



Newsletter

Editor's comment

We are pleased to tell you that the extension to the Apprenticeship agreements to include Business has now been signed by the Management Board together with an extension to our NVQ agreements to include Business and Management.

3 projects to support Apprentices are now underway with 1 of the projects involving two colleges working in collaboration and supported by the Aimhigher Vocational Pathways Strand.

We continue to add resources to the Staff Room section of our website which also includes resources produced through our FE Development projects.

We are sorry to be saying 'farewell' to Mary Mussett our Administrator. We will certainly all miss her and would like to say how much we have appreciated her support throughout the past 3 years. We wish her good luck in her new role at the University of Bristol.

FdA Digital Media Arts at Wiltshire College

As WVLLN Progression Coordinator at the University of Bath, I have been working with Foundation Degree Programme Leaders in FE colleges and University Learning Partnership staff to ensure that the entry route via APEL is made transparent for potential applicants.

Rather than having a general statement that admission by experience is a possibility, we wanted to provide applicants with the sorts of criteria against which their prior learning through experience would be assessed. We used the QCA level 3 descriptors as an initial benchmark, and from these, developed criteria which would be relevant for each foundation degree subject area.

The FdA Digital Media Arts delivered at Wiltshire College is an example of a programme which attracts a really wide variety of

applicants, including those who leave school at 16 and subsequently develop considerable knowledge and skills (equivalent to level 3 or above) through pursuing their own interest in the subject area alongside employment. The criteria which applicants without formal level 3 qualifications are expected to demonstrate through their interview and written task include, among others: problem solving using a range of different approaches; use of initiative in directing their own work; presenting relevant information to others accurately, both verbally and in writing and having an awareness of current issues within the sector. As with all applicants, they also need to have an aptitude and enthusiasm for media arts and present a portfolio of previous achievement that indicates this commitment.

For some foundation degrees, the criteria also specify particular industry-related previous qualifications which will be taken into account as part of the admission by APEL process. For example, in relation to the FdSc Computing at Wiltshire College and City of Bath College, these include CISCO, Novell and the British Computer Society ISEB qualifications.

The aim is to make the foundation degrees as accessible as possible to those with skills and knowledge gained by experience rather than formal qualifications, whilst at the same time, maintaining a rigorous, evidence-based approach to admissions in order to ensure that entrants have a positive learning experience and are likely to succeed.

Article by Ruth Waring Progression Co-ordinator at the University of Bath

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Creative Industries Courses

Taking the guiding principles behind the APEL protocol as a starting point WVLLN Creative Industries Strand Co-ordinator, Tasmin Head, has been working on a range of initiatives to support adult learners to progress on to Creative Industry courses within the region.

APEL can encourage participation for adult learners with creative industry experience who can use their professional knowledge to gain entry onto a course, apply for module exemptions or be offered advanced standing. APEL can be used to accredit the learning experiences of adult learners who may have developed their artistic practise in their own time, as an experienced amateur or who may be undertaking voluntary work within the creative industries.

Creative Industries are characterised by

small and medium sized enterprises and often learners may be self employed or freelance workers who would benefit from using the APEL process but are harder to engage with than those working at large companies. To overcome the challenge of engaging with individual artists WVLLN has been working with Arts Matrix (the skills and enterprise development agency for creative professionals in the SW) to develop a bespoke APEL workshop. Aimed at those currently working in the creative industries in full-time, part-time, freelance, self-employed and voluntary roles this workshop focuses on participants mapping their learning experiences and identifying their own personal development needs. The workshop explores the option of returning to learning and how learners can make an APEL claim which is supported by the WVLLN Strand Co-ordinator. This is part of

a larger project working with Arts Matrix to develop an awareness of the potential of APEL as a route into higher education with its clients and staff.

Tasmin Head is currently working with Bath Spa University to develop detailed illustrations of the APEL process for the Creative Industries subjects it offers. The resulting case studies will be published on Lifepilot website (www.life-pilot.co.uk) to give learners a real insight into the APEL process. Lifepilot will also host a new section of subject specific advice and detailed guidance on how to create a visual or audio portfolio to be used as evidence of prior experiential learning. There will also be guidance and support for learners who will be undertaking the music & performing arts audition process.

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Our aims for the next month

Elaine Fisher



We are pleased to announce that the Advanced Apprenticeship agreements have now been extended to include Business. The NVQ agreements have also been increased to include

those in the Business and Management sector.

We are still working with 14-19 advisors and following the successful Diploma event last November we have produced a 14-19 Discussion paper which has been fully endorsed by our Management Board. We are now in the process of pulling together an audit of available resources and a regional Directory of all Consortia and HE links. We are also in the process of considering a proposal which aims to establish a Knowledge Exchange Network with a focus on 14-19 diploma developments.

We are currently funding three projects which are looking specifically at supporting Apprentices and their progression onto HE. One is a joint project with City of Bristol and Gloucestershire Colleges (supported by Julia

Ingram for Aimhigher), the second is with Stroud College and the third is a project jointly funded by Aimhigher through the Western Training Provider Network.

On 31st March ConstructionSkills, supported by the WVLLN, organised a conference in Bristol to share best practice to help existing and future consortia as well as employers make the most of their involvement. Held at the University of the West of England, the conference was designed for consortia delivering to students in September 2008 or 2009, as well as employers looking to engage with the Diploma. The purpose of the event was to network, share good practice, link in with employers and most importantly to feel part of a bigger programme of activity. This is the first of two events—the second one will be held in the Autumn.

We are supporting a project through U-too (in conjunction with Wiltshire College), which is aimed at raising aspirations of teenage parents, investigating barriers to progression onto higher

education and providing identified pathways to HE.

In conjunction with Aimhigher and the Open University we are supporting a project which is looking at conducting a feasibility study into the production of materials/resources for study skills for a range of vocational learners.

Finally we sadly say 'goodbye' to Mary Mussett, the LLN Administrator. We will all miss her support, especially in relation to the WVLLN website where she has worked tirelessly to motivate, encourage and cajole us onto providing resources for the Staff Room.

Upcoming Events

- 12th May—WAPA Steering Group interim meeting on Access Grading, Bristol
- 15th May—Transferability workshop, COBC
- 3rd June—Team meeting, Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester
- 11th June—Management Board, Purton

Progression Focus

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The work with Bath Spa University shows how learners with a Creative Industry background may be well placed to take advantage of APEL opportunities as their experience can often be simple to evidence through the current application and selection processes. Adult learners could attend an interview with their portfolio of work or participate in an audition, then if they are able to show that they have the required level of skills and experience to complete the course any additional APEL evidence can be agreed on a case by case basis as required. This ensures that the APEL process is simplified and that a learner does not complete a full APEL application before being selected for the course.

This is the way that APEL is currently happening at Bath Spa University for Commercial Music students and Bath School of Art and Design students. Many creative industry courses are looking for a talent to be nurtured, passion and enthusiasm not just qualifications and are very open to applications from adult learners with relevant experience.

Article written by Tasmin Head Creative Industries Strand at Bath Spa University

Foundation Degree Student Survey: High levels of satisfaction and some uncertainties @ Bristol

Frank Williamson, the WVLLN Progression Coordinator at Bristol, recently carried out a survey of students on the Foundation Degree (FD) in Counselling at City of Bristol College (CoBC), delivered in partnership with the University of Bristol (UoB). With a response rate of 68%, (25 of 37 completed), the findings provided a robust base of evidence, although the author's hope of a 'census' of all students was not fully met.

The students are the first cohort through the FD and had just begun the Intermediate Level of their p-t programme; they are a particularly diverse group of learners, many being 'mature' and several had previous Higher Education (HE) experience. The vast majority began the FD for professional reasons involving acquiring, up-dating or enhancing their counselling expertise.

The respondents almost uniformly expressed great satisfaction with all aspects of the curriculum, being highly complimentary about their tutors and administrators and the resources provided by CoBC. The few negative comments mentioned 'teething troubles' linked to being the first group on the programme.

A major purpose of the survey was to gather views on the BSc (Hons) top-up programme – here strong majorities favoured: being taught along-side students on other BSc degrees; that the top-up 'year' should in fact take 3 (or 4) semesters; and that there was a case for using a slightly higher performance 'threshold' for entry, as well as interviews, to seek enhanced likelihoods of success at BSc level, given that passing the FD itself is likely to achieve parallel professional recognition at present, (although change could occur in this field shortly).

Several students were highly uncertain about progressing, however, until fee levels, workload (and its timing) and detailed curricula were clarified. Tutors at CoBC and at UoB have welcomed the findings and a further survey of the larger group, presently in their first year of study and practice, is planned. Full details of the survey form and findings can be found on the WVLLN website in the News and Events section under latest news.

Article written by Frank Williamson, Progression Co-ordinator at University of Bristol