



Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) for Employment Based Students on the BSc Hons. Social Work at the University of Hertfordshire

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The University of Hertfordshire runs an Employment Based Route (EBR) through the BSc (Hons) Social Work. On this route, employees from Hertfordshire and Brent Social Services are sponsored by their employers on to the social work degree programme. They attend for part of the week at University, and for the rest of the week they are at their places of work.

These students come with often quite considerable experience of working as support workers, or professional assistants in their agencies. They are therefore given APEL for two modules in the first year of the degree programme – Preparation for Practice (15 credits) and the Portfolio of Evidence of Learning and Achievement (15 credits).

In order to demonstrate that they can meet the learning outcomes for these two modules, EBR students produce a portfolio over the summer prior to admission to the course in September. They are given 3 or 4 portfolio preparation sessions over the summer at the University. The portfolio is submitted at the beginning of August.

Students are expected to demonstrate understanding of the National Occupational Standards for social work and the General Social Care Codes of Practice throughout the portfolio. The content of the portfolio consists of 10 items including:

- a CV and personal statement, mapping their 'professional journey'
- a case study on direct work with a person using the service, demonstrating their understanding of the National Occupational Standards, and the GSCC values from the Codes of Practice
- a direct observation of practice by a suitably experienced social worker or professional in their agency, to include the student's reflection on the observation process and the observer's feedback
- a reflective journal consisting of four entries, two of which are accounts of the students' direct working, one on the students' observations of shadowing an experienced social worker, and another focusing on a discussion or interview with a person using services to ascertain their views in a particular service area
- an evaluation reflecting on the whole learning process of undertaking the portfolio

Feedback to date from the students has been positive. Some identified that although anxious initially about the whole process, the writing of the portfolio had been a positive learning experience for them. Their reflective accounts had given them a new perspective on the work they undertake in their workplaces, demonstrating to them the range of skills that they use.

Writing the portfolio also helped to familiarise them with the study skills that they would need for the BSc, as some of them had been out of formal education for some years. Attending fewer modules at the University in the first year helped to relieve some of the pressures on EBR students, who can have a difficult time meeting the dual demands of the workplace and their studies.

The External Examiner who moderated the first set of portfolios considered that the portfolios were well written and presented and that some showed potential beyond that of the average Level 1 student. She concluded that while she had always imagined that APEL was a poor substitute for direct learning, these portfolios had demonstrated this not to be the case.



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