

<p><b>Institution: University of Chester</b></p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management Studies</b></p>
<p><b>Title of case study: Work Based Learning</b></p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Practitioner research into Work Based Learning (WBL)* undertaken at Chester since 1993 has seen the University established as a national leader in this field of study and the impact has affected both the private and public sectors. During 2008-2013 practitioner research at Chester has underpinned consultancy and developmental work. This has resulted in significant impact on workforce development including transforming policy and efficiency within a large Government department, a NHS Hospital Trust and with businesses in the private sector.</p> <p>*(WBL defined in this context as fully accredited, negotiated, modules or programmes of planned learning through work delivered by HE providers)</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Prior to 1993, little research had been undertaken by universities regarding the potential of WBL as a form of personal and professional development for part-time learners in employment. During the period 1994-1998 research undertaken by Chester resulted in the development of a flexible framework for the award of academic credit on programmes of negotiated WBL (titled Work Based &amp; Integrative Studies, WBIS). The driver for this research was the appetite among professional people for bespoke programmes of learning for the purposes of professional development with flexible delivery.</p> <p>Taking into account both employer and employee needs, research was undertaken into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Design of flexible accreditation frameworks</li> <li>• The award of credit for prior learning</li> <li>• The distinctive nature of facilitating learning</li> <li>• Negotiated learning contracts</li> <li>• Design and development of fit-for-purpose assessment strategies</li> <li>• Work as the curriculum and Workplace as a site of learning</li> <li>• The development of critical reflection as a higher order cognitive skill.</li> </ul> <p>This research led to the design of a unique set of graduate programmes within an over-arching framework. The Work Based &amp; Integrative Studies framework was validated by the University of Chester in 1998.</p> <p>In 2000/01 as a result of successful tendering for both HERoBaC funding and HEIF 1, the University established the Centre for Work Related Studies (CWRS) to coordinate a growing number of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing research into WBL through practitioner enquiry</li> <li>• Undergraduate and postgraduate WBL for those in full-time employment</li> <li>• Design and delivery of Graduate Apprenticeships (Director of CWRS appointed by DfES to National Committee advising Government on GAs)</li> <li>• Design and delivery of a training programme for graduates entering the Hi-Tech industry (funded by the NWDA)</li> </ul>

Practitioner enquiry undertaken by CWRS (during 2000-2007, as a result of continued HEIF support) enabled the Centre to operate from a soundly built platform. During the period 2008-2013 it expanded significantly. This included developing the skills and techniques of partnership working with employers through action research and collaborative experiential enquiry. It also developed techniques for capturing the tacit knowledge of the workplace, re-packaging it in the form of knowledge resources to support learning. The Higher Education Academy recognised the expertise of Chester's specialist WBL staff in 2007 inviting them to lead a national expert advisory group on issues pertaining to WBL. This led to the publication of a number of papers for the HE sector advising on WBL and Employer Engagement issues and outlining a blueprint for the future.

1993-2000 saw few universities engaging seriously in WBL. There were no established models to consult. The knowledge revolution assisted arguments for the justification of WBL as a significant model and for its full admission into the HE curriculum. Thus, the university entered the workplace and engaged in initiatives such as increasing and widening participation in HE, and the Lifelong Learning movement. In sharing its intellectual capital, Chester has been at the vanguard of contribution to the growth and development of WBL across the HE sector and helped to make subsequent HE qualifications (e.g. Foundation Degrees and Professional Doctorates) viable developments.

Key participant researchers in this case study are **Talbot** (Senior lecturer, University of Chester, September 2004 - present) and **Major** (Dean and Special Projects Director, University of Chester employed since April 1981 - present).

### 3. References to the research

Work Based Learning for Academic Credit : A Dissemination Document. This work was produced under contract with the Department of Employment after Chester submitted the winning tender, competing against 6 other Universities Crown copyright 1993. Published by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. ISBN 1 870529 15 4

Major, D. (2002). A More Holistic Form of Higher Education: the Real Potential of Work Based Learning. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 4(3), 26-34.

Major, D. (2005). Learning Through Work Based Learning. In P. Hartley, A. Woods, M. Pill (Eds), *Enhancing Teaching in Higher Education: New Approaches for Improving Student Learning* (pp16-25). London, UK: Routledge.

Brodie, P. & Irving, K. (2007). Assessment in Work Based Learning: Investigating a Pedagogical Approach to Enhance Student Learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 32(1), 11-19.

Talbot, J. (2009). Workers researching the workplace using a work based learning framework: developing a research agenda for the development of improved supervisory practice. *Journal of Applied Research in Workplace E-learning* 1(1), 169-182.

Talbot, J. (2010). Changing power relations in work based learning: collaborative and contested relations between tutors, learners and employers. In S. Jackson (Ed) *Innovations in Lifelong Learning* (pp 187-208). London, UK: Routledge.

### 4. Details of the impact

The period 2008-2013 has seen a growth of activity in CWRS and the expansion of the WBIS programme. This has resulted directly from the earlier research work (detailed in section 2) which laid the foundations for such development. The number of learners undertaking negotiated WBL

through the WBIS programme across the University has grown to circa 1500 (2013). WBL not only has a significant impact on personal and professional development but the work-learning combination brings about significant and positive change within businesses. Building on the experience of WBIS, CWRS designed and validated (2009), a Doctor of Professional Studies award and is now working with professionals who are using this route of academic study to undertake major projects in the workplace that will have significant impact on the businesses and organisations in which they work.

The following four examples illustrate the impact CWRS and the WBIS framework have had in the period 2008-2013.

1. Department of Work & Pensions (DWP), Pensions, Disability & Carers Service (PDCS). CWRS was awarded a contract in 2005 (renewed in 2008) to work with the PDCS of the DWP to provide consultancy and to work with PDCS trainers to design, develop and deliver a new programme of staff development aiming to raise the quality of decision making of client claims. This large scale project (1400 Decision Makers) resulted in better and more informed decisions being made. This improved organisational performance, and brought about a professionalization of the role. This intervention changed the way decisions are made through the adoption of new processes and a programme of education focusing on critical thinking and critical reflection. The work of CWRS at the DWP attracted the interest of HEFCE who requested a publication (HEFCE funded) outlining the scope and progress of the project. In turn, the project leader at DWP gave a key-note lecture at the annual UVAC conference. This contract ended in 2012. Evidence from a senior manager in the DWP (see section 5) speaks of “improvements in quality of decisions and the beneficial impact on both staff and claimants”
2. Wirral University Hospital at Arrowe Park. CWRS has provided non-medical education through the WBIS programme at Arrowe Park throughout 2008-2013. Professional development through WBL engages managers, administrators, nurses, midwives and doctors with each on an individually negotiated study pathway with many opting to take modules designed in partnership with the employer to address specific business needs. Engagement with WBL impacts positively in personal and professional contexts and enables the hospital to introduce courses to help with the management of change and to bring about improvements to service delivery while enhancing its standing as a learning organisation.
3. The introduction of a Post Graduate Certificate in Work Based Learning Facilitation (PGCWBLF, 2008). The programme deals with theoretical and practical issues concerning WBL including a module on the specific skills involved in learning facilitation. This is a dual-accredited programme offering also Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. While the impact is directly on the development of the capabilities of the FE lecturers, in-house company trainers and independent consultants who work with the CWRS, indirectly the impact is much greater in terms of the dozens of businesses and many hundreds of individual employees they work with. In 2011 the programme was opened up to academic staff from other universities to share expertise and to build the WBL capacity of the HE sector generally. Three UK universities have registered members of their academic staff on the programme and currently CWRS is in negotiations with two European universities who wish to develop WBL provision. Significant impact on staff, students and professional practice have been reported (as evidenced in section 5, letter from University of Greenwich) in terms of “great influence on the University” and “leading to the development of our own post graduate programmes” using Chester as a model.
4. The Forum of Mobility Centres began working in collaboration with CWRS in 2011 to develop a programme of WBL to address the educational and professional development needs of its staff which represent a wide diversity of professional backgrounds. Students have not only enhanced their professional skills and knowledge, but have also begun a process of critical review of current professional practice across the mobility sector. Through

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this process of knowledge development and critical review, there is emergence of improving professional practice and a stronger recognition of, and reliance upon, practitioner research and evidenced based practices that will facilitate higher levels of service provision. The impact on the organization has been reported as “a significant change of organisational culture” and “an emerging expectation and ambition of practitioners to develop enhanced workplace practices through research focussed professional development”. (See section 5 corroborative letter from The Forum of Mobility Centres).

As a result of the growing reputation of CWRS further significant business opportunities involving hundreds of learners are opening up including a number at international level.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

Perrin, D., Brodie, P., Thompson, P., Weston, P. (2010). *Facilitating Employer Engagement Through Negotiated Work Based Learning: A Case Study*, Gloucester/Chester, Higher Education Funding Council for England

Major, D., Meakin, D. & Perrin, D. (2011). Building the Capacity of Higher Education to Deliver Programmes of Work Based Learning in *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, Vol. 2; Bolton, UVAC.

The following organizations have provided statements to corroborate the claims made in the case study:

- The Department for Work & Pensions, Pensions, Disability & Carers Service
- The University of Greenwich
- The University of Northampton
- Wirral University Hospital
- The Forum of Mobility Centres