2019 European Quality Assurance Forum

Supporting societal engagement of higher education

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Call for contributions: Paper submission form

Deadline 22 July 2019

Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.

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Robert Wagenaar is Professor on History and Politics of Higher Education and Director of the International Tuning Academy at the University of Groningen. The Academy is an education and research centre with focus on the reform of HE programmes. It runs a bi-annual SCOPUS, ERIC and Web of Science indexed *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. From 2003 until mid-2014 he was director of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the same University. His research interest is in HE innovation and policy-making.

He has been involved in the development of many international initiatives such as the development of ECTS since 1989 and two overarching European qualifications frameworks. His most recent projects are *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe (CALOHEE) (2016-18)*, and *Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience into Higher Education (WEXHE)* (2017-2019), both co-financed by the EU.

It is intended that the paper is jointly presented by the three authors.

If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author and indicate who is the corresponding author and who will be responsible for presenting the paper at the Forum.

IMPORTANT: If you are submitting a proposal, please do not register for the event online until the results of the selection process have been announced. Papers selected for EQAF 2019 will benefit from one reduced fee per contribution, which will be applied through a special registration process.

During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum as well as the associated Powerpoint presentations will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers. Please however note that all Powerpoint presentations will be published, regardless of whether the full paper is published.

Proposal

Title:

Filling the Gap. Defining a Robust Quality Assurance Model for Work-Based Learning in Higher Education

Abstract (150 words max):

Work-Based Learning is gradually becoming an integrated key component in many HE programmes covering a significant number of ECTS credits. It is therefore remarkable that until now not much time and effort has been dedicated to developing instruments to guarantee its quality. An inventory made by ENQA shows that only single QA organisations have taken initial initiatives, but that a comprehensive model for quality assurance of this type of learning is absent.

In the context of the Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliance Project *Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education (WEXHE)* a consortium of universities, employers organisations and EURASHE and ENQA has developed detailed replicable models for high quality internships, traineeships and entrepreneurships. An important component is to assure the standards of these moods

of learning. The suggested approach has been outlined in a paper – to be presented and discussed in the session – which analyses the applicability of the ESG for WBL.

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details. NO

The paper included below is an abridged version of the original - longer - paper. The paper to present is a draft for consultation and further enhancement. The EQAF session is intended to obtain additional feedback from experts in the field before publication.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

Filling the Gap.
Defining a Robust Quality Assurance Model for Work-Based Learning in Higher Education

Introduction
It is now widely accepted that higher education (HE) programmes should not only meet internationally agreed quality standards, but also be of relevance to meet the needs of society. During the last two decades the notion has been developed that graduates should not only be knowledgeable but also skilled. As a result, the development of generic competences or transferable skills has been emphasised, alongside subject specific knowledge and skills. It has been gradually understood that this notion requires a change of paradigm regarding the learning process. In the setting of the Bologna Process it is stressed that degree programmes should no longer be expert-driven, but should be student-centred, promoting active learning. This implies that knowledge transfer and acquisition need to be supplemented with their application in practice, which requires an extended toolbox of learning, teaching and assessment strategies and methods. As a result, learning is now expressed in learning outcomes statements, for which the following definition is applied. They specify what students will know, be able to do or be able to demonstrate when they have completed or participated in a course unit or programme. The outcomes should be observable, measurable and allow for demonstration.

Outcome-based learning is also perceived as conditional for bridging the identified skills gap of what is learned and what is required to operate successfully in the workplace and in society at large. Knowledge and skills can be practiced in the setting of a HE environment, by offering designated assignments. The ultimate test whether students apply what has been learned and take responsibility for their actions, showing autonomy, is in the workplace. Although work-based learning (WBL) has become an integral component in a growing number of degree programmes there is still hesitation or even outright opposition among academics. The arguments challenging WBL range from it not being academic to insufficiently quality controlled.

To overcome opposition against and to facilitate WBL the Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliance project *Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education* was launched in January 2017.[1] The project is now in its final phase and able to offer initial results. It combined the expertise of four HE institutions with the expertise of the employability field as well as EURASHE and ENQA. It defined as its three main objectives: (1) to increase the capacity and competences of staff in universities and enterprises to provide high quality work experience and entrepreneurship; (2) to support the accreditation of all kinds of work experience through ECTS and effective quality assurance; (3) to ensure that the skills needs of employers are understood. On the basis of these three aims the project also reviewed existing policy development to support further policy development in this field. In the context of this project, 9 comprehensive information and guidelines *Packages* have been developed, which each focus on different groups of stakeholders, covering placements, traineeships and entrepreneurships.[2] The Packages are based on some 80 good practices which have been collected from 7 EU countries. The more detailed Packages have been transformed into easy to use brochures which contain very practical circuit diagrams.[3] In each of the Packages extensive attention is paid to the quality assurance aspects of WBL.

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[1] WEXHE Project website: https://wexhe.eu

[2] WEXHE, Work Placement Package. Prepared by prof. Ivan Svetlik, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 2019.

[3] WEXHE, Work Placement Package. Summary Report. Prepared by Hacer Tanelli, UIIN, Amsterdam, 2019.

This paper, which is one of the outcomes of the project, focusses on the recognition and quality assurance mechanisms related to modes of WBL, in particular placements. When discussing quality assurance *process* and *content* related aspects should be distinguished. *Content* – development of subject specific and generic competences - can be phrased in terms of whether the evidence – the intended level of learning - is actually offered. A well-defined *process* for quality enhancement and assurance is perceived as a requirement to build trust and confidence. It checks whether the conditions for learning are up to standard. Both - conditions and level of learning – are key ingredients for recognition. An inventory made by ENQA shows that very limited work has been done by Quality Assurance agencies so far to assure the quality of WBL. For this paper the work established by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (Unibasq) has been analysed. Both agencies have developed specific criteria or methods for the quality assurance of WBL and underlined some best practices. Their work has been aligned with an analysis of the applicability of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)[4]* and the insights offered by the WEXHE project. The paper answers the question which elements are thought necessary to build a robust and reliable quality assurance model for WBL.

The European Standards and Guidelines
The ESG provide the overarching framework for internal and external quality assurance (QA) in HE enabling assurance and improvement of quality of HE and mutual trust. The latest version of the ESG was adopted by the Ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015 following a proposal by ENQA, ESU, EURASHE and EUA in co-operation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and EQAR. It takes into consideration the progress made after the first version (2005), in QA as well as in other Bologna Process action lines such as the qualifications frameworks, recognition and the promotion of the use of learning outcomes.

The ESG are composed of three parts (IQA, EQA, and quality assurance of QA agencies) and they apply to all HE offered in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. This means that the ESG cover the WBL provision as well although not specifically.

This paper, based on an analysis of the work of the QAA UK and Unibasq, respectively the QAA Quality code for Higher Education[5] and the Unibasq Protocol for recognition of dual learning for official Bachelor's and Master's degrees[6], presents a mapping exercise of the ESG part I (IQA).

Purpose, challenges and usefulness of the analysis
Following the results of the survey conducted within the WEXHE project to enquire on QA agencies practices on QA of WBL, it was decided to look further into the topic. Indeed, only few surveyed agencies had developed criteria or methods to address QA of WBL specifically (only 5%). It seemed, thus, useful to identify elements to consider when conducting an evaluation that involves WBL Looking into the QA of WBL provision would help to reassure the society (parents, students, employers, etc.) that the provided traineeships or placements are of good quality (among other things), and that they are well embedded in the learning process. The final publication that will result from the analysis could be used by QA agencies to evaluate WBL provision, either as a separate procedure or incorporated in the usual processes. Though, some questioning might arise from QA agencies and/or HEIs on the extra burden that looking specifically at WBL may cause and if there is a real necessity of such segmentation of different forms of educational provision and their QA (similar work was done for QA of e-learning).

Applicability and relevance of the ESG Part I to work-based learning
Although it is well understood that the ESG apply to all modes of teaching and learning, no matter their place of delivery, the way in which they could be interpreted in the WBL context is sometimes less clear. In the setting of the WEXHE project ENQA examined the applicability and relevance of the ESG Part I

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[4] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in Higher Education: https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/ (accessed in April 2019)

[5] QAA, Quality code, April 2019, (English): https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/

[6] Unibasq, Protocolo para la obtención del reconocimiento de formación dual para títulos universitarios oficiales de grado y máster, April 2019 (Spanish): https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Protocolo_DUAL_Unibasq_CA_09_10_2017.pdf

(IQA) providing special guidance (e.g. elements to be considered) on how they could be applied where programmes involving WBL are concerned. In general, as it is the case with the ESG, all elements mentioned below need to be considered in conjunction with other contextual requirements such as institutions' regulations, funding body requirements and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' rules and regulations as well as relevant national qualifications framework and sector-recognised standards. In the analysis the numbering of the ESG Part 1 is followed. This paper concentrates on the first three standards, which can be perceived as the most crucial ones in the setting of WBL, although the others are very much of relevance as well.

1.1. Policy for quality assurance

As it is stated in the ESG 2015 in the Guidelines of the Standard 1.1 *"The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties".* This means that a strategy of WBL or elements of WBL should be included in the overall institutional strategy and in the general policy for quality assurance of the institution and that the responsibility of all parties in terms of quality assurance in this context should be defined.

Institutional policies for WBL may contain the constituting elements of quality, which include among others:

- institution and employer support
- design and planning of the WBL degree or course
- WBL degree or course structure
- teaching and learning
- student support
- identification of needs and expectations
- employer's infrastructures
- student assessment and certification
- monitoring and measurement of satisfaction
- improvement

The institution may also define policies to grant proper access and ensure participation in WBL for those students affected by disability, illness, and other mitigating circumstances.

As WBL involves partnerships, there should thus be a policy on formalised agreements between the different parties indicating which features they should include. These agreements, which are developed prior to the WBL opportunity should be supportive so that all stakeholders are aware of their own and others' roles and responsibilities. They may include elements such as:

- what is expected of students
- statutory requirements: health and safety, and safeguarding at the workplace
- clear and transparent roles, responsibilities and expectations of the education organisation, the employer and the student (and the relationships between them)
- how specific issues, such as sharing of data, are dealt with
- contingency procedures to deal with premature termination of WBL including possible options for students to continue studying, either at the same or an alternative institution.

1.2. Design and approval of programmes

Prior to developing a WBL programme or course, it is necessary to evaluate the interest and relevance of the WBL approach for the acquisition of some of the competences of the whole degree for example. WBL should be integral to the course of study and should be designed in partnership between the different parties involved, which means that it should include employers in addition to institutions and students (and other stakeholders as required such as, care users, professional bodies and regulatory authorities). The partnership role between employer and institution is important in defining the content and delivery of the work-based modules, and in designing the work-based assessments as well as in the daily management of the programme or course (performing the assessment itself and intensive tutoring of students). The employer is indeed an active agent in the programme/course in general and more specifically in the teaching-learning activities. It could be interesting to create a mixed commission with representatives of the institution and the workplace to guarantee the coordination and integration of the activities developed in both places (workplace and classroom).

When developing the programme or course unit, the different parties should decide which activities will be performed in the classroom and which in the workplace, as well as their duration, schedule, evaluation criteria, learning outcomes and the temporality with which they are going to be alternated (e.g. alternate semester, weeks, days or hours in the classroom and in the workplace).

In the case of WBL, the learning outcomes that are part of the programme/course design, should be directly relevant to work objectives to ensure integration and an effective experience. WBL should ensure that students have opportunities to apply and integrate areas of professional knowledge, skills and professional behaviours to meet programme/course learning outcomes for an identified job role and/or broader employment.

It should also be clear which competences will be developed in the workplace and which ones in the classroom and how they will be developed (general competences or specific competences). If a competence is developed in both places, the different level of development or way of acquiring it in each one of the places should be indicated. It should be demonstrated in any case that the design and implementation of the degree coordinates and integrates classroom activities with those carried out in the workplace. This also means that the credits acquired within the workplace must be combined with those acquired in the classroom.

The WBL programmes should be designed in a flexible way, in order to enable all students to benefit from WBL opportunities, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. Furthermore, students should previously take the necessary training to ensure the development of the WBL provision in the workplace safely and effectively.

For certain types of WBL, such as placements, the course aims are designed to meet the learning needs of the student as an employee, and the aims of the employer organisation. And they should be designed with milestones in place to enable progress to be monitored (skills, learning behaviour, development).

To define relevant learning results from WBL, WEXHE has identified a list of key generic competences, for each of the types of WBL identified. The ones for placements are the following: Communication, social relations and negotiation; Teamwork and networking; Problem solving and decision making; Initiating creative and / or innovative ideas; Independent learning and working, capacity and enthusiasm to learn; Entrepreneurship and leadership; IT skills. For each of these competences three levels of mastery have been defined in terms of descriptors for both bachelor and master level. The tables resulting, offer an excellent basis for selecting the WBL learning outcomes for individual learners, taking into account their subject area and type of HE education.

1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure flexible learning paths that enable all students to benefit from WBL opportunities, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Education organisations, employers and students should be clear on the scope of the WBL tasks and the methods of assessment that will be undertaken. Both tutors (teacher and employer) should participate in the evaluation of students, jointly in most of the cases. Furthermore, where employers are involved in assessment, appropriate training should be given and their role should be clearly defined, and the usual mechanisms of quality assurance should be used. This is also a way, among other processes, to ensure that assessment and corresponding awards in WBL opportunity have the same reliability, validity and equivalence for students than in other workplaces or at the institution.

Stakeholders should be engaged in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience, which means that students, employers and others involved in WBL can and should contribute to course design and development, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

There should be fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students and guidance should be given to students on when and how the relevant process(es) can be accessed and which party they should address. Students should however have an ultimate right of complaint to the institution who is the primary responsible for providing high-quality to the students.

WBL should ensure that students have opportunities to apply and integrate areas of professional knowledge, skills and professional behaviours to meet course learning outcomes for an identified job role and/or broader employment. All students should be able to benefit from an authentic and learning-rich environment and be allowed to complete relevant tasks (sometimes under supervision) that support the achievement of learning outcomes. However, some students may need guidance on how to achieve

this, therefore, student-centred approaches should be directive to enable students to take responsibility and benefit from opportunities that are aligned to the employment. Students could for example benefit from training before the WBL experience to ensure the development of the WBL provision in the workplace effectively and safely.

Conclusion

The key principles of QA are applied to all modes of delivery or provision of HE thus including WBL. However, the specificities of WBL should be taken into consideration and some elements should particularly be highlighted. This applies to the involvement of employers in the various steps of the delivery as they are directly dealing with students and are responsible for the quality of the training they are delivering to them, providing altogether a safe and affable environment. Emphasis should also be given to the accessibility and equity in the WBL, meaning that all students should have the opportunity to be involved in WBL and that they should have the same recognition and validation as those studying more traditional modes of delivery. This also means that whenever it is necessary, students should be given initial training to feel as comfortable as possible in the workplace environment.

In the HE landscape, not many QA agencies have systematic approaches to address the QA of WBL specifically. The WEXHE partners have taken up the challenge to fill the existing gap, extracting elements on the topic from the work already performed by some experienced QA agencies and combining these with the findings of the project. This in order to provide, as an integral part of the information and guidelines Packages, a set of tools as complete as possible to stakeholders. By identifying a list of key generic competences which can be developed best in the context of WBL and by defining three levels of descriptors WEXHE offers in addition a reference of what can be learned as a result of WBL. In conclusion, this offers main stakeholders – HE institutions and their staffs, WBL providers, students and quality assurance agencies and organisations – a robust QA instrument covering both content and process.

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WEXHE Project website: https://wexhe.eu

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 22 July 2019 to eqaf@eua.eu.
The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not
send a hard copy or a PDF file.