



University of the West of England

Implementing a flexible Shell Award Framework

FEATURES OF THE INNOVATIVE PROGRAMME

Flexible ways of capturing learning

1. To support credit accumulation and transfer in a creative and innovative way in a rapidly changing world of employment and learning, the University of the West of England has validated a centralised Shell Award Framework (SAF). Whilst this is not a new concept, some Universities have operated shell frameworks for over a decade, the UWE SAF is unique in the way it recognises external learning to the benefit of lifelong adult learners as it enables the transfer of credit and marks through a process of negotiation.
2. All pathways, whether negotiated by an external organisation or by individuals, are underpinned by use of a Negotiated Learning Plan (NLP) where:
 - certificated learning is recorded, planned and evidenced (general credit);
 - experiential learning is identified so it can be assessed and awarded standard UWE credit (either through 'shell' modules or through an on-line service).
3. For some awards larger than 'normal' amounts of external credit can contribute to an IPD programme to meet the needs of learners in work who may wish to gain, or have already achieved, academic credit for their continuing professional development (CPD). This is particularly beneficial to lifelong learners with a type of 'career driven curriculum' such as those sponsored by the British Heart Foundation with whom the University is working in partnership.

Framework learning outcomes

4. A strength of the Framework is its generic 'can-do' aims and learning outcomes. These provide a clear focus to enable bespoke programmes with work-based learning at their core. Based on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), Learning through Work and SEEC, they are instrumental in providing the flexible framework in which learners and employers can construct bespoke awards.

NLPs are judged by the Director of Work-Based Learning and Shell Awards. Decisions are ratified by a University Panel and the NLP becomes the formal record of learning which has been approved to contribute to an Integrated Professional Development Award (specific credit). The NLP, however, is not in 'tablets of stone'. It can be re-negotiated any time to accommodate employment changes but the learner remains the driver.

Flexible award titles

5. The suite of qualifications available through the SAF (which range from 60 credit undergraduate Certificates, through Foundation Degrees to Honours Degrees and Masters' qualifications) all carry the title 'Integrated Professional Development'. For learning pathways negotiated with specific partners, there is a quality assurance process for the approval of an IPD title as either suffix or prefix to an award descriptor. For example, approved for the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health is MSc/PGDip/PGCert Integrated Professional Development (Environmental Health); approved for British Heart Foundation sponsored cardiac practitioners are the Framework's awards with the descriptor '(Cardiac Practitioner)' as a suffix to IPD. Future partners may want a descriptor as a prefix to IPD in the qualification title, and this can be readily provided.
8. The Framework's flexibility is instrumental in maintaining the programme's sustainability. It is the Framework that is the subject of validation and review and not the different pathways within it, making it flexible and responsive to meeting the changing needs of both individuals and employers in a timely way. Furthermore, programme coherence comes from the learners' needs, not from the subject discipline paradigm and values continuing professional development as part of a programme pathway.
9. The programme is sustained by an on-line APEL tool and a designated Blackboard platform with access to learning objects licensed from Ufi Ltd Learning through Work that can enhance learners' self-assessment and preparation skills to learn at HE level.

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

6. In terms of impact on the wider University, the SAF has acted as a catalyst for change, changing mindsets around work-based learning, CPD administration and flexible programme delivery (in particular how, when and what to study). The Framework cuts across the traditional academic year by having monthly intakes to meet the needs of employers and work-based learners.
7. In terms of impact on workforce development, the effectiveness of the work-based learning in the recent graduate's professional practice was evident in their assessed projects and recognised in student awards for work-based learning.

RECRUITMENT AND PROGRESSION

10. The Framework began recruiting in September 2010 and to date has 70 registered learners. In November 2011 four learners graduated: two with BA Integrated Professional Development (IPD); one with BSc(Hons) IPD; and one with PGCert IPD. All graduates demonstrated that their learning has had a significant impact on both their career developments and improvements in practice.

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