

# THE VALUE OF LEARNING BASED AT WORK



Work Based Learning  
at Middlesex University

**Come riconoscere e validare l'apprendimento  
nel lavoro (Work Based Learning)  
anche a livello universitario**

**Giornata di Studio  
“Validazione delle competenze”  
Bellinzona, 9.11.2006**

**Barbara Light – Middlesex University**



# Middlesex University

- Work Based Learning has been pioneered by Middlesex University for over 10 years
- 1996 - Middlesex was awarded a **Queen's Prize for "Excellence and Innovation"**
- 2003 – National Quality Assurance Agency report highlighted the innovative and robust procedures for ensuring programme quality
- 2005 - **Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning** status awarded



# Higher Education at Work

- Work Based Learning (WBL) can be defined as “learning through, at and for work” and has different applications eg: practice-based, professional learning, apprenticeships, work experience etc.
- WBL links the university and the work place as sources of knowledge – socially and economically desirable
- Experiential learning & competencies gained through work can be recognised and assigned university credits and levels
- WBL enables access to university programmes which provide an academic framework for learning

# WBL enables knowledge transformation



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- Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (**APEL**) process can transform tacit knowledge held by an individual learner into explicit, accredited knowledge
- Research wbl projects can be linked to strategic objectives and generate new, explicit knowledge and practices
- Explicit knowledge transforms into intellectual capital through theories, know-how and systems
- Personal and professional knowledge is enhanced

# The University and the Work Place as Partners in Learning



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- Programmes can be collaboratively developed and delivered eg:

Accredited organisational training course or  
professional development course

+

Learning review & research module

+

Negotiated work based research projects

=

University degree (BA, BSc or MA, MSc)

# Negotiated individual pathway



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- Agreed by individual learner, employer and university through a learning agreement eg:

Recognition & Accreditation of Learning (APEL)

+

Research and programme plan (including learning agreement) modules

+

Work based research project(s) or:  
project(s) + taught modules

=

University degree (BA, BSc or MA, MSc)



# What is APEL?

- **A**ccreditation of **P**rior **E**xperiential **L**earning
- A process by which knowledge, skills and behaviours acquired through **experience**, and **un-certificated** learning is given recognition and academic value expressed in credits/levels
- Way of gaining course entry **without** starting at the beginning
- Recognises life long learning and is learner centred
- Legitimised and pioneered from 1980's in UK



# How APEL can be used

- Identify knowledge, skills and competencies – retrospective and current
- Forward-looking reflective review of learning
- Identify learning “gaps”
- Tool for personal/professional development
- Recognition that learning occurs in multiple sites
- Consolidate previous learning
- Transform subjective experience into statements of objective learning and learning outcomes that can be formally recognised
- Full award eg: Doctorate in Professional Studies by Public Works





# APEL concerns

- **Quality** – is experiential learning comparable to learning from HET programmes?
- **Assessment** – is it valid and reliable?
- **Resources** – too resource-intensive in terms of costs, university time, trained staff etc..
- **Benefits** – who benefits?
- **Are we giving awards away?**



# APL/APEL portfolio contents

- CV – extended to 2/3 pages
- Job description (JD) – describing **real** work tasks
- Previous credit-rated learning
- Evidence
- Reflection on learning
- Areas of learning – these are informed by the CV/JD and identify and analyse learning that is:
  - Thematic
  - Horizontal



# APEL recognition model

**TIME**



Senior Manager	- strategic management
Manager	- production & HR management
Supervisor	- machine & people oriented
Foreman	- maintaining/repairing machines
Apprentice	- operating machines



**SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & EXPERIENCE**



# WBL MA Programme example: John, Senior Manager– no degree

## Semester 1 APEL portfolio:

- APEL: 10 ECTS Level (L) 3 + 30 L 4  
+  
Module: 5 at L 4

## Semester 2:

- Research & programme planning modules:  
10 L 4 + 5 L 3

## Semester 3:

- Work based project in systemic change = 30 L 4

**Total : 90 credits - MA**

# WBL BA Programme example: Susan – FE Teacher



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## Semester 1 APEL portfolio:

- Existing Certificate in Teaching Further Education =  
**30 ECTS at Level (L) 1 + 30 L 2**  
+
  - APEL: **15 L1 + 20 L 2 + 25 at L 3**  
+
    - Module: **5 at L 2**  
+
      - Transferable skills: **10 L1**

**Total APEL credits: 120**



# Programme continued:

## Semester 2:

- Research & programme planning modules = **10 L 3**  
**+ 5 L 2**

## Semester 3:

- Work based project on Integrating Deaf People in Mainstream Further Education – **30 L 3**
- **Total : 180 credits - BA**

# Learning outcomes and assessment criteria example



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**Analysis & synthesis of information and ideas will:**

- **L1:** be sufficient to present an argument
- **L2:** be sufficient to indicate further areas for development
- **L3:** be sufficient to make judgments & derive principles to guide future action
- **L4:** result in creation of knowledge of significance to others



# APEL claim example

One of my main areas of responsibility lies in regularly analysing current trends in the field of technology, and evaluating the effectiveness of our own products. For example, I research:

- overall market share
- costs of production
- price
- innovation correlated to trends and demand

This enables me to propose the strategic direction our organisation needs to take over the next 5 years, in collaboration with other managers.



# Conclusions: advantages of APEL & work based learning



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- Enables access to university & widens participation
- Effective use of time
- Enables learning while earning
- Enables knowledge creation and enhances professional practice
- Builds confidence and self-esteem as personal and professional learning is recognised and validated
- Recognises work as a site of learning

# Disadvantages of APEL & work based learning



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- Issues of validity, acceptance and public perception
- Very resource intensive for the university
- Assessment decisions can be subjective
- Learner autonomy essential so not suitable for all
- Lonely process



# Contact

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