



ELL-2-01-06(p5)

## **Work Based Learning**

**Background Paper for  
NAW's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee  
11 January 2006**

## **Introduction**

- 1 fforwm is the national organisation representing all 25 further education (FE) colleges and institutions in Wales. fforwm works to raise the profile of colleges amongst key decision-makers and supports them in the continuous pursuit of high quality education and training, and stimulating economic development, social well-being and cultural life in Wales.
- 2 In addition to managing approximately 20% to 30% of the funding provided by ELWa through specific Work Based Learning (WBL) contracts, colleges also provide significant additional education and training for employers through ELWa Further Education (FE), and ESF funding. Additionally, many colleges deliver significant aspects of the WBL funding provided for other providers, such as local authorities, private organisations, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and voluntary/not-for-profit organisations
- 3 Colleges provide WBL across a very wide range of vocational areas as part of their key role in providing local public sector services to meet the needs of individuals and employers in their communities. At least one third of the members of college governing bodies are drawn from the business community.
- 4 fforwm fully supports the need to continue to improve standards and achievement levels in WBL. More recent inspections of WBL provision at colleges have demonstrated that significant performance improvements are being achieved across the board.

## **Addressing the Issues - Finding Solutions to Raise Standards**

- 5 In order to address the key issues highlighted by Estyn, the FE sector has successfully secured ELWa Common Investment Fund (CIF) support for the following projects as part of a long term commitment to improving standards:
  - 6.1 Engaging with employers to improve colleges' responsiveness to training needs
  - 6.2 Raising standards in WBL delivery
  - 6.3 Self regulation (including but not limited to WBL)
- 6 The main objectives of the WBL project are to:
  - 7.1 Improve the quality of WBL through working collaboratively
  - 7.2 Identify and share good practice and innovative developments.
  - 7.3 Identify poor practice and the reasons for poor performance, and identify and implement ways of eliminating these.
  - 7.4 Encourage the sharing and benchmarking of data against national comparators in WBL across providers.
  - 7.5 Ensure that WBL is firmly embedded within the Governance, Leadership and Management of colleges.
  - 7.6 Establish robust self-assessment practice which improve overall effectiveness and efficiency.

## **Key Areas for Review and Development**

- 7 Over 120 providers currently have WBL contracts, with monetary values ranging from £6,000 to nearly £5m. Efficiency and effectiveness might be improved by rationalising the number of individual contracts issued, thus offering a more

manageable portfolio of contracts for ELW and more scope for smaller providers to work with larger providers with a proven track record in audit requirements and systems. To this end, the introduction of “lead provider” contracts could be considered.

- 8 An analysis of the content of WBL Frameworks (which define the qualifications that have to be achieved) would be helpful to ensure that providers can meet the needs of employers. The SSCs have a key role to play in this.
- 9 WBL programmes, in a similar way to the Welsh Bac, are very demanding in that they require the learner to achieve at least five qualifications for full framework completion and to be deemed a “successful outcome”. There are several reasons for the low attainment rate. The first is the lack of recognition of partial achievement (the NAW has recognised that a similar issue exists for the WBQ); the second is the demands of the National Framework compared to the levels of achievement at point of entry; the third relates to the social status of vocational routes and the lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational study.
- 10 WBL funding is allocated on an annual basis through a tendering process. Simplification of the tendering process and the potential introduction of 3 year budget allocations would allow all providers to plan and promote opportunities more strategically and effectively, and invest in the resources necessary to improve standards.
- 11 It would be helpful if audit and administrative requirements in WBL were streamlined in order to ensure that WBL delivery focuses on quality provision and positive trainee experiences. This should improve value for money and enhance the performance of providers and the attainment of learners. In this context, it is worth noting that there are significant audit and other administrative demands associated with WBL that do not reconcile with or apply to FE and sixth form funding systems.
- 12 Whilst increased participation in WBL by 16-19 year-olds has been identified as a priority, it is necessary to ensure that WBL is also promoted to other age groups. For this to be achieved, consideration must be given to implementing innovative short to mid-term measures to positively discriminate in favour of WBL.

## **Conclusion**

- 13 fforwm welcomes the opportunity to discuss the above points with members of the ELL Committee. The FE sector looks forward to contributing to the future of WBL and its potential expansion and further development.