

Designing and assessing flexible learning

Group discussion points:

Issues

Long discussion about relationships with employers in designing curriculum- how to involve: if employers paying for learning how much to be involved: relationships between learners/employees, employers and HEIs- what information should be shared about learner progress, what they are learning, how it impacts on the workplace, should learners share assessment outcomes and achievements with employers; why would employers want to be involved – implications for employee development/appraisal and performance management; issue of what HEi should share; negotiating with learner what they can share – creating space for all to access information on curriculum, learning outcomes, assessment issues, results

QA issues – do institutional systems support learner responsive provision – how can systems be developed that are more responsive and flexible?

Issues relating to pedagogy – transferring academic theory into practice - sharing how this can happen with employers – employees be able to demonstrate this.

Staff development required to ensure theory supports practical outcomes – experiencing the workplace themselves is important

Good practice/current activity

Building issues into design – could institutions have standardised approaches that make it easier to address any barriers at the design stage

Example – Staffs – learner ID – provides access to platform for sharing information between tutors, learners and employers but learner makes choice of whether to share ID to give employers access

BCU and others - flexible and fast track validation process – 6 weeks to bring employer requirements to fruition – requires development of Qa issues ongoing throughout delivery rather than establish initially

Use of shell frameworks – allows for readily available learning outcomes – 20 credit modules – provides opportunities for bespoke learning to be developed easier- QA written into design

Development of contracts – with employers, with learners outlines possibilities for sharing information – agreement on what good practice in HE

Negotiated learning agreements

Ensure good practice in the use of mentors in the workplace – mentor training, mentors from within the organisation or out-with from someone within a similar sector organisation. Mentors should not be supervisors /managers so learner can access neutral support

Involvement of key champions within the institution to drive forward the acceptability of fast track systems to be responsive to employers

Technology as an enabler

Technology is not seen as the answer to these issues – technology should come after the initial issues are dealt with – finding suitable technology to support the learning is important – the existence of the technology should not drive the approach. Good example is where CRM systems are in use in HEIs – they are sometimes unwieldy and do not provide the methodology required to be more responsive in meeting employer needs. Sometimes systems are too complex and tools are difficult to use – people are then put off using the systems

Strong feeling that IT should be seen as an enabler and not drive innovation but to support innovation

Culture of use of technology should be developed that sees its use as positive – technology for example shouldn't be seen as a way to replace people but to make the work of people easier – to free people up to be more effective in other ways. For example writing up documentation can be time consuming – developers could use other tools such as video that will instantly capture the detail of the development and become part of a portfolio of evidence of the decisions made and issues raised in developing and designing curriculum

HEIs should make best use of Open Source materials- be aware of what is available to be able to do the job that has been defined earlier without technology

Using platforms available to support transparency in developments with partners, and avoid duplication when similar processes are followed in developing bespoke provision

Gaps

Most significant gap is about acceptability of requirement for ERP- this requires a culture shift in some HEIs or within parts of some HEIs- this is about the business case for ERP but equally it is about recognising the benefits of WBL to the institution and pedagogical approaches - could be mission driven and learning from changes in approach to TLA could benefit whole HEI provision – challenges to existing and more 'traditional' approaches – bring level of dynamism to institutions and academic approaches