

Success in Experiential Learning

A guide to fulfilling the CIEH requirements for work-based
experiential learning

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Introduction

You are now on the road that will lead to your qualification as an Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP). You may just have started on, or be part way through, a degree course accredited by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), or you may have obtained your degree and be embarking upon 'end on' work based learning, or you may be following the Accredited Associate route towards qualification; whichever route you are following you must:

- a) Successfully complete a work-based Experiential Learning Portfolio (ELP); and
- b) Successfully complete a practical examination in food inspection; and
- c) Successfully complete the CIEH professional examination and, in the case only of the Accredited Associate route, meet those additional requirements which are applicable to this route

Details of qualification routes are available on the CIEH website (www.cieh.org) and are also outlined in Appendix 4 of this document.

This guidance is concerned with the first of these steps – the ELP.

What is experiential learning?

Experiential learning, as its name implies, is learning that takes place as a result of you undergoing certain experiences. In the context of the EHP qualification process, this learning takes place in the workplace; hence, its full title is "Work-Based Experiential Learning".

Experiential learning is more than just watching what other professionals do in the workplace and then trying and repeating it for yourself. There is the potential for this to lead to incorrect or incomplete learning resulting in the perpetuation of inherited errors or mistakes.

Experiential learning, as required by the CIEH, is learning that involves both 'seeing' and 'doing' but, additionally, involves 'checking', 'questioning', 'reflection' and, hopefully, the development of real understanding. Learning conducted in this way is more likely to produce a practitioner who does not rely on inherited 'wisdom', and who has the ability to think for himself/herself and who also has the skills to develop and justify a course of action and to amend it if it doesn't work out.

So, throughout the time you devote to experiential learning you will come to develop skills in the following areas:-

- i) Preparing and researching problems
- ii) Developing appropriate aims and supporting objectives for your 'interventions'
- iii) Inspecting, auditing and investigating
- iv) Identifying, selecting and justifying options for your intervention
- v) Critically reviewing and reflecting on the effectiveness of your intervention in comparison with your initial aim and objectives
- vi) Demonstrating and applying underpinning knowledge.

vii) Communications

It is these skills that the CIEH will pay particular attention to, in order to make a determination about the progress of your learning in the work place.

How long will experiential learning take?

We all learn at different speeds and student EHPs are no different in this respect. The CIEH recognises that the speed of your journey through experiential learning will be determined by a number of factors, such as:-

- a) The amount of time you can devote to the process
- b) Your ability to manage your own learning
- c) The availability of support from colleagues and managers in the workplace
- d) Whether you already have some relevant experience.

It is important to remember that experiential learning is not a race and there is no officially set maximum or minimum timescale. It is learning that takes place at your own pace; however, your employer may wish to specify a timescale. The CIEH believes, however, that for the majority of students, the task is likely to take around 9 to 12 months.

Where can experiential learning be undertaken?

Experiential learning can take place in any workplace where environmental health is being practised as a whole, or where individual aspects are being practised. It may take place within an Environmental Health department within a local authority, or it could take place within a Bank, Building Society, Insurance Company, Consultancy, University, Government Agency, etc. The list of possibilities is almost endless. There are many opportunities for undertaking your ELP within the private sector; so please don't feel that you have to get a placement in local government. Have you thought about working abroad to gain the necessary experience for your ELP? You may never get another chance!

It may be possible for you to secure a contract with a single organisation to complete the whole of the process; or you may wish to take-up a series of short-term learning opportunities. All are possible.

If you want to get some experience of certain enforcement-related practices (although these are not specifically required for your ELP) you may have to work within a local environmental health department or other agency responsible for environmental health enforcement. If you have any doubts regarding the suitability of an organisation to provide experiential learning, then please contact the Education & Professional Standards Unit at the Chartered Institute for advice (Tel: 0207 928 6006).

Your ultimate goal, irrespective of the organisation within which you are placed or employed, is the successful completion of our (the CIEH) requirements for your ELP.

What does the CIEH require of you?

Our requirements are quite straightforward. Briefly, over the period you spend in work-based experiential learning, you must:-

- a) Gain experience of practice in a number of prescribed intervention areas. ('Interventions' are those actions that EHPs take to control, eliminate or mitigate the public health implications that arise from the impact of environmental 'stressors' on the physical, social and human worlds.) These prescribed intervention areas are listed across the top of each of the five matrices, to be found in Appendix 1 of this document. The headings, given to each intervention area, have been kept deliberately broad so as to give you the widest opportunity to demonstrate your attainment of the necessary experience.
- b) Develop the prescribed 'skills' within the intervention areas. These prescribed skills are listed on the left-hand side of the five matrices to be found in Appendix 1 of this document.
- c) Produce 'evidence' in a portfolio to show that you have gained experience in the intervention areas and developed the skills.
- d) Produce five reports (to be included within your portfolio) that demonstrate your development in the 'key' intervention areas. Prescribed 'key' intervention areas are shaded in grey on each matrix. The reason they are cited as 'key' interventions is that we consider them to be particularly important to that overall area of practice.

What are 'prescribed intervention areas'?

The 'prescribed intervention areas' are broad areas of environmental health work in food safety, health and safety, housing, environmental protection and health protection and development that generate 'interventions' by EHPs. 'Interventions' are as defined above. The intervention areas, prescribed by us for inclusion in the five matrices to be found in Appendix 1 of this document, are deemed to be particularly important areas of work that are crucial to the development of experience, skills and learning in the student EHP. The experience gained, skills developed and learning completed in these interventions, will act as a foundation from which 'competence' should develop in the future.

You will see from the matrices in Appendix 1 that the terms used to define each intervention area have been left very broad. As an example, intervention area F4 on the Food Safety matrix merely says: "Food Inspection and Fitness". You might, therefore, reasonably ask what we expect of you in respect of this. The simple answer is to gain experience of interventions concerned with food inspection and fitness! No other constraint is placed on you and, amongst otherthings, you might reasonably include any of the following within this intervention area:

- a) Dealing with a complaint concerning a mouldy pie being sold from a market stall
- b) Investigating an allegation of unfit meat finding its way into the human food chain
- c) Inspecting food at a UK Port of Entry
- d) Investigating a complaint that a cod fillet, sold from the fresh fish counter in a local supermarket, is "off".

Over and above these few examples, many others are possible and are likely to be experienced by a student EHP during their period of work-based learning.

If you are unsure whether an issue that you are dealing with falls within a particular intervention area, then seek advice from any of the following: Training Officer, Learning Co-ordinator, University Lecturers, the Education and Professional Standards Unit of the Chartered Institute or an ELP mentor.

What is 'evidence' and how is it presented?

Evidence that may be included in your portfolio will be of several types and the requirements are determined by the contents of each Intervention Group matrix (see Appendix 1); however, the over-riding requirement is that evidence must be provided by you to demonstrate that you have experienced prescribed interventions and developed prescribed skills.

The matrices

Interventions

For each of the prescribed intervention areas (seven each in Food, Health & Safety and Environmental Protection and five each for Housing and Health Protection & Development), you will need to ensure that you have three sources of evidence (except for the Key Intervention – see below). Sources of evidence are 'visits' or other 'activities' (e.g. inspections, investigations, presentations, training exercises etc. etc.) that you have undertaken for the purposes of carrying out interventions.

From your three evidence sources (in each intervention area), you should then choose what you consider to be your best intervention and designate it as the 'primary' source by deleting the 'S' in the appropriate box at the top of the matrix sheet. The remaining evidence sources will, therefore, be designated as 'supplementary' by deleting the 'P' in the appropriate boxes at the top of the matrix sheet (see Figure 1 for a worked example).

'Best' means the piece of work undertaken by you that you believe is your best learning experience. You will often find that you learn the most from those interventions which did not go well or which did not succeed or which are not particularly complex!

Remember to give a reference 'number' for each intervention

There is, however, one exception to the above - on each matrix, one intervention area is shaded in grey to signify that it is designated as the Key intervention area.

For each Key intervention area, you will need one reflective report (i.e. five Key Reports in total) which must be set out in the style prescribed in Appendix 2 of this document. Your Key report is regarded as being particularly important and, in addition to completing the report in the prescribed manner, you must also demonstrate the Key Skills which are asterisked on the matrices. (Please note – the list of key skills does differ slightly from matrix to matrix!)

Skills

Across all of the prescribed intervention areas it is necessary to show that you have practised all of the skills.

For each skill (14 in total), evidence of its practice must come from a minimum of 3 different intervention evidence sources identified by you on the matrix. From these sources you should choose one as being your best (which means where you think you have best demonstrated that

skill) piece of evidence and this should be designated by you as being "Primary" and marked with a 'P' in the appropriate box on the matrix; the remaining two evidence sources will then be designated by you as being "Supplementary" sources and marked with an 'S' in the appropriate matrix boxes.

As indicated above your Key Intervention Report must show that you have demonstrated the Key (asterisked) skills. However you may feel that you have demonstrated any or all of these skills better in other intervention areas and you are therefore free to place your P's and your S's in any intervention 'box,' not solely the Key Intervention 'box.'

Making life easier - Cross Referencing

It is, of course, perfectly acceptable for a single evidence source to not only demonstrate the attainment of experiences in several intervention areas but also the development of several skills. Under these circumstances, you are encouraged to make life easier for yourself and to get the most from your evidence via a system of cross-referencing. If you were to use all evidence sources once only you would be required to produce 83 narratives. Quite a task! Careful cross referencing could reduce the numbers of reports required by over 50%. For example, in the Intervention Group Food Safety, whilst preparing evidence of Auditing of Food Premises (Ref 5/2) it is possible to include HACCP and Contamination of food – the same reference number is seen in each of these Intervention Areas; similarly whilst undertaking Food Inspection and Fitness (Ref 4/1) it is possible to include Food Preservation and HACCP– the same reference number is seen in each of these Intervention Areas (see Appendix 1 for an example of a completed matrix that demonstrates referencing, designation by P's and S's and cross referencing)

Most evidence sources will generate physical evidence that you should include in your portfolio. Irrespective of whether an evidence source has been designated by you as being 'primary' or 'supplementary' for the attainment of experience in an intervention area, you must include in your portfolio a brief narrative, written by you, that gives your personal account of your practice in that intervention. The narrative, in addition to telling the story of the intervention and why the intervention was necessary, must include:

- a) An evaluation of all of your considered intervention options (but please don't try to include every possible option – just those that you reasonably considered in this particular intervention)
- b) Selection and justification of your preferred option
- c) Personal reflection on your learning and skill practice that has taken place during the intervention.

Item (c) in the above list is particularly important.

In addition, you may also include some evidence in support of your narrative: (in which case there may be no need to write a lot of detail about it in the 'story.')

By way of example the sort of evidence you may wish to use could include such items as:

- a) Copies of your inspection / audit notes
- b) Copies of any photographs, sketches, plans or measurements taken or made by you
- c) Copies of letters, memos or reports produced by you

- d) Copies of any Notices drafted by you
- e) Copies of any statements taken by you etc

In determining how much evidence from the above list you should include in your portfolio, you should note that your task is to include sufficient evidence to demonstrate to the Portfolio Assessor that you have developed your skills and that you have been set on the road to becoming competent in your practice of that intervention.

Bear in mind that the evidence you include should generally be that produced by yourself. However where you feel another piece of evidence will help to support or amplify your narrative (e.g. a report from a laboratory or a complaint form etc.) you are free to include that if you wish. Please, however, do not be tempted to include pieces of work which are merely copied from files etc.

Finally, remember that each intervention group matrix includes a Key Intervention that is shaded in grey - these are interventions that are considered as being particularly important. This Key Intervention must be the subject of one substantial report. Each asterisked skill must be addressed in your Key Intervention Report even though the intervention that generated that report may not necessarily be cited as your primary or supplementary source for that skill.

Our requirements in respect of the layout of this Key Intervention report are detailed in Appendix 2 of this document. – please read this requirement carefully.

Reflection

The ELP requires that you reflect on all aspects of your intervention experiences. Reflection is particularly important as it gives you the opportunity to consider what you did, why you did it, whether it could have been done differently, whether it needed doing at all etc. It also gives you the opportunity to question, to examine, to critically appraise and thus gain maximum learning from your experience. Some of the reflection will be about you, about how you felt – angry, happy, frustrated, confused, confident etc. – and why you felt that way. And also about how you think you should react in a similar situation in the future, with a bit of rationale to say why.

Reflection should help you with problem solving, arriving at the right decision, becoming more involved and becoming more aware of your own learning and development.

So – in simple terms ask yourself a few questions, in relation to the intervention area you're covering, like:

- a) What worked well (or didn't)?
- b) What could I have done differently (or better)?
- c) Why did I do what I did?
- d) How do I feel?
- e) What would I do in a future similar situation?
- f) What did I learn?

Reflection can take place at all or any of the stages of an intervention – you don't always have to wait until the final outcome.

Reflection can help you to:

- a) Better understand your strengths and weaknesses
- b) Identify and challenge your and others underlying values and beliefs
- c) Acknowledge and challenge possible assumptions on which ideas, feelings and actions are based
- d) Recognise areas of potential bias or discrimination
- e) Identify possible inadequacies or areas for improvement.

The presentation of your portfolio and referencing within it

The amount of evidence that you include within your portfolio is really up to you; however, you are reminded that this is your portfolio that charts your learning and development – the ELP is all about you and your thoughts, it is not mechanistic and is not bound by a template or by any prescriptive processes; and, as indicated above, it is generally not appropriate to include material produced by others. Additionally, however, you may include material produced by others if you do so in order to offer reflection on it, or evaluation of it. As a general guide, around 2 lever-arch files should be sufficient to include all of your experiential learning evidence.

When constructing your portfolio, you should ensure that each of the five intervention groups are clearly identified and physically separated by a coloured separating page. Each section should begin with the inclusion of the relevant matrix from Appendix 1 of this document – electronic versions of these matrices in Microsoft Excel and Adobe Acrobat formats may be downloaded from our website (www.cieh.org).

A3 sized, colour printed versions of these matrices (which are easier to read) can be obtained, free of charge from us – just ring 0207 928 6006 and ask for the Education Unit.

The matrices are provided as an index to your portfolio sections, in as much as they must show which evidence sources are designated as being 'primary' (P) and 'supplementary' (S) for each prescribed intervention area and skill.

In order to make the task of compiling your portfolio as easy as possible, you are encouraged to make the best use of each intervention experience that you attain by cross-referencing – both within a single intervention group and across all intervention groups.

Personal Declaration – your own work

There is now no necessity (as was previously the case) for confirmatory signatures on each narrative. When you have completed all your interventions, documented your skill practice, provided appropriate documentary evidence in the portfolio and completed the entries on the matrices you must complete your declaration at Appendix 3. This is your declaration which certifies that you have attained the experience claimed and that the portfolio is your own work. You must also get your placement supervisor(s) to endorse the declaration.

Getting help and advice in compiling your portfolio

It is perfectly acceptable for you to seek and receive help and advice in completing your portfolio. You are reminded, however, that any help and advice provided should not replace your own input to the process but be utilised as an adjunct to it!

Help and advice is available from a number of sources, such as:

- a. The CIEH Education and Professional Standards Unit at Chadwick Court (tel: 0207 928 6006)
- b. Training Officers / Learning Co-ordinators / Placement Supervisors
- c. The CIEH Experiential Learning Portfolio Mentoring Scheme (contact the Education and Professional Standards Unit for details) – it's free!
- d. Work Colleagues
- e. University Lecturers

You are strongly advised to seek help from any of these sources.

What to do on completing the portfolio

The objective of your work on the portfolio is to chart your experiences and skill practice in order to successfully demonstrate that you have been set on the road to achieving competence in all of the intervention groups. The determination that you have reached this stage is made by a group of specially trained EHPs, appointed by CIEH, as ELP Assessors.

Your portfolio must be submitted for assessment as a whole. When you feel that you are ready to submit the portfolio, you should first check that you have fully met all of the requirements detailed in this document. Having ensured practical completion you are advised to pass the portfolio to a friend or colleague and ask them to check that they can find the relevant evidence utilising your referencing scheme. Once this check has been successfully completed your portfolio is ready for assessment.

Assessment of your portfolio

Assessment of your portfolio may take place at any one of the formal assessment sessions – details of which are on the application form. The process of entering your portfolio for assessment is as follows – you should download an assessment application form from our website, complete and return it, at least six weeks before the date of your chosen assessment session together with the appropriate fee (if necessary - see below) to us at the address provided on the application form. Details of the fees to be paid for assessments are provided on our website and your application will not be accepted unless accompanied by the fee.

NB. The Environmental Health Registration Board (EHRB,) as the name suggests, keeps a formal record of all persons fully qualified as EHPs. In addition, students on the road to professional qualification must also register with EHRB. You must be registered as a student with EHRB prior to making an application for your ELP assessment. You should allow at least three weeks for the registration process.

EHRB Registration is not the same as becoming a student member of the CIEH.

If you have obtained Full Registration of the EHRB and paid the full fee then no further fee is payable for the first assessment of your ELP. However if you obtained Partial Registration (paying a lesser fee) then a separate fee is payable for ELP assessment. Registration application forms and details of registration fees can be found on our website.

Once your application form has been received by us, you will be sent confirmation of the receipt of your application and fee. The confirmation will indicate the date and venue for the assessment of your portfolio.

Details of your responsibilities in respect of the conveyance of your portfolio to and from the assessment session are provided on the application form and you are strongly advised to fully acquaint yourself with them before sending in your portfolio.

The CIEH Examination Regulations governing the assessment of your portfolio and other professional examination issues can also be viewed and downloaded from our website– again, you are strongly advised to make yourself familiar with these before submitting your application for assessment.

Your portfolio will be assessed in accordance with the Regulations and full details of the assessment criteria, including a sample copy of the assessor's mark sheet, can be downloaded from our website.

Plagiarism or other irregularities

We treat cases of plagiarism or other forms of cheating very seriously. Never, under any circumstances, be tempted to falsify entries or copy from another person's portfolio. If any such case is suspected, your portfolio will be seized, pending a full investigation. Upon a case being proven, the CIEH Qualifications Board will impose a severe penalty that can include a lifetime ban from resubmission.

Sources of information which may be of help in completing your portfolio – all can be downloaded from the CIEH website (www.cieh.org):

- a) The CIEH Examination Regulations
- b) The ELP Marking Scheme
- c) 'Work Based Experiential Learning – a guide for students and placement supervisors'
- d) ELP FAQs
- e) Application forms for assessment and registration

You may also find the New Professionals website of benefit - www.ehnewprofessionals.com

Finally!

You may wish to include with your ELP a supporting statement to the assessor. This statement, which should be no longer than two sides of A4, may include any information that you believe may be useful to the assessor. Suitable information may include details of interventions that you feel you have achieved particularly well, or areas where you had particular difficulties etc. It is your choice as to whether or not you include such a statement.

Please make sure the narratives and other information in your portfolio are legible and understandable. Your narratives must be written in the English language (although you may include evidence, such as notices or letters, written in the Welsh language if that is the normal practice of your training organisation.) Please tell the story and don't worry too much about producing formal or 'academic style' reports. And no 'text speak!'

Good luck, enjoy your learning experience and, if in doubt, ask!

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
Education and Professional Standards Unit,
Chadwick Court,
15 Hatfields,
London
SE1 8DJ
Tel: 0207 928 6006

APPENDIX 1 - The Intervention Group Matrices

See separate document: "2008 Success in Experiential Learning Appendix 1 – Matrices"

APPENDIX 2 - Required Layout for the Key Intervention Reports

You must ensure that your report, drafted in support of each Key Intervention, is structured in accordance with the following layout. Adherence to this layout is an absolute requirement of this portion of the assessment!

Heading:	Must Normally Address:
Preparation and research	The problem / reason for intervention Premises history, description/plan and previous rating (if appropriate) Description of activity Relevant legislation / guidance considered
Developing an appropriate aim and supporting objectives for your intervention	What are you trying to achieve and what are the benchmarks that demonstrate progress i.e. Preparation plans for organization of inspection Timing and consultation with management Powers of entry How information collected Documents requested
Inspecting, auditing and investigating	Auditing of any hazard analysis or formal management system and identification of unforeseen hazards or Identification and evaluation of all hazards and any current controls.
Identifying, selecting and justifying options for resolution	Possible options Factors Influencing option selection Description of action taken and justification Possible evaluation of premises rating (if appropriate)
Critically reviewing and reflecting on the effectiveness of your intervention in comparison with your initial aim and objectives	Critical review of effectiveness of inspection / audit and outcomes Reflection of what learned and how applied in future with evidence
Demonstrating and applying underpinning knowledge	This is subject specific and hence determines those things to be covered
Communications	As demonstrated in case study report, letters etc.

APPENDIX 3 - Declaration of Own Work

Candidate declaration

I..... (print full name)
hereby declare that I have attained all the experiences claimed and that this portfolio is entirely my own work. I further declare that where I have included any pieces of evidence to support my work which I have not personally produced, this fact is made clear either by an appropriate comment within the narrative or the fact that the author or originator is obvious from the document.

Signed.....

Date..... Registration Number.....

Confirmation by Placement Supervisor

I (please print name)
hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the declaration above is correct and given in good faith.

Signed.....

Designation.....

Employing Organisation.....

Date.....Contact telephone number

APPENDIX 4 - Routes to Qualification as an Environmental Health Practitioner

The Examination Regulations give details of the routes to qualification as an Environmental Health Practitioner. The regulations are from time to time updated and you are strongly advised to download a copy from the CIEH website – (www.cieh.org)

In essence, to be eligible to receive the Certificate of Registration of the Environmental Health Registration Board (EHRB), candidates enrolled under Curriculum 2003 must have -

- a) been awarded a degree (BSC (Hons) or MSc) accredited by the CIEH, and
- b) passed their ELP assessment, and
- c) passed the CIEH Professional Examination, and
- d) passed a practical food inspection examination accredited by the CIEH.

Candidates following the Accredited Associate route to qualification must -

- a. hold a relevant degree or higher award as determined by the CIEH, and
- b. hold any EHRB 'technical' qualification or equivalent as determined by the CIEH, and
- c. have at least 5 years full time equivalent experience in some aspect of environmental health work following the award of an EHRB qualification or passing of the CIEH Accredited Associate Assessment, and
- d. have held Accredited Associate membership for at least the 3 years prior to application for registration, and
- e. have passed their ELP assessment, and
- f. have passed both the Part 1 and Part 2 examinations of the CIEH Professional Examination, and
- g. have passed a practical food inspection examination accredited by the CIEH.