

Derby utilises the 'Learning through Work' portal on Learndirect. The Learning Contract was created by the student, following on screen prompts, drop down boxes and text fields. Working through the learning contract, undertaking each category in turn, until all the requisite information for building a programme of study was captured.



The learning contract covered the categories shown in Figure 1 above.

Under '**experience**', the student's employment, review of experience including a 'where are you now?' current status and relevant qualifications was captured by the system.

Under '**Qualifications and Credits**,' identification was made of the type of qualification and the number of credits needed to reach the qualification. The student stated their programme focus, or title, at this stage.

In the LtW Learning Contract the '**Purpose**' focused on why the student was undertaking the programme.

In the '**Aims**' section of the Contract, the student stated the learning outcomes that would be achieved from taking the study.

At the '**Components**' stage, the student selected a number of components to make up the final programme of study. The selection was made with support from the tutor, to identify the following:

- *Title and objectives of each component* – this would include a short statement that explained what the component intended to achieve. This objective would relate to one of more aims in the learning contract;
- *Contributing activities within the component* – would include description of what the student undertakes. If the activity relates to a project, or self-managed learning activity, a concise 'project plan' that details the activity would be included by the student;
- *Timescales* – would include the overall timescale of the component, as well as highlighting key milestones within the component;

- *Intended learning outcomes* – would include a statement from the student on what they expect to learn once the component has been completed; the learning outcomes are part of the criteria for assessment of the component;
- *Proposed evidence* – would include the materials (such as reports, plans, log books, a portfolio, or a narrative) produced by the student to demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes;
- *Level and credit rating* – would include a level relevant to the intended qualification being sought and the credit rating would be agreed as appropriate for the intended component;
- *Relevant level indicator* – would be selected from the Learndirect level indicator for the qualification being taken. These indicators are a set of pre-configured abilities and are reflective on the student entering the level and credit rating. Along with intended learning outcomes, the relevant level indicators form the assessment criteria for the component.

These programme components make up the major activities of a programme of 'Learning through Work'. Selection of components must be at the right level for the award sought, add up to the correct credits for the qualification chosen, and form a coherent programme that meets the aims identified in the Learning Contract.

APEL Component

APEL has been an area that often has been problematic in capturing the appropriate information; however, the coherent structure of the Learning Contract enabled students to make a claim for credit for prior learning, by following through the same sections as they had done in creating a specific component of study.

- *Title and objectives of each component* – this would include a short statement that explained what has been gained from this component. This objective would relate to one of more aims in the learning contract;
- *Contributing activities within the component* – would include description of the activities that led to the learning outcomes that the student claimed a credit for;
- *Timescales* – would not be included for an APEL component, as the work has already been done;
- *Intended learning outcomes* – would include a statement from the student on what actual learning outcomes had been achieved;
- *Proposed evidence* – would include an APEL portfolio or evidence of the student's previous qualifications;
- *Level and credit rating* – would include a level relevant to the intended qualification being sought and the credit rating would be agreed as appropriate for the intended component. In APEL, the University would make a judgement on the volume and quality of work being put forward and would suggest an appropriate credit rating to reflect this;
- *Relevant level indicators* – the indicators that are selected can be used as assessment criteria for the APEL component. If the component is larger more of the indicators will need to be used.

Student Support

The support was provided by the LtW Tutor in the University and a mentor or supervisor in the workplace together with the online dialogue environment inside the LtW portal. Derby University's Learning through Work provides students with support and guidance to help them develop the knowledge and skills necessary to:

- design a programme that is unique and meaningful to them
- prove what they have learnt
- identify their future learning needs
- plan for their personal, professional and career development

“I’ve got a mentor at work, a more experienced engineer, and he’s guiding me through. He helped me put together my own design module against the criteria the university needed to make sure that it was going to meet an MSc level. He’s useful too, because I can talk to him about what I’ve discovered in my research and he comes up with things that he’s found and between us we can develop it. And my tutor has been excellent. Whenever I needed help, I can phone, email or use the dialogue facility on the web, and we can sort things out”

*John Blundell, LtW MSc (Eng) Student
Derby University, Alstom Power*

Student support in Learning through Work is very important as the student needs to feel that if they need help, for example with completion of the learning contract, that the support infrastructure is available to assist them.

Industrial Relationship

For the students undertaking the Learning through Work approach, the industrial relationship is a given, in so far as, students are normally employed and the employer is responsible for paying for the WBL programme undertaken.

Derby University has been approached by companies interested in the ‘chunks of learning’ style that enables employees to gain HE qualifications in their own time, using the Learndirect LtW framework for negotiated learning. The ability to *creditise* prior experience and learning, enable employees to shorten programme timescales, and suit employers better than pre-defined, rigid programme that stretch over a long time and involve employees spending time out of the workplace.

Since 2000, Derby University has worked with employers to produce programmes for individual learners or cohort/group learners, covering a range of qualifications from specific upskilling delivering credits to masters’ level awards.

The driving factor has been the company or learner specific requirement that led to a programme of study, which met target learning outcomes in an industrial/business context.

Assessment and Feedback

The assessment has been driven by satisfying ‘learning outcomes’ and meeting the appropriate level indicators for the awards. Derby University uses the level indicators in Learndirect’s Learning through Work, and these have been built on from the standards identified at each HE level by QAA, and by the regional credit consortia descriptions. The level indicators cover 5 main areas:

- Complexity and responsibility
- Scope
- Thinking and understanding
- Investigation and evaluation
- Innovation and originality

The level indicators are written in generics, not sector specific as they apply not just to engineering and technology.

The level indicators relate to HE levels as follows:

Level Indicator HE Level Qualification type

- 4 HE 1 Certificate in Higher Education
- 5 HE 2 Diploma in Higher Education
- 6 HE 3 Honours Degree, graduate diploma
- 7 HE 4 Postgraduate / Master's
- 8 HE 5 Doctorate

Decisions on the types of assessment are the product of discussions between the student and the tutor. Assessment is in the form of reports, assignments, log books, portfolios and/or plans.

Motivation for WBL

Derby University has seen the demand for LtW programmes grow from just 41 in 2001 to a 2007 target of 1205 students. This growth clearly indicates that there is a demand for LtW WBL.

Derby found that a key motivator for industry was the ability to deliver tailored responsive solutions to stated learning needs. In addition, business wanted delivery in appropriate timescales and to meet their budget constraints.

For example, Alstom Power has funded a cohort of 12 students on an LtW programme of specific knowledge up-skilling. They said that having the flexibility and the industrial context was important.

The RAF (Engineering Division) had also a set of requirements to up-skill their engineers. They wanted the learning to have credit awards at the end. A 30 unit programme with credits of learning was specifically created to meet both the RAF needs, through Derby University's LtW programme.