

Graduate Level Apprenticeships

Work-based learning principles

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Document control

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Terms and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
GLA(s)	Graduate Level Apprenticeship(s) / Apprentice(s)
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

If you need any further information please contact: glambx@sds.co.uk

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1. Principles of work-based learning

1.1 Background

This paper outlines the principles that will be used to define work based learning in Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLAs) and the rationale behind this. It is intended to support the Product Specification documents that provide the requirements for programmes at SCQF level 8, 10 and 11.

1.2 The benefits for industry of work-based learning and Graduate Level Apprenticeships

Graduate Level Apprenticeships support the education and development of employees so that they acquire the skills, knowledge and competence necessary to work and progress in the sector. These apprenticeships have several advantages and benefits when compared with traditional learning based primarily in an educational establishment. Graduate Level Apprenticeships are built on a partnership between employers and learning providers where employers have an equal role in this delivery and assessment.

In a Graduate Level Apprenticeship work-based learning is learning delivered and assessed in the workplace. Employees learn and reflect through working with others on real life challenges. The curriculum and the methods of delivery and assessment are based on what employers have identified as their current and future needs. Thus Graduate Level Apprenticeships deliver on the needs of industry.

Graduate Level Apprentices are paid. They continue in employment while working towards a qualification. The integration of the achievement of skills, knowledge and competence results in graduates who are ready to work at the level required by industry when they complete their award.

Graduate Level Apprenticeships are based on the standards required by industry. They are also based on the standards of professional or regulatory bodies. Graduates have a clear pathway to professional recognition.

1.3 The principles of work-based learning and Graduate Level Apprenticeships

The objective of this paper is to develop an understanding of what work-based learning can contribute to Graduate level apprenticeships in Scotland. It does not aim to be an all-encompassing review of the literature on work-based learning but rather draws from some of the key theorists in this area to develop characteristics and parameters for Graduate Level Apprenticeships.

The proposed characteristics for work-based learning and Graduate Level Apprenticeships are summarised as follows:

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- the work-based learning component of Graduate Level Apprenticeships is a significant and central part of the award(s) – this is based on real-life experience in the workplace
- learning in work must be fully integrated into the delivery and assessment – this cannot be successfully achieved through add-on components
- located on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- accredited as part of a certificated nationally recognised award by a national awarding body and, in the case of Graduate Level Apprenticeships at SCQF level 10 or 11, as part of a higher education degree
- recognised across the sector by all employers
- transferable across employers
- ensure that learners can achieve necessary professional standards
- support reflective learning and the development of reflective professionals/practitioners
- contain processes and opportunities for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an integral part of the award
- partnership between employers and learning providers
- significant ongoing involvement and contribution from employers including curriculum development, delivery and assessment
- meet the needs of employers/industry
- quality assurance systems and processes which involve all partners (employers and delivery bodies)
- support for each individual of a mentor in the workplace

1.4 Employers and partnerships

Raelin (1997) argues that a key challenge in work-based learning is to strengthen the dialogue with employers to meet the needs of society and the labour market. This is in conjunction with a “move away from the teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred approach”.

A key feature of work-based learning in the literature is the need for a close relationship between employers and organisations delivering the learning programme. In Boud, et al. (2001), there is a focus throughout on work-based learning that takes place within partnerships between educational institutions and other enterprises.

Shiple (2001, p.143) describes some of the gaps that have emerged in developing work-based partnerships between industry and education. One such tension arises where a traditional university-based curriculum does not meet industry and individualised learning needs. He warns against “the curriculum tail wagging the organisational dog”. The partnership then needs to include ongoing and active engagement of employers. So, the curriculum needs to be developed and delivered in the workplace with work-based learning fully integrated into the overall learning programme.

1.5 What is work-based learning?

There are various definitions of what constitutes work-based learning across academic literature in the field. The distinction is frequently made between work-based learning and work-related learning. Work related learning has a broader meaning than work-based learning and includes any learning intended to enhance an understanding of working life or employability (Little, et al., 2006, p.2).

A study by the Open University found that the terms work-based learning and employability are sometimes conflated (Open University, 2014, p.7). The term work-place learning is also used to include non- formal learning arising from interaction with others in the work setting (Eraut, et al., 1998, cited in Gray, 1999).

Raelin (2000, cited in Gray, 1999) distinguishes work-based learning from traditional classroom learning in four key ways:

- work-based learning is centred around reflection on work practice and reviewing and learning from experience-and not simply acquiring technical skills
- in addition learning arises from action and problem solving in a work environment and so is centred on live projects and challenges to individuals and organisations
- the creation of knowledge is a shared and collective activity
- crucially it requires the acquisition of meta-competence that is learning to learn-and not only acquiring new knowledge

Gray (1999) concludes that work-based learning operates at both a formal and non-formal level in the workplace; it is goal and work oriented; problem centred; involves experimentation and trying things out; personal reflection on outcomes and feedback from colleagues and managers.

For Raelin (2008, p.3), learning is more than the acquisition of technical skills. It also becomes the creation of new knowledge. Brennan and Little (1996, cited in Little, et al., 2006, p.3) similarly concluded that what is important is the learning that an individual gains from the experience of real-life work experience and from reflecting upon this. Work-based learning differs from conventional education in that it involves conscious reflection on actual experience. This is central to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle of concrete experience, observation and reflection on that experience, formulation of theory or hypotheses involving abstract conceptualization then active experimentation

Despite the range of definitions a central tenet of work-based learning for the purposes of this paper is that work-based learning is "learning derived specifically from doing a job of work and taking on a workplace role" (Brennan and Little, 1996, cited in Little, et al., 2006, p.3).

Blackwell, et al. (2001, cited in Little, et al., 2006, p.14) in an analysis of work-based learning studies also found that reflection by learners was seen as essential. In addition, good quality work-based learning has the following:

- stakeholders all understand the intentions

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- prior induction and briefing; facilitation of ongoing reflection, debriefing, reflections and identification of outcomes
- work experience is accredited
- formative assessment supports process of learning from experience
- building up a work-experience portfolio-students say what they have learned, and provide illustrations
- quality is monitored

1.6 Work-based learning in higher education

In developing a taxonomy of what would be included in a definition of work-based learning for Graduate Level Apprenticeships, it is useful to consider what different authors have included in their categorisation.

A Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Scotland) study includes the following range of scenarios in the definition of work-based learning:

1. “employee-students in vocational areas undertake professional qualifications part-time using their work context as a key component of their learning
2. employee-students undertake general degree studies using their work context for learning and assessment
3. workers undertake in-house courses that are then credit rated towards HEI awards
4. workers undertake programmes deliberately planned to integrate learning and practice.” (Ball and Manwaring, 2010, p.4)

It is argued in the current paper that the second and third categories would not address the requirements of Graduate Level Apprenticeships.

Ball and Manwaring (2010, p.4) also exclude the following from their definition of work-based learning in higher education:

- HEI courses that send students out on block placement
- students take an internship model within industry as part of their degree
- workers study by distance learning, evening class and day release, block release or blended learning **which is not linked to the work context**

Ball and Manwaring (2010, p.7) conclude their discussion of features of work-based learning with the following: “The key difference between the traditional day-release type of design of one day at college model and the current work-based designs is that the curriculum is delivered and supported by both the employer and the HEI and the content is grounded and situated within the practice setting”.

For Boud et al (2001, p.4) “Work-based learning is ... a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organisations, to create new learning opportunities in workplaces.” These are formally accredited university courses.

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Boud (2001) argues that there is a wide variation in the mix of elements in work-based programmes. However, he found that typically work-based learning programmes share the following six characteristics:

1. a partnership between external organisations and an educational institution is specifically established to further learning
2. learners involved are employees of, or are in some contractual relationship with, the external organisation
3. the programme followed derives from the needs of the workplace learner rather than being controlled or framed by the disciplinary or professional curriculum
4. the starting point and educational level of the programmes is established after learners have engaged in a process of recognition of current competencies and identification of the learning they wish to engage in rather than on the basis of their existing educational qualifications
5. a significant element of work-based learning is that learning projects are undertaken in the workplace
6. the educational institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programmes with respect to a framework of standards and levels (pp.4-6)

1.7 Individualised learning and the recognition of prior learning

As one of the objectives of work-based learning in Graduate Level Apprenticeships is to support learners to achieve professional standards or standards of a regulatory body, the taxonomy needs to include curricular pathways to these standards. Nevertheless the needs of learners should also be addressed through individualised learning. One such pathway which addresses both requirements is through the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

RPL concerns learning that has its source in experience. It can be formative and can help learners identify skills and knowledge which they have gained through a variety of informal and non-formal situations and experiences.

RPL can also be for credit through a summative process whereby the learning is assessed and credit given, for example, for entry to a formal programme of learning or for credit towards a qualification.

Within a work-based learning programme, the RPL process can be used to assess and give credit for current competence developed in the workplace (Boud, 2001, p.50; SSSC, 2008).

The RPL process can also form the basis of individualised learning which is designed to achieve the standards and the learning outcomes of the work-based curriculum.

1.8 Requirements for developing programmes

The following must be considered when developing work-based learning for Graduate Level Apprenticeships.

Learning for what?

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It is possible to achieve the following range of learning through a work-based learning apprenticeship:

- learning so that the individual can develop the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to achieve a professional standard
- learning through which an individual can develop a range of transferable skills, knowledge and competence to support their employability across a profession
- although the knowledge and skills learned should be based on the needs of employers, they must meet the needs of employers within the sector generally and not just the needs of one specific employer
- learning that ensures that individuals develop generic skills, knowledge and competence which supports their employability in a variety of roles (this includes generic skills such as management, leadership and problem solving)
- learning that supports the individual to engage in an appropriate level of professional enquiry
- learning through the process of reflection on work practice and reviewing and learning from experience – becoming a reflective professional/practitioner

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