

**SKILLSACTIVE**  
**Playwork Higher Education**  
**Committee**

Supporting the development of the  
Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

**MENTORING**  
**GOOD PRACTICE**  
**GUIDELINES**

**Progress Report for the Children's Workforce Unit**  
**- DFES**

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# INTRODUCTION

The writing and launch of the Statement of Requirement (SOR) and Core Learning Outcomes (CLO) for a Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree (PSEFD) took place in January 2005, following which higher education institutions started developing their own playwork foundation degree and preparing for endorsement and validation. Three universities are currently piloting the PSEFD and it is anticipated that it will also be delivered in London, the North East, and South West in 2007/8

The Statement of Requirement (2005) states that

“SkillsActive will seek to explore existing models of good practice in mentoring, with a view to developing further guidance on this aspect of work based learning.” (p23)

This report has been funded by the DfES, Sure Start Programme, as part of the overall development of the PSEFD, and represents the realization of the aspiration set out in the Statement of Requirement; it contains three case studies, representing different types and phases of Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree Development – as “adapted”, “newly introduced” and “imminent” initiatives.

The Case Studies describe the nature of work-based learning on these courses and the arrangements in place for assessment and mentoring, including contextual details, identification of aspects of good working practice, and where relevant issues and concerns.

Generic guidance for the design and delivery of good practice in mentoring and workbased learning is provided in the appendices at the end of the report.

Appendix One is derived from the QAA (2005) Foundation Review: Sharing Good Practice and identifies key aspects of good practice in mentoring. Appendix Two for the delivery and design of mentoring and work based learning. Together with the contact details in the conclusion, it is hoped that this report will be a useful resource to those seeking to introduce the Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree.

# METHODOLOGY

The case studies are based upon course documents, and semi structured interviews with tutors delivering the PSEFD, and involved with work-based learning and the mentoring process.

At present, there is considerable variation in the terminologies used to describe work-based learning and mentoring. The case studies use the terminology of their course literature and the words of those interviewed to describe what they do, and how they do it. Elsewhere, the report uses the ‘language of the foundation degree.’ It is anticipated that the review, consultation, and revision of the QAA Code of Practice 9 – will bring some definition to this diversity of terminology.

The second part of the report contains contact details and reference to resources relevant to the introduction or development of mentoring and work based learning on foundation degrees.

For speed of reference, summary points and a checklist of key features relating to mentoring and work based learning are included as Appendix One and Two – although a full reading of the reports from which they are derived is fully recommended.

# **CASE STUDY ONE:**

## **An “adapted” Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree.**

### **BACKGROUND**

The BA Hons (Playwork) is a long-established course, enjoying a good national, and increasingly international, reputation. It has been running for over 13 years, continuously delivered by staff with a strong background in playwork.

The staff are linked through membership and publication to many sections of the playwork sector. The decision to adapt the course to Foundation Degree Status came through involvement of the Course Director with national field based initiatives to develop foundation degrees.

A recent Periodic Course Review provided a good opportunity to introduce changes to the course and to strengthen the adaptation to Foundation Degree Status. The PSEFD provides a clear articulation route to the BA Hons (Playwork)

Traditionally the course has attracted, and the foundation degree continues to attract, full- time, mature students, mainly from non-traditional academic backgrounds, interested in and committed to a career in playwork.

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND PLACEMENT SUPERVISION**

Some 240 (of 360) hours over 13 weeks in the first and second years are spent in active work in playwork settings during term time and over the Easter holidays.

Students are required to keep a reflective log, self-assessment, experiential learning report, agency report and child observations, and in the second year, an additional team work and agency profile. Experiential learning has to be passed in order for the student to successfully complete the course.

The course espouses a clear philosophy for experiential learning, one that has been influenced by and in its own turn influential within the playwork sector. The Experiential Learning Handbook states: -

“Experiential learning is not the same as many forms of placement; playwork students are offered continuing student support in their learning from the university and are expected to take full advantage of that support, both in respect of their direct practice and the work they undertake alongside that for assessment. Equally supervisors of playwork students can expect support from tutors in relation to student supervision and for the work of their agency where that is relevant to student activities.”

Tutors are expected to learn from this process too. As an emerging profession developing rapidly in many aspects of its provision for children playwork needs constant efforts by those involved in practitioner education to keep abreast of the needs of the field. Contact with supervisors of students makes a substantial contribution to that endeavour.”

The Experiential Learning Handbook details all aspects of the quite lengthy and rigorous placement negotiation process.

Students at level 2 are free to choose a placement of their own, anywhere in the world. There have been placements as far afield as Hong Kong, Canada, Tanzania, Ghana, Romania and North America.

Students are required to draw up a learning contract, and find a placement that provides for the realization of carefully identified personal learning goals. This has to be agreed with the university based Personal Tutor. The Experiential Learning Tutor helps the student find a suitable agency, through discussion and advice. A Practice Supervisor is identified at the agency - the role being to support students, provide guidance on the day-to-day functions of the agency. The role and expectations of the supervisor and student are described in detail in the handbook.

The assessment of experiential learning modules is based on written assignment work, and reports received from practice supervisors and visiting tutor assessments.

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

The Experiential Learning Handbook contains a set of agency criteria in order to ensure adequate student support. These include requirements relating to the good management of the agency, the level of work and risk the student will be exposed to, the capacity of the agency to provide day-to-day information and support, and for tutors to visit the placement during the course of the work and meet with the placement supervisors. Arrangements for overseas placements involve rigorous investigation and contact arrangements, but it is rare that tutor visits occur.

The advice, the interviewee providing case study detail, offered when setting up work-based learning experiences for playwork students included “don’t give the students lists, they will hold the tutors responsible for everything that goes wrong.” “Students mustn’t be in a place where their presence is essential” and concluded by noting “it is very rewarding for supervisors to see their ideas and practices reflected in the thinking and doing of the student.”

## **CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS**

At the outset of the BA (Hons) Playwork Course there was a shortage of suitable placements and supervisors. This has been considerably resolved over the years. Graduate students have tended to take up local employment, sometimes in development posts that have led to the expansion of play settings locally and to a work-based alumni well placed to offer placements and informed supervision and support.

The adaptation to sector endorsed foundation degree status, and the resource allocation for mentoring has been used to identify ways of training and standardizing the placement supervisor's role through centralized accredited training. At the time of interview, the scheme was in its planning stages, however, it is anticipated that the logistics of finding a suitable time and date for attendees, may prove problematic.

The course is strongly linked to the regional centre for playwork training and qualifications. In partnership with Yorkshire Play, University, Practitioner Seminars are held regularly, providing a forum for the exploration of playwork theory and practice: whilst not primarily focused on the mentoring, supervisory relationship, this strengthens the link between local employers and practitioners, thus providing a sound basis for communication and contact relating to placements and supervision.

# **CASE STUDY TWO**

## **A “newly introduced” Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree:**

### **BACKGROUND**

This is a new course developed by the School of Education Studies of the University and through a partnership between the University and local FE colleges. In September 2005 the local FE College piloted the PSEFD. It is anticipated that another FE college in the region will also deliver the course in 2006.

From the outset the course was developed through links with national and local employers. The partnership for the development of the PSEFD included representatives from the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnerships, “Young Hearts” local employers, the Eastern Regional Centre for Playwork Education and Training, relevant representatives from SkillsActive, as well as from local FE colleges and the university.

The course is based in the School of Education Studies, which has piloted the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree and is currently a designated pilot scheme for the Early Years Professional Status. The university is clearly making an early, distinctive and successful contribution to the reform of the children’s workforce as envisaged by the Every Child Matters agenda.

The course is designed for part time students working in playwork settings who attend the college for approximately one day per week over a three-year period. The timing of the course was designed to meet the needs of the workforce.

### **WORK BASED LEARNING AND MENTORING**

The course started in September 2005 and is one of the first pilots for the Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree. The part time course has a work-based module (worth 30 credits) starting towards the beginning of each year academic study: Reflections on Practice; Designing and Running a Project; and Professional Playwork Practice.

Assignments include presentations, collection of a Professional Practice Folder, and the submission of a Critically Reflective Essay, to present a proposal for a project to conduct this in practice, and to write an Evaluative and Reflective Report on it; other modes of assessment include On- Line discussion of Key Themes, and a Report on the Play Setting Orally or in Poster Form together with the completion of a professional practice folder. Assessment is on a pass/fail basis.

Students have a work-place mentor who supports them and also authenticates, but does not assess, the evidence gathered by the student for the Professional Practice File. College-based tutors visit the setting to meet with the mentor in order to discuss the degree programme, answer questions and address any issues that may have arisen in relation to the course.

Through the experience of the first, year of the course, it has been found that the key ingredients of a successful mentoring relationship include trust, confidentiality, mutual respect between the mentor and student and clear boundaries and rules of engagement, as drawn up in a written learning contract at the start of the course. A mentor that fully appreciates the foundation degree is likely to open up and identify developmental experiences for the student. The mentor's role is to support learning and to authenticate i.e. "witness" the student's work in the Professional Practice Portfolio. Mentors are not involved in the assessment of students. All parties remaining informed and engaged with the learning processes of the FD programme sustain a good mentoring relationship through frequent contact.

The Region, within which the course is based does not have a long-standing tradition of the delivery of playwork qualifications at level 4/5 and so, unsurprisingly, it has proven difficult to find mentors that are more qualified than the students they supervise. A flexible approach has had to be taken to this. Often line-managers act as mentors, or in some cases, the most suitable person in the setting who is able to undertake the role. In some cases, it proved impossible to find a mentor. Some students felt "shortchanged" by this, the mentoring role is generally seen as crucial – and in a small number of instances the college tutor, visited the play setting to authenticate students work.

At present the university and course deliverers are working to identify the best ways of training mentors. Logistically, in terms of time, travel and working commitments it has proven difficult to provide centralized training. Much support to mentors is achieved through communication with the college tutor.

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

The expert witness model seems to work well, with mentors authenticating the work undertaken by the student in the workplace. Though it is important for mentors to be made clear that this, and not assessment, is their role.

Some settings do enjoy what might be called a 'culture of mentoring', e.g. school and other educational settings. Teachers have been mentored in their training and thereby feel informed of the requirements of a role that is frequently provided in their setting. Conversely it might be said that playworkers and playwork settings are in the process of building this experience and expertise, to provide for a culture of mentoring within an emergent profession.

## **CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS**

At present there are not enough people available to be mentors in settings with sufficient experience of playwork and experience of Higher Education.

Current funding for mentors is insufficient, they are unpaid and often the workload is unrecognized. Within current resources it is difficult to support mentors in a key role in the programme.

# **CASE STUDY THREE:**

## **An “imminent” Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree.**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Dip HE (Playwork) has been run by the University for 10 years. The last Dip HE students completed in 2004 and graduated from the BA (Hons) Degree Playwork in 2005. Following reorganization and diversification, the University now offers a Joint Honours Framework in Health, Education and Social Care that includes a part route relating to Children, Play and Playwork Studies. The university is also currently engaged in the development of a Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree that will be developed by a Consortium including the University and several local FE colleges, through which the foundation degree will be delivered regionally.

There is a long tradition of partnership between the University and the North East Centre for Playwork Education and Training and this continues to characterize the development of the PSEFD.

The staff at both the University and North East Centre have considerable experience of playwork and have been involved from the outset with the development of the BA Hons (Playwork). It is likely that there will be some continuity of experience evidenced in the design of work-based learning and mentoring for the new Foundation Degree and for this reason the intended initiative is included in the Case Studies.

The Honours degree catered essentially for full time students, the PSEFD will be designed for part time study.

The process for placements is clearly written in the Placement Handbook. At the outset students complete a form detailing previous work, experience sought, place of residence and goals. From a bank of placements that have been built up over the years, the student is allocated a placement and placement supervisor. The placement has been quality assured and audited with regard to health and safety, insurance and in strict accordance with the QAA Guidance in the Code of Practice: 9. Placements

Supervisors have been inducted and trained by the university at a training session that precedes the placement –the placement handbook is thorough and clearly written. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to attend training sessions. Course tutors informally assess and keep a watching brief on supervisor competence and will intervene to provide advice and information should this be felt to be needed.

Assignments include a portfolio of relevant activities, a reflective log and a Practice Report produced by the supervisor and agreed with the student and college based tutor.

The placement starts with a meeting to establish goals for the placement and to agree to weekly, 30 minute, supervision sessions for the duration of the placement. A course tutor visits during the mid period of the placement to support the supervision processes and address any matters relating to it. The placement concludes with a meeting between the college tutor and

supervisor – the assessment is made in relation to the agreed criteria and format. This is collaborative, involving the mentor, student and tutor, with the university having the final say.

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

The course enjoyed a healthy tradition of employer mentoring and of students graduating into senior playwork posts and subsequently becoming placement supervisors themselves.

The Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree is based on a strong Consortium of interested parties, national and local play organizations, FE colleges, employers and the university. The collaborative course design, makes for efficiency and effective use of resources, and the colleges will provide a mechanism for the course to be delivered over a wide geographical area, most easily accessible to students. Foundation degree students can articulate to the Joint Honours Framework in Health, Education and Social Care.

The course developed strong, clear written materials outlining the role and responsibilities of all parties to the placement relationship.

## **CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS**

Placement assessment on the honours degree programme utilized the grading bands of the university, covering a spectrum through excellent, very good, good to poor. This proved difficult to standardize, there being some inconsistency in grading between different supervisors. A pass/fail grading is felt to be more appropriate to work based learning modules.

Logistically it had proven difficult to bring supervisors together for briefings and training. It is anticipated that the funding for mentoring attached to the PSEFD will be able to support travel and attendance costs.

There have been several initiatives to support supervisors, through training and the development of support materials.

The University Mentoring Project, “Mentoring in Practice and Work-Based Settings.”, has produced learning programmes for mentors, practice teachers and supervisors. This is provided by community work agencies in partnership with the Community Work Assessment Consortium for NE England (CWACNEE). This accredited short course covers many aspects of mentoring and practice supervision.

Similarly the North East Centre for Playwork Education has produced a training, and resource pack for people working within playwork, early years and youth work. The pack is designed to assist in developing an understanding of the complexities of supervision. It is also designed to provide a practical tool kit in order to equip the participants with the necessary knowledge and skills for developing, implementing and reviewing an organizational policy for effective supervision.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

It is hoped that through this report, and other forms of communication, the development of the Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree can be supported by the experience of others, elsewhere engaged in the same process. Contact details for institutions currently offering the Playwork Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree can be found below. The persons named are happy to be contacted.

A list of relevant resources, referred to in the text, is also provided below, these are likely to prove helpful to those involved with the development of the PSEFD.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Consultant.  
October 2006

# CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

**For further information directly from institutions running the Playwork Sector  
Endorsed Degree contact:**

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### **For Resources relating to the training and support of mentors.**

(CWACNEE) Mentoring in Practice and Work based Settings  
Community Work Leading to CWACNEE Award and Registration  
Credit towards other University Awards  
Empowering Communities Mentoring Project  
Regional and European Office,  
University of Northumbria,  
21-21 Ellison Place,  
Newcastle on Tyne NE1 8ST  
0191 2274106

Staff Supervision a training and resource pack for people working within play work, early years and the youth work sectors. (Marc Armitage and Barbara Morris 2004) published by  
North East Centre for Play work Education and Training,  
Northumbria University,  
Coach Lane Campus, Newcastle upon Tyne,  
NE7 7XA  
0191 215 6279/6208  
ne@play work.org.uk

### **Relevant QAA Guidance**

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2005 Learning from reviews of Foundation Degrees in England. Carried out in 2004 – 05 Sharing Good Practice.

Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 9 placement learning.  
*(Please note, this is currently under review and consultation (September 2006) a final, revised code is scheduled for April 2007)*  
Available on QAA website [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews)

### **Relevant Resources from the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree**

National Centre for Social Research: Research Report RR 752 DfES  
Jean Taylor, Richard Brown, Sarah Dickens.  
Evaluating the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree: The role of the Mentor Chapter 3 pp 45 – 61 [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications)

**The Statement of Requirement and Core Learning Outcomes for the Play work Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree can be found on the SkillsActive website [www.playwork.org.uk](http://www.playwork.org.uk)**

# APPENDIX ONE

Good Practice relating to work based learning and mentoring on Foundation Degrees as derived from the QAA (2005) Learning from reviews of Foundation Degrees in England carried out in 2004-05 Sharing Good Practice

These extracts highlight the good practice identified in the report

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Good practice was found in institutions that provided student handbooks that provided clear information for students about intended learning outcomes, assessment and WBL arrangements – and also provided clear information for employers and mentors about the programme especially WBL. The use of consistent terminology in this, was noticeably helpful.

It was found that providers who have developed effective links with employers enjoy:

- Good communications;
- Stimulate employer commitment to WBL;
- Ensure appropriate training and briefing of mentors;
- Explored ways of involving mentors in the review and development of the programme.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

It was noted that processes need to be put into place to ensure that external examiners have knowledge of the defining characteristics of FD's and the role of WBL and their report covers the FD's defining characteristics, particularly WBL, its effectiveness and integration with academic study the format of external examiner reports may benefit from redrafting to include the defining characteristics.

## ASSESSMENT

Examples of strengths in assessment cited include the assessment of students in a real work environment, with employer involvement in the assessment of WBL modules and appropriate support and guidance given to employers for their involvement in assessment.

It was also perceived that staff would often benefit from staff development or training particularly when new to the defining characteristics of the FD.

# APPENDIX TWO

## A CHECKLIST FOR THE DELIVERY AND DESIGN OF MENTORING AND WORK BASED LEARNING. (WBL)

### Have you?

#### Provided a WBL handbook that describes

The course structure  
Intended learning outcomes linked to WBL  
The relationship and expectations of employers/workplace/mentors/providers/tutors/ other staff e.g. placement coordinator  
The roles and responsibilities of mentors tutors and students clearly  
The role of mentors in assessment

#### And contains

Relevant forms, with completion guidance for the workplace  
A provider-employer- student contract  
A glossary of terms clearly defined and consistently used.

### Have you also?

Identified WBL as a defining characteristic of the FD and briefed/ trained relevant staff?  
Trained mentors who have an assessor's role?  
Taken steps to ensure that the delivery of WBL and the student experience of it is of consistent quality across provider sites and work locations?  
Ensured that external examiners have knowledge of the FD and the role of WBL as a defining characteristic.  
Ensured that the external examiners report requests specific feedback on WBL (and other defining characteristics of the FD)  
Set up a virtual learning environment to support WBL?  
Inducted new staff to WBL on the FD programme.

(These points are derived from the QAA Review of Foundation Degrees in England 2004 – 2005  
Sharing Good Practice is - a full reading of this is recommended.)