in the business world which is the destination of those studying.”^{lviii}

In 2000 an Institute of Management report contained the following analysis of proportions of organisation using different types of training for managers:^{lix}

Formal training	%
In-company training to develop specific skills	52
External seminars/conferences	50
External open/public courses	46
In-company training to develop organisation specific skills	38
Informal training	
Mentoring	46
Coaching	44
Planned on-the-job development	37
Job shadowing/sitting by Nellie	14
In-company job rotation	12
External placement/secondment	5

MSC have highlighted their 5 criticisms of the current management and leadership system:

1. Complexity. The current qualifications systems is seen as complex, difficult to understand and full of duplication and redundancy
2. Bureaucracy. S/NVQs come in for criticism, particularly from Skills for Logistics as being bureaucratic
3. Oversized. Training programmes and qualifications do not meet the specific and immediate needs, particularly of SMEs
4. Variable quality. Training providers and courses are considered to be of variable quality
5. Not delivering business benefits.^{lx}

In their 2005 report, *The Effective Business and Skills Support*, SFEDI identified what was wrong with the current provision:

1. The focus is on availability and accessibility, rather than appropriateness
2. Support is supply chain, rather than demand driven (i.e. have to keep introducing new things, rather than keeping on offering things people want/use)
3. Time scales need to be longer term to allow for planning and building and seeing results, rather than being forced into being short term (because of availability of grants/programmes/incentives etc.)
4. Finance is an end in itself, not a means to an end, i.e. you do it because there is a grant available for it, rather than identifying what is needed and getting the appropriate funded support. A grant mentality/dependency is formed, which helps no-one
5. More creative and innovative ways of engaging with entrepreneurs need to be found
6. Products and programmes on offer are very generic – one size fits all. Individual tailoring is required

7. The language used by entrepreneurs and business support is different: they need to „talk the same language“
8. There needs to be a shift in attitude by business advisors. Currently they are just doing a job, but they need to display more enterprise in fulfilling this job, rather than a 9-5, PAYE attitude to business advice
9. Both the perceived value of the offer and its quality need to be raised: not just an evaluation based on cost and output^{ixi}

10.0 Predicted trends

The recent Leitch Report called for the provision of training to be more demand-led. The Review sets the target of 40% of the adult population to be qualified to level 4 or above by 2020.

In *Leaders and Managers in Wales: An Agenda for Growth*, the WMC highlight the importance developing skills that will meet the problems of tomorrow. 80% of current employees will still be in the workforce in ten years time. The emphasis arguably should therefore be on the training and skills development of those already working.

The MSC identify 5 requirements for management and leadership development and qualifications in the future:

- “Firstly, they need to be clearly related to business need.
- Secondly, they need to be bite-sized and allow managers and leaders to chunk-up their learning into larger qualifications over time.
- Thirdly, they need to reflect the trend towards more informal modes of learning.
- Fourthly, they need to fit together in an easily understandable structure that encompasses knowledge-based, skill-based and competence-based qualifications and supports lifelong career development.
- Fifthly, they need to be delivered via a range of media, particularly electronic media, which fit in with managers’ and leaders’ lifestyles”^{lxii}

In 2003 the WMC noted in their *Agenda for Action* that in relation to demand and supply of management training and development, little had changed over the previous ten years.

The SSAs produced by SSCs map out the skills needed by employers in the short, medium and long term, with details of how these will be supplied. Most SSAs highlight the need for a “skills broker” to put employers and providers of HE in contact and to devise innovative ways of attracting funding.

The role of such a “skills broker” has different connotations for different people. Whether a “skills broker” would be a person, physical centre or an on-line „centre” spanning the whole of Wales or one per region is not clear. Issues of impartiality would need to be clear as there would be legal implications of recommending one course over another.

Research conducted by the CIHE into workforce development suggests that “Small businesses will generally only buy bite-sized chunks of learning which is flexibly delivered to suit their needs as they cannot afford to release their staff for long periods.”^{lxiii}

Shields (1998) noted a positive relation between the level of qualification held by an employee and the probability of them receiving training. Also noted is the negative relationship between the employee’s age and probability of training. Thus we have conflicting view points. With an aging workforce in the UK, it would be expected that demand for training would decrease, as there would be a shortened period of time over which the costs of training could be recouped by the employer. Alternatively, given the increased level of education in the workforce there should be an increased demand for training.

Managers' skill needs are changing, and future demands are likely to focus on

- Managing and using technology
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurship
- Use of time
- Having an open mind
- Partnership working
- Personal development
- Ability to manage change and uncertainty

Behavioural training has also been noted as emerging as a trend^{lxiv}, one that looks to be increasing. This training focuses on the understanding of individuals and how to influence others, as opposed to the „traditional“ management and leadership training.

Managing change is an important in Wales. According to SEMTA^{lxv} more change occurs in Wales, hence managers must be prepared and trained to deal with such occurrences.

The WMC argue that if management and leadership development is to improve then the interaction between influences, funders, deliverers and employers must be improved. The nature of the provision will also be of key importance. The WMC use the analogy of Health and Fitness Centre – “places where SME managers can go to obtain high quality, professional support, tailored to their particular needs at the time, and carefully monitored to ensure maximum benefit.”^{lxvi}

The MSC outline board principals on which a management and leadership Qualification Strategy should be based:

- Bite-sized chunks
- Informal as well as formal learning
- Management and leadership Standards and other relevant NOS
- Academic, professional and vocational qualifications
- Clear career progression routes
- Tangible benefits
- Lean delivery, just-in-time
- Both stand-alone and embedded in sector qualifications
- Continuing Professional Development
- Key Skills^{lxvii}

The features of future learning and qualifications systems, according to the MSC, need to be:

1. Accessible and easily understood
2. Based on NOS
3. Unitised with accumulation of credits
4. Demand-led
5. Delivered at the right time, in the right way
6. Recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning

7. Support for continuous development and career progression.^{lxviii}

There is no doubt that an abundance of management and leadership training/CPD available. However, in the future this CPD/training needs to be more demand led, flexible and appropriate. “Skills and employment services must be flexible and adapt to changing patterns of demand”^{lxix} because, as Leitch states it is impossible to accurately predict the future demand of future skills types.

11.0 Conclusion

There is a lack of conclusive research in some areas of leadership and management training including:

- skill profile of those receiving training
- skills that are being developed
- impact of training, on both the individual and the organisation.

Management and leadership CPD training in Wales is heavily supply driven. Organisations are overwhelmed when looking for appropriate management and leadership training. There is a lack of a central information point where organisations can gather information about the type and range of courses most suitable to their needs. There is a need to simplify and streamline the access to information and the volume and range of training on offer.

Many SSA reports highlight the need for a “skill broker” to bring together organisations and providers of higher education and to devise ways of attracting funding. They believe this one-stop shop would reduce the confusion faced by organisations when locating suitable training.

There is always difficulty when predicting future trends. With 80% of today’s workforce predicted to be in employment in 10 years and the increased emphasis on the needs for skills it follows that demand for management and leadership skills will increase. However, at what rate and level is difficult to predict.

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University of Wales, Lampeter

**HEFCW: Strategic Fund Project
High Level Learning for the Workforce of Wales**

27 May 2008

Ian Roffe

Centre for Enterprise, European and Extension Services

**Business Opportunities for workforce development Welsh
Business in management capacity building.**

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Appendix A: Data Gathering Questionnaire.

Acknowledgements.

University of Wales, Lampeter is very pleased to have been commissioned to undertake this research into work based higher learning activity in Wales and has very much enjoyed the work. We would like to thank the members of the project Steering Group for giving their time and expertise, and would like to express our gratitude to the service providers, organisations and groups consulted during this research for taking the time to give us their views.

Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

University of Wales, Lampeter was commissioned in July 2007 by UWIC under the HEFCW strategic development fund project to undertake a programme of research in support of a feasibility study for an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development. The full schema involves ten micro projects that are grouped as scoping projects, markets & futures and delivery structures. The purpose of the whole work programme was to provide an evidence-base for higher Work Based learning (WBL). The dimensions and opportunities for WBL in Wales might then be better understood by the Higher Education Partnership, and hence that future services could be configured and targeted on the basis of evidence of potential demand.

1.2 Methodology

University of Wales, Lampeter undertook:

- Desk review of the policy context for WBL and defining research questions.
- A review of current definitions of work based learning activity.
- An investigation of WBL activities from a selection of employers and organisations.
- Reporting.

This project had areas of interaction with that undertaken by Cardiff University, concerned with the industry needs, partnership with the Sector Skills Councils to meet local, regional and national leadership and management skills gaps. The Cardiff project reported on these gaps in March 2008 and this project considered its findings as well as the competitive environment and nature of services of a proposed WBL centre.

1.3 Definitions

Finding an accepted definition of work based learning is surprisingly difficult. The term is widely applied by educationalists, trainers and policy makers, but the interpretation varies. Konrad (1997) in a review of the policy studies observed that the field has “problems of poor definition, confused conceptualisation, complex language and procedures ...and a lack of a reliable and valid system of assessment”. However, it is a focus for academic enquiry on policies, processes, competencies, analysis of work roles and organisations' strategic direction or priorities.

A Google search on 4 October 2007 returned, surprisingly, just one record. This record is drawn from Washington State in the United States school context. „Work based learning: a learning experience that connects knowledge and skills obtained in the classroom to those needed outside the classroom, and comprises a range of activities and instructional strategies designed to assist students in developing or fulfilling their education plan” (www.k12.wa.us). This illustrates that the activity is wide in scope and interpretation.

Work based learning in higher education in the UK can take on very specific and nuanced interpretations. For instance, the University of Derby operates a „Learning through Work” scheme in association with learndirect (www.learningthroughwork.co.uk). In this context, work based learning is not a set course but an online framework that will help an employee demonstrate the learning achieved at work and recognise it towards a higher education qualification.

The Higher Education Academy (2006) in a seminal review of workplace learning defines workforce development as “the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees”. This proposition makes the term fully inclusive to include generic terms such as human resource development (HRD) as well as training. It therefore includes many processes and forms such as off-the-job training, on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching.

Following a study of existing policy definition work based learning for the purposes of this feasibility study is taken to mean:

‘Learning experience at work that can be connected to higher level learning in a higher educational institution’.

1.4 Project Initiation

Following an initial project scoping meeting, a breakdown of the proposed investigation was created and a task analysis breakdown and schedule created. Progress was reported to the Steering Group at its quarterly meetings.

1.5 Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached on the basis of the evidence gathered during this study.

Conclusion 1

What is the potential future market and activity in workforce development and accreditation, with particular emphasis on higher learning in management that would contribute to Welsh Businesses?

Economic activity has risen in recent years, with a growing prominence on in-company workforce development. Each Sector Skills Council reporting in Wales indicates the need for management development. There is, though, an existing provider base of public and private trainers and assessors for work based learning. This is particularly strong at lower levels and for certain sectors (health and social care), particularly where there is a legislative requirement. A development emphasis on higher learning for management, leadership and specialist skills in organisations appears to exist from evidence of company interviews. These high level skill requirements, however, are distributed relatively thinly across the geographical area. There are also numerous higher learning providers across Wales as well as those English HEIs that recruit in Wales. This indicates that a networked organisation for HE could serve to meet the needs of small numbers of distributed learners. However, it is also very feasible that competition in the form of FEIs, already delivering HE and WBL see the gap and bridge it with external validation before an effective response is made by HEIs in Wales.

Evidence

See sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.

Conclusion 2

What general and specific activities for the centre on higher learning provided by Welsh HEIs in relation to the assessment and accreditation of prior and /or experiential learning could be offered?

Addressing a distributed and dispersed population of in-company work-based learners will be challenging for most Welsh HEIs, because of the distributed population and the existing competitor base. Lower level WBL activity in-companies are addressed by a range of existing providers: FE, industry and private sector. For a general Wales HE sector response, it would appear best to harness the strengths of existing provision, such as CPD, across a wide span and draw it into a networked or virtual arrangement of HE providers. The UALL CPD network has proven very successful in England and a Welsh arm would be a rational extension. There are many general professional groups to which professional updating is a membership requirement, e.g. architects, lawyers, social workers etc and each of these groups would require some management development. There is also an explicit demand from all industry sectors for management skilling. A further challenge exists because Work Based Learning involves radical change for a HE institution; it changes regulations, curriculum, reconfigures learning relationships and introduces new practices. There is no fixed curriculum for Work Based Studies the predominant knowledge source is within the client / candidate organisation itself or within similar organisations and not within the academy. As a result, the interfacing organisation needs to be:

- Responsive to client demands.
- Have an adaptive structure.
- Have an ability to regulate diverse demands.
- It needs to differentiate itself from other organisations.

Evidence

See sections 4.10, 4.11, 4.12.

Question 3 What practices are in place in this field of management capacity building and workplace development at University of Wales, Aberystwyth and University of Wales, Swansea?

Conclusion 3

Aberystwyth University has apparently no explicit work based learning provision. However, operating a strategic partnership with Bangor University, it has applied to HEFCW Third Mission Fund collaborative funding to operate a Skills Academy addressing needs of Sector Skill Councils. Bangor has received significant Objective 1 ERDF and ESF for capital funding for a Management Centre that offers flexible management training and degrees.

The position of Swansea University is that there appear to be activities currently that implicitly and explicitly fit. A Masters in Business and Law is a modular programme aimed at key aspects of law and business, covering areas such as commercialising innovation, intellectual property,

contract and e-commerce as well as traditional business disciplines. The programme was supported by KEF innovation. However, the programme presents as a flexible post-graduate programme rather than a bespoke work based learning programme.

There is also case activity in the Medical School as well as the JISC Regional Centre located at the University, which also supports work based learning. There are strategic developments between Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University and Trinity College that aim to create a virtual university in south-west Wales. Proposals coming from Swansea University under the Convergence to operate a HE partnership project are also directed at work based learning: for example in developing leadership and management skills in SME managers as well as a range of advanced professional learning activities in companies.

A regional learning partnership in west Wales is currently under consultation. All the FEIs in the area have agreed to put forward a Convergence proposal aimed at work based learning, from NVQ 2 to NVQ4 and above. This is an explicit move by FEIs to enter the higher work based learning market in Wales.

Evidence

See sections 4.10, 4.11, 4.12.

Question 4 What, if any, facets exist that impact on innovation and management capacity building?

Conclusion 4

The move to a knowledge economy is one economic development response to the fall in jobs in manufacturing, construction and other production industries. Management capacity development need is wide spread. Innovation capacity proves much more difficult to assess. Both areas appear to be supply driven. Wales has excellent higher education and research institutions. Significant investment has been made in various dimensions of high level skills training from HE providers in Wales, supported for example by the Knowledge Exploitation Fund. WAG also supports four regional innovation networks, drawing together agency support. However, the representation on these networks is weighted towards the public sector. Innovation is critical to the business proposition enterprises. In the case of large sized enterprises (LSEs) they are adopting open innovation models and have the capacity to drive this forward as it is aligned to the business proposition, however demand from small and medium sized representatives (SMEs) are often isolated from similar enterprises due to competitive rivalry in their sector of the business world and do not obtain together the critical mass necessary to express demand.

Evidence

See sections 4.11.

The Research Brief

2.1 The Research Brief

HEFCW has commissioned a feasibility study for an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development under its Strategic Development Fund. The overall of the umbrella project is led by UWIC. The schema involves ten micro projects that are grouped as scoping projects, markets & futures and delivery structures.

University of Wales, Lampeter has a contract to operate a micro project approved recently as part of a big umbrella project. The project will be delivered through collaboration between the Centre for Enterprise and the Department of Management and IT: Learning Through Work. The contract spans from July 2007 and a draft report is deliverable in May 2008. Management of the umbrella scheme is through a project group and also a professional advisory steering group, both of which are serviced by a secretariat from UWIC. The project is one of three within the larger project aimed at looking at looking at future market / work activity for workforce development for the proposed Centre (UWIC, 2007).

Another micro project undertaken by Cardiff University, had areas of strong interaction with this current project. This Cardiff project – MF5- (Cardiff, 2008) is concerned with the industry needs, partnership with the Sector Skills Councils to meet local, regional and national leadership and management skills gaps. The Cardiff project reported on these gaps in March 2008 and so this project considered its findings as well as the competitive environment and nature of services of a proposed WBL centre.

2.2 Primary research questions

The specific objectives in the contract, rephrased as primary research questions. First, what is the potential future market and activity in workforce development and accreditation, with particular emphasis on higher learning in management that would contribute to Welsh Businesses?

What general and specific activities for the centre on higher learning provided by Welsh HEIs in relation to the assessment and accreditation of prior and /or experiential learning could be offered?

2.3 Secondary research questions

Two secondary questions arise from the contract. First, what practices are in place in this field of management capacity building and workplace development at University of Wales, Aberystwyth and University of Wales, Swansea?

What, if any, facets exist that impact on innovation and management capacity building?

2.4 Background to research brief

This feasibility study is part of a group of related studies into the capacity for higher work based learning and a virtual centre for Wales. The study is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council in Wales, project managed by UWIC and operated through an advisory group as well as a steering group comprising members participating in the feasibility studies (UWIC, 2007).

2.5 Methodology

Pursuing the research brief, University of Wales, Lampeter proposed structuring its methodological approach into three distinct phases of active research, followed by a final phase of reporting and feedback.

- Phase One: Project Planning.
- Phase Two: Desk Research, Active Consultations and Review.
- Phase Three: Reporting and Feedback.

2.6 Phase One - Project Planning

University of Wales, Lampeter welcomed the opportunity to work with a project steering group which acted as a consultative and advisory body to guide the research and with whom key actions and activities were planned and agreed. The Steering Group comprised representatives from:

- Bangor University.
- Cardiff University.
- Glamorgan University.
- North East Wales Institute, NEWI.
- UWIC.
- UW Lampeter.
- UW Newport.

The process of project planning and scoping the feasibility started by drawing up an initial sample of key documents and representatives drawn from organisations involved in work based learning. This was actioned through task analysis and project plan.

The research deliverable is a report outlining future business opportunities for workforce development activities for Welsh business and HEIs in Wales, with particular regard to management. It would appear that research questions (b) and (c) are relatively self-contained. Research questions (a) and (d) appeared to require more investigative work. However, desk research did not appear to offer an in depth probe into WBL practice in organisations and so interviews were held with twenty organisations that interact on training, skills and development issues with UWL.

2.7 Phase Two – Desk and Scoping Research

The researchers undertook a strategic review of the key policy documents which provide the strategic framework within services which are currently being delivered for the priority groups identified.

This included key documents such as:

- The Single Programming Document for the Economic Regeneration of West Wales and the Valleys.
- EU Convergence Programme for West Wales and the Valleys.
- Any Relevant baseline research.
- Details of other programmes in the region likely to impact.
- EU Competitiveness Funding.
- Wales a Vibrant Economy.
- Prosperity for all in the global economy- world class skills (Leitch).

- Sector Skills Reports for Wales.

A review of existing services was undertaken by desk research as part of this project to identify further organisations delivering relevant services. Interviews were carried out with key bodies, in a semi-structured way based on a questionnaire in Appendix A.

During interviews information was gathered relating to the following issues:

- Key criteria to describe the field of higher work based learning activity as it relates to the specific characteristics of the priority groups identified in the brief.
- Identification of key features that could form a potential „offer“ to clients.
- Identification of key bodies that might comprise the competitive environment for a new service.

2.8 Phase Three: Reporting and Feedback

This final phase comprised the following stages:

- Draft report
- Steering Group feedback.
- Final Report

University of Wales, Lampeter produced a draft report. A meeting with the steering group ensured that the findings of the report:

- Met the requirements of the brief.
- Provided meaningful data and evidenced conclusions.
- To develop workable recommendations in the light of the information gathered.
- To ensure agreement on the content of the final report.

The final report was produced prior to the final Steering Group meeting, and signed off by both parties as the final version at the meeting, subject to some minor changes.

3. The Economic Context

3.1 The Economic Context

The Wales economic context is regularly reviewed, for example under Welsh Assembly Government policies, consultations and plans (WAG, 2007). A key characteristic is that Wales has witnessed an unprecedented fall in the proportion of its jobs which are in manufacturing, construction and other production industries.

The position on loss of jobs in manufacturing is clearly seen from recent press announcements on job losses in west Wales. Almost 300 Corus steelworkers in Llanelli have been told their jobs are to be axed; leading to claims that Welsh manufacturing is in meltdown. The cuts at the Trostre works were claimed by company managers to be needed to safeguard the future of that arm of the business. The latest cuts will reduce the plant's 700-strong workforce to nearer 400. The news comes as a third major jobs blow to the area in recent months, after announcements that Avon Inflatables in Dafen was to close and at least 185 posts were to go at 3M in Gorseinon.

The response to job losses in manufacturing pointed to the need for solutions. These are often presented as a need for future and predicted workers to be retrained for new, high-skilled jobs. They also justify an investment in call centres and screwdriver assembly plants. Moreover, that the focus for Wales as a whole had to be re-focused onto creating a knowledge-based economy with value added as well as on entrepreneurs.

Bridgend has been held up as one of the economic success stories of south Wales in recent years. Independent research by analysts Business Strategies found that, in the 10 years up to 2001, Bridgend had the second fastest growing economy in Wales and ninth fastest in the UK in terms of jobs created. This growth had been based on a shift away from manual work. However, Bridgend is untypical of Welsh local authorities and the position of Ceredigion County Council is more directly relevant as a rural, relatively remote county that is the campus site for the researchers.

3.2 Economic influences on WBL.

Economic activity has risen in recent years, with a growing prominence on in-company workforce development. Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are a relatively new feature of the education and training landscape in Wales. They have been set up to lead the skills and productivity drive in industry or business sectors recognised by employers. (SSCs) bring together employers in their sectors, learning providers, trade unions and professional bodies to work with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop skills that businesses need. Each SSC agrees sector priorities and targets with its employers and partners to address five key goals to:

- identify and articulate their sector's skills needs;
- help develop more responsive provision to meet business needs;
- provide the business case for skills;
- engage employers in skills development;
- influence skills policy.

Each Sector Skills Council working in Wales is preparing agreements that include working with HE through a HEFCW arranged panel. The influence of SSCs on Work Based Learning and the findings for leadership and management is the subject of another report by Cardiff University (CU, 2008). This report estimated the current number of managers in Wales is put at around between 150,000. Research by SkillsActive shows there is a general lack of demand for development from managers, particularly among SME owner-managers. The report identified 1600 providers of management and leadership development and 10,000 different programmes or offerings. This equates to roughly one course for every 12 managers. It concluded that the volume and array of training on offer inevitably leads to confusion among managers. Organisations with more than 50 employees are more likely to use business schools and universities for management training and development. Research by WMC has identified that the mean training each manager receives is 6.5 days a year. This equates to an estimated 550,240 management training days in Wales, with a total spend of £138 million.

The Wales Management Council (WMC) believes that the quality of managers and leaders in Wales is a key driver for economic growth (WMC, 2006). The development of management and leadership skills in all sectors, and in businesses and organisations of all sizes, is in their view of critical strategic importance. The Cardiff report highlights that for future provision, with 80% of current employees will still be in the workforce in 10 years time there needs to be increased focus on upskilling them. From looking into the available research the likely future management and leadership skills will include:

- managing and using technology,
- leadership, entrepreneurship,
- use of time,
- having an open mind,
- partnership working,
- personal development and ability to manage change and uncertainty.

The other significant finding was that the current provision is supply-driven and that the future of management and leadership training does need to be more demand-led, flexible and appropriate.

There is, however, an existing provider base of public and private trainers and assessors for work based learning. This is particularly strong at lower levels and for certain sectors (health and social care), particularly where there is a legislative requirement. A development emphasis on higher learning for management, leadership and specialist skills in organisations appears to exist from evidence of company interviews. These high level skill requirements, however, are distributed relatively thinly across the geographical area.

3.3 The Ceredigion County and Wales Perspective

Ceredigion is a county in mid-west Wales, which is a unitary authority, Parliamentary and National Assembly constituency. According to the most recent statistics available, it has a population of around 78,300 (NOMIS, midyear population estimate for 2005), being one of the smaller local authorities in Wales, accounting for some 2.6% of the population of Wales. The Ceredigion economy has also been subject to major changes in recent years, experiencing the largest loss, in proportional terms, in manufacturing, construction and other production industries between 1998 and 2006.

The Ceredigion area's economy relies heavily on the service industry, especially tourism-related occupations, public service employment and skilled trade, as well as agriculture. The table below shows the proportion of Ceredigion employees by sector, in relation to the respective percentage figures for Wales and the UK Table 1. Ceredigion also has one of the highest proportions of self-employed people in Wales, significantly higher than the Wales and UK percentage figures. In all probability this reflects the significant proportion of farmers, agricultural workers and skilled tradesmen who are self-employed.

	Numbers	Ceredigion	Wales %	UK %
Manufacturing	1,400	5.4	14.2	11.1
Construction	1,000	4.0	4.7	4.6
Services	22,900	89.6	79.5	82.9
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	7,300	28.6	23.7	24.1
Transport & communications	700	2.8	4.5	6.0
Finance, IT, other business activities	2,400	9.5	13.1	20.7
Public admin, education, health	10,900	42.4	32.8	26.9
Other services	1,600	6.2	5.4	5.2
Tourism-related	3,500	13.5	8.4	8.1

(Source: NOMIS annual business inquiry employee analysis, 2005).

Table 1 Employee jobs by industry

Ceredigion has a level of accredited qualification significantly better than the averages for Wales and the UK, Table 1. However, the Future Skills Wales survey of employers (2003) noted some skills shortages in the mid-Wales area:

- Understanding customer needs
- Communication
- Ability to follow instructions
- Showing initiative
- Team working
- Adaptability/flexibility skills.

Employers felt that demand for the following skills would be larger over the coming years:

- IT skills
- Leadership skills
- Management skills
- Organising one's own learning and development
- Welsh language skills.

Qualification level	Numbers	Ceredigion %	Wales %	UK %
NVQ4 and above	14,000	28.3	24	26.5
NVQ3 and above	24,400	49.3	41.6	44.4
NVQ2 and above	35,200	71.1	62	62.9
NVQ1 and above	40,900	82.7	76.3	77.2
Other Qualifications	2,600	5.2	7.0	8.4
No Qualifications	5,900	12.0	16.6	14.3

Table 2. Geographical Distribution of qualification levels.

(Source: NOMIS annual population survey, Jan-Dec 2005).

3.4 Managing knowledge and innovation.

Knowledge creation and the deployment of new knowledge in the workplace have given rise to the workplace itself being recognised as a site of learning and knowledge production. This concept is an integral feature of the „knowledge economy” and the growing intellectual capital of businesses has the potential to erode universities as being the dominant force in knowledge creation. If HE is to continue to make a contribution to the knowledge economy, collaborative activities based in and around the workplace should be considered (Brennan, 2005).

Innovation is the key to growth, competitiveness and thus social well-being in the 21st century. Enterprises need to innovate in order to achieve competitive advantage and to survive in the new economy means that knowledge management has acquired significant importance and for certain companies, indispensable. Separating out innovation from management is artificial since it is implicitly tied into the business proposition of enterprises and the functional specialisations of management, such as knowledge management. However, there is significant public investment in the supply side in higher education that merits consideration of actual demand.

The scale of this investment stretches from European initiatives such as Innova and the European Institute of Technology (EIT), through to regional arrangements such as Cardiff innovation network and the network of Innovation Partnerships supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. EIT is a European initiative that sets out to integrate the three sides of the „Knowledge Triangle” - higher education, research, as well as business-innovation; and seeks to be a world-class innovation-orientated reference model. The EIT aims to generate new products, services and markets responding both to public demand and to the needs of the knowledge economy.

Europe INNOVA is an initiative for innovation professionals supported by the European Commission. The fundamental objective is to support the priority of Structuring the European Research Area. In acting as the focal point for innovation networking in Europe, Europe INNOVA adopts a sector-based approach and aspires to inform, assist, mobilise and network the key stakeholders in the field of entrepreneurial innovation, including enterprise managers, policy makers, cluster managers, investors and relevant associations.

Economists advocating policies to aid economic development highlight the importance of innovation and economic cluster development to success (Porter, 1984). Some industrial sectoral and technology fora are already well-established in Wales. A number of Wales based initiatives are aimed at capacity building in higher level skills and innovation, supported through the Knowledge Exploitation Fund of the

Welsh Assembly Government. The KEF initiative is intended to help transform education and research results into tangible commercial innovation opportunities for business, KEF will further bridge the innovation gap between Wales and the rest of the UK. WAG considers that marketing the importance of innovation is essential (WAG, 2002), but also equipping both management at all levels and the workforce with the change management and task-oriented skills they need to innovate in their particular business is equally important. This led to the Skills Action Plan and particularly the Action Agenda for Management Training being developed by the Wales Management Council. Key principles included managers in the private and public sectors self-assessing their needs, and making informed choices about the best, most appropriate training.

3.5 Work Based Learning in England

Workforce development – the accrediting, upskilling and reskilling of an organisation's employees is extensively carried out in England (HEA, 2006). HE provision at Level 4 and above encompasses includes Foundation Degrees, undergraduate programmes (part-time), taught and research postgraduate programmes (part-time), and short courses. Such provision forms part of higher education's well established initial, continuing professional development and work-based learning offer to employers. There are varied levels of emphasis and extent of provision, which in some instances are driven by the institutional mission, while in others it happens as a by-product. Surveys of the perceptions of work-based learning have show that it is still seen by some as belonging to more vocationally oriented institutions. The curriculum for WBL is predominantly derived from context of application of the learning (i.e. the workplace) as well as learners' current knowledge and experience. The pedagogy is also experiential in nature, centered on the application of learning in the workplace and evidence-based assessment of progress and achievement. This makes sure that the workplace is the primary site of learning.

Although HEIs are delivering in work-based learning, baselines are difficult to establish (HEA, 2006). Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS) for 2002-03 showed that HEIs attract almost £130m from non-credit bearing CPD activities - £13m from SMEs (10%), £72m from other (non-SME) commercial business (56%) and the remainder from the public sector. This figure is up 25% on the previous year but still represents a fraction of employers' total spend on developing staff. Data are extremely difficult for HEIs to gather in this area as income is distributed across different reporting codes. The figures above exclude income generated from Foundation Degrees, part-time undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Hence, the data do not reflect the true extent and breadth of the activity. For instance, students whose undergraduate studies are supported by their employer provide an indication of the core interaction between the HE sector and the economy. Such provision is an integral part of how HEIs support workforce development.

3.6 Work Based Learning in Wales

The benefits to business of having more productive workers suggest that there should be an incentive for employers in Wales to invest in skills. However, the importance of work-based learning, market failure and the prospect of high social returns provide the logic public sector intervention in skills development. WAG perceives a strong work-based learning system is important (WAG, 2006) for a number of reasons:

- Provides an opportunity for people to continue in learning while active in the labour market;

- It enhance the employability skills of participants;
- It addresses the formation of intermediate skills;
- Creates transferable skills useful for any future employer.

In support of these reasons, WAG supports a number of work-based learning initiatives that aim to:

- Provide a broad range of competence-based skills and knowledge to enhance employability and career progression;
- Enable participants not in employment to acquire skills and work experience;
- Help provide employers with a workforce with the skills and knowledge to compete in a global economy.

This response provides a range of non-higher work based learning routes in Wales. This emphasis on non-advanced level is also a feature of the WAG response to the Leitch review (WAG, 2008).

4. Evidence and Responses

4.1 Everyone does Work Based Learning: but what does it mean?

Everyone has a view on what work-based learning means and they use a wide range of terms interchangeably (e.g. workplace learning, work-related learning, or vocational learning). This confuses the situation and can undervalue the potential benefits of work-based learning as a mode of learning at a higher level. It is critically important to establish a shared understanding of the particular area of focus from both an institution's and employer's perspective, irrespective of the terms used.

Interviews were conducted with twenty four key employers and organisations. Every one undertook some form of work based learning. Identifying a commonly accepted interpretation of work based learning though was more difficult. There are a wide variation of interpretation that is elaborated below 4.3 to 4.10. Hence an important first step is in establishing a common terminology.

The reasons for undertaking WBL given by respondents are due to the rising expectations in organisations across all market, a reduced tolerance to accept poor performance and compliance with statutory requirements were given most frequently as reasons. Respondents gave particular requirements, but confirmed the cross-the-board need for management development and training that is highlighted in Sector Skill Councils.

No fixed curriculum appears to exist for Work Based Studies; the predominant knowledge source is within the client / candidate organisation itself or within similar organisations and not within the academy. Work Based Learning therefore involves radical change for a HE institution; it changes regulations, curriculum, reconfigures learning relationships and introduces new practices.

The above points highlight that there are a number of concerns for any Higher Education interfacing organisation. It needs to be:

- Responsive to client demands.
- Have an adaptive structure.
- Have an ability to regulate diverse demands.

Another requirement is key for the sector: differentiation between other forms of WBL organisations. Here the position of Further Education is crucial as it is providing HE and is seeking moves to acquire more higher level provision. The attractions of workbased higher learning are clear to managers in the sector.

4.2 Work Based Learning and FE in Wales

Organisations are heavily involved in WBL provided by FE and private providers. Sectors show some variation, but some have had very significant impact such as the Care Sector and this extends up to NVQ 4. The reasons for this are the statutory requirements and implications of non-compliance. Hence, could expect significant impact across most sectors, particularly at lower levels.

4.3 FE historical engagement with WBL

Reports came out on the employer engagement for FE in the mid eighties (De Vere) about the importance of the duality of traditional academic qualifications and work based practice. The position at the time was that work based practice needed to be recognised properly.

A strong incentive was the withholding of 25% of the budget of FE provision and the requirement for organisations to bid for this money (stemming from the 1984: Educational Support Grants and progressive developments). Then this pool was opened up to private providers creating a training market. Many of these providers are still competing. This competition between state and private does not really exist at HE level. However, the effect on FE management has been to make them hugely responsive to market opportunities and changes. They need to be in order to secure the funding to function as educational enterprises. For this reason, when national vocational qualifications arrived together with Work Based Learning, the agenda was grabbed with alacrity by FE. The practice is not entirely clear cut across all organisations that deliver NVQ as there is still a debate at the higher level on its applicability. However, balance has moved into acceptance and adoption of the scheme.

4.4 FE delivering WBL

There appears to be a fudge in FE delivery of WBL. All lecturers in FE are expected to be able to undertake work based NVQ assessment. They are expected to do it as part of their job along with lecturing. Someone appointed to FE would have to be trained to be an assessor, but there is already a system for doing this. The institution would then assess an assessor on the job. There are also dedicated assessors that have been through a core competence programme: ILT modules, for example. The easiest way to get into this area for a new entrant is hire someone who has the certification, in order to do the NVQ work based assessment.

4.5 Private Work Based Learning Providers

The existing WBL sector in Wales comprises of contractors who specialise in training for and in the workplace. Organisations tender every three years for a WBL contract from the Department of Children,

Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) of the Welsh Assembly Government and are allocated an individual contract value annually. For 2007-08 the WBL budget for Wales was £112m.

In west Wales £22m is allocated this year for WBL providers. There are 50 WBL providers in south Wales and 19 are based in west Wales. These providers are a mixture of private companies, local authority training units, specialist college departments, voluntary and not for profit organisations. They vary in size from small specialist providers (10 to 15 staff) who work within a defined sector and geographical area, to large scale national or international companies, who are multisector and cross region providers, who employ several hundred staff. WBL providers will also access other funding sources, i.e. Job Centre Plus funded training schemes, New Deal, ESF and employer or learner self funded training. WBL turnover also varies from £500K to £7M + per organisation. Some WBL providers will also sub-contract to other providers, who may not hold a direct contract but have expertise in a particular area. In these cases the contracted provider is responsible for ensuring the sub-contractor meets quality, health and safety and data and audit requirements.

It is difficult to estimate accurately the size of the private training sector. These organisations comprise individual trainers, small specialist training providers, or training departments within large companies. There is not one central source that these organisations contract with. They often sell short training courses directly to other businesses. They often, but not exclusively, operate in their own geographical region.

Learning opportunities delivered through work based learning programmes are for 16 years and over with no upper age limit. There is a growing demand for WBL amongst the 25 years + age group. All programmes are roll-on roll-off, although some providers who utilise college based provision are limited to operating programmes during the academic year. The following programmes are currently available:

Skill Build is for non employed learners to identify and address learning barriers, basic skill needs and provide learning opportunities to enable learners to better participate in the workforce and society at large. Learners are referred to providers via Careers Wales or Job Centre Plus. Learners will undertake job tasters and / or NVQ, Key Skills and softer skills development such as self-esteem, motivation, etc. In 2007-08 providers forecast 3123 starters on this programme in the south west area.

Pre-Apprenticeship Learning (PAL) is a new programme for 2007-2010 for employed learners to undertake Basic Skills development prior to entering framework programmes. In 2007-08 providers profiled 39 PAL starts in the south west Wales.

Foundation Modern Apprenticeship is an employment based learning programme at level 2. Learners follow a framework developed by the relevant Sector Skills Council which specifies the learning, including NVQ, Key Skills and technical certificates (where relevant). Learners can be employed, or trainee status (not employed). In 2007-08 providers profiled 3687 FMA starts in the south west region.

Modern Apprenticeship is intended for employed learners to level 3 and follows a framework developed by the relevant industry Sector Skills Council which specifies the learning, including NVQ, Key Skills and technical certificates (where relevant). In 2007-08 providers profiled for 1967 starts in the south west region.

MSD Modern Skills Diploma is for employed managers and aspiring managers. It provides opportunities for learners to improve their skills and knowledge at level 4. Learners working towards City & Guilds programmes are eligible for cap and gown ceremony. In 2007-08, 255 MSD starts were profiled for the south west.

For all programmes following an Initial Assessment to identify existing abilities and learning needs, tutors and assessors work in partnership with employers and learners to devise and provide Individual Learning Plans and programmes to meet learner needs. Tutors and assessors will visit the workplace to provide support during agreed times to meet learners' shift patterns. They will also complete 4 or 8 weekly progress reviews with the learner and their employer. Learners will also attend external training at the provider's premises or at a suitable local venue.

Providers may also offer learning ranging from Entry Level to Level 5 and short courses in many topics, such as Health and Safety, Management and sector specific topics. Some providers are beginning to be involved in 14-19 Pathways and Welsh Baccalaureate.

4.6 Key Challenges for private WBL providers

Other sectors and general public are often not aware of the depth and breadth of learning programmes amongst these providers. Incorrect public perception remains that work based learning is YTS style training schemes only, for lower ability people who have failed in the academic system. The challenge perceived by WBL providers is the need to develop parity of esteem for this sector and show that vocational pathways may be most suitable for some learners.

Effective employment can be an issue, especially for not employed status programmes where there are potential wage implications on not learners, who need lots of support and are not fully contributing to the workplace.

Implications for network post-Webb review and impending restructuring of skills learning linked to the Skills and Employment strategy, as is the case for all sectors. Involvement in 14-19 networks at early stages to support vocational development is also variable throughout the region.

4.7 Accrediting Bodies

There are lots of accrediting bodies: EdExcel, OCN, OCR, City and Guilds for example. Providers choose the one that is closest to what they want to do. However, they are all different, with different administration processes. After application, they visit and test the integrity of institutional systems.

4.8 A mature market with mature processes

FE is very heavily involved in work based learning. Breaking into this market for Higher Education will be difficult, especially for a provider not doing it already. The current consultation document „Skills for Wales“ (2008) perceives that FE will have an even greater role in skills development. A greater role for FE in third mission work is also a recommendation of the Webb review (2007)- suggesting a larger third mission fund with applications made from FE.

4.9 WBL at higher levels

Scale of activity at higher level is relatively modest. Remember though, this is not a big market. The lower level market is huge, driven by the expectations of external organisations. Health and Safety for example means that for a manufacturing firm this becomes a necessity.

A management pyramid exists. The market for skills at the top is much smaller than for lower tier skills. Indeed, it presents as a pretty steep pyramid. However, participation depends on the organisation. Those that take on the ideas of HRD with an accent on people in organisations take it up, yet others are reluctant.

4.10 What is the crucial element in take up?

Management in organisations need to have belief internally that there is value in investment in HRD, work-based learning and that it has an impact on productivity and profitability. Investment is an organisational decision. The key appears to be that the provider must demonstrate the benefits to the business. Whatever the proposition made by the provider, it must infer that it makes more money for the business.

4.11 The impact on innovation and management

The challenge for UK businesses is to compete on the basis of unique value. This will necessitate investments in new products, processes or services and in new ways of doing business. Measures to develop the enterprise skills and creativity of the workforce are likely to be a prerequisite. This has led to a drive on the supply side of work-based learning to maximise innovation, enterprise and creativity. The speed of technological change and market responses demand a continuous drive to innovate. HE has a key role to play in supporting businesses to innovate.

Innovation and management need to be separated as themes. Management is a generic occupation and has a well defined and commonly recognised skill set. Indeed all organisations identify a managerial role. Moreover, the skill requirements at different levels are well recognised through the work of the Institute of Management and Future Skills Wales. There is a sub-field of activity in management termed innovation management. Employers were questioned on work based activity and applications for innovation.

The findings on management training and development echoed previous research findings on areas for development: understanding customer needs, communication, team working, adaptability/flexibility skills and so on. Employers also appeared to have a wide range of providers available to call on. Getting more specific information on innovation management proved more problematic as this was seen as tied up with business processes rather than an explicit subject. Interviews with an EU Innova project in the UK included a small number of Welsh firms in its population and highlighted the difficulties of identifying and addressing individuals and businesses. This was reinforced in the difficulties in phone interview to get more detailed information about whether the organisation had used KEF services, or others. On this limited sample basis, contacting organisations, revealed little awareness of the provision available and organisations required very industry-specific support.

There is a wide range of training for high level skills in the areas of Science, Engineering, Technology and Innovation Management made available through the Welsh Assembly Government's Knowledge

Exploitation Fund (KEF) scheme. Indeed WAG has published a directory of the provision that it supports (WAG, 2007). As well as the Wales base HEIs offering learning support in innovation management there are a number of other major UK providers such as the Open University, Ashridge and Henley; with Liverpool University having an impact in North Wales. In addition to the KEF directory, a Web search reveals many other public and private providers. There is therefore, not an apparent shortage of high level skills training of different forms, for different industries. However, information on take up proved very much harder to obtain. Hence, it could be concluded that this area is essentially supply-driven.

Companies that did put an emphasis on innovation also were characterised by an emphasis on teamwork, autonomy of decision-making, full involvement in the whole business process, skills development, and reward for success. Innovation is expected in these enterprises to deliver company strategy and must be applied within a context of where the business wants to be. Management and workforce then work as a team to innovate to achieve shared business goals.

Innovation leadership was considered to be a combination of managing the status quo and external focus to understand the market and where it is going. The skill set is different from management. Leaders must think outside the box, challenge what currently exists, have the dynamism to succeed, and above all value people. Company culture is crucial to developing innovation with the goal of providing a competitive advantage. In an innovative firm all employees need to find their work fulfilling and rewarding, maximise the opportunities for capturing ideas and increase profitability. Innovative leaders and managers are open to critical information, are excellent communicators, have a sense of urgency, question the status-quo, know the customer intimately, practice „hands on“ management, know the power of a good idea, seek to learn, and share experience.

The following were identified as key business parameters:

- Leadership
- Strategy
- People
- Process
- Products/Services
- Customer Focus
- Profitability through Competitive Advantage

4.12 **General and specific activities for the centre on higher learning.**

Work based learning applications open the window for adopting new approaches to learning in the business or organisational environment. More choices become available to organisational and HRD managers on how to fulfil an HR development strategy, because firms find it hard to come up with the time for dedicated employee release and associated costs in a hectic business workplace. From the perspective of a business customer, there are a number of current options open: for example, seek support from existing HE WBL providers in England or negotiate with a current low level WBL provider. What general and specific activities for a centre on higher learning provided by Welsh HEIs could be offered that would be a benefit?

Although industrial centres provide a certain concentration of potential work based learning centres, small numbers of higher level learners might exist within an individual enterprise. In rural and semi-rural areas, the target population is even more scattered. Addressing a distributed and dispersed population of in-company work-based learners will be challenging for most Welsh HEIs. The reasons are the costs of prospecting and current in-company activity addressed by a range of existing providers: FE, industry and private sector. For a general Wales HE sector response, it would be best to harness the strengths of existing provision such as CPD across a wide span and draw it into a networked or virtual arrangement of HE providers. The UALL CPD network has proven very successful in England and a Welsh arm would be a rational extension. A clear brand and contact access information would be useful to channel enquiries. There are many general professional groups to which professional updating is a membership requirement, e.g. architects, lawyers, social workers etc and each of these groups would require some management development. There is also an explicit demand from all industry sectors for management skilling. However, there are clear competitive challenges in this approach.

Work Based Learning involves radical change for a HE institution; it changes regulations, curriculum, reconfigures learning relationships and introduces new practices. There is no fixed curriculum for Work Based Studies, the predominant knowledge source is within the client / candidate organisation itself or within similar organisations and not within the academy. This highlights that there are a number of concerns for any interfacing organisation. It needs to be:

- Responsive to client demands.
- Have an adaptive structure.
- Have an ability to regulate diverse demands.
- It needs to differentiate itself from other organisations.

Evidence suggests that work-based learning can be more resource-intensive than other modes of learning (HEA, 2006). Providing cost-effective work-based learning solutions will challenge HEIs wishing to expand their provision in this area and increase their respective market share. Meeting the costs of design and delivery through collaborative arrangements is one way of alleviating the costs of delivery.

A number of pedagogical approaches associated with work-based learning to be mainstreamed have been made by the HEA with a number of recommendations on the impact of research that are very relevant as recommendations to carry forward in Wales (HEA, 2006):

- Orchestrate more detailed research which unpacks the territory, captures what is going on now and addresses; issues of language, meaning and interpretation;
- Highlights practices which work and explores the nature and value of the work-based learning approach to institutions and practitioners
- Explores how new initiatives can be used to inform practice (e.g. how the use of National Occupational Standards alongside professional standards can shape the HE curriculum);
- Challenges our intuitive assumption that the pedagogical processes associated with work-based learning are widely applicable and present benefits to institutions beyond that of learning in the workplace alone;
- Identifies where the „discipline“ and approaches associated with workbased learning can be aligned in order to add value to the teaching and learning strategies of institutions;

- Illustrates how flexibility and responsiveness in work-based learning programmes are delivered in cost-effective ways;
- ensure that a strong research base provides the bedrock on which policy and practice are developed
- Co-financing presents itself as one option; however, different models of the relative contributions of students, employers and the state need to be worked through;
- Ensure appropriateness and rigour of assessment in everything that the sector does; approaches to assessment that work well need to be illuminated through further research;
- Share understanding and strengthen the „community of practice“ to better enable the adoption of good practice;
- Build a stronger understanding of the process of partnership (or collaboration) in learning and the nature.

4.13 Practices in workplace development at Aberystwyth University and Swansea University.

Aberystwyth University has apparently no explicit work based learning provision. However, operating a strategic partnership with Bangor University, it has applied to HEFCW Third Mission Fund collaborative funding to operate a Skills Academy addressing needs of Sector Skill Councils. Bangor has received significant Objective 1 ERDF and ESF for capital funding for a Management Centre that offers flexible management training and degrees.

The position of Swansea University is that there appear to be activities currently that implicitly and explicitly fit. A Masters in Business and Law is a modular programme aimed at key aspects of law and business, covering areas such as commercialising innovation, intellectual property, contract and e-commerce as well as traditional business disciplines. The programme was supported by KEF innovation. However, the programme presents as a flexible post-graduate programme rather than a bespoke work based learning programme.

There is also case activity in the Medical School as well as the JISC Regional Centre located at the University, which also supports work based learning. There are strategic developments between Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University and Trinity College that aim to create a virtual university in south-west Wales. Proposals coming from Swansea University under the Convergence to operate a HE partnership project are also directed at work based learning: for example in developing leadership and management skills in SME managers as well as a range of advanced professional learning activities in companies.

A regional learning partnership in west Wales is currently under consultation. All the FEIs in the area have agreed to put forward a Convergence proposal aimed at work based learning, from NVQ 2 to NVQ4 and above. This is an explicit move by FEIs to enter the higher work based learning market in Wales.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The organisations interviewed undertook some form of work based learning, although the interpretation of WBL commonly required teasing out as it meant different things to different respondents. The drivers for interest in WBL are rising expectations across all market, a reduced tolerance to accept poor performance and statutory requirements to an extent.

WBL is not a green-field site for exploitation by HE. There are private and public sector providers active in Wales and these are eying up NVQ5 level provision as an extension of their services.

Work Based Learning involves radical change for a HE institution; it changes regulations, curriculum, reconfigures learning relationships and introduces new practices. There is no fixed curriculum for Work Based Studies, the predominant knowledge source is within the client / candidate organisation itself or within similar organisations and not within the academy. The above points highlight that there are a number of concerns for any HE interfacing organisation. It needs to be:

- Responsive to client demands.
- Have an adaptive structure.
- Have an ability to regulate diverse demands.
- It needs to differentiate itself from other organisations.

Conclusion 1 *What is the potential future market and activity in workforce development and accreditation, with particular emphasis on higher learning in management that would contribute to Welsh Businesses?*

Economic activity has risen in recent years, with a growing prominence on in-company workforce development. There is, however, an existing provider base of public and private trainers and assessors for work based learning. This is particularly strong at lower levels and for certain sectors (health and social care) particularly where there is a legislative requirement. A development emphasis on higher learning for management, leadership and specialist skills in organisations appears to exist. These high level skill requirements, however, are distributed relatively thinly across the geographical area. There are numerous higher learning providers across Wales. It is also conceivable that an FEI delivering HE, could see the gap and bridge it with external validation. For a sector response, it would be best to harness the strengths of CPD across a wide span and draw it into a networked or virtual arrangement of HE providers.

Conclusion 2 *What general and specific activities for the centre on higher learning provided by Welsh HEIs in relation to the assessment and accreditation of prior and /or experiential learning could be offered?*

Addressing a distributed and dispersed population of in-company work-based learners will be challenging for most HEIs because the lower levels of WBL activity in company are addressed by a range of existing providers: FE, industry and private sector. For a general HE sector response, it would be best to harness the strengths of existing provision such as CPD across a wide span and draw it into a networked or virtual arrangement of HE providers.

Question 3 What practices are in place in this field of management capacity building and workplace development at University of Wales, Aberystwyth and University of Wales, Swansea?

Conclusion 3.

Aberystwyth University has apparently no explicit work based learning provision. However, operating a strategic partnership with Bangor University, it has applied to HEFCW Third Mission Fund collaborative funding to operate a Skills Academy addressing needs of Sector Skill Councils. Bangor has received significant Objective 1 ERDF and ESF for capital funding for a Management Centre that offers flexible management training and degrees.

Position with Swansea University is more complex. Activities under the KEF higher level training initiative have led to a Masters programme in Law and Innovation, with a modular structure and has the flexibility for it to be delivered through work based learning. This seems to cover relevant areas such as IP. The extent of take up though is not clear. There also appear to be activities currently that implicitly fit. For example case activity in the Medical School as well as the JISC Regional Centre located at the University, which also supports work based learning. There are strategic developments between Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University and Trinity College that aim to create a virtual university in south-west Wales. Proposals coming from Swansea University under the Convergence to operate a HE partnership project are also directed at work based learning: for example in developing leadership and management skills in SME managers as well as a range of advanced professional learning activities in companies.

A regional learning partnership in west Wales is currently under consultation. All the FEIs in the area have agreed to put forward a Convergence proposal aimed at work based learning, from NVQ 2 to NVQ4 and above. This is an explicit move by FEIs to enter the higher work based learning market in Wales.

Question 4 What, if any, facets exist that impact on innovation and management capacity building?

Conclusion 4

The move to a knowledge economy is one economic development response to the fall in jobs in manufacturing, construction and other production industries. Management capacity development need is wide spread. Innovation capacity proves much more difficult to assess. Both areas appear to be heavily supply driven. Wales has excellent higher education and research institutions. Significant investment has been made in various dimensions of high level skills training from HE providers in Wales, supported for example by the Knowledge Exploitation Fund. WAG also supports four regional innovation networks, drawing together agency support. However, the representation on these networks is weighted towards the public sector. Innovation is critical to the business proposition enterprises. In the case of large sized enterprises (LSEs) they are adopting open innovation models and have the capacity to drive this forward as it is aligned to the business proposition, however demand from small and medium sized representatives (SMEs) are often isolated from similar enterprises due to competitive rivalry in their sector of the business world and do not obtain together the critical mass necessary to express demand.

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Appendix A
**Business Opportunities for workforce development Welsh Business in
management capacity building.**

Data Questionnaires

**University of Wales, Lampeter are conducting research on the
opportunities for workforce development in Welsh Businesses.**

Questionnaire for Businesses

Name of Organisation?

Location of Organisation?

Business Sector?

Number of Employees?

Number of supervisors / managers?

What is the current position on Work Based Learning?

NVQ?

Higher level learning?

Subject field?

What is the potential future market and activity in workforce development and accreditation, with particular emphasis on higher learning in management that would contribute to Welsh Businesses?

What, if any, facets exist that impact on innovation and management capacity building?

DS7. Design and Validation of an FdA and MA in Applied Professional Practice.

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Cardiff School of Management

Project Co-ordinators: Dr Barrie Kennard, Peter Treadwell, Dr Tasheen Rafik and David Lloyd

Executive Summary

In an attempt to gauge demand and interest in achievement at Level 4 and above via work based learning meetings were held with a wide cross section of „involved parties“ across Wales. Several Sector Skills Councils were canvassed for their input as were SMEs and larger employers. There was considerable positive feedback from these meetings and the final format of both the Foundation Degree (FdA) and the Masters (MA) were submitted for validation via UWIC’s Cardiff School of Management. The design, whilst academically rigorous, recognises the non traditional learner demographic of the participants in the extensive use of learning contracts and negotiated assignments. These two methodologies allow learners to play a far greater part in the learning process and thus underline the andragogical ideology that is pivotal to both the FdA and MA.

Both degrees are innovative in design and delivery with an emphasis upon learner support that recognises the different needs of learners from non traditional backgrounds and who are carrying on in employment whilst completing these awards. Many organisations stated that there was a feeling amongst their workforce that if these awards were to be truly work based in their learning methodology then the delivery team involved should have a working knowledge of learning at work. To enable and support the learners engaged on the programme(s) careful consideration was given to the selection of the delivery team and allowance for ad hoc deliverers to be brought in as required.

Many of the organisations that were canvassed stated that generic degree programmes, although having worth and credibility amongst learners were not perceived in the same high regard by employers. By introducing additional modules that were specific to employment sectors the FdA could be regarded by employers and learners alike as having workplace credibility.

A copy of the fully validated FdA and MA in Applied Professional Practice documents was supplied to HEFCW in June 2009.

Report on research leading to an options appraisal and feasibility study for the establishment of an all-Wales Workforce Development Centre in Higher Education

Funded by HEFCW, commissioned by UWIC

Prepared by the Institute for Work Based Learning, Middlesex University

November 2008.

Introduction

This options appraisal and feasibility study has been conducted to inform the establishment of an all-Wales Workforce Development Centre. Key stakeholders identified for consultation included Universities with an interest in progressing workforce development, Sector Skills Councils, the Wales Management Council, the Confederation of British Industry, a cross section of Government agencies, and public and private sector organisations.

Methodology

The intention from the outset was to find ways forward to build on already established work and organizations. There was a reminder to be mindful of the geography of the regions of Wales, and the impact on communication and on the aspirations of people wanting to stay in their own localities. Value for money was also important. A key element of the approach related to the limited time available to undertake the study.

Overall timescale – 11 weeks:

Week 1 w/b 08 09. 08	Stage 1 Liaise with UWIC, confirmation of the scope of research; search strategies developed, research commenced
Week 2-5 w/b 15. 09. 08	Stage 2: semi-structured telephone interviews; preparation and distribution of questionnaires
Week 6-8 w/b 6. 10.08	Stage 3: Data analysis, formulation of concepts, usages/contextual variables, relationships, issues and implications
Week 9 w/b 20.10.08	Stage 4: Discussions with experts in the field on implications for related thematic work
Week 10-11 w/b 10.11.08	Stage 5: Final report produced:

Ethical considerations

The research process was carefully planned in advance, with due regard to the sensitivities of the respondents and care for the respondents and co-researchers. The purpose of the exercise was explained in advance to each respondent and each was offered the option of not participating. Due care was taken to ensure that respondents could change their answers and have control over the data they provided. Data was anonymised and confidentiality was built into the final report.

The five stages of the research:

Stage 1 *Confirming the scope of the research in relation to guidance given by the commissioners of the research and key stakeholders*

The scope of the initial data gathering stage was primarily to ascertain possibilities for higher level provision from HEIs for workforce development for people already in the workplace and was therefore focused on HEIs, academic readiness, obstacles and potential opportunities.

An exploratory meeting enabled the researchers to explore the wider context with commissioners of the research and to refer to other reports from Stage One of the overall project. The researchers subsequently devised the structure and themes of the interviews and questionnaires and submitted them to the commissioners for comment (see Appendix A). Key stakeholder groups were identified (HEIs, HE organisations, relevant Government bodies, employer agencies and individual businesses) and, in view of the tight schedule, the commissioners provided telephone numbers of key contacts. The „Who’s Who” in business in Wales was made available. Advice was given to the researchers on the way the regions are located and the industry is situated in relation to the universities in each region. The nature of the interviews and content of the questionnaires was also discussed. The seven themes in Appendix A were identified, based on issues drawn from other reports within Part One of the overall project.

The criteria for identifying and selecting key data were agreed within the team, drawing on their experiences of systematic research processes and in consultation with UWIC.

Stage 2: Data collection

Two methods were used to obtain data. The same script given in Appendix A was used for each.

1. Telephone interviewing. An independent researcher, who had not been involved with the respondents in any way in the past, arranged and conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews averaging 30 minutes in length with key stakeholders in higher education, public bodies and employer groups across Wales. To assist analysis the interviews were taped with respondents’ prior approval.

2. An email-based questionnaire was devised and distributed using a stratified sample, to 125 businesses and business organisations from a publication of Who's Who in Wales (Media Wales, 2008). The survey elicited a 25% response from a range of sizes of establishment.

These two methods provided a rich collection of data and descriptive statistical information and were appropriate for the scale and timeframe for the research.

Stage 3: Data analysis

All interviews were electronically recorded and notes were taken. An initial analysis was made drawing on qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaires. Salient issues were identified from the data which were then summarised within a framework that called upon the responses to the 7 broad questions that had been asked in the interviews and survey and also the general responses that were invited. (See appendix C and Appendix D for a graphical presentation of the survey questionnaire).

Stage 4 initial concept mapping

The research team drew upon the expertise of colleagues in the Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University to consider implications for policy and practice. A Focus Group, constituting WBL practitioners from The Institute discussed what were considered the main issues that arose from the data and provided suggestions as to how these issues could be evaluated. To draw on further expertise from colleagues, the anonymised evaluation was circulated for feed back to colleagues who have particular expertise in Work and Learning and an understanding of the broad structural issues involved in workforce development nationally, to inform the recommendations and options.

Stage 5 Final Report

An independent report using data from the interviews and questionnaires was produced. The report includes an options report map and clear guide to the obstacles and potential of the current situation in Wales.

Also included is a rationale for the need for employer engagement with the higher level learning of their employees, the perceived opportunities and barriers to an all-Wales workforce development centre and recommendations as to the potential of possible ways forward.

General view of proposal

Stakeholders supported the concept of an all-Wales Centre for Workforce Development in Higher Education as a positive endeavour which fitted with policy and practice. "*Great idea!*" was one enthusiastic response. From the interviews and the surveys there was agreement that the possibility of an all-Wales Centre for Workforce development in higher education would be positive, a good idea.

There was an emphasis on building on already established work and organizations. Value for money was also important.

Although some respondents highlighted the different meanings of the concept of workforce development and the need to clarify its definition, analysis of responses indicated that the understanding of the concept is generally aligned to the idea of making higher education more relevant and accessible to business and organisational needs through a genuine partnership and collaboration that takes as a starting point a recognition of the contexts of businesses and organisations and the core values, needs and expectations that guide and sustain their existence. This perception gave rise to different views about the outcomes of existing and past strategic engagements and projects between business and higher education. Despite this, many saw the idea as a new movement that should be informed by past and other experiences to build a viable centre where businesses and organisations in Wales can make maximum use of higher education to meet their workforce needs.

Views about potential functions of an all-Wales centre for workforce development

1 Observatory

The idea of establishing an Observatory to collate and disseminate expertise and research appropriate to the needs of Welsh work – place learners was met with positive responses and a keenness to share expertise. An observatory was not only to be the repository of information. The function of such a centre would be multifaceted to bring together information, provide an overview of services, and be useful for learners, businesses and higher education. One respondent stated:

“A coordinated approach collating and disseminating information on higher level workforce development would be beneficial to all stakeholders in both the education and the business sectors.”

The role of the centre as an observatory was seen as bringing activities on to the same page. *“It is long overdue; there is the need to capture all activities.”* Also on a positive note, it was felt that a central observatory, could provide an overview of services. *“It would be useful if the observatory also monitored WAG initiatives, funding and services.”* The suggestion for an All Wales Centre consistent with the current policy context was regarded as important and it was noted that the proposed Centre meets these policy directions. *“This is consistent with the Skills Council Strategy. It is a good idea.”* There was a need for the Centre to be user friendly, with people sharing through dissemination.

2 Collaboration and partnership

The centre as an engine to facilitate collaboration and partnership between higher education and business was also viewed positively. None of the respondents were against this idea and most of the respondents in the survey valued it as very good or excellent. As one respondent said, *“I am extremely enthusiastic about that...it is a good point and an innovative idea.”* Another stressed, *“Great idea...from a business perspective, collaborations work perfectly well, and that should be a way forward for business and higher education.”*

However, many respondents had the view that there should be clarification about the nature of partnership and collaboration such that there is equality in the partnership, in which the scheme functions independently as a whole rather than being driven by a few members in pursuance of their individual self-interest to the detriment of other members.

Partnerships were regarded by most respondents as worth trying despite awareness of the challenges these can present. An all-Wales Centre for Workforce Development in Higher Education was seen as a challenge but achievable. *“...the idea of a Centre for Wales is crucial in helping cross – referencing of materials and experience. Partnerships need to be sustainable and accessible. Very difficult to establish – but it should be tried.”* It was recognised that it can be a challenge to get the private sector involved.

3 Facilitating credit transfer and APEL, advice on quality assurance

Quality assurance and APEL, formal recognition of learning from life and work experience, was seen as having some value. It was seen as beneficial to support a lifelong learning agenda.

“This would be hugely valuable especially where SMEs are concerned – and smaller institutions and smaller companies. This would help transferability, and make it easier for industry to participate. It could free up the system. Experiential learning is very important in the work-place so this might give it more recognition”.

There was a view that if an all-Wales centre had a quality assurance role it could challenge conventional higher education protocols used to determine quality through the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which was seen as having an overall function over quality. However, HE quality descriptors are often seen as not consistent with quality perspectives of businesses and organisations, that emphasise measurable returns.

“This is a crucial point – we already have a flexible system but it needs to be managed to demonstrate how credits could be used to facilitate work-force progression to Foundation and higher qualifications and to provide new routes.”

4 Promotion of new opportunities to expand work-force involvement in higher education

The role of an all-Wales centre for workforce development in higher education in promoting new opportunities to expand work-force involvement in higher level learning was seen as crucial and a welcomed idea that holds the key to the essence and sustainability of any collaboration and partnership between business and higher education.

“This is another crucial activity, to inform people of what is available and how to get it. This will be easier if it can be shown there is money and other kinds of benefits available – to business and to higher education institutions.”

The promotion of new opportunities to expand work – force involvement in HE, was also seen as an important activity that could create a standard approach. Locality was stressed, in that it was seen as

important to create opportunities locally as people want to stay in their local areas. Commitment and involvement of all partners, developing effective models of communication and marketing and ensuring its neutrality such that they do not favour only particular groups would be a useful strategy to expand work-force involvement in higher education.

5 Facilitating the development of (learner managed and other) innovative work-based learning

Facilitating development of HE programmes appropriate to individual needs and for small businesses in Wales was seen to have good value. *“HE should respond to market demands.”* The nature of the programmes was also seen through a sectoral lens. *“If they are designed entirely from the perspective of SME end-users the value would be high. If they are designed and delivered from the perspective of “normal” HE programmes, the value could be low.”*

An all-Wales Centre could facilitate the development of (learner managed and other) innovative work – based learning programmes appropriate to the needs of the large number of dispersed SMEs. This was viewed very positively.

“Useful? Yes indeed! It would be particularly relevant to SMEs and the Third Sector (charities etc) in the context of bite sized and other learning models, bearing in mind their lack of training budgets for conventional opportunities. Learner managed work – based learning would offer greater flexibility for clients and employers but could possibly raise issues related to the contracts of university staff.”

Employers were described as being concerned with provision of delivery, timing and direct usefulness to needs. *“Yes; but do SMEs need programmes? They need just in time courses. It may be innovative from the academics point of view but at the end of the day programmes will be laborious and boring for business”.* And *“If a new model or various models that work are developed that will be welcomed.”*

Some of the respondents had a concern about how effective learning activities might be and given the geographic terrain of Wales, who would be able to access the learning.

6 A one-stop web service for stakeholders

Respondents were asked to consider the idea of a one-stop web service for institutions, businesses and clients (work-based learners). There was support that it could be useful linking higher education institutions, it could be a search engine facility and could be linked to all services. The cautionary note for this idea was that existing one stop shops didn't seem to be working. A web service was perceived as having some value but was questioned with reference to the existence of existing sites and services. Notes of warning referred to *“One stop shops don't have a good history.”* Some respondents also showed a clear opposition of the idea of an all-Wales centre providing a one-stop web service stating that there would be *“No added value. This does not need to be developed.”*

7 Staff development activities

The role of an all-Wales centre for workforce development in staff development activities was generally viewed as sound and feasible, *“We certainly need staff development to facilitate workforce development, especially in institutions that are not previously involved in such services.”*

There was also a stress for staff development in higher education to steer staff away from traditional views and practices that are not suitable for workforce development and particularly un-useful to businesses.

“Yes I think there will be a need for that particularly the development of flexible learning materials and content issues, delivery issues and assessment of such programme. I think it is a different arena to traditional teaching which is taking place in HE.”

Staff development activities for HEIs and businesses needed to be tied in with policies and developed with consideration of existing programmes. However some respondents viewed the staff development role of the centre as inconsistent in the sense that trainers are usually appointed based on their expertise and to spend funds to train this group is a waste of funds. For example a respondent stated: *“Are you saying train the trainers? Why were they hired in the first place?”* Another stated: *“Again, this is an explicit view of a deficit model that business may not need. Will this be staff development for HE and business?”*

Themes emerging from the data

- Perceptions of roles within partnerships:

An All Wales Centre, in considering promoting new opportunities to expand work force involvement in HE, was seen as being able to provide opportunities to share best practice. There were perceptions that there would be a need to be a cultural shift in HE. *“I suggest that this might involve a significant cultural change within the HE sector that may not be easy to achieve – but it would be a welcome development.”*

Recognition of the contribution by the business sector was related to the running and locating of a Centre. A Centre

“should be shaped by business, - help institutions shape, not be shaped by higher education institution perceptions.” “Housing the centre in higher education could reduce the value, business should be the host of collaborative partner (both should be involved).”

Higher education is challenged to be a centre for innovation and should come out with new ideas that will fix the dilemma of workforce development,

“I will prefer them coming out with some questions about the exact things they might be offering us, how they think they might be approaching it and what difference they can make and how they are going to crack, what benefits they can bring.”

- Building on existing practice:

Responses consistently emphasised the need to build on existing developments in Wales, for example the Welsh Assembly Government which had just granted funding for an Academy for Business programme, so the role of this initiative needs to be taken into account. Similar schemes were cited as being in operation and that information on these needs to be collected and located in a central bank.

Whilst views were positive, there was a note of caution. A majority were of the view that a brokerage service would be of some value and very useful. However one blunt comment reiterated the need to not duplicate services with the statement, *“Save the taxpayers money please – this is nonsense.”*

The need to avoid duplication and to build on what was already in place was a consistent thread running through the stakeholder responses. *“The strength is that we have never done this in Wales. I support the idea but we should not underestimate the fact that there are many similar agendas going on which may undermine this.”* Also noted, *“I would have concerns that yet another brokerage would confuse the market still more and add to the number of organisations that are offering to help businesses.”* And,

“This is a positive idea, if only to avoid inefficiencies in the system. It could help to support new initiatives. Its role should be seen as developmental, opening up new initiatives, rather than competing with other HEIs. It should supplement rather than replace existing activity.”

- Communication

Effective communication and transparency across partnership regardless of the size and geographical location of partners was seen as essential in guaranteeing the success and sustainability of an all-Wales centre for workforce development. *“Communication is an important domain. Making sure that there is transparency across all partners will be particularly important for success.”*

- Financial support for such a centre

Despite the generally positive view of the proposal, respondents were concerned about the resource demand of such an initiative and possible sources of funds to sustain it.

“Money support will be crucial. It is important to raise the awareness of what is available.”

- Independence of the centre

The running of such a Centre was considered with an emphasis on a need for equality and sharing. *“Would not be useful to be run by one particular institution” “Success can only be achieved if each institution is seen as an important broker of the partnership”*

Recommendations and Options

The UK is the fourth largest economy in the world, but its prosperity is constrained by its relatively poor skills base. The Leitch Review (2006) stressed that „If businesses are to be successful they need to compete, and to compete they need to have trained, skilled employees“. The report set a target of 40 percent of adults to be educated to level four or above by 2020 if the UK is to be economically competitive. The DfES estimated the workforce-development market in the UK in 2003/4 as worth £5 billion per annum. Higher education supplies a small fraction of the total training and education market (DfES estimates only £300 million was earned by higher education institutions in 2003/04). There is a need for a well defined higher education presence in workforce development and the results of the interviews and survey undertaken in the project reflect a readiness for universities and businesses in Wales to address such an opportunity to work together. It is therefore recommended that an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development in Higher Education should be established which:

- a) has a Management Committee consisting of comparable numbers of both Business and HE representatives drawn from all major regions, to oversee the operations of the Centre;
- b) acknowledges the importance of local knowledge and meeting the needs of particular organisations within their context avoiding duplication of effort;
- c) collates and disseminates research and information on higher level workforce development,

Note: the Higher Education Academy has instituted an information page about work-based learning (HEA, 2008) which might act as a starting point to collate and disseminate publications and other work-related information;

- d) builds on existing organisations and practice and develops new meaningful partnerships;
- e) is well networked, easy to access and maintains key information channels;
- f) adds value to experienced workers and this could be achieved through a university-led focus on managerial capability,

Note: The all-Wales Centre would need to be well networked, easy to access and maintain key information channels. An important role would be adding value to experienced workers and this could be achieved through a university-led focus on managerial capability. Experience and research (Nixon 2008) has shown that research and development skills that lead to impact in the workplace can be accomplished by undertaking university monitored and assessed, work-based projects. Baldwin and Henel (2003) found that the way organisations become innovative and knowledgeable is through two key means. One is their external networks, links and contacts and the other is the internal resource of their managers and other employees“ capability;

- g) explores possible adoption of procedures that focus on the developmental needs of individuals and work-places,

Note: drawing on research including that undertaken by the Council for Industry and Higher

Education (King, 2007) and for the DfES, (Wedgewood, 2007) which highlights that employers are seeking quality of provision, relevance to business needs and a delivery method suited to individuals and companies rather than the higher education provider. (See also Eraut and Hirsh 2008);

- h) seeks to improve communication between universities and employers ;
- i) facilitates the development of relevant programmes in universities that link into organisations“ staff development policies, individual aspirations and existing practice,

Note: The publication Key Note – based on a variety of published sources - estimates that growth of employment-related education and training in the UK will be restricted over the period of this plan to a modest 1% p.a. at best. However, there is also mounting evidence that, in a currently static or slow growth market for work-related learning, work-based provision using a successful model is likely to enable the UK HE sector to take a bigger share of that market by attracting employers¹⁴³.

In particular, changes in the character of in-house or in-company provision suggest that HEIs may be well placed to move into this area of the market through Work-based Learning (WBL) (see appendices D, E and F). Another example is how corporate provision of in-house learning through „corporate universities“ is changing in character through “...focusing on creating programs and processes to identify, get onboard and prepare specialized talent faster and more effectively [and becoming] ...more flexible and adaptable in how they provide technical and competency-based learning to their global workforces” (Maize and McCool, 2007);

- j) engenders a user friendly approach,
Note: this is likely to entail universities listening closely to the needs of employers and employees and adapting frameworks of provision accordingly. The all-Wales Centre can play a significant role in advising and negotiating with and between universities and businesses/ organisations. It is likely that universities will need to expand their offer to include shorter and more professionally and work-related courses;

- k) facilitates university staff development in work-based short courses and programmes appropriate for local organizations,

Note: There are no authoritative data on the provision of full award-bearing programmes by or in work based learning at Hons Degree level or above in the UK. The 2006 research by KSA commissioned by the Higher Education Academy suggests that the national picture is one of increasing interest in Work Based Learning but with only a few large players (student numbers 600 to 1100)

¹⁴³ Key Note Training: Market Report 2006 (London, 2006)
http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/362451/training_market_report_2006

Universities have the potential to combine accreditation of in-house training with negotiated work based learning routes to higher education qualifications. In the period January – June 2008 Middlesex University carried out focused discussions with 53 organizations, employers, support agencies, awarding bodies and sector skills councils included and the most common response to the discussions was that Work Based Learning is „the best kept secret“ in higher education. In short there is strong evidence that stimulating and informing the market will actually grow demand. Employers appear to respond well to the flexibility, utility and purposeful nature of a work based learning approach.

The all-Wales Centre could provide a unique centre where information could be held about the training and development of higher education staff in work-based learning and other workforce development activities;

- l) works with universities to help them create systems and processes that can sustain courses and other activities that support the workplace such as bite-sized and other accreditation and flexible learning systems;
- m) works with universities to help them meet the needs of mature professionals in part time higher education who will require a different kind of service to full time undergraduates who are recent school leavers;
- n) pursues further consultation in designing the content of the centre. The main themes for the questions might be;
 - a consideration of the types of HE/Employer development activities that could be provided
 - how identification of good practice can be disseminated
 - how universities wish to approach development activities for staff.

Authors: Carol Costley c.costley@mdx.ac.uk John Stephenson and Abdulai Abukari

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Discussions so far have suggested an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development in Higher Education should provide the services listed below. For EACH OF THESE, please indicate your view of its value (None, Some, Good, Excellent)

1) Collect information on opportunities, current practice and key players from the whole of Wales and make that information freely available to anyone in higher education and the wider business community

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 1 if you wish.

2) Provide a brokerage service to facilitate collaboration and partnerships between higher education institutions and business

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 2 if you wish.

3) Establish ways of giving formal recognition for learning from life and work experience comparable in level with campus-based learning

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 3 if you wish.

4) Actively promote new opportunities to expand work-force involvement in HE

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 4 if you wish.

5) Facilitate the development of HE programmes appropriate to the needs of individuals and the large number of small businesses in Wales.

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 5 if you wish.

6) Provide a one-stop comprehensive Web service with links to HE providers, business agencies and useful information, plus opportunities for users to develop their own networks, communities of practice and specialist interests.

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 6 if you wish.

7) Provide Staff development activities to enable more higher education personnel to be effective in supporting work-force development.

No value

Some Value

Good value

Excellent Value

Please use the space below to add any comment about question 7 if you wish.

8) How do you rate the proposal as a whole? Use the scale **1 - 5** (less useful - very useful).

What else, if anything, do you think should be added to the above list?

9) Please indicate the approximate number of employees in your business (survey question only).

Less than 10 employees

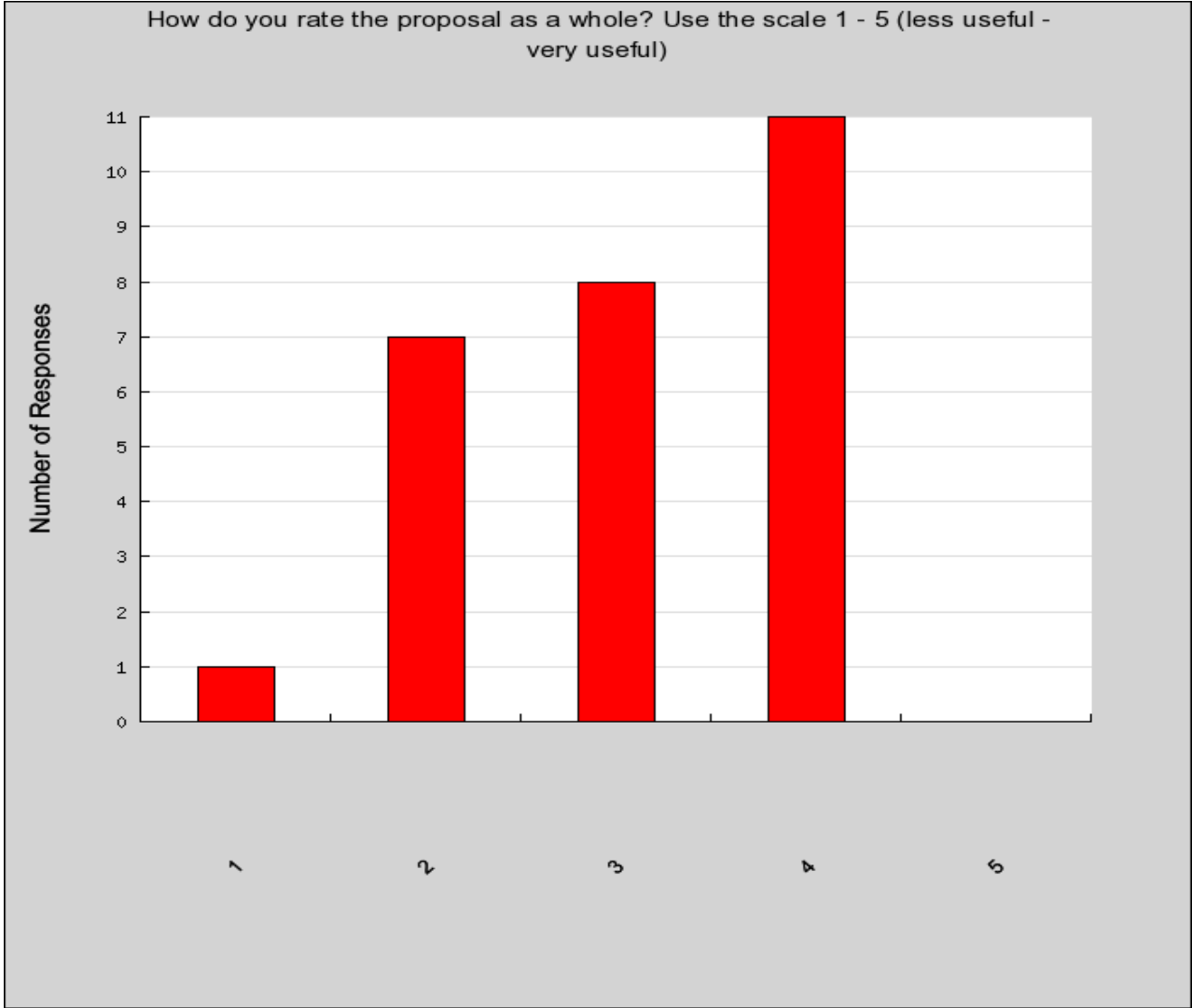
10 - 50 employees

51 - 100 employees

101 - 250 employees

Over 250 employess

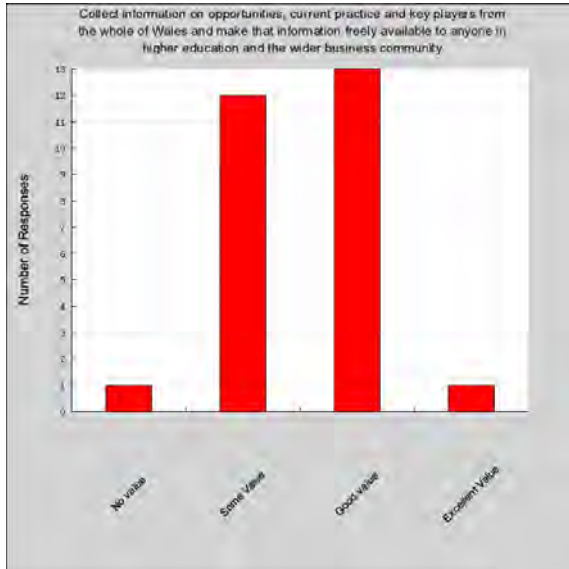
Appendix B



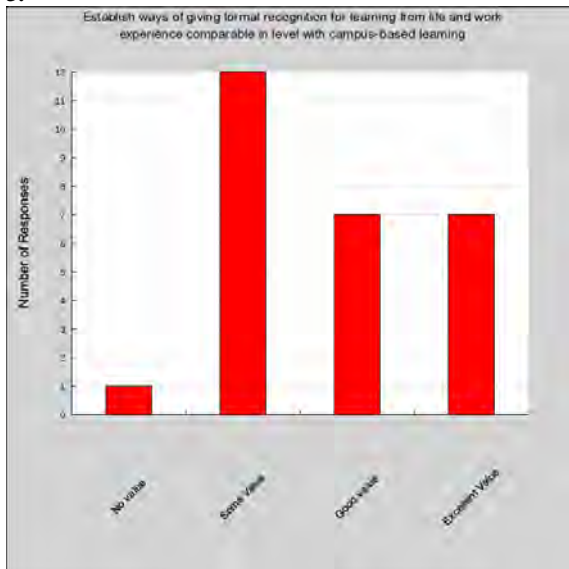
Appendix C

7 graphs that relate to the 7 broad questions asked in the survey.

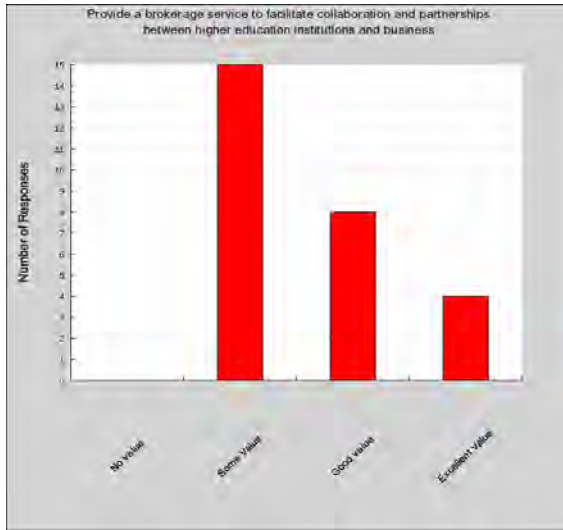
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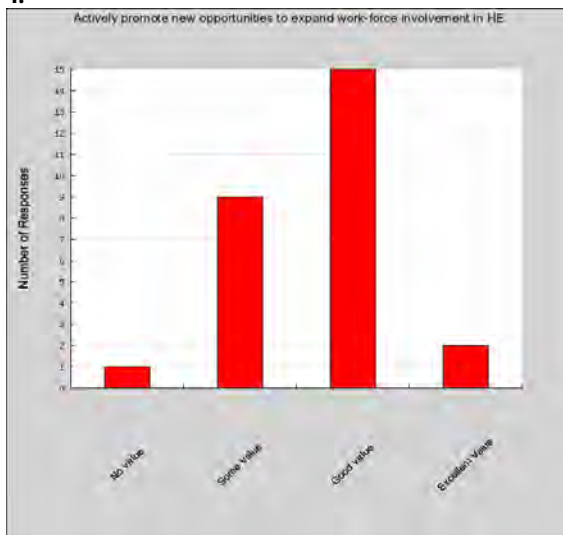
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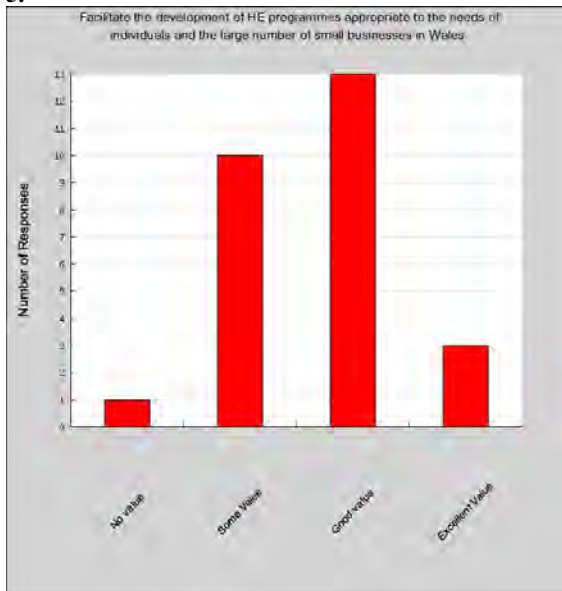
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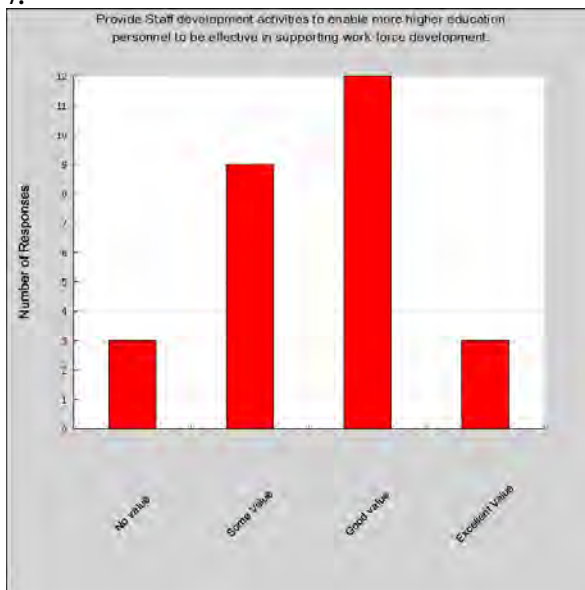
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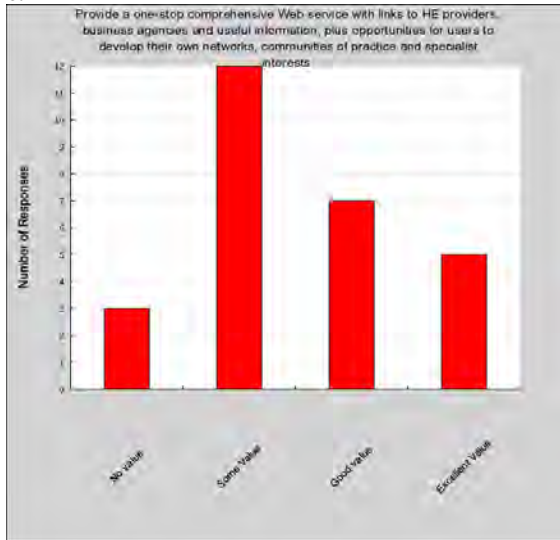
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6.



Three Case Studies

Appendix D

APEL within the Chartered Teacher Programme and the University

In 2001 the new grade of Chartered Teacher was introduced in Scotland through agreement between teachers, local authorities and the Scottish Executive. Chartered Teacher programmes validated by Higher Education Institutions and accredited by the General Teaching Council Scotland began to be delivered in August 2003.

To achieve Chartered Teacher status, a teacher can follow either the Programme Route or the Accreditation Route. Both routes require a teacher to complete Module One (Self Evaluation) successfully before continuing. The Programme Route involves the completion of a twelve module Masters Degree followed by the award of Chartered Teacher status by The General Teaching Council Scotland. A teacher following the Programme Route may claim accreditation for prior learning for up to the equivalent of six modules. A teacher following the Accreditation Route will complete Module One and then make a claim to the General Teaching Council Scotland. The claim will consist of a portfolio and commentary showing how the teacher has achieved and maintained the Standard for Chartered Teacher.

Teachers will make claims based on both prior formal learning and prior experiential learning. Both types of claim must contain evidence that learning has taken place which allows the teacher to claim Chartered Teacher competences. Claims must be equivalent to level 11 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (Masters or SVQ 5); show evidence of professional action, knowledge and understanding and show time and effort spent.

The University of Strathclyde is offering support to teachers wishing to make claims for university level learning. Teachers who are considering registering on the Chartered Teacher Programme can attend a three hour workshop on how to maintain a CPD Portfolio which introduces them to the concept of keeping evidence of experiential learning for future claims. Once teachers have completed Module One, they are invited to attend a one day workshop on making an accreditation claim. This second workshop gives teachers practice in reflecting on past experience and relating these to recent practice and to the Chartered Teacher competences. Workshop presenters use case studies, discussion and focussed exercises to guide participants through the process.

Case study by Isobel Calder, Professional Development Unit, University of Strathclyde.

Appendix E

A University Work Based Learning approach in Healthcare

Jane is a health visitor working as part of a team in an inner city Primary Health Care Trust which has a population which under all indices is acknowledged to be deprived. The Primary Care Trust decided to commission educational awards via work based learning for a cohort of staff. The project was a joint venture between the University and the Trust. A cohort of 22 staff were selected from nurses, health visitors and managers across the Trust.

The first stage of the award programme was to develop a portfolio of learning which could be presented for academic recognition and the award of academic credit. This caused much consternation in the group who had no experience of learning in this manner, on the contrary their experience led them to believe that knowledge and the consequent right to practice was something that was externally conferred by experts. Confidence and assertion that knowledge could be derived from reflection and analysis of their own practice was extremely challenging.

With support from group and individual advice Jane developed an area of learning focusing on refugee health. Reflecting upon her experience Jane described and analysed how many refugee families not only found it hard to survive economically in a new environment but to understand and adapt to the differing expectations of child care and upbringing that they encountered in the UK. Her area of learning explained how healthcare, illness prevention, food, behaviour, punishment all presented problems of understanding and internalisation which not infrequently led to confrontations with authority leading to more misunderstandings. Jane elaborated upon how she had adapted her practice by drawing upon her own experience of loss of status, loss of family and friends and bewilderment as a refugee to understand family needs and to open up communication between herself as a health care professional and her clients.

Jane developed this area of learning, relating her knowledge and skills to the Higher Education level 6 (Degree level) criteria used in work based learning at Middlesex. The work was assessed and sampled by an external examiner leading to the award of credit at level 6. The group of fellow workers, including her line manager, was astounded as they knew nothing of her background nor the skills that she had developed in tackling what was for them all a very real issue. Jane became a resource for helping colleagues to enhance their skills and for exploring ways of improving the service. She reported that the public recognition through academic credit and the connection that drawing up the claim had fostered with her manager and peers had served to enhance both her confidence and motivation. Jane went on to gain a first class honours degree.

Case study by Katherine Rounce, School of Health and Social Science, Middlesex University.

Appendix F

A University and a Construction Company partnership

This case study examines the development of a work based learning partnership between Middlesex University and Bovis Construction from 1994 to 1999. The partnership programme was made possible by the accreditation policy and procedures of the University.

Bovis originally approached the University seeking accreditation for their Management Development Programme. They particularly did not want changes to be made to bring it into close alignment with existing University management courses if accreditation was to be achieved. Bovis were reluctant to change a programme which clearly met their business needs. Universities are often reluctant to fit into companies' needs but because of changes to Middlesex university's systems, an approach to accreditation was not restricted to close matching of existing programmes as University regulations also allowed assessment against generic higher education level descriptors for the award of „general academic credit“. Following this approach the university was able to accredit the Management Development Programme as carrying twenty academic credit points at postgraduate level.

In further discussions about the possibility of building upon the accredited Management Development Programme to develop a work based learning postgraduate scheme for Bovis managers the Bovis Core Competencies were identified as a key source of organizational learning which Bovis wished to be incorporated into the programme. The Bovis Core Competencies were a set of behavioural indicators which were common to all staff within the organization, they were part of the performance management process and underpinned all learning and development activity at Bovis. The knowledge and skills required to exhibit competent performance in the Bovis Competency areas were identified and developed into an accreditation proposal by the University Accreditation Manager and the Bovis Training Manager. An example of how the Bovis competency "Teamwork" was developed for accreditation is given below.

Table 1: Elements of the Bovis "Teamwork" Core Competency.

TEAMWORK
1.Demonstrating understanding of team roles and commitment to team decisions.
2.Manage group processes by taking account of individual and group behaviours.
3.Contribute fully as a team member, resolving conflicts, building appropriate alliances and networks and helping others to do so.
4.Keep the team fully informed about developments and encourage awareness of the competitive environment.
5.Treat colleagues as customers.

Each of the five elements of teamwork were analysed to identify the knowledge and skills required in order to perform it. This resulted in an expanded version of each element. An example of the expanded element 3 of "teamworking" is given below.

Table 2: Expansion of Bovis Teamwork Core Competency element 3.

Teamwork . 3 Contribute fully as a team member, resolving conflicts, building appropriate alliances and networks and helping others to do so.
3.1 Understanding of the causes of conflict.
3.2 Ability to resolve conflicts
3.3 Understanding of what constitutes an appropriate alliance, network.
3.4 Understanding of what constitutes building appropriate alliances and networks.
3.5 Ability to help others to build appropriate alliances and networks.

This accreditation of the Bovis competency framework was a significant development for Bovis and for the University. The significance for Bovis was that it had a substantial stock of University accredited learning which could be used alongside the accredited Management Development Programme as part of a customised postgraduate work based learning scheme. The high level of customisation was achieved by the use of accreditation to enable the scheme to draw upon the structural capital not only of the University but also of Bovis. A work based learning project report by Comerford (1998) demonstrated that participants in the scheme had a much greater understanding of the core competencies than other employees. Participants in the postgraduate scheme were required to demonstrate their understanding of the competencies and how they related to their work roles.

The development and accreditation of a competency framework was a significant development for the University as for the first time it explicitly linked corporate capability with academic accreditation. By determining credit values for specified areas of learning based upon the Bovis competencies the assessment process of individual learning from experience was given greater structure and uniformity as the assessor no longer had to come to individual judgements about the volume of credit awarded. The assessment focused on satisfactory coverage of all the elements for the competency claimed and a judgement of the level of learning achievement demonstrated, measured against the University generic work based learning level descriptors. The accreditation formed the platform for individually negotiated development programmes which culminated in major work based projects of direct relevance and potential value to Bovis.

Case study by Jonathan Garnett, Middlesex University. (For a full account see Garnett J, Comerford, A. and Webb, N. (2001), *Working with Partners to promote Intellectual Capital*, in Boud D and Solomon N (Eds) *Work-Based Learning: A new Higher Education*, Buckingham, SRHE and OU Press.)

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Strategic Development of High Level Learning for the Workforce In Wales

