



Harper Adams University College REEDNet Update

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1.0 Background

This report aims to provide a commentary on recent achievements, current challenges and future opportunities for work-based learning activities. The report has been informed by preliminary *Aspire* evaluation work.

2.0 Key achievements

2.1 Infrastructure

To support the employer engagement agenda Harper Adams has created:

- Employer Engagement Accreditation & Validation Committee
 - To approve modules and awards up to the value of 80 academic credits at any level.
 - Meets 10 times per year.
 - Membership list attached.
 - Primary purpose, swift validation of employer engagement credit.
- Employer Engagement Courses Committee
 - Mirrors EEAVC in that responsibility falls for employer engagement up to the value of 80 credits.
- Employer Engagement and REEDNet Assessment Board
 - To deal with partner college results and employer engagement results, where there are no existing arrangements.

2.2 New modules and awards

Through the business development managers and other colleagues a number of new modules and awards have been approved through the Employer Engagement Accreditation and Validation Committee. Approvals have been made for new developments which have been delivered and designed by Harper Adams staff and also for developments designed and delivered by partner college staff. The eclectic range of validations comes from both new partners and from existing partnerships.

- These early EEAVC approvals have acted to test and refine the procedures of the employer engagement validation process.
- New developments have been the result of spin-offs from existing opportunities and new business.
- Assisted by these developments REEDNet has been successful in achieving its Additional Student Numbers (ASN's) for its first year of operation.

Successes thus far can be seen largely to have been built upon existing areas of strength.

2.3 QA Manual update

To support the development of modules and programmes for employer engagement sections 3 & 4 of the Quality Assurance Manual have been reviewed and adapted. Significantly there has been development of a programme specification template for work based learning awards to scaffold employer engagement developments.

In support of the aforementioned development, has been the creation of 'Guidance for the Creation of Employer Engagement Modules and Descriptors'. This takes the form of a booklet which contains advice and guidance for anyone involved in developing provision for



work-based learners. The booklet has been distributed internally and externally to REEDNet partners. Initial feedback suggests that this is a useful resource.

2.4 Joint working

In addition to the joint working being upheld by specific award developments, notable gains in the working relationship underpinning REEDNet have been made.

Through a sharing 'getting to know you' day (July 2009) teams from both the RAC and Harper Adams met at a mutually convenient venue. At this event the respective teams exchanged understandings about work-based learning and have begun to:

- Develop some underpinning systems/infrastructure for joint working (specifically the use of a collaborative platform called Huddle which transcends institutional infrastructures and is remotely hosted).
 - The use of Huddle is now being tested for suitability for working with a wider range of partners on joint developments.
- Develop understandings amongst colleagues about the respective roles of collaboration and competition, information sharing and geographic 'common sense'.
- Grow personal relationships to facilitate joint working.
- Identify topics for which it would be useful to undertake joint development days.

The success this initial event has resulted in joint-working days being scheduled specifically around the development of a shell module framework.

2.5 Funding Model

The two colleges devise and agreed a funding model/formula for REEDNet initiatives. Literature has been produced to explain this to prospective partners. The formulation of this model will enable colleagues and particularly the business development managers to work with confidence and clarity when developing initiatives. The funding model is designed such that it can easily cater for different combinations of delivery, design and QA. Initial, informal feedback is that the model is easy to understand and use.

2.5 Strategic Funding

The two colleges have agreed principles for the use of strategic funding. Guidance literature for this has been produced (July 09). The first application for strategic development funding has been received.

2.6 Teaching and Learning Forums

A number of teaching and learning forum events have specifically addressed issues which contribute to staff development in the area of employer engagement. Sessions were around creative assessment (June 09) and shell module design (Sept 09). The shell module session was a joint session with the Royal.

2.7 Internal work-based learning contact events

The REEDNet team have hosted an event to raise awareness of employer engagement opportunities and developments. The 'REEDNet Rendezvous' invited colleagues to chat and explore ideas and opportunities over an informal lunch. Approximately 35 staff attended the event in addition to REEDNet staff; this has directly resulted in some potential development leads. More such informal contact events are now planned.



2.8 Shell module development

A development exercise has been undertaken to design a series of shell modules to enhance current work-based learning provision. A suite level four of modules had been designed. The purpose of these modules has emerged as being two-fold

- To provide validated modules which business development managers may adapt for employers, thus providing ready made modules which can be highly customised.
- To provide modules which promote practitioner inquiry and reflection; these modules may complement eclectic combinations of short course credits to form an award in professional practice.

The formation of these modules has involved consultancy with business development managers, members of EEAVC and colleagues more widely. Work on identifying the most effective role of such modules continues.

2.9 Shell framework development

Discussions as to the merits of a shell framework are ongoing; a shell framework would subsume shell modules and would actively encourage APL/APEL. A development day on this theme is planned for November 13th at the Royal Agricultural College.

The development of a framework approach can be seen as complementary to the REEDNet aim developing “*common approaches ... for mutual credit recognition and transfer in the context of REEDNet initiatives*” (REEDNet Business Plan, p.3).

2.10 Evaluation

A strategy for evaluating work-based developments has now been designed, and initial data collection is underway with the launch of an online student survey (beginning with AMTRA and Marks & Spencer). The primary purpose of the survey is to explore the impact of work-based learning and to identify successful elements of provision.

Additional strands of the evaluation include student interviews, employer interviews and Harper Adams Staff interviews. The evaluation is being coordinated by the *Aspire* Work-based learning developer with support from business development managers and course managers. The planned outputs from the evaluation include internal and external reports.

In addition to the ‘extra’ evaluation the critical review of MDS is looming, this programme review can be used as a learning opportunity for REEDNet.

2.11 Case studies

As a first step towards evaluation a number of initiatives have been profiled as brief case studies. These are available to be the basis of further publicity material where appropriate. The case studies highlight the nature and benefits of different developments.

2.12 Engagement with national professional community

Harper Adams has become a member of FDF and EBTA, membership grants access to level of support and information in work based learning issues, it gives Harper Adams a voice in a key national forum, and in addition membership offers a channel for the introduction (from FDF) of potential clients. Two FDF events have been attended thus far and more are planned for coming months.

BDM's have been involved in regional networking through membership of the Lifelong Learning Network. In September 09 the LLN hosted a networking event and lunch at Harper Adams, which included a presentation of the REEDNet concept.



Through the development of work-based learning provision there has been association between Harper Adams University College and a range of professional bodies, including AMTRA, RICS and BASIS. Further relationships are being considered.

2.13 Online development

With growing confidence fully online work-based provision is now being piloted on a small scale (AMTRA).

2.14 HEFCE

- 367 FTE (vs. first year target of 369).

HEFCE representative met with the REEDNet Director to explore progress. Similar such meetings had already been undertaken with other employer engagement initiatives. The meeting proved to be useful in seeking clarity on a number of very specific issues (e.g. co-funding and the place of MA level studies). Feedback from HEFCE was positive.

The meeting added to project confidence that we were teasing out very particular questions and challenges, showing the fast maturation of the project and a growing confidence to identify and resolve complex operational issues. In effect the meeting showed that Harper is progressing to in to little charted waters on a national level.

3.0 Challenges

The achievement of REEDNet targets as well as internal and external joint working developments has presented an excitement around the realistic possibilities for the coming year. Still challenges remain for work-based learning at Harper.

3.1 Space and Virtual Space

Campus space is limited for short courses, in addition we believe (in keeping with HEA research) that learners and employers do also value off-site delivery which is flexible and fits in to their working patterns. We therefore need to consider flexible delivery methods including online delivery. Presently there is a tendency to steer towards face to face delivery as the mode of delivery. Developing online provision remains as a challenge.

3.2 Assessment

Developing assessments which are authentic and valuable to the workplace and are manageable for students, remains as an ongoing challenge. There is already good, exemplary practice going on in both colleges. Strategies to capture and build on this may be desirable.

A further challenge is how to actually ensure assessments are completed for all attendees; some modules have experienced issues with non-submission. This problem appears to be less when the qualification is a workplace or sector requirement.

3.3 Disparate credit

A number of small credit modules exist, but students do not always have a progression option for a full award. It remains a challenge to explore whether participants on small-credit bearing modules would wish to progress to an awards and if so what the provision is viable. The will of students to progress will be addressed in part by the evaluation exercise.

3.4 REEDNet continuation strategy

REEDNet is funder for a finite time. At the end of the funding term there is little certainty as to whether funding from HEFCE will continue for employer engagement. This will depend on both the economic and political climate and the finding from the current employer engagement initiative (e.g. how much of the cost the private sector can contribute).

3.5 Publicity

After considerable discussion the REEDNet brand has a 'place' alongside the two lead partners branding as a supporting brand. It remains a challenge for the REEDNet team to promote the services available but to avoid confusion (for staff and the wider sectors) with the positions of both colleges.

3.6 Administration

The administration of work-based learning remains a challenge. Work-based learners present unique administrative challenges including:

- Off site registration
- Complex funding combinations
- Remote access to VLE's
- Remote submission of assignment
- Study at a pace not in keeping with the traditional undergraduate student body.

In seeking to ensure learners have a slick experience in terms of administrative encounters, it remains a challenge to first understand to learner experience and then to act accordingly to refine systems. Presently there is considerable variation between administrative systems for different work-based courses.

3.7 Research/capturing the journey

The REEDNet project is a huge learning experience for all involved. It is important to disseminate and capture that learning wherever possible for the benefit of both Harper and the wider HE community. Considering how ongoing learning may be captured and disseminated remains as an ongoing challenge.

Some dissemination has occurred through attendance at events and through the publication of : Chapman, E. 2009. 'A Higher Education Response to Legislative Changes within the Animal Health Industry' Volume 4: Scholarship of Work-based Learning issue of LATHE (Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) and also through event attendance/presentation, informal networks and individual contact.

4.0 Summary: The maturing of work-based learning at Harper Adams.

From a review of previous work-based learning reports it is clear that Harper Adams has grown in its development of work-based learning, not only in terms of student numbers but also in terms of institutional confidence. Within the life of the Aspire CETL the emphasis of activity relating to work-based learning has shifted. Initially emphasis was on facilitating opportunities, building capacity and start up of key work-based initiatives. Later the development of opportunities has become embedded in the REEDNet project, with an additional focus upon enhancement work, for example in promoting new assessment methods and evaluating provision.



Summary : Towards maturity

