



University of
Chester

**VPL – The experience of the University of
Chester in the United Kingdom**

UK Context

- Universities highly autonomous
- No legal framework for validation
- Almost all universities have regulations which permit validation to varying degrees
- No data collected but practice sparse-concentrated in Work Based Learning centres and Nursing. Not even much credit transfer.

UK practice

Currently no agency to spread practice
(previously Learning from Experience Trust,
based upon US CAEL)

Successive surveys have highlighted lack of
knowledge that validation is possible (students
and tutors)

Lack of political interest, despite calls for
'flexibility'

University of Chester context

- Approx 15000 FTE students
- Conventional mix of science and humanities studies, teaching and research.
- Mostly full time undergrads
- Regulations permit up to two thirds of a named award for past learning. Learning at Level 6 Bachelor award must be new learning

Work Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS)

- Since 98. Belongs to whole university but delivered by CWRS.
- Whole programme Learning by Contract
- Specifically designed for working adults
- Award, title and curriculum ('Pathway') wholly negotiable with learner(s)
- Must relate to work and there must be sufficient underpinning knowledge in uni.

Pedagogy

- Programme recognises value of practice knowledge and hence site of learning in the workplace
- Aims to enhance, deepen and extend practice knowledge by active reflective learning, informed by wider, authoritative reading
- Integrated into EQF in terms of learning levels, Learning Outcomes, Credit volume etc.

Preparing students

- First module is usually ‘Self Review and Negotiation of Learning’ (10 credits ECTS)
- Four elements- Learning CV, Learning in current job, Learning Pathway Rationale and exercise in reflective learning
- Designed to sensitise students to ‘learning’ as an active, continuous process
- Where claims for past learning are identified

Designing a WBIS Pathway

- Title must reflect experience and learning
- Pathway can include past formal, informal and non-formal learning
- Can also include current experiential, trans-disciplinary learning (ie workplace projects)
- As well as conventional subject modules- usually ones we have created but can be any university module

Integrating past learning

- Must be consistent with the award title
- Accreditation of Past Certificated Learning (APCL) is automatic provided it is consistent with the award title, authenticated (NARIC) and current (ie within last five years)- free
- If it is older we require a reflective essay up to half the normal word tariff either updating the knowledge or demonstrating application

Past Informal and Non formal learning

- Accreditation of Past Experiential Learning (APEL)- half fees
- Student provides evidence for the basis of the claim (Certificate, testimonial, letter of appointment etc)
- Writes a reflective review, up to half normal word tariff. Assessed on a Pass/Fail basis.

Assessing past learning

Review describes the experience, analyses the experience and then concludes by looking forward for future application

The analysis will include subject specific literature but will also consider matters such as specific skills, competences, how effective the learning has been, the degree of skill attainment etc

Obeys standard academic conventions, fully referenced.

An example, Title and Level 4.

Student has several years experience as a lab technician but no credit beyond Level 3.

Negotiates title of “BSc Professional Laboratory Management (WBIS)”

Level 4 studies consist of Self Review module (10 credits ECTS) and claim for past learning based upon 11 years experience- Non- formal (courses) and Informal (lab routines etc) (50 credits ECTS)

Level 5

- 10 credit claim (APEL) focussing on lab Health and Safety issues
- 10 credit claims (APEL) each for Saylor Units Introduction to Chemistry CHEM101, Introduction to Molecular and Cellular Biology B10101, Microbiology B10307
- 10 credits each for completion of modules we created Managing and Leading People and Practical Marketing Communication

Level 6

- Current experiential learning (10 credits) on supervising learners in lab routines and practices
- Current experiential learning (10 credits) planning and leading a TV feature on the lab
- Designing a workplace project – 10 credits
- Completing the project (testing the effect of a sports product) – 30 credits

Lessons

Professional/ practice knowledge is different from academic/subject knowledge so that conventional curriculums, designed by tutors within a subject discipline framework cannot readily capture what practitioners know.

The learner is expected to adapt to the educator not the other way round.

Enhancing practice knowledge

Where educators do attempt something different they are largely engaged in the capture of professional knowledge (Credit exchange)

This presents practical difficulties with Learning Outcomes, Learning Levels, transparency etc

The real objective should be to deepen professional learning

Finally: two issues

Our assessment is as closely aligned with all other assessments as possible- therefore aligned with the EQF

Students require guidance on how to reflect upon experience- provide guidance on writing a review and formative assessment