

H E @ Work



Introduction

Most companies provide training for their staff in the critical skills for business and encourage continuous professional development (CPD). It is part of creating a competitive advantage and often a licence to operate. However it is unusual for this to result in recognized higher level academic qualifications. Some companies deliberately avoid these awards because they feel that it will result in a more mobile staff that are very likely to leave.

However there is increasing evidence that employees value CPD and offering pathways to qualifications actually improves recruitment and encourages retention thus a source of significant additional competitive advantage that is, quality staff. The persistent problems, however, are the complex processes steeped in the time honoured traditions of university protocols. As a result few companies are willing to invest the management time and effort needed to understand this complex area and the benefits which can be derived from such activity for the business.

HE@Work is a new consultancy formed by a partnership between the Edge Foundation and the University Vocational Awards Council. Its aim is to make workplace learning count as recognized academic learning and thereby facilitate the award of higher qualifications (Degrees, Masters, MBAs, and postgraduate certificates) to employees, delivering business need through higher level learning. It does this by structuring training and work experience so that it is academically recognized. There is the added benefit that structuring workplace learning this way can also bring measurable efficiencies in training and competency management. In a sense it is taking the learning management skills that exist in universities and applying them to improve the effectiveness of workforce development in companies.

Consequently HE@Work's core offer is designed to assist companies improve their workforce development programmes and enable employees to access higher level academically recognized qualifications normally based on in-company training.

HE@Work will, in partnership with UVAC, negotiate access to work-based learning (WBL) accreditation and validation arrangements, expertise and campus-based qualifications with HE partners and set up all the necessary systems and processes to meet company requirements.

HE@Work specializes in programmes aimed at senior professional or technical personnel but can also provide support where simple competence measures are required.

Services

1. Health check

This service is an in-company diagnostic exercise intended to provide managers with a quality audit of their current in-company training programme(s) measured against company business priorities, HE standards and industry best practice. It is the first stage of 1-4 in the Summary of Services, see page 5. It will identify and assess in-house provision including the quality of delivery, assessment and outcomes to provide recommendations for improvement. This will enable employers to assess the effectiveness and value for money of the programme(s).

2. Programme enhancement

HE@Work provides an advanced diagnostic support service to enhance or augment existing in-company programmes. This may enable a programme to gain credit recognition necessary to achieve a full HE award including APEL where currently it has no recognition or is only able to achieve a smaller amount of generalized credit such as the “Kite-marking” scheme for in-company programmes, full in-house external validated HE awards or dual accreditation. Programmes would always start by being designed around business requirements and work activities.

3. Credit recognition of an in-company programme

This provides a credit rating¹ for an in-company programme of learning to establish a volume and level of general credit² for the purpose of kite-marking the programme against higher education standards. In order to achieve a general credit rating, the programme must have clearly defined learning outcomes and a robust assessment process. The credit rating must be quality assured by one or more HEI partners through an Approvals Process. Individual participants are not registered with an HEI and do not receive a Certificate of Credit. Participants must complete the full programme and will receive a Certificate of Completion issued by their employer, which will bear a wording such as “This programme is recognized by (Name of HEI(s)) as equivalent to x number of credits at Level Y. Since the volume and level of credit relates only to the whole programme, it may not be necessary to break down the programme into individual modules or units of learning.

¹ All HE programmes are measured by “credit” indicating the size of the programme and “Level” indicating the difficulty. See Appendix: definitions for further explanation.

² As opposed to “specific credit” which is credit contributing to a specific HE Award – certificate, diploma, degree etc.

4. Accreditation of an in-company programme

This establishes a volume and level of general credit for an in-company programme of learning for the purpose of verifying the academic standard of the programme and to enable individual participants to be awarded Certificates of Credit. In order to be accredited, the programme must have clearly defined learning outcomes and a robust assessment process. The credit rating must be quality assured by one or more HEI partners through an Approvals Process. Individual participants are registered with an HEI and receive Certificates of Credit and an individual transcript that gives details of the credit volume, level(s) and, if required, the marks achieved for each module/unit. Since participants may receive a Certificate of Credit for each module or element completed, it will normally be necessary to describe the programme in terms of individual modules or units of learning. Certificates of Credit do not in themselves add up to a full HE award but may be used to contribute to an award. This requires an ongoing relationship for the HEI to quality assure the assessment of individual participants.

5. Development and validation of a higher education qualification

This refers to the validation by HEI partner(s) of a programme at undergraduate or postgraduate level that is delivered in a work-based or company setting, exclusively for a single company, organization or sector. In order to be validated, the programme must have clearly defined learning outcomes and a robust assessment process. The programme may incorporate accredited in-company learning and may need to be augmented and enhanced by the development of new modules or units of learning provided by the validating partner(s). The award is validated by the HEI partner(s) using established quality assurance processes for the validation of higher education award. Participants are registered with an HEI and on successful completion will receive the award and a transcript that gives details of the credit volume, level(s) and, if required, the marks achieved for each module/unit. A full award might be a Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma or a Degree.

6. Dual accreditation against occupational standards and HE credit and levels

In-company programmes may be developed to enable learners to achieve both HE credit and demonstrate competence against National Occupational Standards (NOS). In this case, programmes would need to have clearly defined learning outcomes and a robust assessment process which combined the requirements of the HE Partner(s) and an Awarding Body for the relevant occupational area. This is very useful in disciplines where demonstrating competence is a key outcome of the learning programme. Individuals would be awarded either a Certificate of Credit or full HE award depending on the route taken and an NVQ or individual NVQ units depending on the size of the programme. In-house competency schemes will form an important component of this approach.

7. Programme management

HE@Work provides a client management service for accredited and validated programmes to assist companies in setting up the internal systems and processes necessary to manage and assure quality to HE standards. HE@Work can also provide ongoing support for the management of assessment and all the requirements of the validating HE partner(s). This would include, for example, the management of the student experience, administration of the assessment process, co-ordination of the assessment panel, annual monitoring, maintenance of student records and liaison with the validating HE partner(s).

8. Access to existing HE qualifications and expertise

Some employers may not have or wish their programmes to be validated or accredited but may still want their employees to achieve qualifications or access HE expertise. In this case HE@Work will research suitable campus-based courses offered by HE institutions and seek to negotiate entrance and progression routes for their employees. Arrangements would need to be agreed regarding suitable delivery mechanisms and this may include developing APEL modules which could provide credit towards the achievement of the award. In addition companies can be directed to approved HEI providers of WBL who have existing flexible WBL frameworks in place to enable companies to negotiate a customized route for their employees to access university qualifications without the company necessarily having to provide in-company programmes. Unlike 3-6 above, where the employer essentially becomes the HE provider, the employer would have no control over the development of the programme or the progress of learners. This type of partnership is well practised and has often provided an expedient and effective route for many employers. HE@Work will source these opportunities and manage the relationships on behalf of the company acting as an agent.

Summary of Services

1. Health check

A diagnostic service to providing a health check for in-company programmes compared with HE standards

2. Programme enhancement

A diagnostic and support service to enhance or augment existing in-company programmes

3. Credit recognition of an in-company programme

A "Kite-marking" scheme for in-company programmes against HE benchmarks to establish general credit

4. Accreditation of an in-company programme

HE general credit is awarded to individuals completing the programme

5. Development and validation of an HE qualification

Company schemes are developed to enable learners to access and successfully complete an HE qualification

6. Dual accreditation against occupational standards and HE credit and levels

As 4 or 5 above but incorporating Awarding National Occupational Standards (NOS) or other occupational or professional standard.

7. Programme management

A service to assist companies in managing the assessment requirements of their in-company programmes where HE accreditation is required.

8. Access to existing HE qualifications and expertise

Provision of specialist expertise as required and access to standard qualifications offered by HEIs on campus probably part time. This also includes services to direct companies to approved HEI providers of WBL who have existing flexible WBL frameworks in place to enable companies to negotiate a customized route for their employees to access university qualifications without the company necessarily having to provide in-company programmes.

Appendix: definitions

1. Background

- HE programmes are based on units of learning which are defined by:
 - learning outcomes – what has to be learned
 - assessment criteria – the things which will be used to make judgments about the quality of work and to ensure learning outcomes have been achieved
- The amount of learning is measured using the HE Credit system which is based on Notional Learning Hours (NLH), 1 credit = 10 NLH
- The challenge or difficulty is measured using Levels 4-8 covering undergraduate to PhD qualifications (see Table 1 opposite).
- **Awards** are full qualifications made by individual HE Institutions.

2. Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL is essentially an assessment process designed to enable experience or learning undertaken previously to contribute to a current learning programme. In order to gain the specific credit required to achieve the level and volume of credit of accredited modules or units of an in-company programme or of a validated higher education award that is exclusive to a particular company or organization. The assessment process may take the form of the standard assessment for each module, (but without an 'attendance' requirement), an approved alternative assessment process, or production of a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. HE@Work does not support individuals through an APEL process to demonstrate their general credit standing, although these individuals may be referred to HEI partners who provide such a service. HE@Work does provide support to individuals who may have completed modules or units of learning before there was an assessment process in place, or who can demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes through experience or completion of similar programmes elsewhere.

Table 1: footnotes

¹ QCA levels are represented in numerals.

² Sector Skills Councils (SSC) is developing qualifications and a framework to locate them to reflect employer need in their sector. In addition the SCC is responsible for maintaining and developing the national occupational standards applicable to them.

³ Functional skills are being developed by QCA to replace key skills in numeracy and communication amongst others over time.

Table 1: Making sense of QAA and QCA qualifications

National Qualifications Framework combining QCA and QAA (revised Jan 07) ¹	General/academic subjects	Vocationally related oriented towards a vocation/ profession or trade	Occupational directly applicable to gaining or developing in work
8 D (doctorate) level	Doctorates	Doctorates	Doctorates in Professional Practice and by Public Works Level 5 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA ²
7 M (masters) level	Master degree, Postgraduate certificates & postgraduate diplomas	Master degree, Postgraduate certificates & postgraduate diplomas, graduate apprenticeships Key skills	Master of Professional Practice (WBL) Level 5 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
6 H (honours) level	Bachelors degrees with Honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas	Bachelors degrees with Honours, graduate certificates, Higher and graduate diplomas Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
5 I (intermediate) level	Ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas	Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas eg HNDs Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
4 C (certificate) level	Certificates of Higher Education	Certificates of Higher Education HNCs Key skills	Level 4 NVQ or diplomas derived from Sector Skills Council Qualification Frameworks approved by QCA
3 Advanced level	A and AS levels, key skills or functional skills	Vocational A levels Various vocational diplomas and awards eg BTEC Nationals Specialized Diplomas Advanced Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills ³	Level 3 NVQ Advanced Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills
2 Intermediate level	GCSE grade A*-C	Intermediate GNVQ Various vocational certificates and awards Specialized Diplomas Vocational GCSE (grade A*-C) Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills Functional skills	Level 2 NVQ Apprenticeships, including key skills or functional skills
1 Foundation level	GCSE grade D-G	Vocational GCSE grade D-G Foundation GNVQ Specialized Diplomas	Level 1 NVQ
Entry level	Certificate of educational achievement		

3. Validation

The term 'Approval Process' rather than validation is employed for Accreditation or Credit Recognition of an in-company learning programme. 'Validation' is used only in the context of validation of a higher education award. For all three, HEIs will also normally require there to be some process of Annual Review to ensure that standards are being maintained.

Initial preparation of proposals for credit recognition, accreditation or validation are similar in all three and will require description of each programme in terms of overarching learning outcomes, assessment strategy, internal programme management, and quality assurance and enhancement arrangements. Where a programme is composed of a number of individual modules or units, module specification forms will need to be produced, describing the learning outcomes, assessment specification and assessment criteria of each module.

In the case of Credit Recognition and Accreditation, since there is no award involved, there will not be any relevant award regulations. For accredited programmes and programmes leading to higher education awards, where participants are registered with an HEI, it will need to specify the procedures to be followed should a participant feel that he or she has not been treated fairly or appropriately. This is not required in the case of Credit Recognition, since it is the programme that is credit-rated, not individual participants.

4. Approval process

The approval, usually for a specified period, of a clearly defined level and volume of general credit to be attributed to a programme of in-company learning, as described on a completed Programme Specification Form, thereby ensuring that the programme meets the academic standards required of programmes in the validating HEI(s).

5. Annual or periodic review

The review process will assess:

- whether the level and volume of credit approved for the programme continues to be valid
- whether the academic standards of the programme have been maintained
- the extent of student achievement of the intended learning outcomes
- the student experience and quality of educational support
- action taken to enhance and improve curriculum delivery
- identification of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment
- whether the accreditation of the programme has delivered the objectives intended by the external partner
- whether the external partner wishes to revise aspects of the programme and/or its delivery
- whether the Programme Specification Forms for the programme remain up to date and consistent with the requirements of the validating HEI(s)
- any proposed revisions to the structure, content and delivery of the programmes that may be proposed.



